

*It is bold, innovative, provocative
and highly readable.*

— Khushwant Singh

The
Indus
Saga

**From Pataliputra
to Partition**

Aitzaz Ahsan

About the book

The Indus region, comprising the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent (now Pakistan), has always had its distinct identity - racially, ethnically, linguistically and culturally. In the last five thousand years, this region has been a part of India, politically, for only five hundred years. Pakistan, then, is no 'artificial' state conjured up by the disaffected Muslim elite of British India.

Aitzaz Ahsan surveys the history of Indus - as he refers to this region - right from the time of the Harappan civilization to the era of the British Raj, concluding with independence and the creation of Pakistan. Ahsan's message is aimed both at Indians still nostalgic about 'undivided' India and their Pakistani compatriots who narrowly tend to define their identity by their 'un-Indianness'.

About the author

Aitzaz Ahsan comes from a background steeped in politics, being the third generation from his family to serve as an elected member of a legislative assembly. He is a member of the Pakistan People's Party and has served as the minister of law, justice, interior and education in the federal government between 1988 and 1993. Elected to the senate of Pakistan in 1994, he was, successively, the leader of the House and the leader of the Opposition between the years 1996 and 1999.

After his early education at Aitchison College and the Government College in Lahore, he studied law at Cambridge and was called to the bar at Grays' Inn in 1967. He is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He is also an indefatigable human rights activist and a founder vice-president of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. He has been incarcerated under arbitrary detention laws many times by military and authoritarian regimes. During one such prolonged detention, he wrote *The Indus Saga*.

The **Indus** Saga

From Pataliputra to Partition

Aitzaz Ahsan



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Dedicated to my parents
Mohammad Ahsan (Alig.)
and
Rashida Ahsan
from whom, early in my life,
I learnt to worship my soil
and
to love its people

Contents

Acknowledgements

Preface

Part One: The Two Regions 2000 BC to AD 1800

Introduction

- 1 The Priests of Prehistory
- 2 The Man on Horseback
- 3 Iron, Krishna and Buddha Destroy the Tribe
- 4 Porus: An Indus Version
- 5 Pax Mauryana: The First Universal State
- 6 The Oxus and the Indus
- 7 The Romance of Raja Rasalu
- 8 Feudalization and the First Feudal State

- 9 An Arab Visitor
- 10 More Men on Horseback
- 11 The Second Feudal State
- 12 Turbulent North, Peaceful South and Panipat
- 13 The Second Universal State
- 14 Resistance, Opportunism and Consumerism
- 15 Bhakti, Nanak and the Sufis

Part Two: The Two Worlds AD 1600 to AD 1897

Introduction

- 16 The Europe that Came to India
- 17 The India that Awaited Europe
- 18 Uneasy Heads on the Peacock Throne
- 19 Tombs, Ostentation and Land Tenure

- 20 Sea Power and Military Tactics
- 21 The Sikhs and the Subsidiary States
- 22 1857
- 23 The Third Universal State

Part Three: The Two Nations AD 1757 to AD 1947

Introduction

- 24 The Character of the Hindu Muslim Divide
- 25 Sonar Bangla
- 26 The Plunder
- 27 The Famine and Settlement
- 28 The Economic Divide
- 29 Whither the Muslims?
- 30 The Sons of the Indus Fight

31 Parting of the Ways

32 Towards Partition

Bibliography

Acknowledgements

Had M.J. Akbar not visited Pakistan to witness the Indo-Pak cricket series in 2004, this edition of *The Indus Saga* would not have been possible. And had Pramod Kapoor not come here a few months later, it would never have been in the reader's hands today. Both encouraged me and helped take the project forward.

Of course my wife, Bushra, has always been a source of strength and inspiration, and our children, Saman, Ali and Zaynab, have encouraged me to indulge my fancies in pursuits other than my profession of law and my commitment to politics.

Needless to say, I alone remain responsible for all the flaws and faults in the analysis and conclusions contained in the book.

Preface

On 4 June 2005, Lal Krishna Advani visited the mausoleum of the founder of Pakistan in Karachi. In the visitors' book he inscribed the following words: 'The Indian freedom struggle describes Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (as) an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. His address to the first constituent assembly of Pakistan in August 1947 is a classic, forceful espousal of a secular state in which every citizen should be free to pursue his own religion. The state shall make no distinction between one and another citizen on the ground of faith. My respectful homage to this great man.'

The inscription raised a storm on both sides of the Indo-Pak divide. On the Pakistani side there was outrage on why the vision of Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam, had been described as secular. On the Indian side extremists took umbrage at why Jinnah, the 'communalist' had been referred to as a secularist. Both sides objected to the secular credentials attributed to Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah. But, oddly, both attributed different meanings to the same word: secular.

On the Pakistani side the word 'secular' is a slur. To a large body of Pakistanis a secular state means one that is against religion: a state at war with religion, any religion; a state that prohibits the practice of religion. How could

Pakistan, an 'Islamic' state, have been conceived as a secular state?

On the Indian side, no one who considered the Muslims as a separate 'nation' could have been described as secular. Nor could a state conceived by such a one be considered a secular state. To be secular, a state had itself to be neutral among faiths and have none of its own.

Jinnah was misunderstood on both sides of the border. So, for once, was Advani. But that was only natural because over the last six decades neither side has really understood, or even truly tried to understand, the other. Leaders, intelligence agencies, military establishments and even the media on both sides have spent long years demonizing each other. Even the film industry came on board with mega blockbusters devoted to proving the neighbour as a sworn and treacherous enemy.

And each side had ample self-created justification to demonize the other.

Two generations of Pakistanis have been told that their very identity was their 'un-Indianness': banish this thought from the mind and Pakistan will collapse. Moreover, the Pakistani is Muslim and the Indian is Hindu. Period. That alone was the rationale of the partition of the subcontinent. But even if valid, being 'un-Indian' is a manifestly incomplete answer to any question

about identity. It only purports to state what the Pakistani is not. It does not address the issue as to what indeed he is. And incomplete answers always raise fresh questions. The Pakistani does not necessarily have to be an Indian, but he has to be *somebody*. Who is that somebody? Moreover the smug answer ascribing a singular role in the Partition to the differences between Hindus and Muslims fails to deal with the fact that the number of Muslims in India is greater than the population of Pakistan.

The extremists in the Sangh Parivar who unsuccessfully pushed Advani to resign as the president of the Bharatiya Janata Party are equally off the mark about the Indo-Pak divide. But they are not alone. Even the official reaction of the Congress party, was one of surprise and disappointment at Advani's attributing secular credentials to Jinnah. In India, the opinion has almost unanimously been that Jinnah was a 'communalist' and hence cannot be described as secular. Moreover Jinnah cannot be forgiven the sacrilege of having divided the revered and indivisible Akhand Bharat. And if the Partition is justified on the basis of a distinct regional identity and not by religion alone, then other regions of India might also use that argument to achieve their separatist aims. The indivisibility of India had to be raised to the level of a romantic idea and the creation of Pakistan shown as an unnatural aberration.

The romance of the subcontinent's indivisible unity is, however, neither

new nor exclusive to the Sangh Parivar. It was the very brief that Congress had pursued in the period that led up to the Partition. And it had been most competently articulated by none other than India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Nehru was one of that rare breed of political leaders who did not depend only upon the spoken word. And his writings are by no means insubstantial. Nehru could take an overview of the broad movements of world history. *Glimpses of World History*, which consists of a series of letters he wrote to his daughter Indira from his prison cell, gives us an idea of the breadth of his vision. In it he has analysed, with competence and learning, such diverse subjects as the Greek city-states, the village republics of ancient India, the rise of the European cities, the discovery of the sea routes, the Malaysian empires of Madjapahit and Malacca, autocracy in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, Ireland's fight for a republic and the Great Depression. In many more ways than Gandhi, Nehru was India's ideologue.

Nehru's magnum opus, however, remains *The Discovery of India*. In the introduction to the book, Nehru wrote of his travels, 'from the Khyber Pass in the far north-west to *Kanya Kumari* or Cape Comorin in the distant south.' Where ever he went, Nehru found that 'though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was the tremendous

impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us. The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: it was an emotional experience, which overpowered me. The essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster or catastrophe, had been able to overcome it.'

Six decades on, there is hardly an Indian, even the most accommodating and rational, who does not privately resent the partition in 1947. Even the most congenial Indian, Hindu *and* Muslim, will say with love and affection, 'how much better it might have been if ...' The hardliners continue to nurse the injury caused to their pride by the Partition. The paranoids in Pakistan have always found in this sentiment an Indian desire to undo it all. And they have thus relentlessly nurtured and disseminated a 'fragility syndrome' through the press and media.

The abiding paranoia this fragility syndrome has resulted in is implicit in the recent observation by none other than Pakistan's former ambassador to India and its erstwhile foreign secretary, Humayun Khan, that, 'the most powerful elements in Pakistan ... still believe that India's primary aim is the undoing of Pakistan.'¹ In an interview, senior Pakistani analyst M.B. Naqvi said, 'Notwithstanding the fact that India is a democracy, the guiding spirit behind Indian nationalism has always remained aggressive, bordering on militancy.'²

And how the injury to their pride still rankles is evident from the intensity of the reaction of extremists in India to what Advani wrote in the visitors' book at the mausoleum of the founder of Pakistan. Thus the continuing race to develop weapons of mass destruction and efficient delivery systems. Pokhran and Prithvi find their responses in Chagai and Ghorī. Mutual destruction is assuredly within the competence of the two great nations of South Asia supporting the largest body of people below the poverty line in the world.

Yet the two are destined co-exist. Neither can be relocated to some other part of the globe. The Pakistani may not be an Indian, but neither is he an Arab, a Persian or a Central Asian. The commonality of religion with the Arabs, Persians and Central Asians is obvious, but commonality of religion makes the Pakistani neither Arab nor Persian nor Central Asian. On the reverse side of the same coin his so-called 'un-Indianness' cannot make anyone oblivious to the several aspects in which the Indians and Pakistanis share a common history, culture, language and racial stock. Nor must the Indian continue to deny the distinct and separate personality that Indus (Pakistan) has had over millennia, even during the period preceding the advent of Islam in South Asia. This distinct identity is primordial. That the communal divide was superimposed on it may, or may not, have been propitious for the pre-Partition Muslim League, but Indus would always have remained distinct and different from India

regardless.

The Indian may continue to deny the distinctness and the Pakistani may continue to repudiate the commonality, but both — distinctness and commonality — are facts. What has to be understood is that the Indo-Pak divide straddles this distinctness and commonality and that we must cherish both. Our distinctiveness should reassure us of our separate and unique identities, each venerating the other. And the commonality ought to provide a mutuality of interest and the basis for peaceful co-existence and co-operation.

That our distinctness and commonality have, in the past several decades, facilitated neither confidence nor co-existence is a measure of the insecurity syndrome of the Pakistani and of the injured pride of the Indian. This has only enabled hostile and fanatical obscurantism to occupy the space that should be taken by reason, friendship and co-operation.

That is why some questions remain: is the centripetal pull of India an inexorable force that could again pull the Indus region (Pakistan) to itself? Or does the Indus region have a primordial existence outside India? Does it not have an identity of its own? It may not be possible to put to rest every controversy and contention that these questions raise but one must try to purge the demons of paranoia and bigotry by addressing them dispassionately.

Nehru wrote *The Discovery of India* in the Ahmednagar Fort prison. I began my journey to discover Pakistan in the New Central Jail, Multan. This journey continued in later years, in the Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Mianwali jails. As I journeyed into the distant past, it dawned upon me that 'Pakistan' had existed for almost five and a half of the last six thousand years. Indus had seldom been a part of India. This gave me a newfound vision of myself as a part of an old and continuous tradition. When my mother had carried me in her arms to my first brief imprisonment in 1946, she had indeed been struggling for something that had always been mine. When my father and grandfather³ had courted arrest long before I had ever done so, they, too, had been in quest of my own inheritance.

* * *

The Indus Saga was originally written during the several prison terms that I served during General Zia's Martial Law. Contemplation and reading in solitude over long periods made me search within my own self. It also enabled me to look without, at my country. In jail I had all the time to reflect and ponder. I tried to take a fresh look at myself and at my people and our neighbours. I took myself to the edge to observe them and to study their history, my history and our inheritance.

In this respect Professor Carl Ernst perhaps most aptly understood my intent. Reviewing a series of articles in which I first spelt out my thesis of primordial distinctiveness and commonality, he described my writing as a vision that unfolded to me 'of myself as a part of a magnificent continuum, something destined as an inheritance.'⁴ I dare add: a magnificent inheritance.

Yes, the history of the Indus region and of its peoples was all too magnificent to me. In the confines of a small prison cell, this historical saga appeared before me on a vast and heroic scale, on a canvass spanning ceaseless time and infinite space. The hooves of a million galloping horses reverberated in my ears as they raised the dust of Indus to the farthest limits of outer space; the swords of Indus battalions rose in defence and flashed before my eyes; mighty and turbulent rivers surged and shrank marking the unending cycle of immoderate seasons; dry and burning desert winds swept across the endless plains every summer to be quenched only by the relentless and thunderous monsoon clouds; cold and freezing winter nights made survival all but impossible except for the most hardy and robust forms of life. The cycle continued unabated; the invaders never relented; the resistance never tired; the extreme seasons continued; the Indus person remained tough and indefatigable: he was a survivor.

But he was a survivor in more ways than one. Surviving is therefore not the

only facet of his character that I focus upon in this book. There are countless colourful and gripping episodes in the history of India and Indus, which tell much more. Countless instances of triumph, defeat, heroism, grit, courage, cowardice, expediency, guile and craft provide the backdrop for a drama that unfolds on a stage as boundless and expansive, as vast and variegated as the subcontinent itself. Many larger than life characters performing here have, at all times, displayed an unremitting commitment to higher ideals and devoted their lives to them. Princes and peasants, sufis and rebels, statesmen and poets, fighting, resisting, leading or composing poetry imbued with nationalistic pride — all have added to the colour and richness of the tapestry that makes for Indian and Indus history.

Yet, alas, many of them find no mention in the textbooks in Pakistani schools and colleges. Theirs' is not the history that our official media is permitted to disseminate. We are told a different story altogether. Our textbooks are censored and tell not even the half-truth.

Our earth, we are told, was not our own until people from distant lands came and conquered it (and us), for us. Our ancient heroes cannot be our heroes because they preceded our own conversion to Islam. Muslim conquerors fought only Hindu infidels, never a Muslim opponent. Victory was the fruit of the brave arm and the unflinching faith of Muslim armies. Their

defeats were always the result of Hindu conspiracies or Muslim lasciviousness. Never was a God-fearing Muslim king defeated in a straight battle. Never did superior technology or better strategy win the day. Intrigue and betrayals caused the defeat of Muslim armies and states in all battles.

Nor do our history books convey to us the crucial part played by advancements in science and technology in the successful conquest of the subcontinent by the West or in the result of any battle against its armies. Such advancements are not even noticed. There was always a conspiracy or a betrayal. The role of the printing press and the advantage provided by such Western inventions as the mariner's compass, the steam engine, cast steel, the spinning jenny, the hydraulic press, the pocket watch, the sextant and the theodolite have never been analysed in our textbooks.

The new power was equipped with the speed of the railway engine and the telegraph. The sloth of the old world was depicted by the bullock cart and the elephant. The new power was initiating its young to logarithms, practical geometry, plane trigonometry and calculus. The old order was smug, ensuring that its children were learning entire scriptures by rote. The new power had developed a stable and precise legal and parliamentary system separating the church from the state. The old system was worked by the arbitrary discretion of imperial or feudal lords in whom, exclusively, vested all authority —

ecclesiastic and temporal.

The result of the contest was predetermined. Neither intrigue nor betrayal could have reversed the outcome of the battles between 'Muslim' India and Christian Europe, at least not of the final result. Yet, through stories only of betrayal and deceit, our students are imbued with an unmitigated sense of betrayal. In vengeance alone do they thus seek to rid themselves of the sense of guilt and betrayal. They become easy prey to irrational dogma and the cycle of violence. Thus do our history books tend to distort the character of our youth.

These, indeed, are aspects of how the more distant history is narrated. One marvels at how the very recent history is distorted. For several decades now the state-owned media in Pakistan has made blatant efforts to prove that Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah was an orthodox fundamentalist. We are also asked to believe that all the fundamentalist and religious parties supported him and his Muslim League in his pursuit of Pakistan. None has the courage to admit its past. And by denying their own past, the fundamentalists claim the exclusive right today to determine the agenda for Pakistan.

But in opportunistically denying *their* own past they also cut us off from *our* past. Thus have these religious elements, who hated the guts of the modernist

Barrister, become the custodians of the ideology of Pakistan. Thus have the obscurantist fundamentalists made ardent (but, mercifully, unsuccessful) attempts to displace liberal modernism in Pakistan.

A large section of the Hindu elite and intellectuals in India is no less guilty of irrational extremism that culminates in communal violence. This segment has nursed the 'injury' of the division of the indivisible Akhand Bharat and targeted its ire towards the Indian Muslim, a minority in India, whenever an opportunity has been available: notably Ayodhya (1992), Gujarat (2002).

Hence the dire and pressing need to go back to our roots, to go back to our origins, and to trace our own steps from pre-history to Partition. Thus, too, the need to revisit some more questions: What role did the Congress itself play in the Partition of the subcontinent? Who exploited religious symbolism more: Gandhi or Jinnah? Was Pakistan meant to be a fundamentalist theocratic state? Did Iqbal and Jinnah conceive it as an *Islamic* or as a *Muslim* State?

The answers must depend entirely upon what we consider our identity and our destiny to be. That is the issue on which intense contemporary debate and contention remain focussed. Thus, the need to rediscover ourselves before we are completely swamped by the mumbo-jumbo of obscurantism and obfuscation. Thus, I thought, the need for *The Indus Saga* and the

re-examination of the history of the two great nations of South Asia from the period preceding Patliputra to Partition.

Part I of this book, titled 'The Two Regions', examines the divide between Indus and India, more or less along geographical lines. Part II, 'The Two Worlds', investigates the differences between the Indus person (along with the Indian in this case) and the most recent foreign rulers, the British. Part III, 'The Two Nations', explores the essential features and nature of the divide between the Muslims and the Hindus of the subcontinent. It also tries to discover the reasons why this divide finally became coterminous with the primordial dividing line between Indus and India in 1947. In endeavouring to determine the essential nature of each divide, an attempt is made to discover the character and the identity of the inhabitant of the Indus region.

* * *

I went to jail out of a love of democracy and for the creation of a more humane, liberal and enlightened society in my country. Like me, countless others protested the brutality and intolerance of those brutish rulers and of the elite that supported them. At that time the only honourable option seemed to us to be prison. And the gruesome images of Ayodhya and Gujarat also manifest the desperate need for harmony and tolerance on the other side of the border. No

one who, in pursuit of tolerance and humanity, has not experienced life on the wrong side of prison walls can understand this commitment to, indeed a yearning for, more tolerant, more enlightened and more understanding societies in India and Pakistan.

My only prayer is that never again in this land should prison seem to be the only honourable option for political activists, or for anyone else for that matter. And I have taken pains to trace the history of this region only to attempt to prove that the civilization that has been inherited by Indus citizens (Pakistanis) is not the gift of Aurangzeb or of any other emperor. Nor is it the legacy of any fundamentalist obscurantist, Hindu or Muslim. It is the land of the intense poetry of Khusrau, Hussain, Bahoo, Bullah, Waris, Latif, Khushhal, Iqbal and Faiz. It is the civilization that has been shaped by the deeds and tales of resistance, valour, commitment and wisdom of Rasalu, Jasrat, Sarang, Arjun, Dullah, Shah Inayat, Chakar, Khushhal, Kharal, Bhagat Singh and, above all, by that incomparable progressive and liberal Muslim: Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Whosoever has lived the life and died the death of our heroes, and whosoever has lost his heart to the poetry of our bards, has won the everlasting admiration of the people of Indus. He may have made many enemies in the process; bloodthirsty enemies, in fact. But he has lived after his death. This book therefore is as much about the battlefields where our heroes

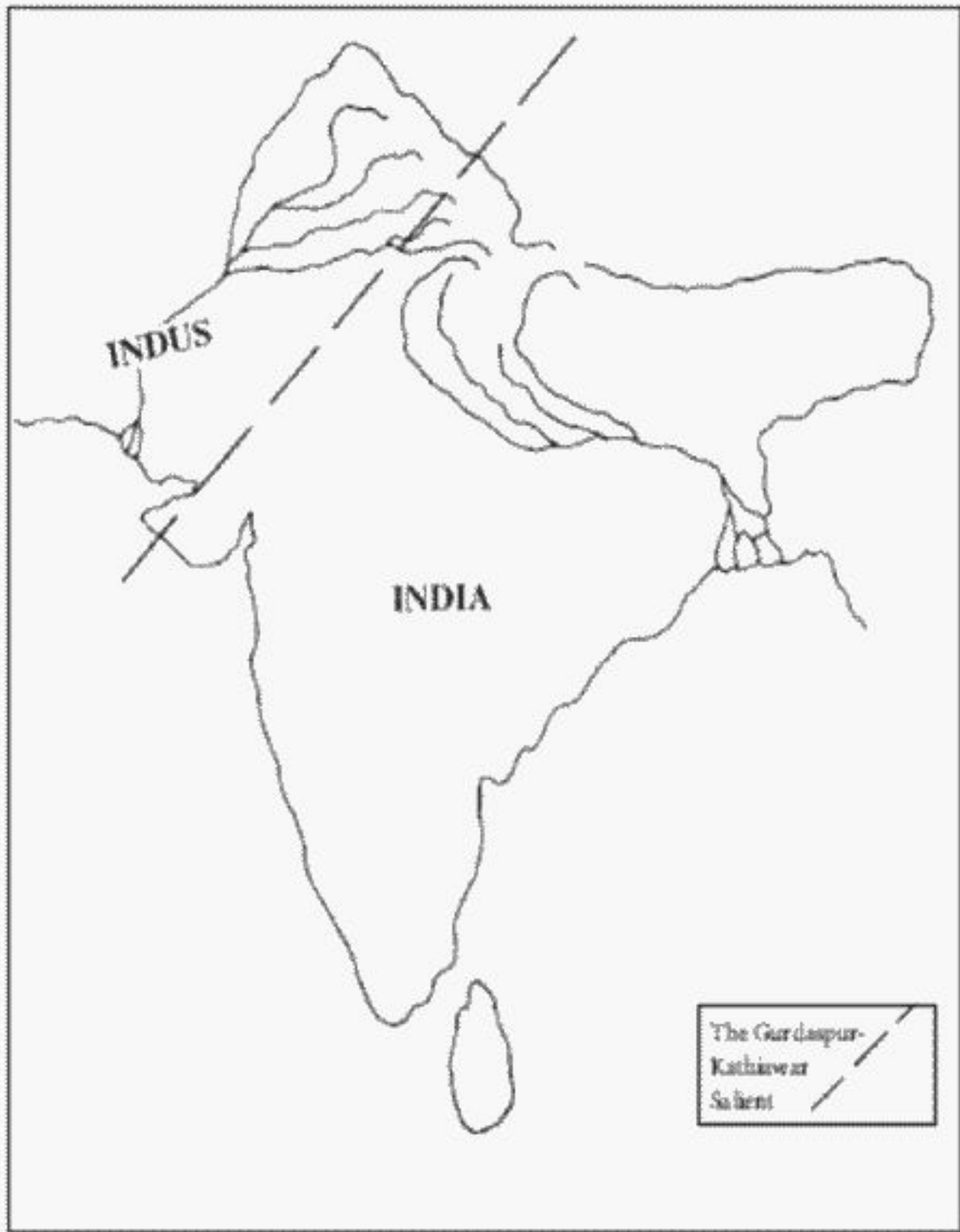
have fallen and the death-cells in which they have spent their last uncompromising days.

1. Dr Humayun Khan and G. Parthasarathy: Cross Border Talks, Diplomatic Divide (2004) Roli Books p. 69.
2. Maneesha Tikekar: Across the Wagah, An Indian's Sojourn in Pakistan: (2004) Promilla & Co. p.135.
3. Chaudhry Bahawal Bakhsh of Mongowal in District Gujrat who, at 82, courted arrest in 1946.
4. The Journal of Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East (1996).

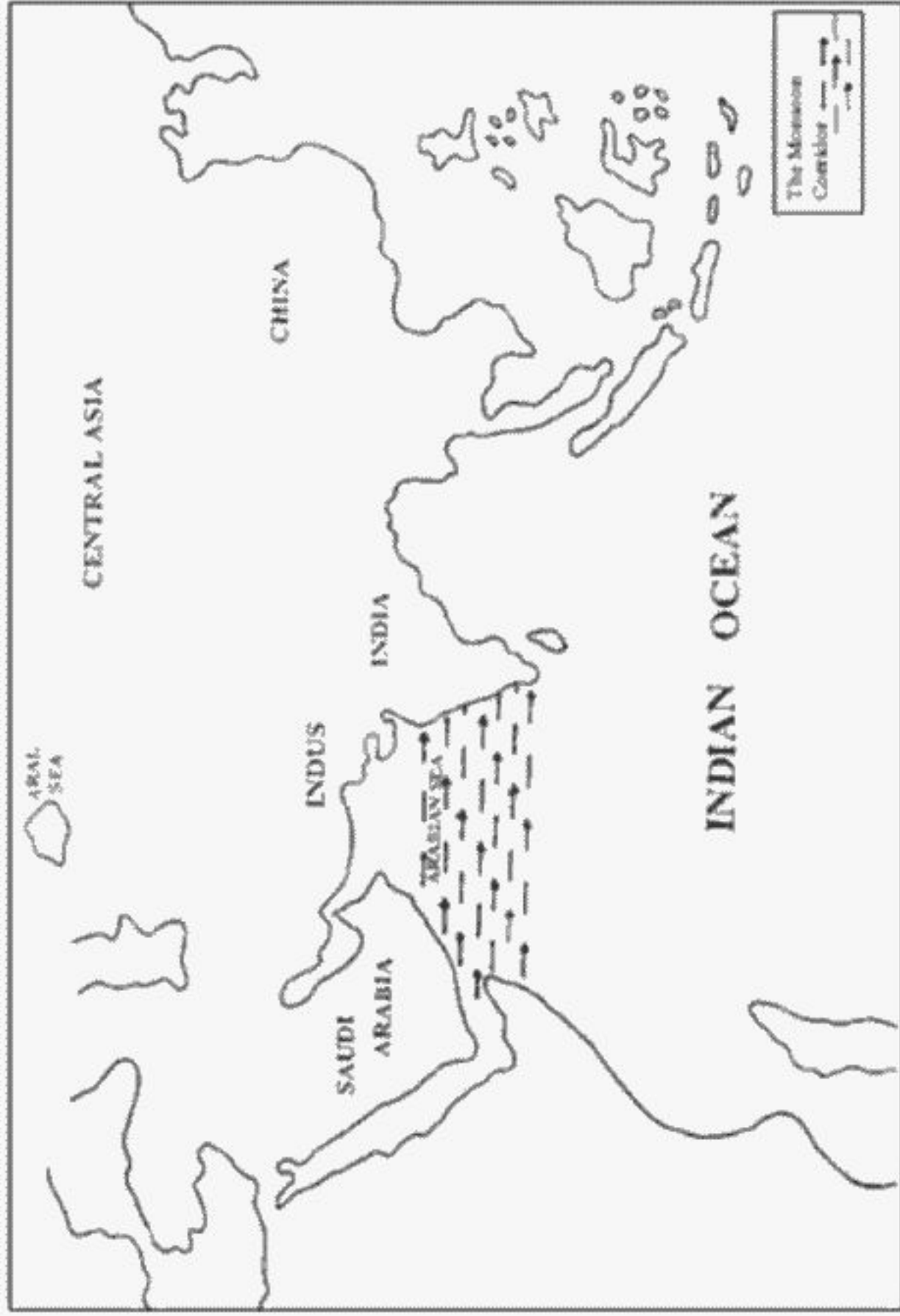
PART ONE

The Two Regions

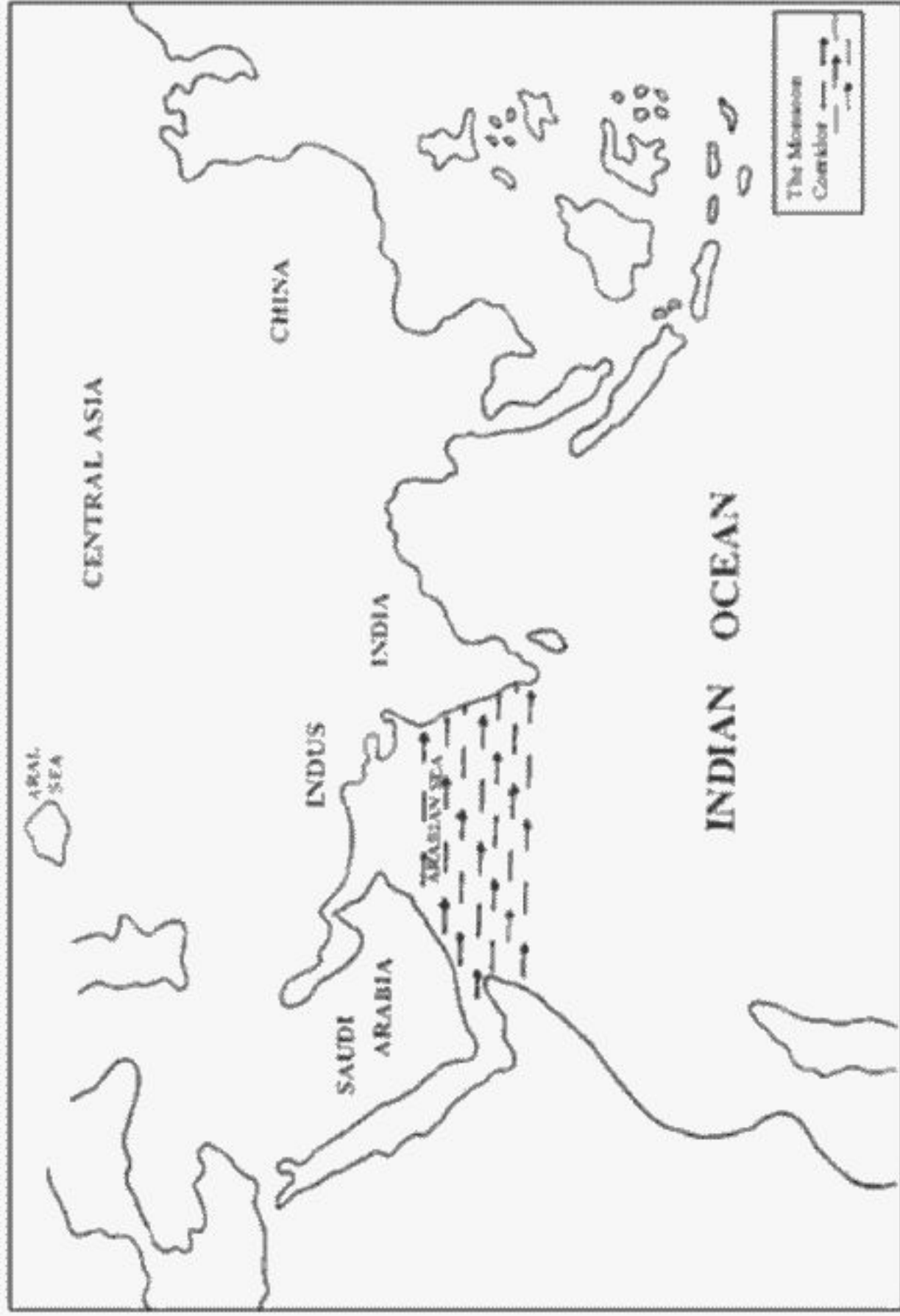
2000 BC to AD 1800



The Historical Watershed.



Arab Trade Routes Bypass Indus



Arab Trade Routes Bypass India

Introduction

I. SEARCH FOR THE PAKISTANI IDENTITY

Is the Pakistani an Arab? Or an Indian? Or something of both? Or neither? Are his origins entirely Central Asian? What influences has he imbibed from Persia? How is he different from the Europeans who ruled him for almost one hundred years? Does he have a distinct personality or culture of his own? If so, for how long has he had this distinctiveness? Was it first created by the partition of the Indian subcontinent in August 1947, or does it pre-date the Partition? Was the divide first created in 1940 when the Lahore Resolution was adopted, or did the roots of the division exist before that? Was the divide created by the First War of Independence, which the British call the 'Great Mutiny', or did it emerge with the coming of the first Muslim rulers and saints upon the areas now forming Pakistan?

Or are the roots of the divide lodged even deeper, going back to prehistory? Has the Indus region, which comprises Pakistan, not had a natural and inherent urge towards separatism, and its own separate identity? Is the Indo-Pak divide not of primordial origin?

The divide, of course, is there. It is real and tangible. It is manifested in the

shape of Pakistan itself. But questions about the roots of Pakistan continue to abound. In this of course, it is far from unique. Such questions have also been raised about other nations. However, many of these other nations have attempted to provide answers for themselves with objectivity and reason. The Pakistani is still in search of an answer to the question: what, in essence, is the Pakistani's identity?

This question still confounds the minds of many who take an interest in the state of Pakistan as it exists today - as an important member in the comity of nations. This book endeavours to discover some answers to this question. It attempts, therefore, to address itself to the controversy concerning the Pakistani's identity. It is about what many have called Pakistan's 'identity crisis.'

It will not be such a great misfortune if the answers this book hopes to provide are not considered the last word on the subject. The real tragedy is that seldom has any Pakistani with unclouded and unbiased perceptions even dared to raise the question. And fewer still have even attempted to look for answers. Pakistanis have spent almost half a century without asking any questions. Indeed, questions are anathema - theirs is not to question why.

By prohibiting questions, authority has been usurped in Pakistan by

pretenders and impostors. Those who challenge the pretenders are punished with imprisonment, even death. This is a risk that all sensitive minds that choose to ask questions in such an imposed cultural environment must take. Yet the questions remain. Just as glacial ice melts only when it is exposed to the right amount of heat and sunlight, answers come when bold, courageous and informed questions are asked. I have thus undertaken to raise and address some fundamental questions.

As I embarked on the perilous attempt to raise these questions and to seek answers, I came across other more inscrutable cultural traits for which our contemporary analyses provide no explanation. And if any explanation for such traits was indeed available, it seemed to be based on certain blindly but widely accepted myths. I have also therefore tried to identify these and other myths, and to determine their origins.

The endeavour is to discover the true bedrock of Pakistan's national identity and of its origins which are buried under layers of myth and obscurantism.

II. AN ANCIENT CONCEPT

In that mythical age when men rubbed shoulders with heroes, demons and

gods, and when mountains moved, forests sprang, and the spirits of the rivers spoke, the plains of the present-day Delhi region supported the kingdom of Kurukshetra. It was the home of the Kurus.

The Kurus lived in the Age of Iron. Unlike copper and bronze, iron was neither brittle nor in short supply. The heavier iron plough cut deeper furrows. It, therefore, made the Kuru farmer's plough more efficient. Iron tools were used to clear the woods and jungles. Thus they aided the harvesting of a larger produce and wealth, which could support a richer ruling class than ever before.

The Kuru rulers were rich. The seat of the Kuru throne was much sought after. There were frequent wars of succession. In one such war, the throne of the kingdom was contested between the progeny and successors of two rival claimants, Pandu and Dhritarashtra. The former had five sons, the latter one hundred. But the sons of Pandu were more vigorous. Initially exiled, they became soldiers of fortune and took to travelling from one royal court to another.¹

The sons of Pandu finally confronted the sons of Dhritarashtra in a fierce and sanguinary battle. Both sides had marshalled all their forces, and the plain of Kurukshetra became the scene of the bloodiest strife known to ancient history. All the kings of the subcontinent and even the distant Bactrians and

the Chinese reportedly took part in support of one side or the other.² After eighteen days of fierce fighting, the five Pandava brothers survived to win a kingdom encompassing Indus and India.

It is perhaps a fact of no mean significance that in a vast and limitless subcontinent, the area of Kurukshetra lies close to the territories of Tarrain, Panipat and Sirhind. Altogether it is this small strip of prize land that has so often been the venue of historic battles which have decided the fate of the entire subcontinent.

Another fact is, however, of even greater significance: The epic, Mahabharata,³ in describing that great prehistoric civil war not only unquestioningly assumes the 'oneness' of the vast subcontinent, but also looks upon the lands of Bactria and China, beyond its great mountain ranges, as outlying frontier regions, inseparable, inalienable and natural parts of the Indian subcontinent. The concept of the 'unity and indivisibility' of the vast and limitless subcontinent, itself the size of all of Europe, is thus ancient and rooted in history and myth.

On the map, too, the Indian subcontinent appears to offer a rare compactness, albeit on a continental scale. It appears to be a single, unified and an exceptionally impregnable fortress. High and imposing mountain

ranges protect its north and north-western frontiers. The deep expanse of the Indian Ocean becomes a vast intercontinental moat on all other sides.

From the Pamirs in the north to Cape Comorin in the south, from Gwadar in the west to Assam in the east, and from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal - the Indian subcontinent has always been treated by the geographer and the historian alike as one single unit. 'Indian History' is held to imply the history of the entire geographical area lying between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean. This contains two sprawling river basins - the Indus and the Ganges - with their alluvial plains and deltaic swamps. It embraces the central plateau with its forests and wild game. And it includes the southern peninsula, its hills, coastal plains, and a drainage network of turbulent and torrential streams.

It was the oft-articulated argument of many leaders of the Congress Party before Partition, and is now of the present-day Hindu fundamentalists, that the subcontinent has been bequeathed by nature with an island-like unity and was indivisible. Nature appears to have provided imposing barriers in the shape of the two great mountain ranges radiating east and south-west from the central and northern apex of the Pamirs. To all appearances of physical and geographical circumstances, the subcontinent with its endless succession of plains, plateaus, and rain-soaked coastal strips, the vast expanse starting from the rugged Khyber to the Ghats of the Bombay-Goa coast, from the barren hills

of Kalat to the humid green of the Sunderbans is one vast sanctuary, a single natural, indivisible whole. The exclusive, almost jealous protection afforded by the sky-scraping mountain ranges and the stormy tropical coastline appear to have quarantined the subcontinent in such a manner as ought to have been conducive to the intermixing of the indigenous racial stocks, designed by nature to evolve over the centuries into a common 'Indian' race. It was this apparent geographical compactness which persuaded an accomplished analyst like Jawaharlal Nehru to expound the concept of the subcontinent's 'oneness' to the point of romance.

Most arguments purporting to advance the unity of India drew upon the teachings of Shankaracharya⁴ of old and Vivekananda⁵ of the nineteenth century. Nehru himself drew inspiration from the travels of Shankar, that famed ascetic who established four major monasteries in the four corners of the vast land. The northern monastery was located at Badrinath in the Himalayas, the southern at Sringeri in Mysore, the eastern on the coast at Puri, and the western at Dwarka in Kathiawar - all attesting, in fact or fable, to the immense energy of the man. This great effort by the saintly ascetic also seemed to suggest to Nehru the 'oneness' of all the lands and peoples that came within these distant parameters.

The much travelled Vivekananda spoke in a language that was simple. His

message was quite clear. 'I am a socialist,' he wrote, 'not because I think it is a perfect system, but because half a loaf is better than no bread.'⁶ He travelled to Egypt, China, Japan and America. When he went to America, he won for himself the title of the Cyclonic Hindu. Vivekananda died in 1902 at the age of only 39. Yet, in those few years, he spoke passionately of India, preaching in all corners of the subcontinent, taking its unity and oneness for granted. He left a lasting impression upon the minds of Indian intellectuals, many of whom were to lead the Indian National Congress in later and more crucial years.

It must respectfully be submitted that all arguments, however, drawing from Shankaracharya and Vivekananda fail to perceive the fact that neither could create a synthesis of Indus and India. None of the four famed monasteries of Shankar was placed in the Indus region. The argument that he had endeavoured to establish the unity of the entire subcontinent is, therefore, self-defeating unless its application is confined to the 'Indian' region, encompassing the Gangetic valley and peninsular India alone.

As to Vivekananda, it is enough to say that he died only a few decades before the centrifugal pull of Indus was to compel, as if by the relentless magnetism of historical forces, the breakup of the subcontinent and lead to the creation of Pakistan.

III. THE MOUTH OF THE LION

The Indus is one of the mightiest rivers on this planet.⁷ It rises as a small spring, appropriately called the 'Mouth of the Lion', in the distant and inaccessible 'Forbidden Land' of Tibet. Near its source the young but ferocious Indus then cuts a narrow, deep gorge through two of the most imposing mountain ranges of the world: the Himalayas and the Karakorams. Upon entering the plains, it slows down and meanders to the sea through the plains of the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh. En route, it imbibes its five major Punjabi tributaries: the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej. This book is essentially about the peoples inhabiting the Indus and its tributaries. It is a land that is referred to here either as 'Indus' or the 'Indus region', depending upon the context. These terms are meant to identify the geographical extent of the land and to distinguish it, at the same time, from 'India', the remainder of the subcontinent. Indus is presently the area that substantially comprises the state of Pakistan. When referring, however, to the *river* Indus, the definite article 'the' precedes Indus.⁸ And also, when 'Indus' is used as an adjective, as in the Indus person, the Indus region, the Indus culture. This is not the case when the reference is to the entire area comprising Pakistan. That will just be called 'Indus.'

Indus (Pakistan) has a rich and glorious cultural heritage of its own. This is

a distinct heritage, of a distinct and separate nation. If the Pakistani was really reassured of this he would be confident that there is no fear of any other country devouring or destroying his state. And he would thus come out of the present-day 'bunker-mentality.'

During the last six thousand years Indus has, indeed, remained independent of and separate from India for almost 5,500 years. Only the three 'Universal States'⁹ - those of the Mauryans, the Mughals, and the British - welded these two regions together in single empires. And the aggregate period of these 'Universal States' was not more than five hundred years.

For the remainder, from prehistory to the nineteenth century, Indus has been Pakistan. 1947 was only a reassertion of that reality. It was the reuniting of the various units - the Frontier, the Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Kashmir - once again in a primordial federation. The mohajirs, who reverted to the Indus in 1947 and thereafter, were the sons and daughters returning to the mother. As such, 'Pakistan' preceded even the advent of Islam in the subcontinent. It has deeper, more ancient foundations. It was certainly not merely 'a chasm that one people created for themselves in the ten short years from 1937 to 1947', as some Indians would like to believe.¹⁰ It need not, therefore, be structured as a fundamentalist intolerant Islamic polity.

The subcontinent has itself always been at least two distinct worlds: the truly 'Indic region', comprising the Gangetic plains and peninsular India, on the one hand, and the 'Indus region', consisting of the basin of the Indus and its tributaries (i.e., Pakistan) on the other. In fact, the twain have seldom, if ever, truly met. 'Indus' (that encompasses the entire Indus valley, including the areas served by the tributaries Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum) has been one large, independent, politico-economic zone for the past countless centuries. Some might even say that from the age of the Aryans, Indus has been relatively closer to the areas of the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) than to any other plains, river system, peninsula or desert region, whether Indian or Arab.

IV. AL-SINDH AND AL-HIND

The present-day belief in this oneness and unity of the entire subcontinent has been inculcated by the calculated interpretations of mythology and, in recent times, by the unifying grip of Pax Britannica.¹¹ The concept of the subcontinent's 'oneness', given currency by the secure and unified hold of the Raj, was adopted eagerly by the Indian historians and political scientists and unquestioningly by their Indus counterparts. To the Indian, it seemed a natural and inescapable conclusion.¹² But even such Indus scholars as have striven to rationalize and support the impetus for Muslim separatism and the creation of

Pakistan, only partially appreciate the truth and essence of its historical and politico-cultural roots.

It is true that the world has shrunk in the last two centuries. The steamship, the railway engine, the telegraph, with their successors, the automobile, the aeroplane, the radio, the television, the telephone and, most recently, the satellite, have contributed to the fusion and integration of cultures. The period of most of the earlier of these advances coincided, in the subcontinent, with the unifying political hold of the Raj. In the one hundred years preceding the partition of the subcontinent, Indus and India seemed to have merged, to have dissolved into one entity.

Not quite. All the primordial impulses that shape a culture, a polity and a society remained different. Indus never really became a part of India. Many common features had no doubt been acquired by the two. Some of these had substance while others only had a veneer of commonality. But at the core, each was given to relentless and natural antipodal pulls.

Captivated by the 'oneness' concept, Indian and Pakistani historians have, however, always tied the history of Pakistan solely to the history of the Indian subcontinent. They have preferred to correlate it to the politics of central India, the Deccan, and the South, rather than to the more influential developments in

Parthia, Bactria, around the Aral Sea, or in Persia.¹³ To this day, historians continue to style the variegated and many-faceted history of Indus as an integral part of what is called 'Indian' history. Accordingly, even when focusing only upon Indus history they pay more attention to the influence upon it of the Indian dynasties than to the politics of Indus itself; even less thought is given to relevant events and changes in Persia or Central Asia.¹⁴

Nor has the 1947 partition of the subcontinent along the natural and historical divide between Indus and India been properly comprehended by Pakistani historians. Many Pakistani scholars and writers, in their zeal to justify Partition do not seek the primordial roots of the process. Yet, with a passion for eschewing all that was Indian, they choose to trace their country's cultural foundations solely to extra-territorial linkages. In denying the Indian, they deny the Indus. This exercise unwittingly but unambiguously prevents them from recognizing the many attributes of Indus culture which are common with the Indian. Without comprehending these, it may never be possible to understand the justifiable pride that a very important section of present-day Indus society, the mohajir, takes in his association with his birthplaces in Agra, Lucknow and Allahabad. But a 'denationalized' Indus elite feels that the very rationale of Pakistan must be a complete and total divergence of the attributes of the Pakistani from the Indian.¹⁵ Perhaps it was feared that an identification of any

commonality between them would jeopardize the rationale for Pakistan. Therefore, a cultural commonality with a completely extra-territorial peoples had to be found.

In looking outside the region for the genesis of Pakistan, the Pakistani historian and ideologue is captivated by the 'Arab element'. The rationale for Muslim separatism is attributed solely to the Middle-eastern Arab influence upon the peoples of the Indus region. A 'personality switch' is thus suggested. The Pakistani's breaking away from the one identity (the Indian) and his reassimilation in the other (the Arab) are both emphatically propounded and vigorously propagated as unassailable absolutes.¹⁶ These assumptions generate conflict between the 'local' (who has thus 'switched'), and the mohajir (who continues to recall, and relive, life in his Indian birthplace).

This concept of the 'personality switch' (of the Indus inhabitant assuming an extra-territorial Arab personality) runs contrary to the historical fact that Indus had almost no direct interaction with the Arabs. In the long period since the advent of the Aryans to the present age, Sindh alone, out of the entire Indus region, had direct political contact with the Arabs. That, too, was for the brief period of 144 years, from AD 711 to 854. Despite this very brief direct contact with the Indus region, Arab authors themselves were perceptive enough to provide one important insight into the distinctness of Indus from

India. In their view, there was no doubt about it. They consistently treated the two lands as different. They always, and with a relentless consistency, referred to Indus as 'al-Sindh' and to India as 'al-Hind.'¹⁷

To suggest that contacts between Indus and the Arabs were historically brief is not to imply that there were no significant contacts between Indus and Islam. On the contrary, Indus was constantly exposed to Islamic doctrines over long centuries of continuous interaction with the Muslim conquerors and empire-builders, and the ascetics of the Sufi order. By the twelfth century Islam had become the dominant religion of the Indus region. Except for the young Muhammad bin Qasim, these invaders, soldier-kings and saintly ascetics were almost entirely of Central Asian or Persian origin, whether Mongols, Afghans, Turks or Iranians.

Barring a few coincidental, fleeting contacts, the story of the Pakistani peoples shares little *cultural* commonality with the Arab. Despite their intense reverence for Islam, the fact remains that racially, ethnically, linguistically, and, above all, culturally, the peoples of Pakistan are more closely linked to the peoples of Central Asia and Iran than to the peoples of the Arab world. The Arabian Sea and the monsoons separated Indus and the Arabian peninsula and maintained a civilizational distance between them. The monsoons crossed the sea in a direction that took the Arabs to the coasts of the Indian peninsula, and

not to the mouth of the Indus or up its waterway.¹⁸ Even Muhammad bin Qasim's advent was the result of political exigencies.¹⁹

This has seldom been comprehended objectively and dispassionately. Artificial arguments have endeavoured to pull Indus either inevitably into India or into an altogether extraterritorial linkage. The one distorts the past. The other confounds the present.

V. THE BATTERED SOUL OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan has always had an identity; and it has always had a soul. Its soul has often been lost to it by interpretations based on illogical myths and obscurantist double-speak. It is today battered by the intolerant and fratricidal schisms of sectarian, linguistic and regional groups; brutalized by ostentatious consumerism and corruption; held hostage by the manifest opportunism and inconstancy of its ruling classes.

Yet this soul is a colourful and vibrant fabric in which many distinct and differing threads have been interwoven and have peacefully coexisted, each adding to the strength and value of the weave. It is time to shake off the acrid dust that sectarian, linguistic and regional conflicts have showered upon this fabric, that consumerism and opportunism have laid upon it, and to expose its

original brightness to all the sons and daughters of this nation, to reassure them of its inherent strength. It is time to rediscover and restore the soul, and the dream that is embodied in it. It is time to rediscover and restore Pakistan as a liberal, progressive, modern Muslim state with its rightful place in the comity of nations. Hence, this quest for the lost soul of Pakistan.

Since I have endeavoured to support all my arguments with what I believe to be substantive evidence, my position is neither confrontationalist nor submissive. It is, I hope, only rational. It is an attempt at combating the 'fragility syndrome' that afflicts many of my Pakistani compatriots, who labour under the phobia that some state or power will overtake and absorb us. It is intended to build confidence in a nation that shows an inherent lack of it despite a half century of present, and six thousand years of historical, existence. It is intended to reassure the Pakistani that the foundations of his country are primordial, indelible and firm.

It may also, perhaps, induce the militant, chauvinistic and irrational elements on the Indian side to reconsider their view of Pakistan as a historical aberration. The Indo-Pak divide is rooted deep in history and should not be a bone of contention or a cause for conflict. It ought to be accepted as a historical fact. The confidence of the one side and the realization on the part of the other will, it is hoped, lead to a new and more substantive understanding

and to the end of an adversarial relationship between the two great civilizations of the subcontinent. Let a Pakistani, truly confident of the strength of his roots, and an Indian, adhering to a rational approach to the history of the subcontinent, come forth with a greater understanding of their origins, and there will be lasting peace. And peace is the prerequisite for the development of two of the poorest and most populous nations of the modern world.

VI. A GENERATIONAL BRIDGE

What follows could, perhaps, be categorized as a cultural history or, more appropriately, a history of the 'political culture'. But the categorization of this account is not essential to the main argument itself. My aim is somewhat limited.

I have endeavoured to examine several cultural trends, but not all. This selective exercise is justified by the purpose of this study. First, its focus is mainly upon the traits of the politico-economic culture. While, therefore, I draw upon poetry to illustrate a point, I have not examined in this book other fine arts like dance forms, painting and music in their historical perspective. Second, I have not concerned myself with the analysis of every significant historical event or fact. Those that I have selected are the several elements that, to my mind, make up the present-day 'Indus person': the Pakistani citizen. The

purpose is for him to discover his own distinct identity, if he has one, and to establish it, if possible, on the firmer foundations of historical facts. Thirdly, while most of these facts may indeed be drawn from the domain of culture of the Indus region alone, yet many political and economic realities of areas beyond Indus are also pertinent to the inquiry. An examination of these, insofar as they throw light upon the Indus person, is thus not outside the pale of this modest work.

I cannot claim to be a historian, less so a historiographer. But I see myself and my generation as a bridge between the past and the future, and between Indus and India. The past, particularly in the accounts of the days of the struggle for independence that I inherited from my parents, has to be passed on to another generation that is now in the process of learning about it. That generation will carry it to the future, hopefully without the burden of the prejudices of the past and with the confidence of being citizens of a stable state whose origins go back far in history. In doing that they must also embrace, and rejoice in, the heroism of the Indian struggle. Both struggles were essentially the same, yet different. They had many common heroes, many common moments of courage, sacrifice and glory. And the recalling of both must lead to harmony, not conflict.

Other historians may come down heavily upon me for treading in the

territory of their discipline. But that, besides being their prerogative, is a jeopardy that I cannot avoid in my quest for the roots of the ancient civilizations that are reflected today in the material and tangible shape of Pakistan.

Through tales, legends, ballads and rituals, I have embarked upon the journey to rediscover Pakistan. And every tale, legend, ballad and ritual, from the most ancient to the relatively recent, from the pre-Islamic to the post-Islamic, has assured me that there has always existed a 'state' or region, encompassing the Indus and its tributaries, which was independent and distinct from India. My journey has carried me through several captivating phases and countless gripping episodes of its history. Without any promise of erudition or competence in expounding history, I seek to take the reader along with me on my journey.

Some of the ideas spelt out in this book were contained in a limited series of articles that I published in 1993.²⁰ Those articles brought me some instant encouragement, along with some unavoidable criticism. I had the occasion, while concluding the series, to thank those who had encouraged me, and to reassure them that, along with my other preoccupations, I would continue in my efforts to discover the mysteries of the land that I was born in, the land that I love, the land of the majestic Indus and its many giant tributaries: Pakistan.

I only wish to remind those who have taken umbrage at some of my conclusions (like the one that asserts that fundamentalism of whatever variety or persuasion is a culture largely alien to the Indus region) that I do not claim to have subscribed the last word on the cultural history of the Indus region. My conclusions may, perhaps, provoke them to analyse and write, even if only to flout my impressions. I look forward to their contribution to this area of study, so rarely entered upon. Not only that, if I trigger off some research into our past by scholars and students more competent than me, I will be satisfied.

Quite often, we look at our past through the spectacles of our present. Our past is, in reality, now our present. There can, indeed, be no present without its past. This book is about our past. Too much of fundamentalist obscurantism and too many of our inflexible contemporary prejudices colour our analysis of our past. I have made an attempt to break with that tradition. If others take up the challenge from the point beyond which it was not within my capacity to continue, I think I will have achieved my purpose.

VII. A THEMATIC APPROACH

Accounts of political history are often linear. Each normally starts from one point of time and moves, along a more or less straight line, towards the end of that given period. The story of the Great Mughals must, therefore, start with

Babar and end, in 1707, with the death of Aurangzeb.

That cannot be the case with an account of the 'cultural' history of a people. To address ourselves to the substance of cultural history we may ask and answer the question with the historian Kosambi: 'But what is history? If history means only the succession of outstanding megalomaniac names and imposing battles, Indian history would be difficult to write. If, however, it is more important to know whether a given people had the plough or not than to know the name of their king, then India has a history.'²¹ Kosambi then proceeds to adopt the following definition for his historical outline of the culture and civilization of ancient India: 'History is the presentation in chronological order of the successive changes in the means and relations of production. This definition has the advantage that history can be written as distinct from a series of historical episodes. Culture must then be understood also in the sense of the ethnographer, to describe the essential ways of life of the whole people.'

While adopting the above definition as the one that applies most to this work, I must nevertheless spell out one caveat. A cultural history need not necessarily be 'in chronological order'. Its account cannot really have any specific starting points, nor any points of conclusion. It is an unbroken continuum. Some influences take several generations to manifest their effects.

Many others remain dormant and surface only after later events have changed the environment.

Nor can an account of the cultural history of a people claim to be exhaustive. The interplay of influences, the interaction of causes and the intermingling of divergent trends never have an equal or uniform effect on all. Nor will these ever be interpreted with the same vision by different analysts. There is always room for different, even conflicting, versions of cultural history. But whosoever attempts to write about the cultural history of a people does, in fact, venture upon an exercise to discover each element that makes up the contemporary individual. He endeavours, in other words, to 'assemble' the man in the context of his times. In so doing, the historian aspires to discover that individual's natural and acquired impulses, emotions, responses, habits, fears, delights and predilections. Going to his roots, he seeks to identify him as an individual, apart from all other nations, but as a part of his own people, living in his own time.

Although generally following a chronological, date-wise order, this account does not adhere rigidly to chronology. The approach is thematic. Many chapters and portions of it may therefore overlap, in respect of the time-frame. But in that respect alone. They do not overlap in respect of the subject, or in respect of the historical events selected to illustrate a theme or a conclusion.

VIII. A WAFER-THIN APPAREL

My perspective, as the reader will notice, is not that of the king or emperor. I do not stand with Akbar the Great upon the battlements of the Lahore fort and survey all those below. I stand, instead, with the subject below, and look up at Akbar upon the battlements. I mingle with the men in the street and with the peasants. I do not find the emperor's position entirely secure. I hear their whispers. I feel their disaffection. And there I also meet with Abdullah Bhatti, the rebel.

That is my account of the history of Indus (Pakistan). It is the story of bold and courageous men and women of resistance. I find these men, like Rasalu, fighting demons and ogres. I see them later, with Sheikha and Jasrat Gakkhar, confronting the 'Scourge of the Earth', Taimur. I notice these subjects in a lowly station in life, gathering under the banners of Sarang, Arjun, Dullah, Shah Inayat, Chakar Khan, Khushal, Ahmed Khan Kharal and Bhagat Singh.²² They gathered to resist alien expeditionaries, invaders and imperial armies. And yet they find no (or, at best, only scant) mention in the recognized and official history books of Pakistan. Their stories do not conform to the myths that we have evolved and which give us comfort.

I am driven to the conclusion that Indus historians, like those who have

written the history of Indian Muslims, suffer, by and large, from that irrational attitude towards themselves that has been described by M. Mujeeb in his monumental work, *The Indian Muslims*. He points out that 'the judgments of the Indian Muslims about themselves have been either inspired by self-praise or self-pity, by an idealization of themselves as the embodiment of religious truth and political wisdom or, with equal lack of balance, by a condemnation of themselves as a people unworthy of those ancestors who spread the word of God throughout the world and set the highest example of social and political justice. Both these extreme viewpoints are misleading. They are also simplifications which effectively prevent that understanding of history and contemporary life which is essential for healthy development. A third form of judgment, which is an aspect of the apologists of the last one hundred years, is that of comparison and contrast. The defects of the Western way of life and of the manners and customs of the Hindus are picked out to show that, however bad the Muslims may be, there are others who are worse.'²³ Unless we write and are prepared to read objective accounts about ourselves, we will continue to fall prey to the dilemma of our identity and remain victims of the obscurantist explanations about our own strengths and weaknesses.

A most perceptive Pakistani historian, K. K. Aziz, has aptly observed that: 'Like governments, a people get the historians they deserve.' He also rightly

laments, 'If five or six historians write and publish in a country of 120 million people, there is something wrong both with the historians and the people.'²⁴ But is this also another example of the 'self-pity' that Mujeeb has noticed among our historians? Certainly not. Aziz has laced all his analyses with historical facts and references. In another perceptive volume he has exposed the distortions created by the contemporary establishment in the written history being taught in our schools and higher academic institutions. By exact reference to specific texts, his works alarm the sensitive reader about how our own history has been distorted, indeed murdered.²⁵

A ruling elite that has imposed its will by a collaborationist 'denationalizing' of the populace has feet of clay. It is possessed by fear. It clamps down on anyone who questions its policies. Questions, in fact, are themselves suspect and are prohibited as they may disturb the moorings upon which the ruling classes presume to justify their hold upon the state. And if a culture proscribing questions and inquiry is indeed adopted, fundamentalist dogma is bound to creep in and take over. The establishment fears that if questions are indeed asked, these may lead to conclusions that the present-day, presumptive moorings are not the rationale for the creation of the state of Pakistan. This shift in thought may destabilize the bureaucratic and fundamentalist stranglehold upon the state, even though the shift in thought

may stabilize the state itself. If truth is indeed discovered, obscurantist myths can be discarded. If these myths are discarded, the ruling elite and its fundamentalist allies will be denuded of their wafer-thin apparel. The emperor wears no clothes except those of myth and self-deception.

Most of those who comprised the generation that struggled for and won Pakistan's independence have gone. But before they went, they had themselves been overcome by a culture that prohibited inquiry and analysis. They themselves laid the basis, after the death of the Quaid-i-Azam,²⁶ for a blind acceptance of their own version of history. Based on narrow communalist myths, this version cut us off from our heroes. Fundamentalist solutions quelled our questions. Firewalls of prejudice and dogma prevented us from embracing our heroes. But the questions and our heroes have survived. They must survive.

Pity the nation that forgets its heroes. We have to rediscover our heroes. Until we do so, many cancerous myths will continue to harbour in our body-politic, and many unwanted fractious controversies and fissiparous tendencies will continue to bedevil us on both sides of the Indo-Pak divide.

IX. NO MAN'S LAND

What has to be perceived is that more than the giant mountain ranges that separate the Indus region from Central Asia, that indiscernible hump between Indus and India along a line roughly connecting Gurdaspur in eastern Punjab to Kathiawar on the Arabian Sea has been the critical dividing line of history and culture. For the present I will call it the 'Gurdaspur-Kathiawar salient'. It approximates the border that today exists between India and Pakistan, thus giving to that border the sanction and strength of history.

It is this unobtrusive strip of land, along with the Rajasthan desert, that separates Indus from India, Gangetic as well as peninsular. It is this imperceptible watershed in the plains between the Indus and Gangetic drainage systems that has proved to be the palpable divide between two lands, two peoples, two civilizations: Indus and India.

It is to the north, along this line, that the Ganges comes closest to the Sutlej, the southern-most tributary of the Indus. But, as if in keeping with the character of the two civilizations and like water draining off the two opposite sides of a sloping roof, each journeys away to drain far out in opposite directions.

The Indus thunders north-west through the skyscraping mountains bordering upon China and Central Asia, swerves southwards, blasts out into

the plains, slows down in the endlessly level lands at the feet of the great mountains, imbibes its tributaries at Panjnad, and then glides on majestically into the Arabian Sea. The Ganges sweeps out of the Himalayas into the northern plains, swivels away towards the east, takes in the Yamuna, and, making a swampy deltaic confluence with the surging Brahmaputra, spills out into the Bay of Bengal. The sources of both the rivers are within a hundred miles of each other.²⁷ But their divergent courses take them to their deltas almost 1500 miles apart. And in opposite directions.

This has also been the case with the great civilizations that have flowered on the banks of these two mighty streams. They came close to each other in some periods of history. Each took stock of the other, and then each went along its own individual, distinct and opposite way. Thus has Indus always been distinct from and independent of India. It is significant that the only politically noteworthy attempt to fuse these two civilizations into one took root in the area of the vital watershed itself, the virtual 'no man's land' between the two streams of water and two civilizations: eastern Punjab.

X. DIFFERING PATTERNS OF OWNERSHIP

This historical distinctness of Indus can also be verified by examining the development of the modes of production, and the relations of production, in

this and the other regions of India at any given point of historical time.

A word, first, about the concept of relations of production and the patterns of their ownership. Man distinguishes himself from the less advanced species by the fact that he is able to produce artefacts other than those for which he was biologically designed by nature. He produces far more than merely his own progeny. Moreover, he modifies and adds value and function to countless such materials as are found in nature and no other species is able similarly to 'manufacture.'

From prehistory, man has been a producer of tools and utensils, developing in time to become a most prolific manufacturer, second only to nature itself. But his needs are also shaped both by his capacity and awareness of its possibilities. The more he creates, the more he desires. The greater the need for a quantity of produce beyond the aboriginal needs of one man, the greater the need for a social 'surplus'. But there can be no surplus production without men uniting, somehow, for joint manufacturing or producing activities and for the mutual exchange of their products. These forms of communal activity for production and exchange (even where those are forcibly obtained) are called the relations of production. These, in turn, are a vital aspect of the modes of production and, *a fortiori*, of production itself.

The basis of the *relations* of production is the relationship of ownership with the *means* of production. Those who possess many implements and means of production may economically subordinate those who have few or no means of production. This gives rise to the perpetuation of property and ownership.

Based on this perpetuation of ownership, the relations of production have appeared in three main forms in history. These are the social relations which go with slave ownership, feudal ownership and capitalist ownership respectively. These forms, in turn, correspond to the three major systems of production and social organization witnessed in the history of man. Between these, there have also been long transitional phases, with relations of production, or social relations, combining in one system the qualities of the old and the new, the dying and the emerging.²⁸

Examine the different pace of development of relations of production upon the Indus on the one hand, and in the Ganges Valley, or in the entire Arab world on the other, and the argument may be appreciated better. The relations of production in Indus have always been more closely identified with, and been shaped by, or have shaped, the relations of production in Central Asia and Iran. The Ganges valley and peninsular India have, on the other hand, almost always existed in historically different times. The pastoral, pre-agrarian and

tribal social order of the Arabs has had even less congruity with the relations of production in the Indus region.²⁹

A review of the social patterns, economic activities, political movements and culture, and of the religions and rituals, throughout the history of Indus, in comparison with those of other areas, will establish its distinctness and uniqueness. It will point to the need to discard both the defensive approach towards our own identity (and nationality) and the obscurantist leap towards another. It will hopefully reassure the Indus person (the modern-day Pakistani) in the pride that he should take in what he is: a Pakistani, a citizen of the Indus valley, with a richer, more glorious history and past than any other nation or peoples in the region. It may perhaps also persuade the Indian elite to adopt a historically more rational approach to another integral part of the Indus region: Kashmir.

There has indeed been an independent Indus region, unified or divided internally, in every historical era. This independence could perhaps not have been visible to the historian writing a straightforward political history of the courts and campaigns of kings and emperors. It would, however, be apparent to the student of the 'cultural history' of the region, studying underlying trends and their causes. It is to such a student that several unorthodox explanations suggest themselves. It is from these, too, that controversy arises.

But controversy is often better than blind adherence. It enables reassessment and re-evaluation. It helps in loosening the hold of unscientific and debilitating, often demeaning, myths. It thus aids the 'de-mythification' of history. And it is precisely this cleansing process that can clear the cobwebs of fundamentalism in India and Pakistan.

XI. QUESTIONS AND MYTHS

Most Pakistani historians seem to labour under an entire matrix of myths that have either been devised by them or by others and have been blindly accepted by them. None of these myths appear to be capable of withstanding the tests of closer examination. Yet, unless these irrational myths are purged, it may not be possible to understand the Indus person. And if this purge is not even attempted, many will continue to smirk with a certain amount of scorn in the Indian myth that 'the nationhood of Pakistan remains as elusive a chimera as it ever was.'³⁰

By concerted but subtle efforts, successive sets of alien and indigenous rulers have disseminated a number of unsubstantiated perceptions about Indus persons: that Indus never offered any resistance to invaders; that it was an intensely fundamentalist society; that Central Asian Muslim expeditionaries had only the most altruistic motives; and that the Muslims of the subcontinent

were always immune from the severity of their raids, or even that they rejoiced in their expeditions.

Take for instance, the widely held belief that Indus has willingly surrendered before every invader. That, indeed, it has not done. As a matter of fact, it may even appear that the entire resistance that successive Central Asian expeditionaries met with was confined to the Indus region. The resistance the Aryans confronted is testified by Hinduism's own sacred texts. The Greeks were stalled in this region and compelled to turn back. Taimur was confronted by Jasrat and Sheikha Gakkhar. Babar repeatedly tried to get to India, but returned after losing heart in the Indus region. At the risk of over-generalization, one may say that once Panipat was reached, an entire empire lay at the feet of the conqueror. Abdullah Bhatti engaged the Mughal might for several years in the Punjab, Khushal Khan in the Frontier, and Shah Inayat in Sindh. Those who care to read the verses of the eighteenth century Punjabi poets will discover the resistance faced by the dreaded Persian Nadir Shah during his passage through Indus.

There were other uprisings and other heroes too. In the nineteenth century the Indus peoples fought several fierce battles before falling to the imperial power that was expanding its dominion from the east. Underground resistance in the Indus region finally broke the will of that imperial authority, contributing

significantly to the roll-back of the Raj.

When, therefore, the proposition that attributes a passive, pliant character to the Indus person is examined by reference to historical facts, it appears to be no more than a myth. Such facts, however, as are necessary for the examination of the proposition are, unfortunately, not readily available in the prescribed textbooks of Indus history. Often, facts are suppressed to give currency to elite-serving myths.

It has to be conceded, however, that myths and perceptions are indeed as important as facts themselves. Often, perceptions become more crucial than the facts, even when a perception has been fabricated deliberately by a ruling elite for its own ends. Many such myths and perceptions have indeed been crafted in the last one hundred and fifty years or so. Myths therefore have to be sifted from facts, as grain from chaff.

Many of the myths that the Pakistani elite of the Indus region have spun around themselves and about themselves are demeaning of the great nation that they are. These myths are designed to consolidate the ruling elite in its opportunist hold of political and economic power. But they are demeaning of the real heroes of the land of the Indus and its tributaries. In order to justify its present-day opportunism, the Indus elite has, in fact, altogether discarded

Indus heroes and has adopted others only to validate its present socio-political *grundnorm*: the success ethic.

This one circumstance has contributed greatly to this 'dehistorification' of Pakistan. After the War of 1857, a new set of 'chiefs' was created by the British. They were allotted large tracts of land for their loyalty. Their sons were inducted into the imperial services. A new civil and military bureaucracy was created and instilled with a culture of unquestioning submission and obedience. They were made to believe and to propagate the belief that defiance and doubt were harmful. These were the persons with economic and state power who then served the alien rulers. It was in their interest to berate and downgrade all those who had resisted aggression. A new history was therefore written to suit the new elite. And to write the new history, people were deprived of the use of the language that embodied their history. In the Indus region, vernacular languages were replaced, as mediums of instruction, by Urdu and English.

The literate classes of Indus were thus weaned from their own local languages. The medium of instruction being Urdu or English, there has been no need to learn the vernacular. This neglect has been the most marked in the Punjab. Although the Pathans, the Sindhis and the Baloch fared much better, at least four generations of Punjabis could therefore imbibe only a vague

knowledge of Abdullah Bhatti (derived almost entirely from an inaccurate but popular film of that name). They have, perhaps, no knowledge whatsoever of such other Punjabi folk and resistance heroes as Sarang, Said, Dilawar, Ahmed Khan Kharal and Bhagat Singh; nor of the deities and beliefs of their predecessor Indus person. Indra and the Vedas, Krishna and the Mahabharata are to be shunned as if they would pollute the minds of the youth; as if Islamic faith is itself vulnerable to such influences with which it has coexisted for centuries and not been overcome. Yet these deities and beliefs, howsoever incredible they may be to the Muslim mind, are facts forming a part of Indus history. In a land beginning only a few miles from the eastern tributaries of the Indus, hundreds of millions of people, most of them peaceable and ordinary, live and continue to believe in these 'facts' in the same manner as the Indus people continue to adhere to the truths inherent in their Islamic beliefs.

Excision from one's own history is a denial of a part of one's own existence. To refuse to understand the beliefs of others is to refuse to coexist. There are many accounts of the history of the Punjab in the Punjabi language that illustrate the resistance put up by the Khattars, Ghebas, Gakkhars, the Gondals, the Warraich, the Bhattis and the other tribes of the Punjab. But very few school children are aware of the heroism of their own ancestors. Najabat's moving verses, for instance, describe many a battle that the Muslim invader,

Nadir Shah, had to fight in Indus on his way to Delhi.³¹ They depict the stoic and brave Indus resistance. Yet Najabat's intense poetry is not a part of the syllabus of any school in Pakistan, not even in the Punjab. Such contemporaneous ballads are the only authentic, though stylized, accounts of the events that they report. Were these literary expressions included in the syllabus of the history of the Indus region (Pakistan), or had 'Punjabi' as a language even been a single compulsory subject in the schools in the Punjab itself, no one would accept the myth that Indus has been a region inhabited by a spineless race that was content to welcome invaders and facilitate their passage to Delhi. It is by the calculated smothering of nationalism and by a deliberately-induced alienation from the vernacular languages that all the Indus heroes of the past have been buried.

When an attempt is made to 'demythologize' history, other essential questions arise. Is the Indus person a liberal or a fundamentalist? Has Indus resolved the issue of the relationship between the state and the citizen? If so, how? If not, why not? What is the status of woman in Indus society? Answers to these and several other questions can help in discovering the inherent character of the Indus person and the Indus society. These questions and their answers can thus lead to the piecing together of the Indus person. These should, therefore, contribute to the understanding of the real impulse of the

Indus region to be independent of India, and the objective basis of the modern-day state of Pakistan.

In attempting to piece together the Indus person, however, it is necessary not merely to define his own attributes. It is also essential to describe how he is different from others. The features and attributes broadly common to all Indus persons, *inter se*, would make them a distinct nation only if these were also dissimilar to the features and attributes of other people, at least other people with whom they had been interacting. In 'assembling' the Indus person of today (the Pakistani) it is necessary, therefore, not merely to show the distinctness of Indus as a geographical region, it is also imperative to address the question how the Indus person is different from the European ruler whose governance he rejected and from the Indian with whom he was not prepared to coexist in one single state encompassing the entire subcontinent.

XII. FROM PATALIPUTRA TO PAKISTAN

Pataliputra, in ancient times, was a great and prosperous city. It lay along the banks of the Ganges sprawling over no less than nine miles at the site of present-day Patna. Near it, the famed university of Nalanda attracted students and scholars from all parts of the known world. Buddha had taught in this region. From the heart of Pataliputra, the Mauryan king Ashok ruled an empire

more vast than that of Aurangzeb. His writ extended to all parts of India and Indus. Ashok's edicts, etched indelibly for the benefit of posterity upon granite and rock, touch the southern-most tip of India and stand today beyond the Suleman Range in the north in the heart of the Hindu Kush.

Ashok's reign provides some corroboration to those who believe in the 'oneness' of the entire subcontinent. But in all the centuries from Pataliputra to Pakistan, the Indus region has maintained a rare individuality and distinctness. The Indus state is thus a primordial and natural state with its roots in prehistory. It is no freak or accident of recent circumstances, nor the product of any 'divide and rule' policy of alien rulers. In other words, and regardless of the uncertainties of history and of geopolitical diplomacy and conflict, there always has been and always will be a Pakistan.

1. During these travels, punctuated with adventures, Arjun, one of the five Pandava brothers, won the hand of the fair princess Draupadi in a 'swayamvara.' To avoid strife among the brothers, however, he is said to have allowed her to become the joint wife of all five! *Swayamvara* is a ceremony in which a princess is allowed to choose her husband from among the assembled suitors.

2. A. L. Basham: *The Wonder That Was India* (1959) 39, 408.
3. With 90,000 stanzas perhaps the longest poem ever written. See Basham, *ibid.*, 407, and Romila Thapar: *A History of India, vol 1* (Penguin, 1979). For easy access to the essence of the 'Mahabharata' as a moral and philosophical tale, see William Buck: *Mahabharata* (1979).
4. Founder of the *Advaita Vedanta*, the dominant philosophical outlook of contemporary Hinduism. See Nehru, *Discovery*, 196.
5. Perhaps the most prominent modern exponent of the *Yoga* and the *Vedanta*. See Nehru, *ibid.*, 194, 356.
6. Nehru, *ibid.*, 358.
7. Jean Fairley: *The Lion River, The Indus* (1993).
8. As in the Nile, the Thames, the Rhine.

9. The term is applied to the three empires that encompassed the entire subcontinent spanning Indus and India. The concept of the universal state based on slavery, with its high-point in the Mauryan empire, had itself sown the seeds of the feudal order many centuries earlier. The two subsequent 'universal states' encompassing the entire subcontinent, would, in turn, be the high points, respectively, of feudalism (the Mughal Empire), and of imperial capitalism (the British Empire). See also chapters 5, 13 and 23.
10. Mani Shankar Aiyar: *Pakistan Papers* (1994). Aiyar does raise some important questions regarding Pakistan's identity crisis which will be addressed in this book, though without specific reference to his propositions.
11. So much so that Prime Minister Clement Attlee opposed the Pakistan concept for the reason, among others, that it would consist of areas that lie across the tracks of the historical and traditional routes into India. See Ayesha Jalal: *The Sole Spokesman* (1992) 185.
12. The Indian scholars' discomfort with Pakistan and their assumption that it remains an aberration continues to impede rational analysis even by the

most discerning amongst them. Take, for instance, such blithe phrases adopted by none other than Mani Shankar Aiyar, a perspicacious and discerning diplomat-politician, as: '[Pakistan] was a country born almost before it was conceived', and: 'In Pakistan's history and culture, it was impossible to draw the line where India ended and Pakistan began. And in its geography, Pakistan was the most monstrous concoction the world had known, a tragicomic parody on the old adage that "a camel is a horse put together by a committee".' Aiyar, *Pakistan Papers*, 3 and 5. How, incidentally, would Aiyar describe the geography of say, Norway? Or even of India itself?

13. Kosambi seems to be one of the very few Indian historians to recognize the essential divisions, and who seems sympathetic to the sensibilities of other nations when, in an early part (34) of *Culture and Civilization* (1977) he points out: 'Hereafter, India is taken as a geographical unit also including Pakistan with a part of Afghanistan and at times of Burma. No political claims or motives should be imputed to this extension.'
14. Central Asia comprises what is essentially known as *Mawara-un-Nahar* (meaning that which is on the other side of the river). It is thus the valley of Zarafshan, on the other side of the Amu Darya (the Oxus), the river that has

for centuries watered the fields of Bukhara and Samarkand. This land has also been called Transoxiana.

15. *Time* magazine's James Walsh in a recent cover article described this syndrome thus: 'A country founded in 1947 as a haven for British India's Muslims still identifies itself basically as the un-India - or, perhaps, the un-Hindustan.' *Time*: 17 April 1995.

16. This theory goes to the point where the official Pakistan television network relays, even in its daily domestic transmission, news in Arabic which very few Pakistanis can understand. It is reflected in what the young civil servant stated in his formal address of welcome at the award distribution ceremony, in April 1995, at the prestigious Civil Services' Academy in Lahore after two years training and education at the institution: 'We trace our origin to, and draw our inspiration from the Brahminabad settlement, made by Muhammad bin Qasim, which amalgamated the Islamic ideal and indigenous need. Twelve centuries look upon us from across the Arabian Sea and stand to judge us.' I was present on the occasion and obtained a copy of the unpublished speech from the learned speaker.

17. See S. Akhtar Imam's article entitled 'Cultural Relations Between Sind and Arabia', in *Sind Through the Centuries* (1981) 223.
18. See Thapar: *A History of India, vol I* , 107, and also chapter 7, section III below. Even when the Portuguese discoverer, Vasco da Gama, sailed to India in 1498, he took advantage of these mid-ocean winds to cross the Indian Ocean from Mombasa to Calicut, in southern India, although he was guided also by the recently invented mariner's compass. See Joseph E. Schwartzberg: *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (1992) 49.
19. See chapter 9 below.
20. *The News* (Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi: every Friday between 13 August 1993 and 24 December 1993).
21. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization*.
22. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, in one of his major speeches as a parliamentarian, described Bhagat Singh and his comrades as political prisoners, and passionately defended their rights. See chapter

23. M. Mujeeb: *The Indian Muslims*, 24.
24. K. K. Aziz: *The Pakistani Historian* (1993) xi.
25. K. K. Aziz: *The Murder of History* (1993).
26. Literally 'The Great Leader', used by Pakistanis for the founder of the state, Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah. See chapters 29-32 below.
27. In fact, until William Moorcroft, the Veterinary Surgeon to the Bengal Army and Inspector of Military Studs himself surveyed the sources of the two great tributaries in 1811, it was generally believed that both had a common source in the Tibetan lake Manasarowar. See Michael Edwardes: *Playing the Great Game* (1975).
28. Some countries, like Pakistan, are passing through one such slow transition from the feudal to the capitalist order today.

29. See, in particular, chapter 9, section III below.

30. Aiyar, *Pakistan Papers*, 8.

31. See chapter 14, section III.

The Priests of Prehistory

I. BURNT BRICK

Before the advent of the Aryans, (perhaps the first and earliest series of mass migrations into Indus and northern India, spanning several centuries), Indus had already flowered into a highly developed civilized system, spread over half a million square miles, and had then died, burying its glory under massive mounds of sand. The excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa bear ample testimony to the mature refinement of that society.¹ The use of cotton for textiles, the commodious houses, the provision of ample public conveniences like public baths and an excellent drainage system, indicate that these people were, in many ways, far ahead of their contemporary civilizations in Persia, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Cultural maturity and refinement is to be found in the models of rams, dogs and other animals as also in the supple modelling of the statuettes found in these places.

The fact that the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa had definite trade links with their western contemporaries is significant to the present discourse. The Indus Valley manufactures reached the markets of the Tigris (Dajla) and

the Euphrates (Farat). The urban civilization had a rich merchant class, and these trade links were fully exploited and busily pursued, resulting in a fair exchange of cultural and material influence. While manufactures were exported, imports included such diverse items as Sumerian devices in art and Mesopotamian (Iraqi) toiletries. These were then copied by the Indus artisans. The discovery of the Indus seals and other artefacts in Iraqi excavations indicates that there must have been busy settlements of Indus traders in Mesopotamian cities even in those prehistoric times.²

The trade route followed the Indus to the sea and then went along the coast of the Persian Gulf to Mesopotamia. Although all shipping was coastal, the method of navigation employed was quite ingenious. If the ship lost sight of land, the sailors let a crow fly and then followed it as it took the shortest route to the nearest coast.³

The existence of a city implies the existence of a class structure in society. Urban civilizations of antiquity were built upon the support of a hinterland of agriculture, producing a sufficient surplus to support the urban elite. Some people are engaged in the process of the production of the food surplus which a more organized minority expropriates and then founds urban settlements with a comparatively greater number of civic amenities. The Indus cities spell the development of a class based society and the rule of the urban elite over

the agrarian hinterland.

How did the civilization come about in the first place? What provided the impetus to its growth? What material advance facilitated the development of fairly large and prosperous urban centres in the Indus region? What technological advantage did these people have over their predecessors? There can only be speculation. In a flat, alluvial plain, lacking in supplies of stone, the invention of the burnt brick may have been the crucial technological step. It must certainly have made flood control more efficient in a region in which seasonal floods, more than any other factor, would otherwise have impeded the establishment of large settlements maturing into cities, on or close to river-banks.

A peculiar circumstance of the Mohenjodaro brick is its size. At 7 x 14 x 28 cm, it is almost the same size and proportion as the standard brick of today. It is evident that the Indus person had discovered quite early the advantage of this particular size. It fitted in the span of a man's palm, enabling him to hold a brick in one hand and a tool in the other.⁴ Since the size of the human hand appears to have changed only slightly in the intervening millenia, the size of the brick has remained almost constant.

II. PRIESTS OR KINGS

The decline of the Indus civilization is attributed to many factors. Among these are counted the change of the courses of the rivers Indus and Ravi, the alteration of the monsoons, the breaking up of trade ties with the civilizations of western Asia on account of the incursions of the barbarian tribes. It is also likely that a serious internal crisis, such as the expansion of slavery beyond the economically optimum, or the increasing exploitation of the rural communities by the highly developed and well-administered Indus cities impoverished their agrarian base. Invading races may have overrun these cities, destroying their economies and decimating their population. Or natural calamities such as earthquakes, salination of the soil or the encroachment of the Rajasthan desert took their toll.⁵ There are other areas of speculation with respect to the specific, overwhelming and merciless challenges that the civilization was unable to confront.

Irrespective of the exact nature of the challenge and the intensity of its onslaught, the amount of damage an extraneous challenge can do to a civilization is also dependent upon the inner capacity of that civilization to withstand or repulse it. If it has itself become rotten to the core, it is not able to resist the threat. This inherent cancer is itself the primary cause of the decline of a civilization. Extraneous events only contribute to the process as catalysts that trigger off the chain reaction of circumstances that end in its demise. A

dead tree will be felled by the gentlest breeze that could have done no harm to a healthy one. The real task, therefore, is to determine the inner ailment of the Indus civilization. Therein may lie the key to its decline and demise. And this more essential cause can perhaps be deduced from a set of facts that are generally accepted.

First, until their discovery in 1925, there was no discernible evidence of the Indus cities. They had flourished and vanished without successors or trace. There was a clear gap of at least five hundred to six hundred years between the disappearance of the Indus cities and the rise of another network of smaller Indus cities in this area some 3,000 years ago.⁶

Second, despite some dispersal of small settlements, there do not appear to have been very many pre-eminent cities. Perhaps there were only two, Harappa and Mohenjodaro,⁷ in a vast and endless river basin.⁸ The absence of a large network of cities indicates that there was an almost lethargic indifference to growth.

Third, there is no evidence in the Indus cities of any central palace or fortress, though Harappa does seem to have been mildly fortified.⁹ Nor do the ruins include any colossal monument to the glory of a king in the manner in which the pyramids stand testimony to the power and authority of the

pharaohs. There were, however, a large number of equally resplendent villas, indicating the existence of a large and rich ruling class of merchants. The absence of a central palace and the opulent lifestyle of the merchants indicates the low level of taxation, and also the absence of any significant coercive potential of any single central authority. All these facts indicate the absence of a dynastic monarchy.

The fourth significant fact is that the prosperity of the cities was not supported by any significant irrigation network. We also know that the deep-digging heavy plough, already current on the Nile and in Mesopotamia, had not yet been introduced on the banks of the Indus.¹⁰ The Indus cities were not given to absorbing and adopting new technologies.

Though the Harappan cities lasted a little over 1,000 years, they remained stagnant. They sprang up as well-planned settlements and throughout their existence they displayed little evidence of growth and development.¹¹ Successive buildings and houses were built exactly upon the foundations of the old. There is an eerie continuity throughout the period of the Indus civilization. There is no expansion and very little innovation. And then the cities suddenly vanished without a trace. As Kosambi points out: 'The Indus region seems to have been called the Meluhha by the Mesopotamians. All mention of Meluhha ceases by about 1750 BC.'¹²

The question that comes up is obvious: Was this stagnation the product of mere sloth and conservatism, or was it due to more fundamental causes? The most likely answer is poignantly relevant to the present-day world, confronted with its own challenges from militant fundamentalism and obscurantism. Two large mounds, one each at the twin cities, and the Great Bath have a telltale significance. Perhaps they provide the clues to the answer.

Temple-like, the citadel mounds indicate the existence of a priestly order in the cities. This is further attested to by the Bath. Since each house was equipped with its own excellent bathrooms, the Great Bath could not have been designed merely for bathing. The fresh waters of the Indus also flowed close to Mohenjodaro, and river-bathing has always been considered a health potion in the subcontinent (though more so in India than Indus). The Bath, with all its adjoining rooms and the split levels connected by staircases, must, therefore, have been the focus of rituals of purification and anointment. Its elaborate structure indicates the importance of the priest.

The pre-eminence of the priest is also established by the fact that the city granaries lay proximate to the citadel mound and were part of the complex of the priestly precincts. Priests extracted and distributed the Indus surplus.

Priests, not kings, thus governed the Indus cities. Dogma not monarchy

ruled. Religious doctrine, not the force of arms, expropriated the product and crops from the primary producers. The surplus was yielded to the state by the producer not out of fear of the sword, but for fear of some kind of divine retribution. A minimum of violence was thus involved. Kosambi observes that: 'The weapons found at Mohenjodaro are weak as compared with the excellent tools. The spears are thus, without a rib; the spearhead would have crumpled up at the first good thrust. There are no swords at all.'¹³

The clergy were characteristically conservative and opposed to development and change. Fundamentalist priests and dogma held sway over the Indus cities. While they ruled, there was no initiative, no science, no invention. The agriculturist did not take to the heavier plough, nor was the surplus expended on building large public works like canals. Development and innovation were anathema, as these have the natural potential of weakening the hold of the obscurantists. The area under agriculture could not expand. There was no further growth. The highly developed urban civilization stagnated. A change in the course of the rivers was capable of destroying the cities that lacked the support of an irrigation system. But for the twentieth-century archaeologists, there may still have been no trace or evidence whatsoever of the great and rich civilization that had atrophied and disappeared under the dead weight of the Indus sands, coupled with the orthodox, debilitating dogma of a retrogressive

and extremely conservative priesthood.

III. INDUS REJECTS FUNDAMENTALISM

It seems that the Indus people learnt their lessons early. They learnt these lessons from the ghosts of those cities of their primordial past, of which they had no evidence until recently, and with which they have no recognizable links. Fundamentalism, henceforth, would never be a popular creed among the Indus people. Indus had destroyed fundamentalism then. Its people continue to reject it today. This is evident from the result of every general election held in this area since 1946. That is consistent and irrefutable statistical evidence that the Indus person (the Pakistani of today), with a liberal and tolerant frame of mind, by nature abhors dogmatic and fundamentalist politics. Even today, despite a greater strength in parliament than ever before, the religious fundamentalist parties remain the marginal choice of the electorate and received only a fraction of the total votes cast in the elections in which their showing was better than ever before.

1. The two ancient cities that thrived during the third and the second millennia BC. Mohenjodaro was situated on the banks of the river Indus in the present-day district of Larkana. Harappa was situated on the banks of

the river Ravi in the Sahiwal district.

2. K. Antonova, et al., *A History of India*, R. A. Jairazbhoy, *Ancient Civilizations*, 99.
3. Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization*, 60.
4. See 'Mohenjodaro: A Civilization Without Kings', Muneeza Shamsie, *Dawn Magazine*, (Friday, 22 May 1987) for the views of Dr Michael Jansen.
5. Antonova, 27.
6. Kosambi, *Culture*, 55; Antonova, 27; Basham, 31.
7. Kosambi, *Culture*, 62.
8. Subsequent finds of other cities, such as at Kot Diji, relate to an earlier period.

9. See Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1975) 54, where he points out that even the structure that earlier archaeologists had identified as the palace at Mohenjodaro 'is merely a merchant's house, about 180 feet x 70 feet, only a little larger than the other merchants' houses that surround it.'

10. Kosambi, *Culture*, 62.

11. Kosambi, *Introduction*, 55: 'All essential features of the urban cultures remained unchanged almost all through their existence.'

12. Kosambi, *culture*, 59.

13. *Ibid.*, 64.

The Man on Horseback

I. ARYAN MATRIARCHALISM

While the pre-Aryan Indus cities flourished in all their Bronze Age splendour, the rest of the subcontinent was very thinly occupied by food-gatherers who went their own several ways in tiny Stone-Age tribal units.¹ It is obvious that in prehistoric times Indus was closer in social development and intercourse to Central Asia than to India. For a few centuries after the Harappan cities had disappeared, Indus lay desolate and bare. But the rich soil, rejuvenated each year by alluvial floods, could not lie fallow for long. The produce of the soil and the surplus that it could yield eventually gave birth to another vastly dispersed urban civilization. Cities were again sustained by the surplus produce of the Indus peasant. It is at this time that the Aryans began to move into the Indus region.

Knowledge about the Aryans remains incomplete, but it is no longer inadequate. The linguistic evidence and the evidence available in the *Rig Veda*² have by now been found sufficient to discard the theory that the Aryans are a myth.

Although the dispute about the original home of the mother-nation of the Aryans continues, (variously being located in Bactria, Anatolia, Central Asia and even the Danube valley), some facts have received a sizeable consensus from scholars. Traces of the mother-nation are discernible in the Greeks, the Latins, the Celts, the Germans, the Lets and the Slavs, besides certain Asiatic peoples.³

Some 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, a major part of the Aryans were settled in Central Asia bordering the Oxus (Amu Darya) the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), and the Aral and Caspian Seas. The pressure of surplus population upon productive forces, perhaps on account of a long dry spell which depleted the pastures, compelled them to migrate. Bifurcating into the Indian and the Iranian Aryans, they migrated respectively to the areas of present-day Pakistan and Iran. This was not in the shape of just one mass migration, there were endless waves of migrations, spanning several centuries, from 1500 BC onwards. They set about perpetuating, for all times, the distinction between Indus and India.

The development of the aboriginal Dravidian tribes in India had not been uniform. With primitive means of communication, separated by impassable forests, inhospitable deserts, rivers and mountain ranges, the food-gathering tribes were in several different stages of development. In the Indus cities, with their resources dependent upon agriculture and their society based on the

urban unit, the level was sufficiently advanced and society had transformed into a patriarchal hierarchy. But many tribes in northern India were as yet at the earlier, matriarchal stage of social organization. Nomads, forests-dwelling food-gatherers, urban centres, agrarian villages, patriarchal tribes, matriarchal societies - all coexisted in the vast Indus plains, shrublands and forests.

The Aryan invasion destroyed this diversity of Indus cultures. Many food-gathering tribes succumbed to the Aryan onslaught. Most resisted for several centuries, but were driven out, and moved towards the south, preferring to migrate rather than surrender.

Even as the aborigines resisted, they left a deep and lasting imprint upon the culture of the invaders. An entire complex of norms, customs and rituals attests to the enormous effect the matriarchal inhabitants had upon the lifestyles and culture of the patriarchal Aryans. The strong arm of the Aryan invader had the capacity to choose and take his bride, but this was never without resistance. That the matriarchal society resisted is commemorated to this day in marriage rituals. In marriage ceremonies, the shoes of the bridegroom are taken off and kept by the sisters of the bride. He has to pay a price in cash for their return before he can take his bride away with him. The bride's superiority, even though the status of woman sank with the passage of the centuries, is still established and made known to all with the customary

and ostentatious display of dowry before all the guests at the wedding ceremony.⁴

The matrilineal and matriarchal aboriginal culture also continues to be reflected in the literature and the idioms of Indus right up to the present day. Shah Hussain⁵ was appealing to this very mother-figure when he cried out:

MAA-EY NEE MAIN KINNOON AAKHAN

DARD VICHHORRAY DA HAAL NEE

Oh my mother, who should I tell

The pain that I feel on account of separation from my beloved.

The appeal to the mother is emotive, as in the modern-day Punjabi poet, Afzal Ahsan Randhawa's superb use of the ancient call:

MAIN DARYAWAN DA HAANI SAAN

TARNAY PAI GAYEY KHAAL NEE MAA-EY

I used to swim the mighty rivers,

I am now paddling in tiny water-courses, oh mother.

OANAY PHATT TAIRAY JUSSAY WICH

JINNAY MAIRAY WAAL NEE MAA-EY

I have as many gashes in my body
As the number of hair on your head, oh mother.

HUNN NA DUDH PIAWEEN POORA
WADDAY HOAN NA BAAL NEE MAA-EY.

Henceforth do not suckle the newborn,
Let him starve and die, oh mother.

II. THE ARYAN VEHICLE

Bronze implied some significant advances. It meant a superior quality of weapons, lighter than those of the preceding Stone Age. Bronze weapons were also tougher, stronger and more durable than those made earlier with copper. Tin was, however, crucial to the bronze alloy, and deposits of tin were not widespread. Bronze, therefore, remained in short supply and could be possessed only by a small minority. It thus brought with it a division of society into classes, while the premium on tin induced long distance campaigns and fighting for control of deposits.

As the first Aryans poured into Indus, the armies that met them and attempted resistance were also the armies of the Bronze Age. In many ways, the defenders were, in fact, superior. They represented, for instance, a superior

urban culture. The Harappan civilization had of course vanished by then.⁶ But it had been replaced by a widely spread agrarian civilization covering the entire Indus. It also supported some cities though these were not as large as Harappa or Mohenjodaro. The age of big urban centres would henceforth come only after the introduction of iron.

It is true that the structural organization of the Indus cities, ruled as they were by priestly conservative orders, was perhaps incapable of resisting the Aryan waves as they descended upon such smaller cities as had survived the decay and disappearance of the twin capitals. Yet it was no cakewalk for the Aryans. We learn from the Vedas, for instance, of many battles. One of these was the Battle of the Ten Kings.⁷

The cause of the battle is stated to have been the attempt by a confederacy of ten invading kings to divert the river Purushni (present-day Ravi). They were, of course, the Aryans. The civilization under assault was, in the main, agrarian. It depended upon flood waters and irrigation by rudimentary 'dams' or spurs. These, in turn, became obstacles in the invaders' movement and debilitated their main vehicle, the horse.

We are told of the Vedic God Indra⁸ performing the feat of 'freeing the rivers.'⁹ With his cosmic club, he unchained the energy of the great streams of

the Punjab. This can only mean the destruction of such dams and spurs as the Indus cities had improvised to direct the flood waters to spread upon arable fields and to provide for their temporary seasonal storage. The assault upon the Indus civilization's mainstay could not go without immense resistance and conflict. The Purus, the local inhabitants, excelled in valour - but not in fortune. After a prolonged and gory struggle, the new migrants won the day.¹⁰

The Battle of the Ten Kings establishes the fact that in terms of weaponry and armour the superiority of the invading Aryan was at best marginal. The real superiority lay elsewhere. First, the stagnant urban civilization, decaying where it had not disappeared, and ruled by a torpid priesthood was no match for the unbounded barbarian energy of the invaders. Priestly conservatism and the stranglehold of dogma had, in an earlier age, ensured the burial of the Harappan civilization. This was the second civilization that the grip of dogma and fundamentalism had made fatally vulnerable.

Second, the Aryan's singularly superior mount, the horse, came from Central Asia. Climatically, Indus and India have never been the home of the horse. In successive periods, the Aryan, Mauryan, Bactrian, Gupta, Rajput, Turk, Mongol, Maratha and British cavalries have drawn almost entirely upon imported stocks.

Astride a horse, the Aryan attained unprecedented speed in tactical and military manoeuvres. He thus had a big advantage in battle. Even where horses were harnessed to chariots, they provided the vehicle and its passengers a speed that was unimaginable in the Indus region. The horse, harnessed to a crude, primitive chariot, was supplemented by sturdy ox-carts for heavy-duty transport. But no cart driven by oxen could strike the enemy with the speed and surprise with which a horse-mounted cavalry charge could attack his ranks. Little wonder that the Rig Vedic hymns praise the horse in glowing verses as, for instance, in the verses quoted by A.L. Basham:

*Rushing to glory, to the capture of the herds,
swooping down as a hungry falcon,
eager to be first, he darts amid the ranks of the chariots,
happy as a bridegroom making a garland,
spurning the dust and champing at the bit.
And the victorious steed and faithful,
his body obedient [to his rider] in battle,
speeding on through the melee,
stirs up the dust to fall on his brows.
And at his deep neigh, like the thunder of heaven,
the foemen tremble in fear,*

for he fights against thousands, and none can resist him, so terrible is his charge.¹¹

The nomadic lifestyle of the Aryan races had further advantages. They had the facility of a mobile supply of food in the Aryan herds of cattle. Though the taboo on cattle slaughter had not yet been prescribed, the stock was to be valued and protected against death and disease.

His horse, however, remained the Aryan's primary wealth and pride. The premium on this animal was, in fact, initially to spell disaster for Indus agriculture and, consequently, its urban civilization. When the Vedic God Indra was performing the feat of 'freeing the rivers' with his cosmic club, he was actually performing a necessary task for the Aryan's dearest possession: the horse. Dams that stored extra surface water had to be destroyed to make the land somewhat less inhospitable for the horse.¹² And the Aryan did just that. The feat was attributed to Indra because a religious justification had to be found for this policy which destroyed the agrarian base of the Indus cities. They were ruined again. Indus cities disappeared again and, for some time, there was a reversion to the dominance of the pastoral mode of living. Pakistan became one vast pastureland.

III. IRON AND THE YAMUNA 'HIGHWAY'

After they break out of their mountain gorges and enter upon the endless, monotonously level plains of the Punjab and Sindh, the tributaries of the Indus display a cruel inconstancy of temperament. For most of the year, they idly snake their way through narrow channels, cut through broad riverbeds of soft alluvial soil, at places several miles wide. Even in the dry season, this rich alluvial soil is fertile. In the two late summer months, when the melting snows add to the torrential monsoon clouds, these rivers suddenly become surging oceans of water moving inexorably towards the Arabian Sea. They carry with them everything in their path. And this path, at such times, is as broad as the endlessly flat plains through which they pass. History so far has been unable to document the number of human civilizations lost in these ravaging flood waters.

Once destroyed, therefore, the urban civilizations were not easy to resurrect. Permanent settlements were impeded in the Indus region by a shortage of metals and the constant change in the courses of the rivers. Society continued to be organized in tribal units, with little or no caste or class differences. Despite the limited availability of bronze, the total destruction of fixed settlements had also eliminated any incipient class system.

Cattle-grazing is not labour-intensive. Cattle-rearing nomads could not be so short of manpower as to require the labour of a subjugated class of slaves

to provide for the ruling elite. Slavery was, therefore, as yet unknown. Gambling, chariot races, female dancers, wrestlers and fist-fights entertained the Aryans. They freely imbibed inebriating drinks, particularly the *soma*.

Had the Aryans remained confined to Indus, Indian civilization may not have come out of the Bronze Age so soon to enter a higher stage of civilization, dependent upon the smelting and use of iron. This new metal had, by this time, already come into use among many Asiatic peoples, the Hittites being the first ever to smelt it. But the iron-ore reserves of India lay far to the east beyond the inhospitable forests of the Yamuna valley. And Indus was too distant from them. To graduate to the Iron Age, the Indus had to be coupled with the Yamuna valley so that it could be linked to Bihar. That would be achieved by the great Mauryan emperor Ashok. But that was much later.

The pressure of the later and more vigorous waves of Aryans pushed the earlier settlers and the aborigines out of Indus and into the Yamuna valley. Although the forests in this valley were impenetrable, there was no other option. The Rajasthan desert was an even bleaker and more discouraging prospect. It was certainly a greater obstacle than the forest. In fact, despite its forested hinterland, the river Yamuna itself seemed to be a godsent waterway, a channel that provided the facility of the transport of men and materials. It was the Yamuna 'highway' to the eastern reserves of iron ore. It took the Aryans

straight to the iron deposits of Bihar but not before several significant changes had been injected into their lifestyle.

The gradual but relentless progress down the Yamuna established the need for countless settlements en route. These required the clearing of forests which in time implied the need for more manpower harnessed to labour. Bronze weaponry was able to subjugate the Stone Age aborigines of the forests. Subjugated, they were reduced to the status of shudras. This was to become the lowest class, producing that essential surplus that was expropriated by the rulers.

Henceforth, the idyllic classless society of Indus would be no more. That had been left behind, in time and space.

1. Kosambi, *Culture*, 58.

2. The *Rig Veda* is perhaps the oldest religious text in the world. Comprising of more than 1,000 hymns, the collection was rendered by and for the aristocracy. Other vedas include the *Atharveda*, for the lower classes. The *Sama and Yajur Vedas* were also meant for the aristocracy, but were compiled by later Aryans, after they had migrated beyond the Indus region.

- See: Ali A. Jafarey's article 'Sindh And The Early Sindhis in the Early Aryan Age' in *Sind Through the Centuries* edited by Hamida Khuhro, 69.
3. In fact according to Stanley Wolpert the Aryans were '*the ancestors of the Italic, Greek, Germanic, English, Celtic, Iranian, Sanskritic and modern Hindi-speaking peoples.*' Wolpert, *A New History of India*, (1982) 24.
 4. Mujeeb recounts the proceedings that Ibn Battutah, the fourteenth century Arab traveller (who was in the Indus region in the time of Muhammad Tughlaq) witnessed at a wedding ceremony, particularly how the bridegroom 'rode up to a pulpit with three steps, on the highest of which the bride was seated, surrounded by women. The bridegroom alighted from the horse and bowed to the ground. Then the bride stood up and offered the groom a paan (betel leaf) with her own hands. The bridegroom sat down on the pulpit, a step lower than the bride.' Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims*, 224.
 5. Sixteenth century Sufi poet of Lahore (1539-1593). See further chapter 13, section V and chapter 15, section IV.

6. Basham, 31; Kosambi, 59.
7. Basham, 34.
8. See *Hindu Myths*, translated by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1982) 13-28. Also Thapar, 43.
9. Kosambi, *Culture*, 79.
10. Times seem to have changed but little. The dispute between Pakistan and India over the waters of the Indus and its tributaries was apparently resolved by the Indus Waters' Treaty of 1959, but attempts by India to make the most of the waters belonging to the lower riparian continue. It is also perhaps from a far deeper, nay primordial, impulse that the following verse by a sensitive contemporary Pakistani poet wells out:

The enemy has diverted the river and taken its waters,

Only a dry water-bed remains upon my parched earth.
11. Basham: *ibid.*, p. 36. The fluent imagery has recurred often in the poetry of

the West and the East whenever the virtues of a stallion charging at the enemy have had to be described.

12. See further chapter 10 section II.

Iron, Krishna and Buddha Destroy the Tribe

I. FIRE, SACRIFICE, DEVELOPMENT OF CASTES, AND BIHAR

In crossing Indus the Aryans had taken a giant leap. Then they slowly began extending their settlements eastwards, effectively taking centuries colonizing the Yamuna valley. Since Bihar with its iron reserves was still in the distant east, iron was not presently used by the Aryans. But there were significant developments in this era.

Bronze tools were brittle and could not cut through the thick forests that confronted the early Aryans in the Yamuna valley. Forests were therefore cleared by putting them to fire. But forest fires consumed not just the forests. They also devoured those who lit them in the first place. The fearsome firegod, Agni thus inevitably rose to pre-eminence in the pantheon of the Aryans gods.¹

As classes emerged, an ideology which sanctioned the classes and kept them in their proper place was bound to develop. The shudra, so vital to the clearing of the Yamuna route, could be held down either by the coercive violence of a central bureaucracy or by religious rite and dogma. In an

environment already inhospitable to man and beast, to Aryan and shudra alike, violence would only deplete manpower. Religious rite and dogma had to devise subtle, though threatening and barbarous, means to limit death, and yet to convey the message. The ritual of sacrifice was an advertisement of the ruling elites' potential for inflicting violence and pain. Stallion, bull and man were put to death, ostensibly to propitiate gods and demons, but with the underlying purpose of establishing the elite's all-embracing authority over life and death.

Sacrifice or yajna became the very basis of the Indo-Aryan social fabric. It was a reminder to all of the established class structure and of the unquestionable dominance of the rulers. As the practice gained in importance, it gradually became more complex, resulting ultimately in what seemed the natural and coincidental rise of a new class, the brahmin. What initially was perhaps a mere veneer of ritual and ceremony soon became the fountainhead of all superstition and dogma.

Between the outer limits of the two classes (brahmin and shudra), two others would also emerge, solidify, and be held apart by ritual, ceremony, superstition and dogma. The kshatriyas would administer the state and fight the battles. The vaishya would profit by commerce and yield taxes to the state.

The Yamuna finally led to the iron deposits of Bihar.² This was a highly

significant turning point in the history of the entire subcontinent. Till the telegraph and the railroads arrived in the nineteenth century, the discovery of deposits of iron and its use were perhaps the only developments which would affect the entire subcontinent as one land. Once the eastern iron deposits had been discovered and exploited, the tide of events and of change would begin to come from the east, equipped as it was with a superior metal. The east would be the seat of the empire. It would also be the fountainhead of change; the social implications of the introduction and adoption of iron as the primary metal in the service of man would radiate outward from here.

II. AXE, AXLE AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

Compared to bronze, iron is easier to smelt, available in greater abundance, and also much stronger and much more durable. Its use, therefore, led to the development of far more potent and effective forces of production at the command of the Indo-Aryans.

The iron axe facilitated the cutting of the forests.³ Vaster areas were thus opened up for agriculture. The heavier iron plough cut deeper furrows in the surface of the arable land. The crops and plants it sprouted were richer and yielded more. The iron sickle appreciably reduced the loss of grain and permitted the harvesting of larger quantities. Its sharp iron teeth caused less

wastage. The warrior-nomads who had once destroyed the Indus agriculture now began to adopt it themselves. This significant occupational transition led to an increase in the economic surplus and politically strengthened the lay and cleric aristocracy, which was now armed with a greater variety and number of more destructive iron weapons.

Iron also brought with it an even greater facility of transport and communications. Ox-carts were now assembled on the new iron axle. These could travel longer distances without the fear of a breakdown. Iron thus extended the reach of the Aryan civilization, particularly of the merchant and his merchandise. The new metal led to the consolidation of the newly emerging trading class of the vaishya. The mercantile class was here to stay.

The ox was the main animal of transport in India. The horse, as we have seen, was not an indigenous animal. Besides the shudra, the ox was the only other means of labour. It was the need, therefore, of the merchant and the farmer alike. Even though the brahmin spun the mystique of sacrifice, the ox, and therefore the cow, had now to be protected and nurtured. It had to be removed from the ambit of the ritual of sacrifice. Even if the gods had to be propitiated, other means of doing so had to be found. This animal could not be lost to ritual or appeasement, even of the gods. This could only be done by raising this animal to a status equalling that of the gods. A place was found for

it in the pantheon of the gods. An inflexible taboo was prescribed on the sacrifice of the cow. Henceforth, the ox-driven cart would become the enduring symbol of ancient and medieval India.

With a relatively larger supply of tools, and those too of a more efficient and durable kind, the Aryans began to colonize new and inaccessible areas, to develop irrigation projects and to enjoy the use of new kinds of crafts. This new and superior civilization encroached upon the insulated tribes dotting the land, each localized in the well-defined and limited territory held by it. The notion of a state-power thus emerged, which could henceforth appropriate a much larger surplus by subjugating a larger area along with its inhabitants. Iron put a premium on aggressive expansionism and thereby brought with it an initial period of conflict and strategic warfare.

Iron also had an impact upon the prevalent class system. As it opened up the gifts of mother earth to man, and as the husbanding of a larger expropriable surplus became possible, the one who actually produced that surplus became the greater victim. He was the one already on the lowest rung of the class structure, but he suffered a further reduction in his status and civic position. The shudra was now reduced to the status of a machine, divested of all civil rights and privileges.

As the shudra descended to the depths of misery and exploitation, the class system peculiar to the subcontinent, the 'caste system', began to take root and shape. It was sanctified by religion, dogma and the cruel economic realities of the times. The brahmin would be the priest, sometimes at the highest levels, at other times below the kshatriya, the soldier-king. The vaishya was the merchant, whose importance would vary with the times, but he would often be the catalyst for important changes. At the very bottom was the shudra, a slave, sometimes a little better off as the serf, but always, according to prevalent doctrine, an untouchable, a pariah.

In later times, the caste system would first develop its rigid contours and then expand to encompass all the agrarian and commercial regions of the subcontinent, only to ossify and debilitate the socio-economic structure.

This initial period of social development coincided with the enhanced capacity of producing and exploiting a greater surplus from the soil and facilitating greater commerce. Of course, the two vital means for this greater production were the iron implements and the subject shudras. With the increased physical capability to command greater surplus, the social incentive to extract it in much greater proportions than ever before also increased. This incentive took the shape of the concept of private property.⁴

What had been considered as public or communal property began to be recognized as belonging to individuals. The rights of the citizens to own land and other belongings began to be recognized. Rules and precepts relating to private property were prescribed. However, the emergence of private property was to provoke more strife and more wars.

III. INDRA BOWS OUT

As the kshatriya (soldier-king) was engaged in the countless campaigns of the early Iron Age and the vaishya (merchant) was yet in the process of growth and consolidating routes and markets, the brahmin (priest) took full advantage of this transitional period and its confusion. His primary function had been to preside over sacrificial ceremonies. To continue his hold upon society and its elite, the brahmin now made these ceremonies progressively more complex and exclusive. Ritual was made a tenet of a great religion. Compliance was considered the only means of salvation. Failure to conform invited upon the non-conformist the severest of punishments.

Along with the growth of private property in cattle, the brahmin's efforts to mystify ritual further aided and consolidated the taboo on the killing of the cow and the eating of beef. This practice was eventually to be sanctified in the deification of the cow. Religious superstition, propped up by totemic ritual, as

in the Harappan cities, held societies together by keeping its classes in position.

Iron, more abundant than bronze and superior as a tool or a weapon, generated some manifestly 'uneconomic' wars. Accounts of these battles were then written and popularly sung. The battle of Kurukshetra became the theme for the Iliad of India, the Mahabharata.⁵ With the Ramayana, the Mahabharata is one of the two most famous epics of India. It constitutes a major source of our knowledge of the prevalent culture and religious practices. It is not easy to date these epics but it is generally accepted that they are the product of the efforts of several generations of poets, philosophers, statesmen and thinkers.

Perhaps the most significant and for the adherent the most emotive part of the Mahabharata is the *Bhagwat Gita*, a poem of about seven hundred verses.⁶ It begins with a conversation between Arjun and the god Krishna before the great battle. The god counsels the dejected prince, who had lost heart after the lines of battle had been drawn on the field of Kurukshetra. Arjun had seen his own uncle in the enemy's ranks (his Kuru cousins), and was unprepared to kill those of his own blood. Krishna persuades him to fight for the 'just cause.'⁷

The Vedas belonged predominantly to the the Age of Bronze, the tribes, the nomadic cattle-breeders, and were cast under a strong central-Asian influence.

By contrast, the epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) belong, not only to the Age of Iron but also to that of the caste, to the surplus-producing *shudra*, sacrifice-oriented Brahminism, the Yamuna and the Gangetic plains. The Vedas belonged to Indus. Mahabharata was composed in India. In many ways, they constitute the two opposite slopes of a watershed. In many ways, they also represent the differences between Pakistan and India.

The epics are also the beginning of another new epoch. In the displacement of Indra by the god Krishna they confirm the Aryan's graduation from the pastoral life to the agrarian mode of production.⁸ Indra was, as we have seen, the Vedic god who destroyed Indus agriculture. He, along with Agni, was invoked at the fire-sacrifice where draught animals were slaughtered. The expansion of agriculture had been facilitated by the introduction of the heavier iron plough. In turn it required traction and force beyond man's own physical power and muscular energy. As soon as an animal's power was harnessed for the use of man - as soon, that is, as agriculture became man's primary surplus-producing industry - the value of cattle rose. The decline in sacrificial tribal cults was a mere corollary. Krishna rose in the pantheon of Hindu gods as the god of the social system based on agriculture.

IV. A MANY-FACETED GOD

The transition from the old order to the new, from the pastoral to the agrarian, took a few centuries to spread across northern India. Though the transformation, wherever it took effect, was relentless and irreversible, it was not without strife. Wars were impelled by the need to expropriate the surplus produce of the peasant as well as of the less developed and subject regions.

This expropriation continued to cause misery and pestilence. The priestly method of domination was too inflexible, too rigid and too cruel. There had to be reaction to and rejection of it at some time. The cult of the cow, the growth of extra-tribal castes and the changes in the relations of production required the development of a new superstructure, a new socio-political and cultural order. There was need to confront and contain the rigid, inflexible tyranny of the priests. The devotional cults within Hinduism,² the Jain and Buddhist doctrines, and the 'universal' monarchy of the Mauryans were all responses to this nascent need. The god Krishna perhaps provided the most prominent and comprehensive response.

Krishna was a many-faceted god. He has been described as 'all things to all men, and everything to most women, divine and lovable infant, mischievous shepherd boy, lover of all milkmaids in the herder's camp, husband of innumerable goddesses, most promiscuously virile of bedmates, yet devoted to Radha alone in mystic union, and an exponent of ascetic renunciation

withal; the ultimate manifestation of eternal peace, but the roughest of bullies in killing his own uncle Kamsa, in beheading a guest of honour like Sisupala at someone else's fire sacrifice; the very fountainhead of all morality (in which he played simultaneously the parts of *deus ex machina* and a menial charioteer); nevertheless ran counter to every rule of decency, fairplay or chivalry.¹⁰

Whatever attributes he may be invested with pale before the importance of the fact of his widespread adoption as the premier deity of India in those times of transformation. This universal recognition reflected two major trends. First, the number of Krishna's 'marriages' clearly implied the widespread assimilation of countless matriarchal and matrilineal aborigine tribes with the patriarchal and patrilineal Aryans.¹¹ It was an expedient assimilation in the new and unifying culture of innumerable local goddesses, each worshipped by one tribe, limited to its tribal territory. The tribe had now begun to disintegrate. Second, it meant that the tradesmen and merchants had now greater facility for travel, a larger hinterland for markets, and richer pockets to pay for agricultural produce and village craft. There was thus an even larger premium on the subjugation of the shudra and a greater incentive to appropriate property to one's private dominion. Class (caste) society and property relations continued thus to consolidate and solidify.

With the introduction of iron and the clearing of forests, the

brahmin-kshatriya alliance had a larger surplus to live on, while the vaishya had now more capital to circulate and expend. The agricultural hinterlands once again began to support sizeable cities and the Ganges basin saw the growth of some important urban centres. Indraprastha (Delhi), Hastinapura, Kosambi, and Kasi (Benaras) were founded in this period and are the first cities with a full and unbroken continuity up to the present day.¹² These cities were melting pots where the different coexisting cultures of India met and fused. Here the eastward moving Aryans, still carrying with them the pure Vedic traditions and culture, mingled with the aborigine food-gatherers of the forests and the emergent new breed of agriculturists and cattle-herders, engaged in the clearing of the Gangetic forests, cultivating the land with newer improvisations such as the iron plough, trading afar on ox-carts moving upon iron axles.

It was only natural that there should be strife, conflict and anarchy. Something more than the devotionism of the *Bhagwat Gita* and more than the escapist ascetism of some of the new contemporary trends would now be required to put an end to the chaos.

The first millenium BC was the millenium of the great transition. As we have seen, iron had brought with it new techniques for a more productive agrarian society, more efficient means of transport, and the capability of clearing forests, making some richer while subjugating others. Settled

agriculture yielded a surplus beyond the needs of the tribe. It enabled the enterprising to carry the surplus beyond their territory to those of other tribes. It changed the ecology and landscape of the earth beyond the imagination of the tribe. It impelled the displacement of Indra by Krishna and severely limited the cults of sacrifice. It allowed the welding together, for some time, of the civilizations of the Indus and the Gangetic valleys, ushering in sweeping changes all over the settled areas of the northern parts of the subcontinent.

V. THE BUDDHA

The deposits of iron ore were far to the east of the Indus region. The Aryans were naturally pulled towards the source of the supply: Bihar and Orissa. From that point of time on, all the major impulses to change and all the pre-eminent religions that rejected the tribal and pastoral-cum-food-gathering mode to facilitate the adoption of agriculture would take birth and radiate out of the east. So would India's only major empire in the first millennium before Christ.

Generally speaking the development of agrarian societies *via* agriculture and the commercial transport of its produce normally spans the entire historical distance from the disintegration of the tribe to the creation of absolute monarchies, supported by the greater available agrarian surplus and managed by the classes trading in it. (This process later matured into

feudalism.)

In the four centuries from Buddha (560-486 BC) to the end of the Mauryan dynasty (c.180 BC), India saw the initial stages of the dissemination of agricultural techniques and the early forms of agrarian social relations.¹³ Gautama Buddha was one of the first perceptive minds to perceive this relentless change which had already begun to take shape in northern India.

When we examine the age of Buddha, we recall that the Iron Age had already equipped man with durable and effective tools. People in small groups had begun to clear the land. These cleared settlements dotted the thick forests. Here, with the heavy iron-nosed plough, they produced a substantial surplus at a distance from the cosmopolitan city centres. The transport of this surplus to the cities was thus at a premium. This need and the social response to it impelled another crucial change.

Two classes responded to the need and began to transgress their erstwhile limits. In doing so, they began to cut across and weaken the pre-existing and rigid 'tribal' mould. The pioneer forest farmer equipped with his iron axe, was the freeman who had left his tribe behind and colonized his own patch of cleared and arable land. The trader, too, had to step out into the territorial limits of the several tribes, profiting by the adventure. The static, localized and

fragmentary tribal order was subjected to this two-pronged assault.

As the limits of this new civilization expanded, there was an increasing demand for the production of an ever larger surplus. Iron implements changed all these prospects into reality. The adventurous forest-clearer and the enterprising merchant had actually made this possible. But the social incentive to continue this development had to be given an institutional permanence. What was a mere adventure and perhaps an idiosyncratic enterprise undertaken by the more daring non-conformists, had to be converted into a profitable and laudable activity under acceptable norms.

Earlier, the tribe had owned all property collectively. To encourage the farmer to continue to produce the necessary surplus, and to make it worth the merchant's effort to expand the network for the collection of that surplus, an extra-tribal response had to be formulated. This came in the shape of private property.¹⁴ Enterprising individuals could now own land, the produce obtained from it, and their farm animals.

The tribe was by now confronted with its greatest challenge. This original 'privatization' threatened its ritualistic practices and put the entire edifice of tribal values in jeopardy. There was a new and enhanced premium on farm and domestic animals. The ritual of sacrifice had now to be shunned. Social

precepts were, by this time, already proscribing cow slaughter and imposing an absolute taboo on beef-eating. It was this environment of momentous social changes that Buddha confronted as he matured into a very sensitive and perceptive adult. His would be another way of rejecting brahminism.

Born into the 'Shakya', a republican tribe of the kshatriya caste where the king was elected by rotation, Gautama Buddha perceived the dichotomy and divergence between contemporary social exigencies and the emerging relations of production, on the one hand, and the strait-jacket of dogma on the other. He saw that the strict tribal constraints upon human intercourse and commerce were outmoded, and the sacrifice of animals, particularly oxen, was a burdensome and obviously unpopular waste of man's primary source of energy.

Buddha was a man of very acute sensibilities. He could not endure this dichotomy for long. He had perceived the inherent contradiction, even though it was perhaps as yet too early for others to comprehend it. Yet he seemed unable to discern any way out of the prevailing milieu. He had to break away from his environment, at once and completely, and then to contemplate afresh the entire scheme of things. His agony was so compelling that he stole past his sleeping young wife and an infant son in the dark hours of one night and disappeared, alone, into the thick forests at the foot of the Nepalese

mountains. He was then only twenty-nine.

For six long years, Buddha meditated, but the solution he sought evaded him. He persecuted himself in pursuit of the Truth. He abstained from all worldly pleasures, even food. He starved himself to bones. He continued to meditate but got nowhere. Then, one day, sitting under a pipal tree, he saw the light.

Buddha realized that what he pursued was not to be obtained from within the existing dogma. There was indeed no solution within the framework of the existing doctrines. They could not be applied to the changing times and the changing social order. New times demanded a new creed, a new philosophy suited to the new compulsions. Tribal cults had to be discarded like a man discards old, wornout clothes. An altogether new direction had to be assumed. The world of belief, philosophy, religion and thought had to turn a new corner. It had to keep pace with the new social order that had been heralded in by the introduction of the new metal: iron. The changes that iron was bringing about, the new classes and social structures that it had generated, demanded a new philosophy and a new religion. Buddhism would respond to this call by providing the doctrinal suprastructure justifying the changes that had already set in.

The noble Eightfold Path became the very basis of Buddhism and its most fundamental doctrine.¹⁵ Prescribing proper vision, proper aims, proper speech, proper action, proper livelihood, proper mental exercise, proper awareness and proper meditation, it decreed new ethical standards and measures for propriety and thereby endeavoured to strike the ultimate blow to draconian and ritualistic brahminism. It was, in effect, a rejection of all that was old and anachronistic. 'Proper action', for instance, denied legitimacy to the taking of life and to adultery, thereby condemning both brahminism and its most extreme reactions, the tantric cults and Shaivistic rituals of dance and orgies. 'Proper livelihood' prohibited the dealing in cattle for butchery, and also the sale of liquor. In both aspects, it was the 'Middle Path' between the strait jacket of brahminism and the sheer abandon of tantricism.

Deriving authority through obscurantist dogma and barbaric ritual, the brahmin clergy had become depraved and corrupt. It trafficked in all social abuses and employed its ecclesiastical position to extort wealth, an outrage now that private property rights were beginning to be recognized. The priests had amassed enormous private properties by extortion and blackmail. The temples they presided over had become their domains of influence and power. To attract popular support, the Buddhist monks were permitted no property beyond the barest minimum: a begging bowl, a water pot, three pieces of plain

cloth, an oil jug, a needle, some thread and a staff. These monks had to beg for their food, while they travelled around as teachers, spreading their precepts - precepts which supported agriculture and the merchant.

Even though both the great kings of the Ganges valley, Bimbisara of Magadh and Pasenadi of Kosala, were prepared to shower unbounded patronage upon him during his lifetime, Buddha wandered on foot for another forty-five years. His fame and influence had spread while he lived. But the forces of reaction, too, were not entirely impotent. The circumstances in which he died in fact suggest that his life must have been an utter and comprehensive failure. 'When Buddha passed away in an obscure village, attended only by one disciple, his own Shakya tribe had been massacred, both his royal patrons dead, in miserable circumstances, his brilliant pupils Sariputta and Moggallana had already attained Nirvana. The doctrine continued to grow nevertheless because it was eminently fitted to the needs of a rapidly evolving society.'¹⁶

Vicious brahmin opposition and the expansion of agriculture promoted the speed with which Buddhism spread until, some 250 years after Buddha's death, it was to encompass the entire subcontinent under the benign and humane authority of the emperor Ashok. The great and wise king would rule with the strength of the new metal: iron.

Though Ashok's empire would compact the entire subcontinent into one single unit, other events, particularly in Indus, a region in short supply of iron, were to precede the establishment of his empire.

1. *Hindu Myths*, 29-33; and Basham, 40. Basham also points out that, like fire in different hearths, 'Agni was here, there and everywhere.' (235). Raising the Rig Vedic question, he postulates that these were early manifestations of the move towards monism: 'Was there only one Agni, or were there many Agnis? How could Agni be one and many at the same time? Questions like these were asked in the *Rig Veda*, and show the earliest signs of the tendency towards monism, which was to bear fruit in the *Upanishads*' (the *Upanishads* being later Hindu texts).
2. Basham, 225.
3. See Thapar, 35.
4. Thapar, 35; Kosambi, *Culture*, 101.

5. 'The subject of the great Indian epic, the Mahabharata, is a battle of extermination in Kuru territory. If such a battle really took place, it could only have been about 850 BC, counting the traditional number of dynastic names down to historical kings. The actual scale of the supposed incident must then have been miniscule, but its literary importance was as great as that of the Trojan war in Greek'. Kosambi, *Culture*, 91. See also Introduction, section II above.
6. See Kosambi, *ibid.*, 93; Wolpert, *A New History*, 80-1; Antonova, 148-51. For text and commentary, see A. C. Bhaktivedanta, *Bhagavad-Gita, As It Is* (1984).
7. It is from that counsel that devotees draw many, often opposing, lessons about life. Gandhi, for instance, was to draw his arguments for non-violence from the *Bhagwat Gita*, while others justified violence for what they believed to be a righteous cause also by reference to the *Gita*. But whatever the deductions drawn from its verses, the *Gita* inspired devotionism and signified a turn towards a new socio-economic order.
8. Kosambi, *ibid.*, 117.

9. Including the sheer abandon of the *tantric* cults and dance forms.
10. Kosambi, *ibid.*, 114.
11. Besides Radha, Krishan is said to have contracted 16,109 marriages. See Kosambi, *ibid.*, 116.
12. Kosambi, *ibid.*, 90.
13. The final stage of agrarian development, the more absolute feudalism, came much later, at first in the scattered regions of the north, penetrating gradually to the south.
14. See Thapar, 35; Kosambi, *Culture*, 101.
15. Kosambi, *Culture*, 106.
16. Kosambi, *Culture*, 114.

Porus: An Indus Version

I. KRISHNA TAKES ANOTHER ALLY

In the available supplies of the vital new metal, once again the Indus experience was different from that of India. Iron was not available in such vast quantities in the Indus region (Pakistan) as it was in India. The source of the metal was Bihar, far to the east of Indus. This relative lack of availability of iron weakened the strong arm of the Indus state. Society had, therefore, to be held together by dogma more than by the force of arms. It thus decreed the development of an ideological pattern of rigid norms and precepts to bind together a variety of countless tribes assimilated in one social order. Indus would not, however, lag behind India in later discarding the tribal order.

We have seen how the Aryan god Indra had initially destroyed Indus agriculture. We have also observed that Indus could itself not remain long without agriculture. As the Aryans settled here, they themselves therefore took to agriculture. Here, too, Krishna, that god of agriculture and the family, displaced Indra and destroyed the tribal system. But in this contest Krishna's ally was not iron as it had been in India. His ally in Indus was a visiting

Macedonian. While Indian tribes and Indian pastoral life were destroyed by Krishna and iron, Indus tribes and Indus pastoralism were eliminated by the deity in alliance with the energetic conqueror.

Indus had generally remained ahead of India, except when the east (in the shape of the Mauryan armies) came to subjugate it with the strength of their iron reserves. But even then the eastern armies may not have been able to overcome Indus but for the fact that before their advent it had spent much of its energies and resources resisting the Macedonian invaders.

II. A RICH AND MYSTIC LAND

At the time of the Greek invasion Indus had for some time been a part of the Achaemenid empire of Iran, and thus a part of the Central Asian politico-cultural system. In 513 BC, Darius I annexed Indus to the empire of the Great Cyrus. Indus was cut off from India. In the period that India largely remained at the food-gathering stage, the more advanced Indus valley gravitated once again towards the markets of the rich slave-owning societies of western Asia, Persia and Mesopotamia.

Indus was a rich and productive land. It yielded a rich tribute and sent its men to fight for the Persians. Herodotus mentions the astounding value of 360

talents of gold dust paid by the Indus satrapy as tribute to the Persian throne. It also provided a back-up of advanced industry to the empire. Firdausi mentions in his *Shahnama* how, during Alexander's Persian campaign, the army of Darius hurriedly placed orders for swords and weapons from India.¹ In fact, the term used for the sword, mohannad, literally means 'from Hind.'

To the Greeks, Indus was a mystical rich land, the most prosperous satrapy of the Achaemenid empire and the most profitable of its provinces. It supported such incredible beasts as the twin-tusked and long-trunked elephant. Its rivers were gigantic, sluggish, brown, slow flowing oceans during the summer months and the monsoons. 'Wool', they heard, actually grew on shrubs and flowered out of small buds. Its reeds (the bamboos) were giant-sized, and a white grain produced here (sugar) was sweeter than honey. The alluvial flat soils produced two crops every year, while the Greeks could only harvest one.

It is little wonder, therefore, that after young Alexander of Macedon had humbled Persia under Darius III in 331 BC, he was compelled by the renowned wealth of the Indus satrapy to venture towards this rich outpost of the Persian empire. Alexander's journey was another manifestation of the innumerable ways in which Indus was already in contact with the peoples of western Iran.

III. A GREEK ACCOUNT

Alexander's was a brief campaign. Almost as if in one spirited charge, one single well-coordinated transaction, Alexander took Persia. He destroyed the Achaemenian might under Darius III at Gangemela, then took and burnt Persepolis (*Takht-e-Jamshed*). And he moved onwards.

Alexander crossed the mighty Indus in the Swat region and came upon Taxila.² Here he obtained the willing surrender of Ambhi, the king of Taxila. Ambhi's logic was simple: he yielded tribute, saying that since there was enough revenue for two kings, there was no gain in fighting over it.

Alexander now moved towards the banks of the river that the Greeks called Hydaspes (Jhelum). It was here that he was resisted with a vigour and ferocity that he had not been confronted with in all his earlier campaigns. The leader who was a match to the Macedonian was the Punjabi prince, Porus.

Raja Porus ruled a substantial principality from his capital near the modern-day town of Mandi Bahauddin in the district of Gujrat. The subdivision of the district, Phalia, recalls Bucephalus, the steed of the invader, and a massive mound near the village Lakhnewal, close to the town, is claimed by the villagers to have been the site of Porus' capital. Foundation digging has

yielded some artefacts and, if one stands upon it and stamps hard with one's foot, a hollow thud travels an amazingly long distance. Standing upon it, you can also discern the contours of the now discarded channel through which the river must have passed, providing a natural, semicircular moat for the capital city.

Arrian, the Greek historian, describes the bloody battle which lasted for many days. In the final phase, according to his manifestly exaggerated account, as many as thirty thousand foot soldiers and four thousand cavalry took part, while three hundred chariots and two hundred elephants were used.³ Arrian goes on to assert that nearly 20,000 of the Indian infantry were killed in this battle, and about 3,000 cavalry.⁴ Even if the entire Greek army were only slaughtering unresisting sheep in the few hours that it took the final battle to be fought, this would have perhaps been an impossible task. Nor did Greeks have any modern-day incendiary device to be able to kill so many within the estimated hours of the battle. Without doubt, Arrian's account is not entirely trustworthy. Arrian's testimony and his attribution of victory to Alexander has come down to us through classical Greek sources. Other descriptions of the Battle of Jhelum are also of Greek authorship.⁵ There is no contemporaneous and comprehensive Indian narration of the conflict.

Alexander, according to these sources, was finally able to defeat Porus by

resorting to a cunning manoeuvre, involving a surprise crossing of the river. The light-armed Macedonian cavalry, mounted on horse, sowed panic among the slow-moving ranks of the local army astride elephants. These turned to stampede their own infantry. The tall and handsome Porus was captured. He had received nine grievous wounds and could barely stand, but when brought before the victor and asked what treatment he expected, Porus declared boldly: 'As is my due. As a king should treat a king.' Impressed by his valour, Alexander let Porus retain his possessions.

IV. RE-EVALUATING THE BATTLE OF JHELUM

That is the account recorded by Arrian, a Greek historian. But without corroboration is he an adequately reliable source? That is the question that needs to be addressed. The accomplished historian, Dr Buddha Prakash, has already raised the fundamental question when, after discussing the inconsistencies between the accounts of Justin, Plutarch, Diodoros, Curtius, and Arrian, he observed that: 'In this way the accounts of the Greek writers about the end of the battle are full of confusion and contradictions. What is clear from these traditions is that Alexander and Porus made an honourable peace and became friends. From the unanimous remark of these authors that Porus was reinstated in his state and the territories conquered by Alexander in India [meaning territories other than those ruled by Porus] were added to his

dominion, it is also evident that the belligerents met together on a footing of equality before the issue of the battle could be precisely ascertained.¹⁶

In another learned analysis, the author further points out that it thus 'appears from Arrian's narrative that Alexander took the initiative in opening talks with Porus and showed so much perseverance in it as to send messenger after messenger to him for that purpose, and Porus was reluctant to have any truck with Alexander and again and again rebuffed and repelled his envoys and emissaries, that, ultimately, through the instrumentality of an old friend, he agreed to meet Alexander and zealously preserved his dignity and status in his talk with him and that the outcome of the peace parleys was an enlargement of the kingdom of Porus by the surrender of a large chunk of territory by Alexander.'¹⁷

It is hoped that some senior historians and experienced historiographers will undertake the exercise of re-evaluation of the Battle of Jhelum on the basis of some of the facts that seem to be accepted in, or can be deduced from, all the known accounts of the battle. Three facts appear to be widely acknowledged. An alternative conclusion about the result of the battle could perhaps be drawn from these: first, that Alexander encountered stiff resistance; second, that after the battle, he swerved to his right to skirt Porus's kingdom and headed south towards the confluence of the five Punjabi rivers and Multan

(this is manifest, even though not admitted by Arrian, by the determination of the point at which Alexander crossed the Chenab); and third, that Porus retained his kingdom and remained its king after the battle. In fact, Alexander even ceded some territory to him. These three facts can be taken as the common factors in most historical accounts of the encounter.

A Greek historian would perhaps have no option but to record the victory of his army. He would interpret the retention by Porus of his own kingdom after the battle as a gift of his own king. But is that a reasonable inference? Is it not more likely that Porus had some singular advantage, despite being taken prisoner, as narrated? Remember, too, that the confrontation with Porus induced Alexander to change the direction of his march.⁸ Why did the Greek king, renowned for so many victories, feel the need to do so?

Although most of the Greek sources describe Alexander's further march across the Hydaspes (Jhelum) and to the Acesines (Chenab), the actual points of the crossings of the two rivers do not appear to be well established. If it can be established that he crossed either river far to the south of the site of the battle, it will have been proved that he was avoiding marching through the kingdom of Porus.

By Arrian's account, the point of crossing appears to be almost several

hundred miles to the south of the site of the battle. For 'Arrian gives its [Acesines, i.e., Chenab's] breadth at the junction with the Indus at about four miles, but this is *after* it has been joined by the Hydaspes [Jhelum] and the Hydraotes [Ravi].'⁹ And if Alexander crossed the Acesines (Chenab) at a point where it had already joined the Hydaspes (Jhelum), Hydraotes (Ravi), and indeed also the Indus, then Alexander obviously never indeed crossed the Hydaspes (Jhelum) near the site of the battle. Could he then have won the battle?

By relating Arrian's account with the geographical location of the rivers, we can infer that after the famous battle Alexander swerved south to skirt the kingdom of Porus, and that he did not again turn eastwards until he had reached the region of Multan. He then crossed over to the east bank below the confluence of the rivers Jhelum and the Chenab. Kosambi is therefore correct when he asserts that: 'The battle with Porus was the last bitter lesson for an intelligent general, however ambitious, whose mutinous soldiers had had their fill of fighting. A flotilla was built on Himalayan pine rafted down the Indus and the Greek army departed by the ancient trade route of the forgotten Indus culture.'¹⁰

Indeed, Porus's men must have continued to harass the invader during his journey south along the right bank of the Hydaspes, resulting ultimately in that

loss of morale among Alexander's troops that led them to mutiny,¹¹ and return from the banks of the Hyphasis (Beas); that is, before proceeding much further towards India. In other words, even if the Battle of Jhelum was a stand-off between Alexander and Porus, the invading army was so overwhelmed that it finally dictated Alexander's retreat from Indus.¹²

The alternative thesis being suggested here is that repulsed by Porus, Alexander appears to have travelled south to Multan and then from the great confluence of the mighty rivers (Panjnad), up the Sutlej to Beas. He thus avoided passing through Porus's kingdom, spanning the Jhelum and the Ravi. Porus, the victor, retained his kingdom and his crown. Alexander, as he proceeded to Multan, was injured by an arrow from the much feared Indus bamboo bow. His men were harassed and demoralized. The Macedonians revolted and forced upon him the decision to withdraw. A flotilla was constructed and Alexander's army rafted down an ancient trade route - the watery, flowing bed of the Indus.

An interesting postscript to this episode may be recorded. The apparent blind acceptance of the versions of court historians was not the only impression that the vigorous young Macedonian left behind. So towering was the shadow that he cast that his name (Sikandar) was adopted even by later Muslim citizens of the Indus, many naming their sons after him. Porus and his

name also preceded the advent of Islam in Indus. Somehow, the indigenous hero who conclusively blocked the tracks of the conqueror is remembered only in that literary idiom that attributes fright and panic to his elephants resulting in his defeat. No one names his son after that native son of the soil. Is this another example of the Indus person denying his own heroes?

1. See also Buddha Prakash, *Porus*, 30.
2. See Arnold J. Toynbee, *Between Oxus and the Yamuna* (1961) 28-9.
3. Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, 275.
4. Arrian, 279.
5. See *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great As Described By Arrian, Q. Curtius, Diodoros, Plutarch and Justin* (first published 1896, reprinted by Indus Publications, 1992).
6. Buddha Prakash, *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab* (1976)

171, 310.

7. Buddha Prakash, *Porus*, 67-8.

8. Plutarch, in fact, concedes that 'The battle with Porus depressed the spirits of the Macedonians, and made them unwilling to advance further into India'. After initial vexation and rage, Alexander 'at last relented, and prepared to retreat.' *Invasion of India*, 310.

9. See Arrian, 42, 285.

10. Kosambi, *Culture*, 138.

11. Arrian, 291ff.

12. I have also endeavoured to raise this question in another way:

The fact is that Porus defeated Alexander,

But Alexander's chronicler feared the wrath of his king;

The fact is that Alexander could not go past Gujrat

Because he feared his army, and his army feared Porus.

*Pax Mauryana:
The First Universal State*

1

I. THE RICE-BOWL STRATAGEM

At the time when Alexander was marching down the Indus, two exiles from the eastern kingdom of Magadh had taken refuge in the premier town of upper Indus. Taxila was already a prestigious seat of learning and a busy centre of trade. Chandragupta and his inseparable friend and counsellor Kautilya (also called Chankaya) gained invaluable knowledge of warfare, strategy, and statecraft by this exposure.²

Kautilya was a perceptive man. He would later author the first important Indian treatise on statecraft. The keenness of his perception can be judged from the manner in which he derived the timeless principles of guerilla warfare from simple observations. As the exile sat, one day, dejected and disheartened, he heard a woman admonishing her young son. The child had cried out in pain after attempting to eat hungrily from the centre of a hot dish of rice. He had burnt his fingers. The mother advised the child to start his meal with the rice

on the sides of the dish, as this was not likely to be as hot as the rice at the centre. Thenceforth, the exiled friends were to win their campaigns and the all-important seat of the Mauryan empire by practising the 'rice-bowl stratagem'. They would never make a frontal, impetuous assault on the capital. First the outer garrisons would be surprised, harassed and overcome one by one. Gradually but surely, they would close in for the final assault upon the increasingly beleaguered capital.

It was the most opportune of times to capture a state which had iron reserves. The subcontinent was ripe for the establishment of a unifying universal state. The greater abundance of the iron reserves in the east (in Bihar) had already accelerated the withering away of the tribe. The step towards an absolute universal monarchy was only a logical development. The new classes - the freeman farmer and the merchant - required a force to guarantee security of tenure of land and transport of produce. The size of the marketable surplus would be proportionate to that security. The state had to be equipped with a long and vigorous arm.

The coercive apparatus of the state that the freeman farmer and the merchant thus supported would, in turn, intrude into and further break down tribal exclusiveness. This was to become a vicious circle. Henceforth, a large part of the more substantial surplus that was now available to the State would

be invested in the State's administrative machinery, so as to enable this machinery to expropriate an even larger surplus. This was a historical spiral that would build upon itself as it continued to build itself.

Kosala and Magadh were the two eastern states that first began to reap the richest benefits of this propitious transformation. Of these two, Magadh had the definite edge. Kosala was happily positioned on the trade routes and commanded the Ganges. It was strategically located. But Magadh had the iron ore deposits. This was the critical advantage. It was therefore destined to grow into the classical universal monarchy, generating the growth of feudal relations of production throughout the subcontinent. The new metal would help subjugate and destroy the countless fractured and divided tribes. For some time, it would hold the entire land in its superior unifying grip.

II. BUDDHISM SERVES THE MERCHANT AND REPLACES BRAHMINISM

Upon Alexander's death (323 BC), Chandragupta turned the skills he had learnt from the rustic Punjabi mother (the 'rice-bowl stratagem'), first to drive the residuary Greek garrisons temporarily out of India and to capture Taxila. The following year, he and Kautilya, abandoning their Indus possessions for the time being, repaired to Magadh. Relentlessly applying the stratagem and

defying the decree of banishment, they soon took the capital, Pataliputra. There, they laid the foundations of an empire. Equipped both with the techniques of statecraft and the strength of unlimited iron ore and iron weapons, this empire began its expansion towards Indus, to reclaim Chandra's first possession.

As the Mauryan state advanced towards it with iron weapons, Indus lay exhausted. Alexander's invasion had already sapped it of all socio-economic energies. As a traditional 'frontline state', Indus had saved India from the Macedonian onslaught but it had spent itself in the process. The retreating Greeks had collected a large number of able-bodied men as slaves from the southern parts of the Indus region. Cattle stocks had been depleted. Agrarian, tribal and pastoral life had been put under great strain. Indus was not in a position to present any strong resistance to the Mauryan invaders from the east who were abundantly equipped with strong iron arrowheads, swords, spears and shields.

In 303 BC, Chandragupta engaged and defeated Seleucus Nikator, the heir to the eastern part of Alexander's empire. The Mauryans again took Taxila. The treaty of that year brought Seleucus' daughter to the court at Pataliputra in a marriage alliance that recognized the suzerainty of Mauryan power. It was at this time also that the renowned Megasthenes, whose correspondence with

Greece is a source for contemporary historical events, was accredited as ambassador to the Mauryan throne by Seleucus.

Bindusara, Chandragupta's son and Ashok's father, completed the Mauryan conquests and soon the Mauryan empire extended to the Trans-Indus provinces to cover a large part of Afghanistan. It roughly encompassed the entire subcontinent. Ashok had no need to conquer. He had only to consolidate.

Consolidation of the empire came in a close and peculiar partnership with Ashok's conversion to non-violence. The greater and richer surpluses that iron from Bihar and northwestern agriculture were yielding made consolidation easy. If these extensive surpluses were to be husbanded from the domestic producer, armies could be put to better use gathering and extorting it than on foreign campaigns. Forswearing of violence was thus a natural social compulsion.

The cult of non-violence was, however, necessitated also by the requirement of the new social order. The prescriptions of the old had to be displaced. Only then would the new order find root.

The old order was embodied in brahmin rituals and prescriptions, which

prescribed violence in the shape of the yajna and prohibited travel beyond the territory of the tribe, thus preventing the collection of surplus produce. It cramped the merchants. Both the ritual and the prescription had to be discarded. The old concept of the community of tribal possessions had to be forsaken. The new concept of private property was to be accommodated in religious and social norms. It was the age of commerce and agrarian plenty. Buddha had already spelt out the Eight-fold Path. The dissemination of the new faith only needed the patronage of an imperial court.

Ashok had inherited the entire subcontinent. Only one corner had defied the armies of Magadh. Yet it was vital to the traders, as it commanded the land and sea routes to the south in the age of the merchant. It was now time for Ashok to take Kalinga (modern-day Orissa). The battle for Kalinga was bloody. One hundred thousand Kalingans died resisting Ashok's army. More than that number were deported. Ashok was filled with remorse. He renounced violence and converted to Buddhism, which had, by this time, become the established faith of the vaishya. Its liberalism had enabled the merchant to break through the strict and impenetrable brahmin divisions of tribes and castes to a wider market and a much wider 'catchment area'. But as his activity expanded, he came to need a vast and powerful state apparatus to facilitate, protect and further expand his operations.

Buddhism had initially supported, encouraged and patronized all those forces and impulses that had brought about the establishment of the Mauryan empire. Now the role was being reversed. The imperial state became the patron of the religion. Buddhism spread, on the wheels of the empire, to the farthest corners of the subcontinent and beyond.

Buddhism became the merchant's vehicle in more ways than merely the ideological. Designed to facilitate the merchant, Buddhist monks built a series of conveniently located monasteries and resting places along all the trade routes. These, in fact, remained long after the decline of Buddhism itself. Thus, when the Chinese scholar, Hsuan Tsang, came to study at the Nalanda university in the time of Harsha Vardhana (that latter-day Gupta king, one thousand years after Ashok), he rested at the innumerable Buddhist monasteries dotting the route from Tashkent, Samarkand and Balkh, all along the foothills of the Himalayas. In many respects, this was a long-lasting Ashokan legacy.

III. SLAVERY, GUILDS AND THE KAUTILYAN STATE

The Mauryan state was no crude and rudimentary apparatus. It was a highly sophisticated system. Even in Ashok's time, the management and policy was undertaken within the overall parameters established by Kautilya. Besides

aiding and counselling the young Chandragupta in his capture and administration of Magadh, Kautilya had been engaged in the production of a far more abiding work. The *Arthshastra* was as comprehensive as its nearest contemporary work, Plato's *The Republic*.³

The *Arthshastra* is a code of statecraft. It prescribes general policies and objectives, and also goes into the details of structure and functioning. It provides for administration and taxation. It makes the state responsible for large public works such as roads, irrigation projects and the clearing of forests. The state was also to ensure peace and security on the trade routes. These were deadly blows to the tribal order.

In order to perform these functions and to further serve the merchant, the Mauryan state needed the services of a large and efficient army. Though Ashok had renounced conquest and violence, his army still had some 600,000 foot soldiers in times of peace. Its cavalry alone comprised no less than 30,000 men and as many as 9,000 elephants.⁴

The public projects that had to be undertaken by the state and the standing army demanded a rich and large base of production and income. Mining and agriculture had helped build the empire. Craft and industry maintained it. Roads and highway security expanded the merchant's operations. The state

itself engaged in some industries such as foundries and shipbuilding, which yielded direct revenues to the state. All the other manufactures and trades were taxed.

Although the Greek ambassador, Megasthenes, believed that all land in the Mauryan state belonged to the king, this was not so. The fact that the practice of pre-emption of sale of land was recognized by law establishes the existence of private holdings. Many of these holdings were worked upon by slaves.

Slavery had begun in the Vedic age. By this time, it had matured and solidified as an institution. The Mauryan state, the first of the three universal states the subcontinent was to see, was based on slavery. Slaves (called *das* and *dasi*) were classed among the animals. They had virtually no rights. The master had the right of life and death upon them. Women slaves were liable to grave sexual abuse. Bondage could not be terminated.⁵ Most of the slaves were in fact shudras, although countless shudras lived outside the pale of slavery in a status and position a little better than the slave.

Slavery may be a black spot in ancient India's 'Golden Age', but in at least one respect India displayed amazing progressivism, uncharacteristic of ancient and medieval times in other parts of the world. It had established associations of artisans, organized on professional and occupational bases which spanned

the entire land. The liability for paying taxes, the prospects of greater profits, the facility of commerce, the availability of slaves and greater access to rich markets demanded and facilitated large-scale production. Manufacturers and cottage craftsmen formed associations by establishing guilds.

For the individual artisan, the guilds provided security and eliminated unnecessary competition with other artisans of his locality. They all cooperated to supply manufactures to a larger market. They exploited economies of scale. For the merchant, the guild became a more convenient entity to deal with. It ensured contracted supplies and the agreed qualities, besides a system of compensation in case of breach of contract. For the state, the guild facilitated the collection of taxes, the supervision of manufacturing and the maintenance of commercial standards. The guilds further contributed to the social economy by providing employment to the young men of the caste with which the guild was associated.⁶

As society became more complex, as specialization of production became possible and necessary with a larger surplus and on account of greater demands, and as a variety of tribes (Krishna's sixteen thousand wives) were assimilated in the sociopolitical fabric, a large number of sub-castes developed.⁷ This vast network of sub-castes was interconnected with 'occupational' guilds and secured to the guilds a regular supply of appropriate

labour and recruits. The area of operation of the guild and the merchant reached into the far corners of the subcontinent and embraced Indus. It even spilled over and beyond.

Internally, the empire was divided into four provinces, each subdivided into districts. These, in turn, consisted of several villages each. The village was thus the basic administrative unit and the unit of production. Each village was a self-sufficient, self-contained micro-organism, living upon its own produce, though generating a surplus to feed the cities and their commerce. Its market was regulated by the impetus of its own demand and supply impulses. The autonomy of the village was jealously protected. No soldier could enter a village unless he had a royal permit.

At this time, the Indus village was a vibrant and vigorous unit. But over the centuries, as the central authority of the state declined, and with the gradual eclipse of the guilds, each village became more and more of an island. Thus insulated, it would in time be crippled by its own self-sufficiency, introversion and the arthritic stranglehold of caste.⁸

The coordination and administration of this vast network of castes and guilds, villages and urban centres, demanded a powerful and extensive bureaucratic apparatus. The *Arthshastra* therefore also prescribed a highly

centralized bureaucratic organization, with the king at its hub and as its primemover. The departments of state encompassed a wide-ranging list including, among others, the departments of ships, cows, elephants, spies, prostitutes and cities.

One last comment about the Mauryan state: to D.D. Kosambi, it appeared to be a state that the modern mind will not be able to fully comprehend because of its seeming omnipresence in all walks of life. Kosambi observes:

The Kautilyan state appears so fantastic today because it was the main land-clearing agency, by far the greatest landowner, the principal owner of heavy industry, and even the greatest producer of commodities. The ruling class was, if not virtually created by and for the state, at least greatly augmented as part of the administration: the higher and lower bureaucracies, the enormous standing army of half a million men (by 300 BC) with its officers of all castes and diverse origins; as important as either, a second but hidden army of spies and secret agents - these were the main supports of the new state.⁹

But as we seek to discover the primordial impulses of contemporary predilections, it may be difficult to disagree with Hamza Alavi's comment about the modern subcontinental states and wonder whether that ancient state

was indeed so fantastic after all:

I have, on a previous occasion, referred to this syndrome as that of the 'over-developed state' in the sense that the excessive enlargement of powers of control and regulation that the state acquires extend far beyond the logic of what is necessary in the interests of the orderly functioning of the peripheral capitalist economies over which the state presides, and specific needs of each of the dominant classes.¹⁰

Clearly the syndrome of the 'overdeveloped state' is no modern phenomenon. It is perhaps more than a mere syndrome. It is a deep-rooted cultural trait, and its origins go back deep into primordial history. It is only now, with the worldwide encroachments by modern technology, the so-called 'Information Superhighway' and the emphasis on privatization that the very concept of insulated and 'over-developed' sovereign states is under some threat.

Ashok died in 232 BC. His system, much of it based on high moral values, survived only fifty years after his death.

¹⁰ The 'universal state' of the Mauryans, spanning the entire subcontinent, was facilitated and enriched by cheap slave labour. The two subsequent

'universal states' were the high points of feudalism (the Mughal Empire) and of imperial capitalism (the British Empire) respectively. See also chapters 14 and 24.

2. It is widely believed that the young man called 'Sandrocotus' who, it is suggested by Justin and Plutarch, Alexander met during his stay in Taxila, was Chandragupta. See Wolpert, *New History*, 56.
3. See Kosambi, *Culture*, 142.
4. The state punished the killing of elephants with death.
5. Thapar believes that it was otherwise (Thapar, 77). But the right to manumission, as in all slave societies, must indeed have been quite illusory and available only in the textbooks. Economic realities and the realities of human narrow-mindedness normally remain too compulsive with the ruling elite and inhibit manumission.
6. Initially, the concept of castes was the primitive division of society on the basis of function and production. The first such division may have actually

come with the relatively fair-skinned Aryans who, in the Indus valley, subjugated the darker Dravidians. Unfortunately, the colour of the skin continues to this day to determine quite often the respect a person commands in the Indus region and in most of northern India.

7. By this time, a child born in Gangetic India could be born into one of as many as 3,000 sub-castes.
8. In this dormant mode, the Indus and Indian village would then sleep on for centuries until the introduction of the modern-day bourgeois mode of production, injected into agrarian relations by European imperialism.
9. Kosambi, *Culture*, 143.
10. Hamza Alvi's article entitled 'Class and State' in Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (eds.) *Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship* (1983) 42.

The Oxus and the Indus

I. THE BACTRIANS AND THE SCYTHIANS

Until the advent of the British, the Mauryan empire would remain the only empire to rule over the Indus basin from a centre far in the east and deep down the Gangetic valley. But even as the Mauryans administered it, they realized that Indus had a character and significance all its own. They knew that it was more an independent buffer than a part of India. Hence the Mauryan belief that the Gangetic kingdom could do without an army as long as the Punjab had no hostile occupation. At the same time, they were conscious of the fact that as long as Indus was a part of the empire and open to invasion, it needed an alert army with one or more separate local commands. This was an early version of the strategy that would be applied two thousand years later by the British as the Forward Policy.

But despite this primordial 'Forward Policy',¹ Ashok's empire began to shrink upon his death. It was soon confined to the Ganges valley. The Bactrian Greeks had claimed Indus by about 180 BC and once again engulfed it in a state spanning the areas of the Oxus and the Indus.

Bactria (or *Bakhtar*) is the vast territory on either side of the river Oxus that spans most of modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan. As Alexander's armies passed through these areas, many Greeks remained behind and settled there. These remnants built a new state in Central Asia. Their subsequent conquest of the Indus region, and their long and stable rule over it left lasting imprints upon the entire cultural spectrum of this region.

The Bactrian Greeks founded the first of a series of Indus states that shared one vital feature. Each one held the Indus and the Oxus in one political dominion. Had these kingdoms, or states, spread southward into India, beyond the Indus valley, the character of India may perhaps have had nothing to distinguish it from Indus. When one recalls that this direct tie-up of the Indus and the Oxus in a consecutive series of Central Asian states spanned several centuries (in fact, the better part of one millenium), only then can one properly comprehend the cultural, ethnic and linguistic affinity of Indus with its immediate northwest. There is no similar primordial and historical affinity of ethnic stock or languages with the Arab states of the Middle East. Historical gravity has always pulled the Perso-Afghan areas of Central Asia and Indus towards each other.

Seleucus' defeat had brought the direct rule of the Macedonians to an end in the Indus region. But it had not prevented the Greeks of Alexander's armies

from continuing to assimilate themselves in Central Asia and Indus. These settlers had established themselves along the banks of the Indus with neither an attempt nor the predilection to go south of the farthest push of Alexander's army. It was only in the Indus region, therefore, that the fusion of the Indo-Greek cultures fabricated a rich and colourful civilization. Having fused the areas between present-day Ghazni and the Punjab into one state, the Bactrians gave birth to the exuberant culture of Gandhara and to its Graeco-Buddhist art. Under the Indo-Greek king Demetrius II, Bactrian dominion spread down along the Indus to the deltaic extremity, and then veered along the coastline to embrace Kutch. Later, Menander consolidated the Bactrian empire by holding the Swat valley, the Hazara region, and the Punjab.²

In contrast with the rest of India, the enduring links of the Indus region with a variety of trans-Indus cultures is highlighted by the impact of the Hellenistic art forms on Gandhara art, which would, in fact, reach its highpoint later, in the Kushan era. The hybrid Indo-Greek style was the major artistic expression of the Bactrian state. The themes were entirely Buddhist, but the sculptured figures had Apollo-like Athenian faces.

There were other ways in which these later Greeks added to the influence that Alexander's short invasion had left behind. They impeded somewhat the development of feudal relations upon the Indus. A hybrid, though exclusively

Indus, society seems to have existed for some time. It was dependent upon Indus agriculture, but not on the landlord-peasant relationship. The agrarian system was worked by a master-slave relationship. Only the comprehensive and long lasting peace bestowed much later by the Gupta empire was necessary to feudalize Indus.

While iron was in abundant supply in the east, it was not yet the primary Indus metal. The relative shortage of iron, despite the high degree of technological skill prevailing here, impeded the expansion of agriculture. Added to this was the influence of Hellenism that drew from a more efficient slave-owning society. This influence, therefore, provided a vital impetus, not towards feudalism, but to the maturing of the system of patriarchal slavery. This peculiar form of the slave-owning society found its highpoint in the Indus valley at the turn of the Christian era. Thereafter, and then only gradually, it made way for feudalism seeping in from northern India.

By introducing this hybrid system and by employing Indus as a waterway and trade route, the Bactrians severed Indus from India, and then fell from power. The attack upon Bactria by the Scythians, another tribe of Caucasian nomads, led to the decline of the Indo-Greek kingdom.

The Scythians³ (or *Seestanis*, also called the *Shakas*), like their compatriots

in the Central Asian steppes, were cattle-herders, still in the tribal stage of development. Their incursion into Indus was the result of a series of developments which occurred in the vast expanses of Central Asia in the second century BC. The pressure of the vigorous and militant Huns first pushed them down the Oxus to the Aral Sea, and then, south-eastwards, into the Kabul valley and on through the Sulaiman Range to the plains of Indus.⁴ Here, faced with agricultural relations, the clan and tribal relations of the Scythians began to break.

Initially, the Scythians disseminated a nomadic cattle culture. But in Indus they began to merge into the local farming population by taking to the cultivation of fields. They thus began to lose their tribal and nomadic self-reliance. In the course of time, by the middle of the first century BC, the Scythians had completely displaced the Bactrians from the upper Indus region and had established their dominion all over the Gandhara region with their capital at Taxila under king Moga. It was in this period that the entire Indus came to be described as 'Scythia', which is sometimes believed to be the origin of the noun 'Sindh.'

The Scythians were not able, however, to hold their newly acquired home for long. Turbulence in the Central Asian grazing lands had become endemic. It might have been the pressure of population or a cycle of periodic droughts,

but tribes found survival in constant movement and, consequently, in necessary militarist aggression. The Yueh-Chi was one such tribe. Though of Chinese origin, it had been trailing the Scythians in Central Asia. One branch of the Yueh-Chi was called the Kushans.

II. THE KUSHANS AND THE PERSIANS

The Kushans pushed the Scythians out of the northern areas of the Indus basin. The latter followed the Indus down its meandering path to the coast, and then to Kathiawar.⁵ The Kushans founded a durable and magnificent empire. Its durability contributed in great measure to the gradual introduction of feudal relations into the Indus region. In some measure, the Kushan state did to Indus what the Mauryan state had achieved for the Gangetic valley. *Pax Kushana* was able to consolidate the change from the pre-agrarian to the agrarian, and then to initiate the introduction of the feudal relations of production. The Kushan state compacted the Indus and the Oxus together in one empire, the parameters of whose geographical expanse were natural ones.

The Kushan pantheon of gods is of significance and interest. It finds representation on Kushan coins. These represent three different pantheons: the Greek, the Iranian and the Indian. Empire-building was facilitated by an acute sense of religious tolerance. Earlier, intolerant hordes had come, swept

all and sundry before them, and perished. The entire process at times took not more than a few decades. Kushan tolerance enabled the dynasty to absorb the strength of its adversaries and to found a strong, durable and vast empire.

Despite the representation of Shiva as a part of its pantheon, the dominant strain and influence in Kushan religion was Buddhism. The next influence was that of Zoroastrianism, which was allowed by Kanishk (AD 78-144), the dynasty's greatest name, to contribute several rituals and articles of faith.⁶ This too was only natural. The empire was again the melting pot of which Indus has so often been an integral part.

It is true that the Kushan empire spread as far east as Benaras, and that Mathura was the frequent residence of the Kushan kings; but the Kushan state, probably the largest empire of the ancient world, with its summer capital in Afghanistan and its winter capital in Parashapara (near Peshawar), retained the predominant ethos of Central Asia and of Indus. The Kushan kings were perhaps the first dynasty to adopt the title of *Shao-nano-Shao* (*Shahinshah*, king of kings). They developed Gandhara art, initially introduced by the Bactrians, to evolve its finest forms in sculpture and stone carvings.

The Central Asians introduced Indus and India to the utility and fashion of stitched clothes. Until their advent, subcontinental dress had consisted of

pieces of unstitched cloth wrapped around the body, whether as a loin cloth and *patka* or *chaddar*⁷ for men, or two *chaddars* or the *sari* (of an early variety) for women. Being horsemen, they also introduced strong leather boots in a land that had previously known only sandals with wooden soles and straps made of grass, elastic twigs, or rope strings. Leather, on account of taboo and inadequacy of supplies, was not an Indus or Indian material. 'Long baggy trousers with tight-fitting tunics and heavy boots, that suited horse-riding, became so fashionable that it is seen all over the place worn alike by kings, soldiers and common men.'⁸

Even though the Kushans welded the Indus with the Oxus, they remained inextricably involved in the affairs and politics of Central Asia. Kanishk's death is believed to have come about while fighting in Central Asia. But by subduing Kashmir and Kashghar, Kanishk is believed to have been the first to open up that prolific trade-route between China and the Indus: the Silk Route, that was to be made famous later by the travels and accounts of Marco Polo.

With Kanishk's death, the Kushan kingdom began to wane, although it may still have withstood the incoming Sassanids but for the fundamentalist bigotry of some of his later successors and the terrible plague of AD 167.⁹

Ardeshar, the Sassanid, had overthrown the Parthians in Iran in AD 226.

His son reduced Peshawar and Taxila. The Kushan kingdom thereafter became a satellite of the Persian empire. The successors of Darius thus pulled the Indus to the west and reclaimed it as their tributary.

In the Indus valley itself, the ruins of the metropolis, Taxila,¹⁰ suggest that it remained the pre-eminent centre of commerce despite the shifting of the political centre of gravity to the Trans-Indus region beyond the Hindukush. In fact, in the entire history of the region Taxila has been the premier city longer than any other city.

Legend attributed the founding of Taxila to Darius I, though the city was never to become a centre of Persian influence. It was positioned on a cross-roads of trade routes. The Mauryans had built a road from Pataliputra to Taxila and beyond. The Silk Route connected it to southern China. The Indus was, by now, one large waterway to the south-western coast. When a prolonged conflict between Rome and Parthia interrupted the the west's overland trade with China, it necessitated an alternate route. The Indus was quite obviously the only choice. And Taxila at once became the most important warehousing centre in the area, sending goods down the Indus to its estuarial port, Barbaricum.

Taxila retained, too, its lustre for the academic. In Mauryan times, it was

India's foremost university after Nalanda. In the post-Mauryan era, it became known for its scholastic grandeur. Its pupils were brilliant and successful. They included such ancient luminaries as Panini, the fourth century BC grammarian, Kautilya, the author of *Arthshastra*, and Caraka, one of the masters of Indian medicine.¹¹

III. THE VILLAGE, GUILDS AND CASTE IN THE GUPTA STATE

Though in the Mauryan period the Indus region had been held by the Gangetic region, it had, as we have seen, reverted, under the Bactrians, and as soon as the Mauryan grip loosened, to its parent federation with the Oxus. There it then remained for an unbroken period of more than five hundred years, longer than the span of the Mauryan, Mughal and British Empires together. Finally, with the crumbling of the Kushan state, the Guptas pulled Indus, for another brief interlude, towards the Ganges.

This pull towards the Ganges was also the allure of a highly advanced civilization that had, in the meantime, established itself eastwards in the plains of the Ganges. In the centuries that Indus had suffered successive invasions (those of Alexander, Seleucus, the Mauryans, the Bactrians, the Scythians, the Kushans), central and southern India had witnessed an era of relative peace and quiet. This peace was the peculiar gift of isolation. It had enabled India to

devote itself to the progress of science and philosophy. A slight digression is, therefore, necessary to take a look at the developments in India at this time before we revert to Indus.

It was during this time that the basics of modern algebra and arithmetic, later to be adopted and advanced by the Arabs, were evolved in India. The zero, a concept of fundamental importance, was conceived. The regressive Greek and Roman numerical signs, which made the simplest written attempts at multiplication and division impossible, were not to impede the Indian scientist. The ingenious method of expressing all numbers by means of ten symbols was India's gift to the world. The Indian system unleashed all the energies of arithmetic. Fractions, minus and plus signs, the decimal and its place value, square roots and cube roots, all these possibilities were at once available to the ingenious Indian mind. Little wonder that even the Arabs were to call their numbers *hindsay*, or that which are derived from Hind.

The infrastructure that facilitated these epoch-making advances were the artisans' guilds in the towns and the self-sufficient and autonomous villages in the rural areas. Between them, the two regulated the lives of the majority of the populace of India. They had not as yet shown any signs of the decay, atrophy or fossilization that in later centuries would paralyse both. In the period under consideration, the guild and the village were still vibrant and vigorous. They

provided for large-scale production, the widespread distribution of manufactures and the harvest of a larger surplus, while ensuring security to their members and inhabitants. At this stage, the rigid caste system also contributed a positive social input, despite the cruel bondage in which it held the lower classes. Thus, while the guild and the village aided the efficient collection of taxes, caste orders continued to contribute specialist labour. By regular and assured supplies of men and equipment, the system also facilitated the maintenance of well-equipped and strong armies. The armies in turn won and ensured to the merchant wider and richer markets.

This was the environment in which the brahmin-kshatriya nexus flexed its muscle to expand its influence and power. In AD 320, Chandragupta became the undisputed ruler of central India. Leading his armies, adequately supplied with iron weapons from his iron mines in the eastern principality of Magadh, he gave India another imperial dynasty that ruled from its capital of Pataliputra, the erstwhile capital of Ashok the Great.

Starting as prosperous landowners, the Guptas were launched by a calculated and propitious marriage contracted by Chandragupta I.¹² The Gupta principality soon became a kingdom which was expanded by the ambition of Samudragupta, Chandra's son. Vigorous campaigns brought the east coast directly under Gupta dominion, while lands as diverse and distant as Sri Lanka,

Nepal, Bengal and the Punjab were forced to pay tribute to Samudra's court at Pataliputra.

The Guptas were a rich, fair-minded and brave dynasty.¹³ The Gupta patronage of the arts supplemented the continuing vigour in Gupta expansionism under Samudra's son, Chandragupta II. This gallant king ruled for forty years (between AD 375 and 415), and assumed the title of 'Vikramaditya', the Sun of Chivalry. Full cultural and political glory was attained by the Gupta empire in these forty years.

Vikramaditya gave peace and prosperity to his feudatories and provided a machine - though not entirely efficient - for the collection of revenue from the peasant. His court was visited by the Chinese traveller and diaryist, Fa-hsien, and was adorned by the poet Kalidasa, whose major work *Shakuntala* is the tale of a peasant girl of unmatched beauty who begets the king a son after he has deserted her. The king does, in due course, recognize the youth as his true son and heir. The style and imagery of the work is sensitive and the dialogues centre around universal truths.

Another marriage alliance, this time with the Vakataka family that had replaced the Andhras in western Deccan, became the pattern of Gupta diplomacy. Thenceforth, several other marriages ensured peace and quiet in

the peripheral areas of the kingdom. The Guptas ruled over this area for the better part of three centuries, mostly with a just and benevolent disposition until the swarms of the white Huns reclaimed, for a while, Indus to Central Asia. The Gupta era was another long interlude of imperial peace. *Pax Gupta* has therefore often been described as the Golden Age of India.

The Mauryan state, equipped with iron weaponry and agricultural tools, had struck the initial blows at the edifice of the tribal order and had triggered the decline of the tribe and initiated the very early stages of the development of state-level agrarian production and commerce. The Gupta state struck the last blow to the degenerating tribes of the Gangetic valley. In so doing, it also brought final victory to the all-pervading and widespread system of the caste. The merchant was again the principal catalyst as also the major beneficiary of this new transformation and the new order. Divided and fractious tribes had impeded the full reach of his trade; now, the caste system provided him with some kind of specialized labour.

It was this stratification into the caste orders, coupled with the powerful state apparatus capable of reducing the peasant to the most abject serfdom, that sometimes gives the impression that the Gupta state was a truly slave-owning state. That, of course, it was not, at least not in terms of the slave-owning states of Bronze Age Egypt and Mesopotamia. In fact, as we will

examine later, the Gupta state aided the feudalization of the subcontinent.¹⁴ Yet the essence of Gupta suzerainty was so widespread that the Pataliputra government extracted tribute from the several slave-owning states in the southern and eastern extremities of the subcontinent.

IV. ARTHRITIS, ISOLATION AND TRIUMPH OF PRIESTHOOD

The merchant, we must pause to recall, had displayed characteristic opportunism, though in a historical framework and context. He had supported Buddhism against brahminism when he wanted to break out of the tyranny of the regional gods and local cesses, and from the unpredictable mosaic of tribal rituals peculiar to each small territory. He wanted a uniform expanded market.

The egalitarianism and universalism of Buddhist teachings, the humanistic rejection of the draconian rituals, and the denial of gruesome offerings to each and every local god had appealed to the merchant in the centuries that spelt a transition from the tribe to the agrarian society. From a rigid, stratified, inflexible and intolerant society, he sought a transition to a benign, egalitarian, accommodative and tolerant social order. But once the new order had been established, once, that is, a new pattern of class stratification had solidified, the merchant adjusted to its rigid structures and adopted it. He began to employ and strengthen the new system. He put the caste system to the service

of his production and commerce. He thus withdrew his support to Buddhism and took to brahminism.

In the historical time-context of centuries, however, this time the merchant, in betting on the brahminical and village system, had bet on the wrong horse. While the merchant (vaishya) was husbanding the surplus produce and with it supporting the Gupta empire, the forces that the earlier Mauryan state had helped generate had, in large part, begun to stagnate and decay. The once vibrant republican and autonomous village, over the several centuries since the fall of the Mauryans had become the victim of its erstwhile admirable self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency had, in time, cocooned it in its smug isolation.

The Gupta state would succeed partially in aiding the merchant to penetrate the defences that the Indian village had been raising around itself. It would succeed entirely in injecting the largely novel and immensely complex spectrum of new and specialist caste orders into the simple organization of the village. But the iron grip of caste (upon which the merchant had earlier placed all his stakes) would, in historical time, asphyxiate the rural areas. Thenceforth, the village would atrophy and stagnate. This then was the beginning of the decay of the rural society of India that would ultimately become, in the fullness of time, an invitation to European imperial expansion and conquest.

The seeds of the subcontinent's ultimate humiliation at the hands of European imperialism lay in its atrophied rural areas, gripped by the arthritis of caste, the isolation of the village and the final re-ascendancy of brahminism over Buddhism. All these developments found support in, and obtained sustenance from, the Gupta state.

Yet the effect of Gupta imperialism was not uniform in all the lands that it ruled or overawed. Under its suzerainty, there were countless states, each administered either by a king or by a raja. Here, too, Indus was different from India.

Kingdoms, by and large, spanned the Ganges valley and the south; Indus was split into several republican states. Kingdoms depended mainly upon caste orders; the republics on the autonomous villages in the settled areas, and on the dying tribal organizations in the rest. Kingship was hereditary. The position of the republican raja was elective, the mode of his election varying from state to state. Brahmin ascendancy was more prominent in the kingdoms than in the republics. Buddhist dogma was overthrown first in the kingdoms, much later in the republics. The cow, however, remained the measure of value in all the regions.

As the relentless thrust of caste orders and brahminism continued to exert

itself and to expand, republics continued to succumb before kingdoms and Buddhism before brahminism. In the course of time, Buddhism was banished from the land of its birth.

V. THE MONSOONS KEEP THE ARAB AWAY

It is appropriate to cast a brief glance at two other historical features that have been remarked upon earlier: the independent and largely unconnected developments in the south; and the absence of any historical Arab influence on or link with Indus.

Southern and central India had all this time been almost impervious to the influence of the events in the north. These had almost no import for, nor were they affected by, the developments in the Indus region. The first century BC had seen the decline of the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Andhras (or Satavahanas) who had held some administrative positions under the Mauryas. By the second century AD, the Andhra state, which had flowered into a magnificent empire, had already begun its decline quite independent of and unaffected by events in Indus.

The seaport of Broach, near present-day Bombay, remained the south's main link with Rome. Because of this port and the sea, the south and Gangetic

India could completely bypass Indus, treating it always as the alien land welded to Central Asia. This mutual exclusiveness was aided by the monsoon and the estuarine swamps of the Indus.

This brings us to the Arab 'non-factor'. It is necessary to revert to it only because, in seeking to draw the attributes of the Indus person and to describe his culture, the fundamentalists continue to distort history by making too much of this. To discern the Indus person and his inherent attributes and culture, it may be useful to remark again upon this misconception. An overwhelming majority of the Indus citizens today are Muslims, proud of their faith, in fact, emotional about it. But they are not Arabs. Nor did the Arabs ever maintain a very live and continuous intercourse with the peoples of the Indus region.

No doubt the empire of Rome traded with India and the Far East through Arab intermediaries. Peninsular India offered ports and rich exports to Roman trade. But as if nature had decreed it purposefully, the Arab shipman's use of the monsoon prevented his contact with Indus.

Until the invention of the mariners' compass in the fifteenth century, shipping remained dependent upon coastal configurations. The seaman dared not stray away from the coastline. He could not venture into or cross the high

seas. Despite this, the Arab seaman was daring and adventurous. He had indeed ventured out and discovered a rare and highly profitable corridor of the most favourable winds across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Classical tradition has it that the use of these winds for navigation was 'discovered' by Hippalus.¹⁵ But there was little to discover, since the Arabs knew of it earlier. They had recognized the seasonality of the Indian Ocean monsoons that enabled shorter and speedier journeys to and from India. As Romila Thapar points out: 'Ships sailing from the Red Sea ports would wait for the south-western monsoon to start and would set sail. The returning monsoon from across India in the winter would bring the ships back.'¹⁶

What Thapar does not remark upon is that these most opportune winds also had the essential effect of keeping the Arab contact with the subcontinent limited to India (as distinct from Indus). This is significant. In an age when ships stuck close to the coast, dreading the oceans beyond the continental shelves, the monsoon was an uncommon vehicle for mid-ocean shipping. The Arabs sailed to Broach (Bombay), and then southward along the coast until they rounded Cape Comorin. Returning, they again took the monsoon from Broach. By taking the monsoon corridor to India (in the summer) and back (in the winter), century after century, the Arabs completely bypassed Indus. The direction in which the winds blew took them to the south-western coasts of

India. They did not blow towards or from Indus. Both ways, Indus remained away from the Arab route. There were, thus, until Muhammad bin Qasim and even thereafter, no historical and natural links between the Arabs and the Indus region.

VI. TOWARDS AN INDUS ROMANCE

Tucked out of the way of the Arab trade routes, and in this age of the great transformation, while the east could boast the Sun of Chivalry and the bard Kalidasa and the south flourished under the Andhras, Indus displayed equal colour and vibrance. It too was in a fairytale era of chivalry and romance. In the Punjab, the bards were already singing the praises of two most amazing and heroic stepbrothers from the principality of Sialkot, by then a major industrial centre in the Upper Indus region.

1 Replicated in medieval times by the Delhi Sultans, in more recent times by the Mughals, and in modern times by the British.

2 See Wolpert, *New History*, 71.

3. Ibid., 72.
4. The wide expanse of their possessions is attested to by the suffix 'kand' that they have left behind in the names of such distant cities as Samarkand, Tashkand, Yarkand, and Malakand.
5. The Scythians made this their home for some time until they were humiliated by the Andhras, an important emerging dynasty of the Deccan.
6. See Wolpert, *New History*, 73.
7. An unstitched piece of cloth, two to three yards in length.
8. Professor Ahmed Hassan Dani, *New Light on Central Asia* (1993) 19. Although Mujeeb is of the opinion that stitched dresses were introduced only much later by Muslims of Turkish and Iranian origin, (Mujeeb, 352), Professor Dani appears to be correct about the early Central Asians who came from cold climates. The later Turkish and Iranian Muslims, however, certainly introduced tailored dresses of far greater refinement (see chapter 12, section I below).

9. Which decimated the entire population of the civilized world from the European seaboard to the Bay of Bengal.

10. Located about twenty miles north of the present-day Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

11. In one verse I had the occasion to thus:

The boys who graduated from Taxila

Had to go beyond China and therefore left before dawn.

12. The importance of this marriage was admitted by the Guptas themselves. Chandra issued coins jointly with his queen, Kumaradevi, who belonged to the influential Licchavi tribe. His son, the great conqueror Samundragupta, although himself the son of an emperor, frequently boasted of his mother's family. See Kosambi, *Introduction*, 311.

13. See chapter 9 below for a further discussion on the Gupta rule.

14. See chapter 9 below for the process of feudalization under the Guptas.

15. The Greek sailor of the first century AD.

16. Thapar, 107. See also Vasco da Gama's route across the Indian Ocean in Schwartzberg *Historical Atlas*.

The Romance of Raja Rasalu

I. RASALU'S TIME

Rasalu was the younger of the two sons of the Raja of Sialkot. Yet he was so colourful and dynamic that he outshone the elder, Puran. Even though Puran's own tale is laced with a heroic contest between good and evil, enlivened by the drama of tragedy and triumph, Rasalu completely eclipses Puran in legend and poetry, in exploits and daring, in dash and valour, in charm and initiative. Together, however, the stories intertwine to throw immense light upon Indus culture in a period that may otherwise appear to be dark and forbidding to the student of cultural and political history.

It is difficult, but not impossible, to date the times of Raja Rasalu. No formal historical account, coin, statuette, or archaeological remains survive to provide any clue. A well, between Sialkot and Kallowal, is still associated with Puran's charm. Barren women, to this day, go to its lip to pray for fertility. Legend claims that they are then blessed with sons.

That Rasalu was a Jat raja of Sialkot, then a stronghold of the Sial tribe, is not vigorously disputed. The exact period of the Raja's life is, however, not

easy to determine. But some facts seem to be beyond controversy. The frequent mention of iron tools and implements in the versified folk tales composed in the ballads of Puran and Rasalu¹ implies that the metal was in general and generous use at that time. Now, although it had been introduced into Indus by the late Aryans, the general and widespread use of iron had come about in the Ashokan and post-Ashokan era. It was in that period that the vast expanse of the Mauryan empire, depending upon the Bihar deposits of iron ore, provided the means for the metal's diffusion to all the corners of the subcontinent. Before the exploitation of the Bihar deposits, iron, being in short supply, had been the metal of the elite. By Rasalu's time, it was in more popular use by all accounts of the legend. Rasalu's is, therefore, a post-Mauryan episode.

Rasalu's is also a pre-Islamic story. The legend contains no reference to Islam, or to any concept, object, saint, or hero associated with the Islamic tradition. The abundance of animism and Rasalu's interaction with scores of people, the ordinary folk and princesses, all with pre-Islamic names, establishes overwhelmingly the period of the legend.

The exiled prince's companions as he starts his forced journey away from home are two young lads, a goldsmith's son and a carpenter's. This company indicates that society was substantially egalitarian. Indus had, therefore, not

been feudalized as yet. The feudalizing suzerainty of the Gupta empire of the fourth and fifth centuries AD was yet to exert its influence, transforming Indus culture from the tribal to the feudal.

The post-Mauryan, pre-Islamic and pre-feudalization parameters place the Rasalu legend somewhere in the early centuries of the first millennium of the Christian era, more likely around AD 200-400.

II. THE BIRTH OF RAJA RASALU

The story of Rasalu is an idyllic fairy tale of romance and high adventure. Rasalu is the second of Raja Salihavan's sons, born to his second and exceedingly beautiful wife, Rani Loona.

Rasalu's birth is presaged by gory events and intense rivalries. The pretty Queen Loona, as yet herself without a child, has her amorous overtures rebuffed by her stepson, the virtuous Puran, the first son of the Raja of Sialkot. She is outraged at such an affront to her beauty. Incensed by Puran's indifference, she convinces her husband, through lies and deceit, that Puran had forced her to cohabit with him. This ensures Puran's disgrace. The enraged Raja decrees his only son's execution. The executioners take Puran away but are not prepared to put to death so handsome a lad. They, so goes

the legend, take pity on the youth. Rather than carrying out the Raja's command, the soft-hearted slaves merely sever the captive prince's arms and legs and lower him into a well (known to this day by his name), deep inside a jungle. How could they kill so handsome and gentle a prince?

Puran, fed by birds and cared for by animals, survives in the well for twelve years until a saint² passing by drops a bucket into the well to draw water. Puran hangs on to the vessel and will not let go. The saint pulls Puran out of the well, employs supernatural powers to restore his amputated limbs, and blesses him with equal supernatural authority.

For the twelve years that Puran had been away, the Sialkot trees had borne no fruit, its birds had sung no song, and Sialkot's cows had remained dry of milk. The second queen, Loona (Rasalu's mother-to-be), remained painfully and fretfully without a child.

Puran, now himself a saint (*Bhagat*), returns to Sialkot. He rests in his father's orchard. At once, it begins to bloom, the birds begin to sing, and the cows start bellowing calls to milkmaids. The Raja, his queens, and Sialkot's citizens are amazed. They follow the rush of all animals and birds to the Raja's garden and are struck with the charm of this saintly spirit. No one except Puran's own mother, the first wife of the Raja, is able to recognize him. And

she does not betray the recognition for fear that he would be put to death by the Raja, angered by the non-compliance twelve years ago of his own command.

Puran's stepmother, the Rani Loona, pleads that the saint bless her with a child. The wish is granted. But there are conditions. Loona must eat a grain of rice which Puran gives her. A son will be born in due course of time. Neither parent is to set eyes upon him for twelve years. If they do not abide by this condition, all three will perish instantly. Blessing them thus, Puran imperceptibly seeks the silent prayers of his own mother and wanders away into the horizon, never again to return to Sialkot.

III. THE TALE OF RAJA RASALU

For twelve years, Rasalu, the newborn, is confined in an underground palace specially constructed for him by the raja. There, he is attended to like a prince. He has maids and servants. He has also the company of the legendary stallion 'Fauladi', and the wise parrot 'Shadi.'³

The vigorous lad cannot be contained for long. Six months short of the prescribed period, he breaks out and demands that he be taken to his father. The wish cannot, of course, be granted. He takes to an impish harassment of

Sialkot's women. As they return with earthen pitchers of water from the local stream, he flings stones to break the vessels. The father provides each household with metal pots. Rasalu caps his arrows with iron arrowheads. His aim is perfect. He punctures every metal vessel in town (also establishing thereby the superiority of iron). Will he hold his hand or continue to deny the town its supplies of water? Only if he is taken to his parents. That cannot be. The peril is the death of all the three. So Puran the saint had spoken. The Raja has now no option. He decrees his son's banishment from the realm. Thence begin the adventures of Raja Rasalu.

Astride Fauladi, with Shadi perched on his shoulder, his arrows weighing one hundred pounds each, Rasalu takes to the wilderness, passing from one land to another, fighting demons, marrying damsels, solving riddles, and putting out strife and fires to become the foremost folk hero of medieval Punjab.

Legend relates, for instance, that when Rasalu comes to Nila (present-day Bagh Nilab, south of Attock), he encounters an old woman kneading flour to make bread and laughing and weeping simultaneously. (This, incidentally, women are wont to do in Indus legends and folklore!) She laughs because she has the handsomest son in the entire area. She weeps because he is to be sacrificed that night. Rasalu is told that the last of her seven sons must be

offered to the local ogre along with a basket of bread and a buffalo.⁴ Six have already met their end in this manner. To the surprise of the towns-people, Rasalu volunteers himself as the human offering, in place of the old woman's son.

It is, however, not like Rasalu to wait for night to fall. He rides straight out into the land of the giants with the basket of bread and the buffalo. There is panic. The giants already have it from their sages and astrologers that their doom will come the day the invincible Rasalu, astride his horse, leading a buffalo and carrying bread, enters their land. The incredulous need more proof and Rasalu proves his identity by manifesting all the pre-ordained signs. His arrow pierces seven giant pans made of iron and held firmly together, one behind the other. His rope, all by itself, ties up all the giants. His sword cuts them to pieces. As the townspeople rejoice their deliverance, Rasalu moves on.

IV. RASALU'S PUNJAB

Rasalu's adventures, despite obvious subsequent interpolations, have much to tell us about the Punjab in the millenium before the first Muslim incursions from the north. Many inferences that can safely be drawn from the legend are corroborated by extrinsic evidence. Axes, sickles and hoes dating back to this period, and prior to it, found among the ruins of Taxila, establish the

introduction of relatively modern and sophisticated (though still medieval) agricultural techniques. They also indicate the widespread use of a better quality of iron.

The fact that the young raja must live by his own wits more than his inheritance shows that a republican order prevailed in most of the Punjab and Indus states of that era. In the kingdoms, too, the republican tradition was strong, and the authority of the king was neither absolute nor autocratic. That is indeed the Indus tradition. And that, surely, must be the cultural tradition of Pakistan.

That Rasalu, banished by his father, wandered on horseback through several states and encountered many a raja, including Hodi and Harichand, shows that Indus was in a state of political fragmentation. The legend also establishes, through the characters of the bewitching queen Loona, and the fair princesses Kokilan, Saukhni, Sundran and Chandni that women enjoyed equality and substantial importance. There was an abundance of principalities and princesses. Ranis Kokilan, Saukhni, Sundran and Chandni were but four of the many. Most were free to make their own matrimonial choices. Their discourse with men was free and on the basis of equality. They may have been demure, but they were emancipated.

Nor was the wandering prince Rasalu himself at a loss for fair maids of a lower status. When some girls wanted him to swing them one by one separately on a swing, he drew up the swing and sent all seventy of them swinging together. It is little wonder that Puraṇ, when blessing Rasalu's mother with the prospect of a son, had predicted:

PAIDA RASALU HOVEGA, TAY CHHALIA USS THE NAAM
TINN SAD SATH CHHALSI, TAY NAAL NA KISSAY SANG

Rasalu will be born, and his name will be the Deceiver,
Three hundred and sixty will he deceive, and be with none.

1. See Captain R. C. Temple, *The Legends of the Punjab*, vol. I.
2. According to many reported versions of the legend, this is said to have been Guru Gorakhnath. But that cannot have been so, as Gorakhnath lived about one thousand years after the age of Rasalu. See chapter 15, section II, below.
3. By some accounts of the legend, Fauladi the horse performed many a feat

by blowing thunderstorms at the adversary, while Shadi, the parrot, watched over the resting Rasalu at night because the bird could sleep with one eye open.

4. By another account of the legend she had only one son but was laughing and weeping simultaneously because he was to be married on the same day that he was to be devoured by the demon. See Salman Rashid: *Riders on the Wind: Travels through Pakistan* (1992).

Feudalization and the First Feudal State

I. THE GUPTA LEGACY

In its early stages, feudalization impeded the development of a large 'universal' state. Petty feudal fiefdoms were initially torn by internecine strife and rivalry. This was the primary reason for political fragmentation in the pre-Gupta period, the initial period of the introduction of feudal relations of production.

The Gupta kingdom,¹ established in AD 320 by Chandragupta I, facilitated the development of feudalism and the advancement of the mercantile class. The establishment of a unifying *Pax Gupta* in a fractious and divided environment was one reason why this period has frequently been termed the Golden Age of India. Although the Gupta capital was far in the east, in the erstwhile Mauryan state of Magadh, the influence of the empire did bring about substantial socio-economic changes in the Indus region, particularly the feudalization process.

It is in the Gupta period that the peculiar features of Indian feudalism took shape. These features differed in many respects from that of the feudalism of

medieval Europe. One prominent feature of Gupta feudalism was the predominance of state-owned land. A second was that neither land nor titles were, generally, inherited. This enabled capable men of humble origins to rise to great heights as military commanders or political advisers. It also implied that no feudatory was secure in the knowledge that his issue would succeed to his position and office. This discouraged saving and provided an impetus to consumerism.² As we shall examine later, it would have disastrous effects upon the fortunes of the entire subcontinent and upon the character of its people.

In some other aspects, Gupta feudalism was similar to that of Europe. The economy of both depended upon the manual labour of the peasant. The surplus produce of the peasant was collected by a coercive apparatus, sanctioned by the prevalent social order and by religious precept. With the advent of the agrarian mode of production, slavery became all but extinct in the Indus region.³

The pre-feudal and fragmented Indus region did resist the expansionist thrust of the Guptas. It could never be made an integral part of the Gupta empire. Indus did, however, accept Gupta suzerainty, and paid tribute to the Gupta kings. The empire had been sufficiently enriched by the taxes it received from the guilds and the autonomous villages. It was thus able to subjugate or

overawe its princely neighbours. It even set off the process of feudalization in Indus. The empire was not, however, rich enough to sustain a campaign to keep the Huns of Central Asia out of the Indus region.

II. A CHANGE IN THE SYSTEM OF LAND REVENUE

In the short span of about fifty years, (c. AD 500-550), the Huns (also called the Ephthalites) reached as far as Sindh, causing great loss of life and property. Mihirkula, the Hun, was a particularly cruel conqueror.⁴ The large number of skeletons recovered near Taxila bear testimony to his carnage. One of his favourite pastimes is said to have been to roll elephants down steep slopes and watch their agonizing fall to death. The extremities of Gupta suzerainty gradually shrank away, out of Indus to the areas south of the Sutlej. But the Hun hold on Indus soon began to fall, as unrest in their homebase in Bactria engaged them with increasing intensity.

The Huns brought many Rajput, Jat and Gujjar tribes with them to the Indus, although many of their sub-tribes had preceded them among the Scythian hordes. The fairly popular second name *Gul*, current among the Pathans of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, is said to have been derived from the Huns. Their ladies are also said to have introduced a new type of baggy trousers called the *gharara*.

In keeping with its character, Indus did not facilitate its own invasion. As in earlier times, the Hun invasions generated resistance and alliances in the Indus region. An axis of the kshatriya and the vaishya rose to drive the Huns out of Indus. The alliance replaced the Hun ascendancy with a Hindu state in northern and central India, and the Pushyabhuti family rose to prominence. It became the vanguard of resistance against all foreign ravagers. In this, the family obtained the support of the newly developed feudal lords and of the merchants. Both wanted peace and secure borders.

The most prominent ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty was the peerless Harshavardhana (AD 606-48).⁵ Harsha was only sixteen when he ascended the throne. He established his capital at Kanauj and toured his dominion frequently to its farthest corners.

Harsha could not, however, extract much revenue, as the caste and village system had now begun to ossify, greatly impairing the efficiency of productive forces. There was thus a decline in the collection of taxes. Neither the Guptas nor Harsha had the well-organized Mauryan-type bureaucracy. Nor were their kingdoms as vast as the Mauryan empire. An inner core-state was surrounded by federating principalities, administered by vassal princes paying tribute, and with considerable autonomy in internal matters.

These factors brought about a change in the system of land revenue. Salaried officials were replaced with grantees of land who were required to pay only a fixed sum to the state while retaining for themselves the surplus expropriated from the peasant or the village.

III. FEUDALISM ENRICHES BRAHMIN TEMPLES

In the three and a half centuries between Harshavardhana and Mahmud Ghazni (c. AD 648-1000), Indus remained divided into scores of small states and principalities. These centuries were like other interregnums between 'universal states'. Whenever the great empires shrank, they disintegrated into a multiplicity of republics and kingdoms. This matrix again spread all over the Indus region. The republic of the Pratiharas, with its capital at Kanauj, and the state of Sindh in the south were the only two reasonably large states in or near the Indus basin.

The Hindu brahmin and kshatriya were forbidden the lowly professions of trading. The vaishya had adopted trade, but, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, stringent anti-merchant precepts had initially been promulgated by brahmin pontiffs in order to maintain their own superiority. The merchant had thus been forced to adopt and patronize Buddhism, at least for some time.

Buddhist non-violence had initially been suited to the itinerant merchant, wanting to penetrate a jigsaw of localities belonging to tribes at war with each other - Buddhist nonviolence brought peace. But then vast markets could only be won, secured and held by the sword. Buddhism was thus unable to hold the loyalty of the merchant against this new reality. He accepted not only a lowlier status in the feudal order, but, since money made the mare go, he also reverted to brahminism, the ideology of the feudal order.

With the rise of feudalism, the hold of the brahmin-kshatriya axis was ensured. The emphasis - indeed, the romance - of internecine wars of honour and chivalry struck at Buddhist non-violence. Hindu brahminism, with a mythology packed with primeval battles and cosmic wars, lent itself easily to the feudal code of honour and chivalry. It thus appealed to the hardy Jats and Rajputs of the eastern Indus region.

The pre-eminence of brahminism was ensured by the network of guilds and villages held together by the caste system. Buddhism and Jainism were pushed to the peripheral areas. Buddha nevertheless found a place in the Hindu pantheon as one of the several incarnations of the god Vishnu. That was brahminism's epitaph for the great Gautama Siddhartha Buddha.

Hinduism ousted Buddhism from India, leaving for it a place only at the

edges of India. Indus, retaining its independent style, remained one of the sanctuaries of Buddhism. Buddhism continued to flourish until the eighth century over most of Sindh, western and southern Punjab, and parts of the North-West Frontier Province, i.e., most of Indus.

Buddha's benign and tolerant creed matched the cultural outlook of Indus inhabitants. They had always eschewed intolerance. Little wonder that, in later times, Buddhism would be supplanted only by the teachings of the ascetic Sufis who, with an almost Buddhist emphasis on inner peace and outer harmony, would take over the hearts and minds of Indus people, preaching non-violence afresh.

In India, this was the age of the ascendancy of the brahmin-kshatriya alliance. The influence of this alliance spilled over into the eastern edges of the Indus region. The brahmins had contrived the philosophical rationale for kshatriya sovereignty and were paid well for this service. The feudals and the ruling families made valuable offerings to their temples. Every Hindu temple was a treasure-house of jewels and bullion. Some of the most prominent of these temples, those at Somnath, Mathura, Thanesar and Kanauj, later became the prime targets of the iconoclast, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.

Before Mahmud, however, another vigorous young Muslim commander

would blaze into the Indus region from the south, leaving his imprints on the soil and soul of Sindh, the southeastern province of Pakistan.

1. Chapter 6, section III, above.
2. This second peculiarity of Gupta feudalism was retained through later empires and kingdoms until a brave young Robin Hood of the Punjab, Abdullah (Dulla) Bhatti took on the entire might of the Mughal empire. See chapter 13, section V. For the development and spread of the cancer of consumerism see also chapter 14, section VII.
3. Slavery was to be reintroduced, though merely in concept and not as an economic class of producers, in later times, in the so-called 'Slave Dynasty' of Muslim generals of Central Asian origins. A republican Indus culture would, in fact, influence the manumission of these 'slaves'. Many of them would then rise to become rulers in their new home.
4. See Wolpert, *A New History*, 94.

5. Ibid., 95.

An Arab Visitor

I. ARAB CAMPAIGNS

While Harshavardhana ruled much of the Indus region, the Arabs of the Saudi Arabian peninsula had been introduced to and invigorated by the message of Islam, which had provided a revolutionary rationalization for the recent exposure of pre-historic Arab tribalism to iron, settled agriculture and the family unit. Islam galvanized the bedouins into a force that carried its austere and simple message to lands as distant and diverse as West Africa and Indonesia. Arab armies went towards the west. Arab merchants sailed towards the east.

We have seen that the mid-ocean sea-route taken by the Arab shipmen to and from Broach (Bombay) did not touch the mouth of the Indus or its neighbouring coast.¹ Even otherwise, the Indus delta did not provide hospitable waters. Al Beruni, displaying admirable knowledge of hydrology, pointed out that: 'These estuaries, too, are dangerous for the ships because the water is sweet and does not bear heavy bodies as well as salt water does.'²

The maritime coastal state of Sindh was thus denied direct access to a rich

sea route, but as long as the overland Central Asian trade routes were available, its upper riparian states did not use the Indus as the primary trade route. Land routes were both busy and safe. Mesopotamian pots excavated at Pirak (Balochistan) between 1968 and 1974 indicate that even in ancient times the Bolan Pass was an important overland commercial highway.

Denied the lucrative profits available to intermediaries, middlemen and carriers, the seamen of Sindh and Makran took to piracy. This, in turn, was an invitation to reprisals. In AD 711, reprisal befell the twin premier cities of Sindh, Debal (Lahuri Bandar), and Debal-Thatta.³ It came in the shape of the young and energetic Muslim general, Muhammad bin Qasim.⁴

Qasim's was not the first Muslim attempt to subjugate Sindh. The *Chachnama*,⁵ which contains an account of Qasim's invasion, and of the reigns of some of the preceding Hindu rulers, mentions several earlier campaigns. During the reign of the Caliph Umar, an unsuccessful bid was made by the Arab Admiral Mughira ibne-abi Aas, the governor of Bahrain. Presuming victory to be preordained, the governor had not even consulted the caliph.

Caliph Usman pondered over the proposition but was dissuaded by the report of Hakim bin Jabala who had been sent to assess the prospects of an

invasion. 'The water in Sindh is brackish,' reported Hakim. 'Its fruits are either tasteless or bitter; the land is covered with barren rocks, and its soil is saline. The people of Sindh are brave. If a small expedition is sent, it will be defeated. If it is a large army, it will starve.'

On assuming the office of Caliph, Muawiya dispatched an expedition, under Abdullah bin Sawar Abidi, numbering four thousand men. The ill-fated army encountered defeats in the mountain ranges of Balochistan and in the Punjab plains near Multan. Muawiya's second attempt fared no better when both his commanders, Rashid bin Amt and Sanan bin Salma, were killed at Buddhia near present-day Jacobabad.

When Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the Governor of Iraq, wanted the permission of Caliph Walid bin Abdul Malik to make another attempt, upper Sindh was a prosperous land, quite unlike its coastal areas. Hajjaj, therefore, guaranteed that he would repay the Caliph's treasury twice whatever was spent from it on the expedition. According to the *Chachnama*, Qasim's successful campaign cost sixty million dirhams, and, in due course, Hajjaj deposited twice that sum into the treasury. Such was the wealth of upper Sindh.

In AD 711, Qasim won Sindh after a fierce battle. By AD 715, he had extended his effective control up to Multan in the Punjab. Despite his youth, Qasim

ruled with a just disposition. He was guided by his uncle, Hajjaj, who had counselled temperance. In one letter, Hajjaj directed him to respect the religious beliefs of the non-Muslims, despite the fact that in theory, having been invited to adopt Islam, they could be slaughtered on their refusal to do so. Qasim was also advised by able ministers, including one Siyakar, a Hindu, formerly an adviser to the defeated Raja Dahir.⁶

In AD 715, Caliph Walid died. He had been the mainstay of Hajjaj's position and influence. The governor could not last long after the Caliph's death. After the governor's fall, Qasim was also taken. He is said to have been transported back bound in an ox-skin. He died on the way.

II. THE ARAB CONTACT

For 143 years after its conquest by the Arabs in AD 711, Sindh remained a part of the Islamic state, first under Ummayyad and then under Abbasid rulers. Since most of the caliphs were preoccupied with palace intrigues, Sindh, as a peripheral state removed from the prolific trade routes, remained substantially autonomous. It never obtained a position of high priority in the scheme of Arab administrators. No expansionist designs were directed towards it after Qasim's premature withdrawal from Multan. The influence of Arab generals and governors upon the culture of this land was, therefore, negligible. In any

case, it was not enduring.⁷

There has, nevertheless, been a tendency among Indus tribes to trace their descent to the Arabs, and particularly to one of the first four caliphs of Islam, or the Rightly Guided Caliphs. And this inclination is not exclusive to the Syeds for whom the lineage is essential to their status, regardless of their position in life. Many of the Pashtuns, the Baloch,⁸ and such Punjabi tribes as the Arrains and the Awans, claim a similar descent. There appears to be little tangible historical evidence of any mass movement of the Arab race towards Indus. Nor does evidence of racial stock substantively corroborate such claims. The Arabs were primarily Semites. The Indus tribes were either Central Asian or aboriginal, or a mixture of both. Nor could the descendants of a few Arab families have multiplied in such numbers as to inhabit the entire Indus region. Many of these claims appear to be fictional.

Mirza Kalich Beg, still perhaps the most competent historian of Sindh, himself provides an example of this contradiction between the claim and the evidence. He first mentions some eighteen tribes, besides the Sumrahs and the Sammahs, said to have been of Arab descent. Then he admits that 'there were indeed very few Arab residents of the time of the Ummeides and the Abbasides to be found in Sind.'⁹ How could their descendants multiply into the vast population that these tribes make up today? While the Kalhoros are

indeed a tribe of Abbasis of Perso-Mesopotamian origin, there appears to be no such clear line with respect to most of the other tribes. Even when Beg proceeds on the assumption that one particular tribe was indeed descended from an Arab ancestor, he is unable to identify him with particularity. That ancestor 'according to one tradition was the son of Umar son of Hashim son of Abu Lahab. According to another tradition, he was the son of Umar son of Akramah son of Abu Jahal. According to a third, he was the son of Akramah son of Asam son of Abu Jahal. But as the title of Jam was subsequently adopted by the chiefs of the tribe, it appears more probable that [he] was a descendant of King Jamshed of Persia, or he was the same person as is known in history as Sam son of Nuh [Noah].'¹⁰

What does this tell us? Nothing specific at all. There is no certainty whatsoever in the account. The most likely genealogy, if a royal descent has indeed to be claimed by some inhabitants of Sindh belonging to the tribe in question, it must be from the Persian ancestor. Only that family tree can be supported by some cogent historical evidence because of the close political and geographical links between Indus and Iran.

It is perhaps no mere historical coincidence that Indus was truly initiated in Islam not by the Arabs but by the Central Asian people, mainly by the saints and princes of Seljuk-Turk, Afghan, and Mongol (Mughal) stock. Historically,

this region had never maintained any consistent, unbroken and long-term contact with the Arabs. It had, on the other hand, retained intimate and unbroken politico-cultural links with Central Asia.

III. PASTORAL TRIBALISM AND AGRARIAN FAMILY

There were other cogent reasons why the influence of Islam derived from Persia and Central Asia was more readily accepted by Indus than the interpretations of Islamic doctrines that were derived directly from the Saudi Arabian peninsula.

In socio-economic and cultural terms, the nomadic Arabs were, of course, several times more removed from the people of Indus than any other race or peoples in the the region, or in the vicinity of the region. The Arabs were not an agrarian community. The prospects of agriculture were almost nonexistent in the thirsty and inhospitable sands of the deserts of the Saudi peninsula. The Arabs remained a pastoral society, leading camels and goats from one oasis to another in search of the scarce foliage upon their lands. Their life was thus nomadic. No ancient agricultural implements have been discovered in the lands or deserts of the Arabian peninsula.

Besides being nomadic, the Arabs were also a patriarchal society. Women

were not only denied inheritance, but the girl-child, considered a shameful liability, was often buried alive at birth by the pre-Islamic Arabs. Only the male could fight the many internecine and inter-tribal wars that became unavoidable in the search for and occupation of the scarce green patches and oases in the desert. The male member of the tribe was its supreme asset.

Because the desert denied the Saudi Arabs the facility of agriculture, the family unit and the social bonds that go with it could not fully develop among the pre-Islamic Arabs. The lack of agriculture contributed to the perpetuation of the tribal order. The Arabs were thus predominantly a patriarchal, nomadic and tribal society. Indus was anything but that.

The Indus civilization had on it, as we have seen, the distinct imprints of a matriarchal society, many features of which continue to enrich it to this day. Indus cities were supported by an agrarian base from the time of the prehistoric Mohenjodaro civilization. There were settled villages, producing a surplus of agricultural products. Agriculture compels man to settle down on or near his fields and landholding. It binds the erstwhile nomad to a fixed abode where, in due course of time, a house and then a colony of houses (village or city) comes up.

Living in separate hutments, cottages or houses, men not only give up

nomadic living, they also break from the tribe. Independent houses break the tribe into many smaller family units. The inmates of the house, male and female, come closer to each other and are distanced from the rest. The woman, now controlling the hearth in the household, demands security and the recognition of her status in society. This brings forth a new social unit: the family. The status of the female members of the family-oriented household is far better and more secure than that in the patriarchal, nomadic tribe. The introduction of agriculture, thus, gives birth to the family and spells the decline and eclipse of the tribe.

The Arabs had very little agriculture; Indus had (it seems) never been without it. The Arabs were nomadic; the people of Indus were settled. The primary social unit in Arabia was the tribe; the primary social unit in Indus was the family. The Arabs were brutally patriarchal; the Indus civilization was tempered by the soft strains of matriarchalism.

This was not, however, an entirely static situation. Significant changes were occurring in the Arab world before the advent of Islam. Some 400 to 500 years before its advent in the Saudi Arabian peninsula, a few elements and influences of agrarian society had begun to creep in. These had a crucial impact.

Medina had a small, very limited agricultural hinterland, irrigated by wells.

Arab traders to Mesopotamia, Lebanon and the Mediterranean brought back some knowledge of a new metal - iron - and of agricultural techniques and implements. Iron facilitated agriculture which in turn brought about permanent dwellings. It began to contend with nomadism and to fragment the tribes. The family began gradually to emerge. But, lacking abundant supplies of arable land and water for irrigation, Saudi Arabia was nowhere close to the Indus region in being a settled agricultural society. It provided very limited prospects for agriculture, and hence for the family, to develop. The tribe has remained the dominating social unit in Arabia into modern times.

Though the dominant strain of tribalism in Arabia continued, some impulses began to be generated by the newly emerging family unit, howsoever limited its area of influence and its geographical span. In the context of this new social unit that had elevated the social status of the woman, unimpeded and cruel patriarchalism had to be confronted, even though it could not be eliminated. Provision had to be made for the newfound status of the mother, wife, sister or daughter. The sharp edges of tribal customs had to be softened to accommodate the as yet inadequate influence but genuine demands of the *family* even when its members had no social position or recognition in the fold of the patriarchal *tribe*. Different tribes took different positions, according to the extent to which they had or had not adopted or acknowledged the new

productive relations. This was a fundamental schism in society, raising countless controversies and causing unending strife and bloodshed. Could order be restored? Could this barbaric and fratricidal confusion be brought to an end?

Islam would confront that challenge. It would bring about a compromise between the old and the emerging.

The tribe demanded that the woman be altogether excluded from inheritance. It had decreed that she had no such right. She was not even human: she could be owned, divorced, or killed at will, whim or fancy. The family asserted that the woman had her rights. She had to be given a share in inheritance. The Islamic compromise entitled the daughter to inheritance for the first time in Arab history, but only to half the share of the son.

The tribe had excluded the girl-child from the residue even in case of a failure of male heirs, howsoever remote. The family would give her a share in such circumstances. The Islamic compromise (except in the case of the Shia sect, dominant in Iran) was again the middle path between the tribe and the family.

Patriarchal tribals wanted to retain the unrestricted right of polygamy and

divorce. Family men were now more protective of their sisters and daughters, and sought the imposition of restrictions on polygamy and divorce. Though tribal influence remained dominant, some restrictions were accordingly placed by Islam both on polygamy and on the husband's erstwhile unfettered right to divorce his wife.

The scope for agriculture in the Saudi peninsula was, as pointed out earlier, however, limited. The institution of the family could not therefore develop beyond a certain point. The fertile riverine tracts of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Indus were otherwise. Here agriculture, and therefore the family, had existed for more than a millennium. The precepts and interpretations of Islamic doctrine that entered Indus from Iraq and Persia were, thus, more readily adopted than those brought directly from the Arabian peninsula. The vehicle were the soldier-kings of Central Asia and the saintly ascetics from Iraq and Persia.

1. See chapter 6, section V above.

2. S. Qudrutullah Fatimi's article in *Sind Through the Centuries*, 101.

3. The former was the port on the sea and the latter served as the inland riverine port.
4. This was the exact time when the Arabs were expanding their empire in successful campaigns. Spain had been taken at the battle of Guadalete in 710. The expansion from Samarkand to Kashghar was made in the years 711-14.
5. See P. Hardy's article on the *Chachnama* in *Sind Through the Centuries*, 111.
6. Ibid., 115.
7. Though Gankovsky feels that the Arab conquest did speed up the process of feudalization of Sindh and, because Sindh became isolated from the other areas of Indus and India, it consolidated its population into a single feudal nationality. See Gankovsky, *The Peoples of Pakistan: An Ethnic History*, 117.
8. See A. B. Awan, *Balochistan: Historical and Political Processes* (1985) 21.

9. Mirza Kalichbeg Fredunbeg, *History of Sind* (1902) 29.

10. *Ibid.*, 31.

More Men on Horseback

I. INDUS NAMES

Muslims often repeat the statement that Islam was not spread by the sword. That is, no doubt, largely true. While this is no compliment to the vigorous sword-arm of the Muslim soldier-kings of Central Asia, it is also true that the diffusion and dissemination of Islamic doctrine owes much to the wanderings of pious ascetics of Iranian and Central Asian stock. But that, too, is not of universal application.

The devotion and reverence that the shrines of these titans among men continue to attract does, undoubtedly, speak of their piety. There is no question that these saints had bestowed enlightenment, through the simple message of equality of all men, on the towns and deserts of the Indus region. However, one circumstance of wide and unexceptionable application seems never to have been analysed, perhaps not even noticed. Yet it has an important story of its own to tell: Indus has almost no Muslim inhabitants with pre-Islamic names. This is quite peculiar. In this, Indus is a unique area. Even Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, does not share this attribute with Indus.

We know that Omar, Usman, Ali were pre-Islamic names. Omar was Omar before he became a Muslim. On conversion, he did not feel compelled to change his name. So with Usman and Ali, Sufyan and Khalid. As Islam spread to Persia and overcame Zoroastrianism and idol worship of several kinds, it encountered Persian names. These, too, were neither Arab nor, as the obscurantists of that age would have chosen to allege, 'Islamic'. These were names peculiar to a heathen order. Rustam, Sohrab, Jamshed, Parvez are pre-Islamic Persian names. No Rustam, Sohrab, Jamshed or Parvez considered it necessary to change his name upon conversion to Islam, in order to 'Islamize' it. What then compelled the Sobash and the Mohanlal of Indus to discard his name as he embraced Islam?

The Sufis could certainly not have dictated this change of name. They did not even insist upon the change of religion. But the Central Asian soldier-kings were not so tolerant. This applies particularly to the earlier conquerors. They did not come here to settle, for they always returned home after their winter raids. They came here to win glory, honour, booty, slaves and the favour of Allah.

Slaves were of particular significance to the kings and princes of Ghazni. While riverine Indus had graduated to an agrarian economy with its own social order, Ghazni and much of Afghanistan had not yet come out of the

pre-agrarian slave-owning system. This system, with limited potential for development within the confines of its own frontiers, had little chance of progress. The rot had set in and could only be stemmed by the import of booty and slaves. The well-endowed brahmin-kshatriya temples of India promised booty. Any subject of the conquered territories, particularly if he was a Hindu, was a prospective slave.

To escape the lot of being dragged away in chains and then kept in bondage in a distant and alien land as a slave, Indus men did not merely convert. They also changed their names and gave 'Muslim' names to their offspring. The names they chose instead were those of the invaders, names of Arabic and Persian origin, intended to establish their 'Muslim' identity. This alone would convince the invading armies that Allah's law forbade them being taken as slaves. In Islam, a Muslim, unlike a non-Muslim, cannot, under any circumstances, be subjected to the indignity of slavery. Had there been an entirely indigenous Muslim ruling elite, there may have been no pressure to change names upon conversion. But these early victors were not indigenous. The tradition set in the first two hundred years of contact with Islam (from Mahmud Ghazni to Shahabuddin Ghauri) was to persist and become the pattern. To this day, people embracing Islam are required to assume new 'Islamic' names.

This precondition must also have inhibited conversion to Islam. Even people who are prepared, or have been induced to change their religions, are averse to the prospect of having to change their names. Unlike Arabia and Persia, therefore, there was no hundred per cent conversion to Islam in Indus, or India, even under several centuries of Muslim rule.

II. THE HORSE

If Indus had indeed graduated into a developed agrarian system while the Central Asian societies remained largely nomadic with only some pre-agrarian, slave-owning city-states, what gave those societies that vital edge upon Indus that they could continue to send irresistible invaders into it for several centuries? What gave the Central Asians that critical superiority when the Indus and India were, without doubt, the more advanced civilization and economies?

The soldier-kings of Central Asia had one invincible ally: the horse. This was the most efficient vehicle, particularly of assault and attack, the one critical factor in the fortune of battle. As mentioned earlier, neither Indus nor the Gangetic plains of India were the natural environment for the procreation of this species. This aspect of Indus was remarked upon when the impulse behind the god Indra's exploits of 'freeing the rivers' was discussed.¹

What made the Indus environment inhospitable to this particular species? Thapar recognizes and laments this incapacity. 'It is strange that India never bred sufficient horses of quality, the best blood having always to be imported; this was to have disastrous consequences on the cavalry arm of the Indian armies, eventually making the cavalry ineffective, particularly in comparison with Central Asian horsemen.' And even a scholar of her standing establishes her generous humility as she only footnotes the hesitant explanation: 'The only likely explanation for this is that climatic conditions and the particular type of pasture suited for breeding horses did not exist in India.'²

Will one really be rushing in where Thapar fears to tread if one were to suggest that it is the shape of the hoof of the animal that makes it unsuited to the climatic conditions prevailing in Indus and northern India? The flat Indus plains, and those of north India with several major meandering rivers and countless other storm channels, turn into endless swamps every summer. An entire year's rainfall pours down from the skies within two months; rivers overflow as the snow in the Himalayas and the Karakorams melts to coordinate with the rains; mountain streams spring to life and charge into the plains with a sudden ferocity. The soil retains its dampness even after the rains stop and the waters recede. 'Even the best Arabian or the Iranian horses were likely to degenerate in a humid climate and the Middle Eastern experts often

accused the Indian trainers of mishandling the horses in their care.³

These humid conditions, the soggy earth, and the heat combine to make conditions suitable only for animals, such as the buffalo and the cow, that have cleft hooves. The cleavage in the hoof allows the humidity to escape and for air to circulate. It also provides a stable, balancing base to the animal treading upon slippery, treacherous top-soil during the monsoons. The horse has no cleavage in his hoof. Even now, when the rivers have been tamed and high roads and paths constructed, people are loathe to bring their horses out in the monsoon months. The horse will thrive in the cold. It will survive in hot climes. But when humidity and heat combine, particularly if these emanate from the earth, the horse meets its Waterloo. Naturally, even today, such hot and humid countries as Bangladesh and Burma are not ideal breeding grounds for horses. Seasonally the monsoons also create hot and humid conditions in Indus and northern India that are similar to those in Burma and Bangladesh during the height of the summer every year. That makes Indus and most of northern India inhospitable to the horse.⁴

It is true that in the excavations at Pirak many animal figurines have been found, including those depicting the horse. But these were not representations of the animals of the Indus.⁵ Pirak, on the way to the Bolan Pass, was a stop-over town. It was exposed to the influence of lands beyond the Suleman

Range. This is evident from the presence of other terracotta figurines displaying, besides the horse, the two-humped camel, never an Indus animal. Unless we accept that both were representations of foreign animals, it is impossible to explain the two-humped camels in a land populated only by dromedaries.

The Central Asian steppes are the natural habitat of the horse. The soldier-kings of Ghazni with their cavalry had an obvious advantage over their opponents mounted on heavy elephants and slow-moving oxen and bullock carts.

III. SULTAN MAHMUD

For the Central Asian soldier-kings, Indus, not India, was their lawful and natural domain, the legacy, so to say, of their forefathers. The stable and durable kingdoms of the Bactrians and the Kushans had established beyond argument the unity of the Oxus and the Indus. The initial impulse of the people of the one area was to spill over into and have intercourse with the people of the other. There was no impulse to go deep into India, unless they were pushed from behind by the superior force of a later wave or expedition, such as had been the lot of the Scythians.

The Kushans had maintained their principal seat south of the Hindukush, at Purushapura (Peshawar). Their state and its feudatories spilled back over to the north of that range into Central Asia. Mahmud of Ghazni was to reverse this balance. With his capital beyond Indus, to the north of the Suleman Range, he was to retain tribute-paying feudatories in the Punjab and Sindh. He had come to power in AD 999 and had immediately obtained the recognition of his sovereignty from the Caliph of Baghdad. Thus secure, he had ventured out to conquer.

Sultan Mahmud Ghazni (999-1030) was a multi-faceted man. He was a king, an administrator, a soldier, an indefatigable campaigner, and a great patron of the arts and sciences. Firdausi, the poet of the epic *Shahnama*, and Al Beruni, the historian and mathematician, graced his court. But the Sultan received far greater renown on account of the seventeen campaigns into Indus and north-western India. These covered a span of only twenty-five years! He held the Punjab and Sindh in his dominions, but returned to Ghazni after each raid. Many of Mahmud's raids went along the flow of the Indus, veering south-east from Sindh into Kathiawar, on the border of Gujrat, to Somnath.

Ghazni was advantageously located on the China-Mediterranean trade route. There were many factors that facilitated the incursions of the Ghazni sultan into Indus. The speed of the Central Asian horse and the sheer stamina

of its rider were as yet quite novel to Indus and to India. This was a particularly vital quality of the Central Asian Turks, Afghans, and Mongols. In subsequent times, Indus and India would see much of this prowess of the horse and its rider in campaign and battle.

When Mahmud first crossed into the Indus valley, northwestern Punjab and the Frontier Province were ruled by the Hindu Shahi dynasty. Founded a hundred years earlier by Lallya, a Hindu minister of the Afghan Muslim Shahiya king of Kabul, the dynasty's last king, Jaypal, held court at Waihind (present-day Hund, fifteen miles north of Attock).

Jaypal had experienced combat with the Ghaznavids. Subuktagin, the slave son-in-law of the Ghazni king, Alpatagin, had led his army to Indus and encountered the Hindu king of Attock. In AD 977, Subuktagin, the slave, became the king of Ghazni. He continued his efforts to subjugate and annex Jaypal's possessions. This, however, was to be the prize of his son, Mahmud.

In the autumn of AD 1000, Mahmud left Ghazni with an estimated 1,500 horses and marched towards Peshawar. Jaypal confronted him in AD 1001, with three hundred elephants, 30,000 infantry, and several hundred horses. Mahmud's strategy was superior. His horsemen were also more spirited and far greater in numbers. Jaypal fought with vigour and valour, but was defeated.

So many defenders are said to have been killed in this encounter that to this day the mountain range that saw the battle is called the 'Hindu Kush' (the killer of the Hindus). Such, however, was the brave but defeated Rajput's sense of honour that instead of returning to his capital in ignominy and shame, he burnt himself alive on a funeral pyre.

Five years later, Mahmud defeated Jaypal's successor, Anandpal, at Peshawar and annexed Pakistan's Northwest Frontier region. Thereafter, Indus was to become the Sultan's own backyard for the thirty years of his reign. Though he did not annex the entire region formally until AD 1021, Mahmud returned seventeen times to sack its cities and temples.

The Sultan must indeed himself have been a great and just leader of men, loved by those who bore arms for him and feared by those that came in his way. The rich plunder that fell into his hands in the first raid induced thousands of transfrontier Turks and Afghans to follow Mahmud's call to arms every autumn. Many asked for no pay, but only permission to plunder in his trail. He had, thus, no dearth of manpower. But an important factor, facilitating his campaigns, were the conditions in Indus itself. The Indus was a fragmented region. These campaigns were not exclusively targeted at Hindu or non-Muslim states. No Muslim state that came the Sultan's way was spared either.

The kingdom of Multan was ruled by Ismaili Muslims who considered that Ismail (the elder son of the Shia Imam Jaffer) and his descendants were the rightful heirs to the mantle of the Prophet of Islam. Ismail had predeceased his father. Prayers in Ismaili mosques in Multan were preceded by an expression of allegiance to the the Ismaili Fatimid caliphs of Egypt. Mahmud destroyed this kingdom. Balkh, Seestan, Multan and Talamba were all Muslim states that the Sultan attacked and took. These, too, were pillaged by his followers.

Another Muslim state, Mansura, bordered Multan. It was governed by an Arab dynasty. To the east were the principalities of Kanauj, Kashi, Delhi, Mahoba, Kalinjar, Malwa and Gujrat. All of these were constantly at war with each other, making them unsettled and unstable. Depending on the direction of his current expedition, the Sultan reduced everyone in his path.

IV. SOMNATH

Though the Sultan was able to once again integrate Oxus and Indus into one political unit and though his campaigns were many, and each quite eventful as we have from Al Beruni, he is remembered most for the capture and levelling of the temple and godhead at Somnath.

The coastal city and its temple took their name from a miracle, an idol

floating in mid-air in the central room of the temple. Romila Thapar, quoting Al-Kazwini, describes the encounter between the king and the idol thus:

When the king asked his companions what they had to say about the marvel of the idol, and of its staying in the air without prop or support, several maintained that it was upheld by some hidden support. The king directed a person to go and feel all around and above and below it with a spear, which he did but met with no obstacle. One of the attendants then stated his opinion that the canopy was made of lodestone, and the idol of iron, and that the ingenious builder had skilfully contrived that the magnet should not exercise a greater force on any one side - hence the idol was suspended in the middle. Some coincided, others differed. Permission was obtained from the Sultan to remove some stones from the top of the canopy to settle the point. When two stones were removed from the summit, the idol swerved on one side, when more were taken away, it inclined still further, until at last it rested on the ground.⁶

Despite the fact that Mahmud had not directed the vigour and destruction of his campaigns exclusively towards non-Muslims and had in fact spared no Muslim state that had come his way, the real culture-shock to the Indian mind was the sack of Somnath. It further perpetuated the Indus-Indian divide. Thapar complains that the, 'destruction at Somnath was frenzied, and its

effects were to remain for many centuries in the Hindu mind and to colour its assessments of the character of Mahmud, and on occasion of the Muslim rulers in general.'

So instant and traumatic indeed were the effects of the sack of Somnath upon the Hindu mind, that the assimilation of the members of Mahmud's party who remained behind required morbid procedures. Nehru refers to a Muslim source that provides the clearest picture of the divide: 'Turks, Afghan and Mughul female prisoners, if they happened to be virgins, were accepted as wives of 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.'⁷

It was about this time that the first of the hardy Baloch tribes moved into their present home in Balochistan. The original home of the Baloch peoples is variously identified as Arabia, Babylonia (Iraq), Kurdistan and even Kirman. One source establishes this original home as the Aleppo valley in Iraq. 'The Baloch tradition of their origin is that they came from Aleppo in the 12th century via Baghdad, the banks of the Euphrates, and the northern border of the Persian Gulf to Mekran, from whence they spread north, intermixing with the Pathan tribes.'⁸ No less a person than Mir Ahmed Yar Khan Baloch, the late Khan of Kalat, corroborated this opinion and recognized the Aleppo valley as

the original habitat of the Baloch.⁹ In the centuries after Mahmud's campaigns, the early Baloch migrants spread out of Balochistan and occupied large tracts in southern Punjab and northern Sindh.¹⁰

1. Chapter 2, Section II above. Almost two thousand years after the feats attributed to Indra, Marco Polo had observed about India: 'Here are no horses bred; and thus a great part of the wealth of the country is wasted in purchasing horses ... Indeed this king wants to buy more than 2000 horses every year, and so do his four brothers who are kings likewise. The reason why they want so many horses every year is that by the end of the year there shall not be one hundred of them remaining, for they all die off. And this arises from mismanagement, for these people do not know in the least how to treat a horse; and besides they have no farriers . . . And another strange thing to be told is that there is no possibility of breeding horses in this country, as hath often been proved by trial.' See Kosambi, *Introduction* 355-6. Obviously horses died not because of the mere lack of expertise in breeding but on account of the fact that the horse was not an indigenous Indus or Indian animal. For the same reason there were fewer expert farriers.

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2. Thapar, 149.
3. Chaudhuri, K. N., *Asia Before Europe*, 278.
4. That is why the early Aryans had so comprehensively destroyed Indus irrigation, and thus its agriculture, more than two thousand years before the earliest Muslim invasions from Central Asia.
5. See J. F. Jarrige, 'Pirak Excavations: New Data About the Second and First Millennia BC in Kachi Plain on the Border of Sind', *Sind Through the Centuries*, 58.
6. Thapar, 234.
7. Nehru, *Discovery*, 247.
8. *Gazetteer of the Dera Ghazi Khan District, 1893-1897 (1898)* 61.
9. See Awan, 20-5.

10. See also chapter 11, section III below.

The Second Feudal State

I. RAJPUT TERRITORY

For Mahmud's successors, his annexation of the Punjab was an invaluable legacy. When, in AD 1151, Allauddin Jahansoz, (literally, one who burns the entire world) took Ghazni and put it to the torch, Mahmud's great-great-grandson took refuge in Lahore. He believed it to be the backyard of his empire. Only, this time he made it his permanent capital.

By the time the uprooted Sultan Khusro Shah took refuge in Lahore, the city had already passed through a glorious age. The ascetic saint, Ali Hajveri, the *Data Ganj Bakhsh* ('he who distributes treasures') had taught, spread the light, and now slept in his eternal abode outside the city. The poet Masud Saad Salman, a contemporary of Ali Hajveri, was the first in Lahore's (and its hinterland's) rich line of progressive poets of resistance. Masud Saad Salman became so popular, in fact, that he was jailed for ten years. One thousand years before Faiz and Jalib, he wrote:

*Not one hair on my head was white
When Fate decreed to imprison me;*

I have spent such a long time behind bars

That there is not a single black hair now.

For more than one hundred years after Mahmud's death in AD 1030, most of Indus remained part of the Ghaznavid Empire. This spanned a wide arc from Central Asia to the southern tributaries of the Indus.

Indus was, however, exhausted by the frequent and energetic raids of the Central Asian hordes. Although the region offered some display of urban splendour, even in these times, in cities like Lahore and Multan, the hinterland of the cities took long to recover after each successive raid. As the marauding armies moved across or about it, the area was depleted of agricultural produce and livestock, and even of able-bodied citizenry.

Not so the areas lying in the vast triangle between the Sutlej, the Yamuna and the Narmada. This region of central India and Rajputana had seen very little of the foreign invaders. It is true that peripheral areas such as Kanauj and Somnath had been sacked, but the continuing misfortunes of Indus had not truly affected the peoples of these areas situated beyond the first reach of the Central Asian expeditionaries.

This was, by and large, Rajput territory, divided into numerous small

states. The relative insularity from Central Asian invaders, especially in the two centuries after Mahmud, enabled the chieftains to extract considerable and determinable revenue from the peasants and artisans. They were thus able to support their own vigorous armies and to squander the surplus on internecine wars. So unceasingly did they fight amongst themselves in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that war, in the words of Romila Thapar, 'became a part of the general chivalric code.'²

Prithviraj Chauhan was the king of Delhi at the end of the twelfth century. A daring and gallant soldier, he had become a Rajput legend in his own lifetime. The dramatic bravado with which this young Lochinvar had won the hand of princess Samyogita, the daughter of the king of Kanauj, had contributed to his renown and notoriety. He had no invitation to the *swayamvara*, where the beautiful princess was privileged to choose her husband by garlanding one of a line of princes assembled at the court. The father of the bride had made no secret of his scorn for Prithviraj. An unglorified statue of the prince had been placed at the entrance of the royal hall, with a necklace of old shoes around its neck.

Without the right of entry, Prithviraj, the handsomest of all princes, the pride of the Rajput ancestry, stood incognito in the doorway, behind his own bust. His eyes had met those of the princess. She, too, knew what was to be

done. Purposefully, but without betraying her intent or the identity of her lover, she moved along the row of handsome royal suitors, and then beyond the row to the door. Once there, to the surprise of every royal in the hall, the coveted and beautiful princess hurriedly garlanded the distorted statue of Prithviraj. The prince wasted no time. In a flash, he appeared from the shadows and in one sweep of his strong arm swung the fair maiden up on to his horse. In no time, he had whisked her away on the fastest charger in Rajputana. No Rajput horse or gallant knight could catch up with the young couple on their first flight of love.

These were the days of knights and valour, of chivalry and romance. Historically, feudalism was young. Economically, it was productive. There was a greater surplus to fight for. The spoils of victory were rich. These were, therefore, also the days of division and dispute. These divisions and disputes were bound to tempt the Central Asian expeditionaries to venture further into India.

II. THE DELHI SULTANATE

In AD 1186, Muhammad of Ghor took Ghazni. Here he augmented his military resources with the products of its foundries and its horse breeders. With Ghazni as the stepping stone, Muhammad Ghori then penetrated the

mountains and laid claim to sovereignty over Lahore. He marched on to Delhi. Prithviraj met him in the field of Tarain, just short of Panipat and adjacent to Kurukshetra, not far from Sirhind. Together the four locales have been the sites of at least seven battles decisive of the fate of the entire subcontinent. Tarain alone saw two such contests.

In this first encounter in Tarain, Muhammad Ghori was defeated and was forced to retreat. Ghori then humiliated his generals for the failure. He is said to have strapped feeding-bags, used for horses, around the necks of his generals. The next year, in AD 1192, on the same battlefield, he defeated an alliance of Rajputs commanded by Prithviraj. The Ghori dominion now extended to the banks of the Ganges.

The Ghori Sultanate³ was initially established by that cream of the slave market which drew its supplies from Central Asia. The need for manpower and for the prowess of the martial arm had given to the Central Asian slave a status previously unknown in the history of slavery. Manumission came easily to the slave who was strong and brave and who displayed skill in warfare. Very often these freed slaves were given the rank of officers. Many of them then rose to power on the basis of personal merit. They proved adept and shrewd administrators and generals.

On the assassination of Shahabuddin Ghori, (AD 1206) in Lahore, his kingdom split among three of his slave generals. Ghazni was taken by Tajuddin Yalduz; Sindh came to Nasiruddin Qabacha; Punjab and Delhi went to the slave-king Qutubuddin Aibak. Embracing large parts of the Indus and Gangetic valleys, the Delhi Sultanate became the first Muslim kingdom that was truly Indian. Despite initial claims and origins, it did not spill over into Central Asia.

Although it has sometimes been called an 'empire', one has to confess that in the three hundred years of its pre-eminence, the Delhi Sultanate was never a vast and great kingdom. For long periods, it was, no doubt, the decisive factor in the politics of the Indus and northern India, as also in the fortunes of the numerous ruling houses. Also the Delhi Sultanate was not ruled by a single continuous dynasty. The dynasties of the Slaves, the Khiljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyeds and the Lodhis succeeded each other, until the last were defeated by another Central Asian power, the Mughals. The Sultanate continued to display its Central Asian orientation and its rulers continued to remain apprehensive of the known centripetal tendencies in Indus that pulled it towards independence or Central Asia, and away from Delhi. At one point, the Delhi sultan, Qutubuddin Aibak, was forced to move his capital to Lahore to pre-empt the pursuit of a claim by the sultans of Ghazni to Indus and Lahore.⁴

Aibak's son-in-law and heir, Iltutmish (AD 1211-1236), and later Iltutmish's

daughter, the renowned queen, Razia Sultana (AD 1236-1240),⁵ were continuously preoccupied with the north-western region of the Sultanate (Indus), as it remained under constant threat of attack by the fierce Mongols of Central Asia. Such was their desire, however, to insulate themselves from the Mongol storms that were raging in Central Asia that they ignored even the pleas for help issued by their own kin. The Central Asian monarch, Jalaluddin Khwarazam Shah, a kinsman of the Muslim rulers of Delhi, had been uprooted by the Mongol hordes. He spent two eventful years fleeing the Mongols and roaming the length and breadth of the Indus basin. He led a substantial army and went about pillaging and plundering the local inhabitants. He sacked Pasrur, went south to burn Uch, and then took Debal. The Delhi sultans, afraid of Mongol retribution, turned down Jalaluddin's emissary, and connived in the assassination of his ambassador.

While his predecessors had merely passively shrunk away from Central Asian politics, Sultan Balban (AD 1266-1287),⁶ took effective steps to hold the Mongols off. Having risen to the throne from the status of a minister, Balban consolidated the Sultanate and insulated it from the ravaging of Central Asia, but at some considerable cost to Indus. To secure the seat of the Sultanate at Delhi against the invaders, he destroyed irrigation and made the wells dry in a vast tract covering the northwestern parts of the Punjab and Sindh.⁷ By putting

crops and villages to the torch, he created an impenetrable 'no man's land'. This defence devised by him was no doubt effective. It held on for a hundred years, collapsing only in the wake of the irresistible hordes of Taimur, as they strode unimpeded through Indus to Delhi in AD 1398.

Though the successive Delhi sultans did their best to defend themselves against these invaders, they did not entirely give up their nostalgia for the homeland that they had left behind. Indeed, they continued to live in the hope of building an empire that would encompass Central Asia. They also nurtured the ambition of conquering peninsular India. In both designs, they failed after a series of attempts.

The Delhi Sultanate, at the height of its glory under the Khilji king Allauddin (AD 1296-1316), reorganized the revenue system with the primary purpose of collecting revenue for these abortive campaigns. Allauddin's minister and general, Malik Kafur, met with only partial success in his march towards the south. During the 26-year rule of Muhammad Tughlaq (AD 1325-1351), repeated failures established the futility of these military campaigns to annex territory.

These failures had a telling effect upon the Sultanate's hold on the territory that it did command. When Tughlaq raised taxes in the south to finance

campaigns in the north, the peasantry revolted. He proceeded to build an entirely new capital in the south, at Daulatabad in the Deccan, to ensure his suzerainty over and control of the rebellious south. The quixotic project sank under its own weight and had to be abandoned in its third year, after having taken its own exorbitant toll in taxes, extractions and labour. The arbitrary use of unbridled authority, the pursuit of wasteful projects and ill-advised campaigns, and the relentless fleecing of the peasants and the artisans corroded the politico-moral basis of Delhi's Muslim dynasties.

Muhammad Tughlaq was a man of many whims. It was he who first proclaimed himself the 'Shadow of God upon Earth'. That testimony is available on his coins. When Ibn Battutah, the famous Arab traveller, incurred the Sultan's displeasure by visiting a saint who had lost the Sultan's favour, Battutah was made to spend nine days fasting and reciting the Quran in the Sultan's audience hall.⁸

Of the several campaigns that would engage the successors of Muhammad Tughlaq, the most vigorous and taxing were those that the Sultanate fought in the Indus region against the Gakkhars and Sarang Khan.

III. JASRAT, SARANG AND CHAKAR KHAN

Sheikha Gakkhar, a chieftain of the Salt Range, had been so emboldened by the anarchy that afflicted the Indus region, that in AD 1394 he captured Lahore. This was a great affront to the kingdom, and the Governor of the Punjab, with his seat at Dipalpur, had to strain all his resources and men to win back Lahore. When Taimur marched upon Delhi in AD 1398, he encountered the Gakkhars. As Taimur went past Punjab on to Delhi, Sheikha had the temerity to retake Lahore. On Taimur's return march, he again confronted him. Sheikha was killed. Taimur took his son Jasrat with him as a prisoner to Samarkand.

Jasrat Gakkhar made a daring escape and travelled all the way over the rugged, inhospitable terrain to return to his people and become one of the most vigorous fighters that Indus has seen. With the Salt Range and Bhera already a part of his principality, he now took Sialkot and Lahore. Then he crossed the Sutlej and captured Talwandi. Thence he repaired to Dipalpur and, capturing it, became the premier chieftain of the Punjab.

While Jasrat led his army around the Punjab and the northern Indus region, there was another expeditionary also leading his force from city to city of the Punjab. Jasrat had avoided taking on the Delhi armies head on. Not so the Mongol prince from Kabul, Sheikh Ali. But Sheikh Ali was defeated in AD 1431 by a strong Delhi confederacy at Nazamgarh. He retreated to Kabul.

Jasrat, too, had been pushed into a retreat in Kashmir. This was the time when he needed more strength. He invited Sheikh Ali to join him. Jasrat and Sheikh Ali rampaged through Indus for several months, pillaging and conquering whatever came in their way. It took Delhi's Sultan Mubarik Shah several years to push the two out of the Indus region and to restore peace in the land.

In those uncertain conditions, the great mass of the population, the peasantry, had sometimes no other option but to flee their abodes and villages. What court historians often describe as 'robber tribes' and 'detachments of bandits' were, therefore, quite possibly fugitive peasants taking refuge in jungles and shrublands, conducting raids for survival.

Sarang⁹ was the leader of one such peasant movement, which he turned into a powerful uprising in 1419. The feudal lords joined hands to quell this movement. Sarang was defeated near Sirhind and fled to the mountains. The discontented peasants, however, continued to rally around his banner. The Sultanate had to take the matter into its own hands. Sarang was finally defeated and taken prisoner by the imperial army. Death in captivity, the fate that awaited him, elevated him to the pedestal reserved for folk heroes and legends.

During the fourteenth century, two major Baloch tribes, engaged in

contention with each other, fighting for territories in Balochistan, were to have an impact in the Indus region. During their contemporaneous migration over the same area and through the same narrow passes, they had to contend with each other. They fought often on their way to the new homeland. Once in the open spaces of Balochistan, they dispersed in their respective directions. The Rind settled in Sibi and the Lasharis in the Kacchi region. But they continued to break into battle frequently.

One of the most prominent Rind chiefs was Chakar Khan. He is believed to have led the Baloch to their extensive possessions in Sindh and the Punjab. He held sway over a vast tract of land spanning the highlands of Kalat, the lowlands of Kacchi, large parts of northern Sindh and southern Punjab up to Sahiwal.¹⁰ Chakar Khan, as the hero of love lyrics and war ballads alike, is the pride of Baloch ancestry and part of Indus folklore.

¹⁰ Salman's tradition of resistance through verse has lived on for centuries through the sixteenth century Lahore poet, Shah Hussain to the modern-day poets like Iqbal, Faiz, Jalib, Kishwar Naheed, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, Afzal Ahsan Randhawa, Faraz, Munnoo Bhai, Salim Shahid, Saleem Jahangir and Javed Shaheen.

2. Thapar, 235.
3. Later referred to as the Delhi Sultanate.
4. Aibak also died in Lahore, after a fall from his horse while playing polo.
5. A peerless queen who led her armies into battle astride her own horse. But Razia was not the only horsewoman in those times. This was the age of emancipated women. As Mujeeb reminds us, most women of Turkish families rode horses. In fact, even when orthodoxy began to inhibit women and the practices of feudal Hindus crept into Muslim culture prescribing strict *purdah* and seclusion, 'it took several centuries for women of Turkish families to give up riding.' Mujeeb, 219. Even when Akbar, himself a liberal in many ways, wanted to prohibit women from riding horses, he was not able to do so. Ibid., 368.
6. Balban had been Razia Sultana's chief huntsman. He had actually siezed power in 1246 and become the grand chamberlain (*amir-i-hajib*) to a puppet king, Bahram, but assumed the title and power of the Sultan in 1266.

7. See Mujeeb, 47.

8. See the article by C. F. Beckingham 'Ibn Battuta in Sind', in *Sind Through the Centuries*, 139.

9. See Antonova, 214.

10. Mir Chakar Khan is also buried in Sahiwal, where he died at the age of 88. See Awan, 25.

Turbulent North, Peaceful South and Panipat

I. A HOTBED OF REVOLT

The politics of Central Asia continued to affect the internal political intrigues and dynastic fortunes of Delhi. The successors of Muhammad Ghorī, right up to the Sayyeds, were Turks. They relied heavily on the support of Afghan generals and troops. But not all of them could retain for themselves the admiration of their retainers. The Khiljis alone succeeded in keeping the Afghans appeased. Balban and Muhammad Tughlaq, by a combination of reward and retribution, were able to maintain the admiration of most of the generals. Others were not so adept. The consequent instability jeopardized the authority of the sultan and the integrity of the Sultanate of Delhi.

Internal dissension was a luxury that Delhi could not afford in that most uncertain of times. The Mongol peril strode beyond the Hindu Kush. It had already laid waste many a prosperous city of Central Asia. Thus a slight historical flashback.

Changez Khan, born in AD 1155, was elected suzerain in AD 1206 by the

Kurultai Diet of all the Mongol, Turk and Tartar peoples at Karakoram in Mongolia. He immediately took to the saddle and embarked on conquests. Bokhara, Samarkand, Herat and Balkh, all prosperous and populous cities, were razed to the ground. Each had had a population exceeding one million people, populations which were decimated. Crops were set ablaze; buildings and houses were levelled after being plundered; irrigation systems were destroyed. One of Chingiz's successors, the dreaded Halaku Khan, sacked Baghdad (AD 1258), the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate. Blazing a trail of death and destruction, he went on to Aleppo and Damascus.

For two centuries the Mongols wreaked havoc and destruction upon the Muslim civilization in Central Asia. But there was, for Indus and India, a significant fallout of the Mongol rampage in Central Asia. It drove endless streams of Muslim princes, administrators, generals, poets and sufi saints from their homelands to the securer plains of Indus and India. This intermingling gave an impetus to philosophy, mathematics and astrology as well as to the arts. The intermixture of languages and literatures produced a new language: Urdu (literally, the 'language of the camp'). This derived its vocabulary from a number of Indus and Central Asian languages, as well as, of course, from Persian.

The continuous flow of displaced expeditionaries and Persian Muslims,

and their ready absorption in the elite ruling class of India had a significant impact on social development in the subcontinent. They took up places that might perhaps have otherwise been assumed by the locals. This impeded the process of assimilation and integration of the two major communities of Indus and India, the Hindus and the Muslims. The inflow of Central Asian and Iranian talent ensured that the ruling elite remained Persianized. It also denied vacant positions in the upper echelons of the administration to Hindus, even of the proud kshatriya caste.

The Mongols had not, so far, arrived in India. They had skirted its northern-most limits and gone away. Then, in 1398, Taimur (Tamerlane) proclaimed himself the renewer of the Mongol empire. Though himself a Turk, not a Mongol, Taimur considered himself the successor of Chingiz.

Having destroyed the city of Samarkand and the power of Khwarazm with unprecedented brutality, and having pillaged the Punjab, Taimur fell upon Delhi. That spelt the end of the Tughlaq line. The ruins of Delhi were inherited by Taimur's own nominee, the founder of the Sayyid Dynasty.

For much of the following fifty years, the Sultanate was an impoverished kingdom. A large part of its territory, particularly the Indus region, was in the grip of famine and anarchy. Revenues were low and disaffection high. The

Sayyeds could not continue to command the loyalty of their Afghan retainers.

The Indus region remained a hotbed of revolt during the Sultanate period. Almost every sultan was preoccupied with quelling rebellion in the Punjab. Two successive governors under the empress Razia revolted: first Kabir Khan, the governor of Lahore, then Altunia, the governor of Bhatinda. While campaigning to suppress the revolt by the latter, Razia was captured. Later the captor and the captive joined hands to march on to Delhi and to their final defeat. In Muhammad Tughlaq's reign, the governors of Uch, Sindh and Multan rebelled. Muhammad Tughlaq finally died in Thatta, after efforts at putting down the rebellion in Sindh.

Despite the prevailing anarchy, feudalism was able to consolidate itself during these centuries. With the state having weakened, the feudal lords became stronger and more autonomous. When Balban attempted to take away holdings from families with no male members capable of bearing arms, there was widespread unrest. The sultan was obliged to retract the measure.

The Indian feudal state was unable to determine the level of taxation to be levied uniformly. The feudals tried to expropriate as much as possible, denuding the peasantry of the very capacity to pay any revenue. By the advent of the sixteenth century, the decline and collapse of the state system and the

arbitrary behaviour of the feudal warlords had caused a significant deterioration in the lives of the rural population.

Yet the era of the Delhi sultanate saw many improvements and socio-economic advances. Literature and the arts were blessed with the peerless Amir Khusrau. Although the early Central Asians had initiated Indus and India into the art and use of cutting and stitching clothes, the Turks and Persians gave currency to such elegant dresses as the *shalwar*, *kurta*, *peshwaaz gharara*, and the *sherwani* or *achkan*.² Irrigation graduated from the tedious process of drawing water from a well with oxen walking down an inclined plane and drawing up a single leather bucket (*boka*) each time, to the endless series of earthen pots, fixed around a Persian Wheel, dipping into the water at one side and spilling forth a constant stream on the other. This was a major technological advance and spelt an enormous increase in agricultural potential.

Conversions to Islam were substantial, though the Sufi movement³ had its counterpart in Hinduism's Bhakti philosophy.⁴ A new drive, a new effort to merge conflicting ideologies, a desire to meet the challenges of the anarchic conditions and an apparent answer to the peasants' unpleasant lot were found in the initial stages and thoughts of Sikhism.⁵ In time, Sikhism was to become the most vigorous movement of the peasants. Later, in the time of the

Mughals, it would become the most nationalistic of indigenous Indus ideologies.

The Sultanate saw a spurt of twilight glory after AD 1451, when Bahlol Lodhi wrested power from the reigning Sayyed king. He established the only truly Afghan dynasty to rule Delhi. The dynasty could rely upon the loyalty of the Afghan troops, which was willingly extended and which guaranteed stability.

This period of stability lasted until Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526), the last of the line, taking both the loyalty and the stability for granted, began to arrogate absolute power with scant consideration for the norms and traditions of tribal counsel and participation. Pursued to the extreme, these policies induced the governors of the north-west to look back towards their original homeland for redemption.

Their 'redeemer' was also anxious for an invitation and was spoiling for a chance at battle. The ruler of Badakhshan, the former chieftain of Ferghana, had been initiated into the ways of a bold and daring opportunism by the adversity of his early days. And this was an opportunity that Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar would grasp eagerly.

II. ALGEBRA, ASTRONOMY AND SHAIVISM IN THE SOUTH

Let us pause for a while at this historical moment when Babar stood poised to embark upon his expedition into India and reflect upon the north-south divide in the subcontinent. Let us cut through a chronological cross-section in the period of the Delhi Sultanate and examine this increasing divergence between the north and the south. The one was influenced by Central Asia; the other was immune from it, and entirely Indian.

During the three centuries of the Sultanate, the south had in fact developed along its own different line and directions. The peninsula had been cut off from the north early in the fourteenth century by the Bahmani Kingdom of Gulbarga in the Deccan, founded by an erstwhile governor of the Sultanate, Zafar Khan. A few years later, in AD 1336, the peninsular kingdom of Vijayanagar was founded. Though the scarcity of arable land ensured hostility between the two kingdoms, the ample coastline and the rich maritime trade compensated for this by supporting a class of wealthy merchants, commanding large taxable incomes. These merchants wielded great influence in the court of Vijayanagar.

The five hundred years between the times of Muhammad bin Qasim and Muhammad Ghori had established indelibly the differences between Indus and peninsular India in the south. The areas of Rajasthan and the Gangetic plains, however, displayed some of the common features of both the extremes.

The south was all that the north was not: the north had moved into the age of feudal relations of production; the south remained tribal and largely pastoral, a compulsion of a difficult, rugged terrain and inadequate tracts of arable lands. The north was divided among small principalities and kingdoms, constantly at war, throbbing to martial drums and the thud of the horses' hooves. The south was quiet. It advanced the cause of algebra and astronomy and lent an ear to the pacifist teachings of Shankaracharya. The north was turning towards the puritanic, though tolerant asceticism of the Sufi mystics and looked up to the vigorous and martial lifestyle of its Muslim generals. The south had perfected the cult of the erotic in its frenzied tantric rituals of Shaivism. The feudals of the north, Hindus as well as Muslims, had begun to cloister their women, who were the prizes of so many battles and campaigns. In the south, the influence of matriarchal tribalism bestowed patronage upon the female temple dancer, and viewed her performance as a pious and divine act.

The north was exhausting itself in ceaseless internal combats. It had overtaxed the village and the artisan, thereby undermining the primary producers as well as the merchant class. Towns were disendowed and impoverished. By contrast, the peninsular coastline in the south was studded with prosperous port-towns teeming with the trade and wares of the entire

known world.

In the north, under the feudal system, the peasant's surplus produce was expropriated to the use of anarchic and wasteful wars. Life in the south flourished with the flow of plenteous coastal trade and was transformed into a colourful and vibrant culture. The north was landlocked, using only riverine routes to the seas. Continental-based Central Asian contact could add no sea-faring dimension to its character. The states of the south vied with each other in the maintenance of merchant navies and sea armadas. The Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Pandyas had kept up the Chola tradition of maritime trade and coastal conflict. And conflict intensified as revenues increased and profits became plentiful. This misfortune exposed the south, as it had the north, to the jeopardy of foreign invasion. The millennia of peace in the south was coming to an end.

The ethno-cultural differences and the resultant contradictions between the north and the south were, perhaps, never as clearly demonstrated as in the drama of the disintegration of the state of Gulbarga. The Deccanis (the locals), had always resented the Pardesis (the immigrants). This resentment developed into open armed conflict and resulted in the massacre of the Pardesis. The state could not absorb the anarchic shocks of this civil strife and the regional governors proclaimed independence, splitting the mother-state into five

smaller ones. Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmednagar, Bidar and Berar thus came into being in the sixteenth century.

Further conflict with the merchants of Vijayanagar brought an alliance of four of the new states on to the battleground against Vijayanagar. Even though Vijayanagar had profited by its friendly relations with the Portuguese,⁶ the result of the war of AD 1564 between it and its immediate neighbours was mutually self-destructive as, by this time, a new and well-established power in the north was planning the annexation of the exhausted south. By this time, the sons and grandsons of Babar, the erstwhile ousted chieftain of Ferghana, and later the emperor of India, were securely established in Delhi as its kings.

III. THE HISTORICAL WATERSHED

That Panipat has so often been the field upon which the fate of the Indian empire has been sealed does not imply that Indus was a mere passive conduit for Central Asian invasions. The fact is that Indus had always been considered as the outpost of the Central Asian states. It always resisted. It was only when the invader had crossed the Indus region that he could, in the battles at Panipat (or Kurukshetra or Tarain), have all of India. Contrary to much popularized myths, the Indus region always provided the great defence of the subcontinent. It provided the first and the strongest resistance.

Yet the Central Asians, on their part, considered the Indus region as a part of Central Asia. The 'international boundary' was always deemed to be the Sutlej. Thus, too, the significance of Panipat. Even if Peshawar or Lahore resisted, the Central Asian invaders considered the taking of these cities as the reconquest of their own outposts. India was to be won with the conquest of Delhi, the city commanding the Gangetic region. The plains of Panipat were at Delhi's doorstep. They were the great historical watershed.

That brings us to the Battle of Panipat in 1526.

1. As to this predilection of Indus governors, also see chapter 14, sections II and III.
2. See also chapter 6, section II, above. At the time when Marco Polo visited Malabar, it was representative of what Indus and northern India were before the first Central Asian empire-builders, such as the Kushans, had been here. In Marco Polo's time, there had been virtually no contact between the Central Asians and the people of coastal Malabar. Therefore his is perhaps a safe description of the dress prior to the interaction described in chapter 6 above. He wrote: 'You must know that in all this kingdom of Malabar

there is never a Tailor to cut a coat or stitch it, seeing that everybody goes naked at all times of the year . . . For decency only so they wear a scrap of cloth; and so 'tis with men and women, with rich and poor, aye, and with King (Sundara-Pandya) himself... It is a fact that the King goes as bare as the rest, only around his loins he has a piece of fine cloth, and round his neck he has a necklace entirely of precious stones - rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and the like insomuch that this collar is of great value . . . What this King wears, between gold and gems and pearls, is more than a city's ransom . . . The people go to battle all naked with only a lance and a shield; and they are the most wretched soldiers, they will kill neither beast nor bird, nor anything that hath life; and for such animal food as they eat, they make the Saracens [Arabs], or others who are not of their own religion, play the butcher.' Kosambi, *Introduction*, 355-6.

3. See chapter 15 below.

4. See chapter 15 below.

5. See chapter 15 below.

6. Giving the Hindu kingdom the exclusive facility to import horses from Persia and Arabia. See also chapter 20, section I.

The Second Universal State

I. A NOTIONAL BUT TANGIBLE LINE

The superior artillery and horsemanship of Babar's army won him Delhi in 1526. But it was not from any non-Muslim ruler that he was snatching India. He had defeated a Muslim ruler, Ibrahim Lodhi, the last of the kings of the Delhi Sultanate. Babar's claim to the kingdom was further consolidated by his victory near Agra in the same year over a Rajput confederacy. He thus founded the dynasty of the glorious Mughals of India. It would effectively rule India and Indus until at least 1707, though it would retain a depleted and titular sovereignty for another 150 years beyond that.

The purpose of the ensuing discourse is not to restate the entire history of the Mughal period. Other more comprehensive texts have done so with great competence and authority. Since the purpose of the present discourse is to select such facts and circumstances as help to highlight the dichotomy between, and the respective distinctive characteristics of Indus and India along the 'Gurdaspur-Kathiawar salient', an all-embracing narrative is not intended. Only such facts are employed in the argument as corroborate or directly

conflict with the essential thesis.

The Gurdaspur-Kathiawar salient, though a notional line on the map, does, however, seem to illustrate a most tangible and palpable watershed of history and culture. A glance at the Mughal period from this perspective will bring into prominence some relevant features to show the almost unbroken continuity of a distinct social and political order, prevailing within the expanse of a vast and 'universal' empire that spanned both Indus and India. It will thus bear testimony to the primordial and restless impulse of Indus to be a distinct and independent 'nation state'. In fact, this primordial and restless Indus impulse to retain its distinct character and to assert its status as an independent 'state' (or region), was eventually to provide the territorial basis for Pakistan.

Despite taking Delhi and making it their base, the Mughals retained an overwhelming impulse to revert to their Central Asian roots. Indeed, after each one of three unsuccessful attempts to take India before 1526, Babar had returned to Kabul. Some time after his death in Agra in 1530, even his remains were carried, according to his dying wish, across the northern plains and mountains to be reburied in Kabul.

Babar's first three campaigns had brought him deep into the heartland of the Indus valley. In his first attempt (in 1505) he had to return to Kabul after

taking Bannu, Kohat and the Derajat. In another attempt, he entered Indus along the Bajaur valley. He stormed the fort, put to death 3,000 men and erected pillars of human heads in the tradition of Taimur. During these invasions, he spared only those Pathans who came to him holding grass between their teeth and surrendering before him as 'Babar's cows'. Babar married Bibi Mubaraka, the daughter of the Yusufzai chief in an attempt to forge a permanent alliance with the hardy and brave Yusufzais.¹

In his third attempt to take India, Babar came as far as Bhera, Sialkot and Depalpur. Because of the resistance in the Punjab, however, the prize of Delhi continued to elude him. India was thus a well-defended fortress, with the valiant peoples of Indus providing no easy passage to the invader. At the beginning of each summer, Babar would return to Kabul.

How harassed Babar was is indicated by his own comments in the *Babarnama* which he recorded on 29 December 1525.² He complained how, even after he had taken the town of Sialkot, the resistance of the Jats and the Gujjars continued. Although he calls them brigands, he admitted that they deprived only such persons of their belongings as were going to the conqueror's camp. 'If one goes into Hindustan,' he wrote, 'the Jats and the Gujjars always pour down in countless hordes from hills and plains for loot in bullock and buffalo. These ill-omened peoples are just senseless because the

country was an enemy's , but they began the senseless work after we had taken it. When we reached Sialkot, they fell in tumult on poor and needy folks who were coming out of the town *to our camp*, and stripped them bare.' (Emphasis added.)

Once he got past Indus, beyond the Punjab, Babar had Delhi and India under his feet. Panipat was the quantum leap. It was the beginning of a new land and a new era for him and his lineage.

Thenceforth, Babar would make Delhi his home, returning to Kabul only to be reburied several years after his death. The battle of Panipat was a most critical success.

II. AN IMPERIAL CHILD ON THE BATTLEMENTS

Not that Central Asia would readily abandon claim either to its presumed 'historical territory' (Indus) or to the loyalty of its own expelled expeditionaries. Kabul would always continue to strain its neck to look over the shoulders of the Hindu Kush range down at the Indus valley.

Only four years after the death of Babar, his son and successor, Humayun, all too readily acceded to the pretensions of his brother Kamran, the governor of Kabul, when the latter added the Punjab to his viceregal territories of Kabul.

This alone did not appease Kamran, who remained at constant war with his brother Humayun. In 1552 the governor came out to fight Humayun, the future emperor, who, having been deposed, was wandering in the throes of adversity.

The Central Asian 'expeditionaries' also took refuge always 'across the mountains' in the north-west when in distress in India. Humayun, fleeing before Sher Shah, repaired towards Iran by the southern Indus route, avoiding Kabul. He may well have gone towards that city but was only too aware of the hostility of his brother. This hostility was soon manifested when Kamran chose to use his nephew, the infant Akbar, in a game of pressure tactics.

Akbar was born to the empress Hamida Bano at a time when Humayun's sole concern was swift flight from the pursuit of Sher Shah. He left his wife and the newborn infant in the charge of the Raja of Amarkot in Sindh, and scurried across into Iran. The Sindhi raja, Mirza Shah Hassan Arghun, afraid of retribution, decided upon making over the custody of the child, but not to Sher Shah, the sultan of Delhi. From the Raja's perspective, the suzerain of Indus was the ruler of Kabul. He dispatched the infant Akbar to Kamran. But the Raja had committed a greater crime than merely that of harbouring the infant Akbar. He had allowed the deposed Humayun to roam his lands for two years without resistance. He had, therefore, the more reason to fear the wrath of his notional 'overlord'. Again it was not the Delhi sultan that he feared, or owed allegiance

to. Besides handing over the imperial child, Raja Arghun also gave Mirza Kamran the hand of his daughter, Mah Chuchak Begum, in marriage.³

The young Akbar was in for an amazing series of dramatic events early in his life. Several years after the child had been handed over to Mirza Kamran, Humayun prepared to assault the Kabul Fort. Kamran, feeling threatened by the superior force of his brother's Persian retainers, propped the young Akbar upon the fort's battlements, visible to the besieging army, hoping that the father would not risk his son's life and would hold the attack. Humayun was not deterred. He attacked with vigour and without any concern for the safety of his hostage son. The infant Akbar was, however, rescued unharmed. Kamran was captured and blinded.

The governorship of Kabul was a prestigious assignment, particularly because the rich Indus could swing between Kabul and Delhi (when it was not itself independent). When the Mughals were securely established in Delhi, the heirs-presumptive of the dynasty were always keen to establish their merit in Afghan campaigns even when Afghanistan was slipping out of Delhi's hands. When Prince Aurangzeb failed to recover Kandahar from the Persians in two consecutive campaigns (in AD 1649 and 1652), his bother Dara Shikoh volunteered to win the city in an effort to outdo Aurangzeb. Dara's unsuccessful bid in 1653 was the last Mughal attempt to recover that city and

retain it as a part of their Indian empire.

III. INDUS REBELLIONS IN MUGHAL TIMES

The number and frequency of Indus-based rebellions against the Delhi government indicate the centrifugal impulse of the region towards autonomy and independence. Despite the political anarchy of the eighteenth century, the Indus and its tributaries had supported vast alluvial tracts of cultivable area, yielding a handsome crop surplus. Their banks thus provided a natural haven and base for rebellions. Indus was the obvious launching-pad for sustainable revolts. It was also host to all the rebels, both from the north and the south.

In which direction could Bairam Khan, for instance, repair to raise the standard of revolt? A rebellion by Bairam Khan was not an insignificant event. It shook the empire. Bairam Khan, after all, had been the young emperor's regent and had crowned the teenage Akbar, aged only thirteen years, in Gurdaspur. For his teenager king, he had then won Ajmer, Gwalior and the Punjab. But being of the Shia persuasion, Bairam fell from grace in 1558, when the Sunni group gained influence in Akbar's court. There was an underplay of dogmatic polemics even in the court of the otherwise liberal Akbar. Naturally, Bairam hurried to Indus, the sanctuary of all rebels. He was, however, defeated by the superior might of his pupil and erstwhile ward, the emperor. Out of

apparent compassion for his mentor, Akbar spared his life, permitting him to proceed as an exile towards Mecca. En route, Bairam fell to an assassin's blow in Gujarat. Had it been willed by Akbar? Did Akbar have foreknowledge of the conspiracy? Or was it only the blow of a fundamentalist zealot? These remain some of history's unanswered questions.

In AD 1606, Jahangir's eldest son raised the banner of revolt in the Punjab. This time too, the superior central army was victorious and the rebel's lot was the severest and most gory public retribution. Dara Shikoh, Shahjahan's son, also launched his campaign against the superior might of his brother, Aurangzeb, from his base in Indus.

Rebellions among generals and administrators already stationed in the Indus region, and of other notables were frequent. These included those of the governor of Lahore in the time of Saleem Shah Suri (1545); of the Niazis (1548);⁴ of Shah Abdul Ma'ali, Akbar's viceroy in the Punjab and the governor of Lahore (1556); the Gakkhar rebellion (1562); the frequent revolts of the Roshnais,⁵ and of the Yusufzais in the upper Indus region during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir; the revolt of the Khattak tribesmen under Khushal Khan;⁶ the resistance put up by the Punjab peasantry led by Abdullah, the chieftain of the Bhatti clan in the time of Akbar; and the almost continuous Sikh insurrection following upon the death by torture of the fourth Guru, Arjan. And

the story of Sikhism is replete with instances of the courage, and of the tragedy, that account for much of what is Indus history.

IV. A TENDENCY TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

At its inception, Sikhism was a syncretic movement of the lower classes and the peasantry.⁷ It was the anti-feudal struggle of the Punjabi peasantry and urban folk against the domination of the Great Mughals and the Durrani Shahs, and against the Muslim and Hindu land magnates who supported them.⁸ It sought to reject the conflict within the ruling elite and to bring harmony between the competing religious dogmas prevalent in Indus. Emperor Akbar had himself attempted to devise and enforce a sort of middle path between the two dominant religions and called it *Din-e-Ilahi*; but a strong fundamentalist Muslim reaction had deprived the experiment of all chances of success. Although the teachings of Guru Nanak (AD 1469-1539)⁹ will be discussed in a later chapter as well, it must be said here that since he did not seek to expound his doctrines from within the pale of either of the major religions and sought to propagate a new creed altogether, he was more successful. Nanak, too, was moved by the apparent contention between the two major religions. He felt that this competition was the cause of most of the anarchy and discontent prevailing during those times.

During the time of the first three Gurus, Sikhism obtained a following only among traders, craftsmen and peasants. Initially, it had no recognizable and functioning order or establishment. During the time of Arjan, the fourth Guru, it won the support of some feudal families and land was obtained to build a temple near Amritsar. Arjan organized the Sikh establishment on more permanent lines by instituting regular collections from income. Instead of voluntary contributions, a fixed tax was levied on each household.

Akbar had been favourably disposed towards the Sikhs.¹⁰ But when, in Jahangir's reign, his eldest son Khusrau fled to the Punjab to lead a revolt and the Sikhs supported him, Jahangir ordered the execution of Arjan. From then onwards, the Sikhs began to actively oppose the Mughals.

The Sikhs were, however, not alone in their resistance to the great Mughals. There were other heroes too. Abdullah was one. No account of Indus (Pakistan) of this period would be complete without a mention of this brave scion of the Rachna Doab.

V. DULLA FORCES A MAGNA CARTA

The various Indus revolts compelled Delhi's rulers to frequently hold their imperial courts in Lahore. The region's rebellious disposition demanded

imperial presence. Akbar was a regular visitor to Lahore. And Abdullah was to preoccupy him here for a long stretch of time.

Returning from Kashmir in 1589, Akbar remained in Lahore for an uninterrupted period of nine years. Guides conducting tourists through the Lahore Fort do not fail to mention that during this period Akbar expanded the palace inside the fort. Historical accounts and textbooks also recount Akbar's long sojourn in Lahore. Very few, however, state that he had to spend these long years in Lahore to ensure the safety of the northern borders and to personally supervise the campaign to quell the insurgency of the Punjabi peasantry.

The Indus and Indian peasant was living on the edge of survival. The ruling princes and feudatories were given to an obscenely wasteful and extravagant lifestyle. This could only be maintained by arbitrary and ever-increasing tax expropriations, necessitated by expensive military campaigns and a lavish court life, often depriving the peasant of even his farm implements and animals. The peasants were at times obliged to work for the state without payment. Thus, when a fortress or a city were to be constructed, the emperor would simply give orders for all nearby villages to take part in the construction work. This labour was referred to as *begaar*. Pushed to the wall, Indian peasantry was on the threshold of revolt. It only needed leaders. It found one

in the Punjab.

Abdullah of Pindi Bhattian, chief of the Bhattis, is popularly remembered as 'Dulla' Bhatti.¹¹ Dulla, who robbed the rich to feed the poor, led a spirited band of Hindu and Muslim peasants. They refused to pay taxes and land revenue. Some feudatories also joined him when Akbar attempted to do away with the *jagir* system and tried to introduce salaries in cash instead. Together, they resisted several high-powered Mughal expeditions seeking to capture Pindi Bhattian. According to the ballad celebrating Dulla's brave resistance, Bhatti women, particularly his mother, Ladhi, displayed amazing resolve, courage, and fortitude, and became prototypes of the brave Indus mother. A modern Punjabi poet, Saleem Jahangir, has portrayed Ladhi thus:¹²

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

AJ VI MAIRAY DOHWAIN PASAY

SAU PUTRAAN DAY SHOOKAN MAARDAY DHANAY

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

JISS NAY KADI WEE DULLEH, JABROO, MIRZAY

JAT TOAN

GHHATT KADAY NAHIN JAMYA.

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

JISS NAY SADA HEE SOORMAY PUTTAR LARRHIAN WANGON

BANA SHINGAR KAY, HATHEEN JANG NOO TTORAY,

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

JISS DAY PUTTAR SOOLIAN UTTAY PEENGHAN PAAYIAN

TAY AAP MAY TARREE MAAREE

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

NAAL ZALMAN, NAWEEEN LAAM THE HOOKA-EE MAIRA.

MAIN LADDHI AAN!

I am ladhi,

Even today on both my sides

Are a hundred vigorous and brave sons;

I am ladhi

Whose sons are Dulla, Jabroo, Mirza Jat,

As I have never begotten any less than them;

I am Ladhi

Who has always dressed her valiant sons as bridegrooms

And sent them to battle;

I am Ladhi

Whose sons have swung on the gallows

While I have cheered and clapped;

I am Ladhi,

I give the battle-call for another battle against the oppressors;
I am Ladhi.

Dulla finally fell before a force far beyond his strength to resist. He was taken prisoner and died a death befitting the most respected folk hero of the Punjab.

Dulla's resistance had an amazing invigorating influence upon poetic expression in the Punjab. His contemporary and friend, Shah Hussain, the sufi poet of Lahore,¹³ broke into intense verse, protesting the persecution of the common folk and decrying the brutality of the rulers. Sixteenth and seventeenth century folk poets composed the ballad of Dulla Bhatti sung to this day by village bards throughout the Punjab. The ballad has Dulla, even as the Mughals close in, defiantly pronouncing:

WAL WAL MAARAN MUGHLAN DIYAN DHAANIAN
DEVAN POOR DAY POOR UTHALL.
MAIN BADAL BANA DYAN DHOOR DAY
TAY KOTEEN UMAR THAR THALL.
MAIN MAAR DYAN BAGGAY SHER NOON
OHDI HETH WICHAWNA KHAL.
MAIN CHARH KAY GHORRAL PHAIR LAAN
MERI JAG TAY RAH JAOO GALL.

KOAN KAMEENA BADSHAH

AAWAY DULLAY JAWAN TAY CHALL.

I lower the fortresses of the Mughals,
I repulse wave after wave of the Mughal troops;
I can raise the clouds of dust
And terrorize Amarkot,¹⁴
I will kill the white lion,¹⁵
And put his skin under my feet,
I will ride my horse to the enemy lines,
And earn lasting fame.
What mean king
Can dare attack Dulla the warrior?¹⁶

While Abdullah's resistance may not have improved the lot of the peasantry, it did result in more autonomy and a greater security of land tenure for the local feudal lord. With the peasantry in revolt, the landowners had to be won over to the throne and made more secure and satisfied. Had disaffection also infected them, the empire would have collapsed. Weakened by the fierce rebellion, it had to make compromises.

Lands of several categories of zamindars were officially designated as

hereditary. This was a departure from the several centuries old custom dating from the time of the Mauryas and imposed firmly by the Gupta kings, that decreed that all land belonged to the king. After the death of each landowner, it reverted to the king or emperor. Thereafter, it was the king's prerogative to give it to whomsoever he selected for the favour. On innumerable occasions, the heirs of the late landowner did not inherit his estate and properties. Although the old rule continued to apply in many cases, what Abdullah achieved for his compatriots was perhaps a lesser version of the Magna Carta, more than three centuries after the one in England,¹⁷ by eroding substantially the king's prerogative.

The resistance of the Punjab peasantry and the brutal manner in which the imperial army crushed it left another lasting imprint upon the people of the region. They learnt to hate and despise the rulers of Delhi. The Mughals, who also claimed descent from Chughtai Turks, began to be derisively called *chughattay* in the Indus region. This name entered Punjabi literature and poetry to refer to all robber barons and cruel administrators.

The multiplicity of the coins struck at Lahore by Akbar, and later by his son Jahangir, establishes the prosperity of the region, while Abdullah's rebellion proves the poverty of its peasantry. It was an area which had stores of bullion and an abundance of crops. The rich alluvial and riverine tracts were obviously

able to support the population of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. Little wonder, therefore, that the kings to the north continued to stake their own claims to the entire Indus. These claims became even more manifest and aggressive on the collapse of the central authority after the death of Aurangzeb in AD 1707.

1. But, as later events would testify, the Yusufzais would not be long beholden to the Mughal line even by this sacred matrimonial bond. Subsequently, the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjehan would be sapped by their revolts.
2. Volume II, 387-91, translated and reproduced by Hussain Khan in *Sher Shah Suri* (1987) 164.
3. Saleem Akhtar, *Sind Under the Mughals* (1990) 42. See also M. H. Siddiqi, 'Humayun in Sind: An Analysis of the Paradox of Moghul Sovereignty', in *Sind Through the Centuries*, 159-60.
4. See Mujeeb, 110.

5. The followers of Pir Roshan of Tirah. See Antonova, 241-3; and Gankovsky, 139.
6. Antonova, 233, 242.
7. See also chapter 15, section III.
8. Gankovsky, 112.
9. See also chapter 15 below.
10. See Dalbir Singh Dhillon, *Sikhism: Origin and Development* (1988) 96 ff. Akbar had, in many ways, been a modernist liberal, although he generated intense controversy among the orthodoxy. Almost four centuries before the Child Marriages Restraint Act (1929), Akbar prohibited marriages of boys before the age of sixteen, and of girls before they were fourteen. 'No one was to marry more than one wife, except in the case of barrenness ... If widows like to remarry, they should not be prevented.' Mujeeb, 263.
11. For a literary rendition of the story of Abdullah see Najam Hussain Syed,

Takht L'hore. The late Major Ishaq Khan also wrote a play on Abdullah called *Quqnus* (Phoenix), with the powerful and moving role of his mother, Ladhi. Copies of this play do not, however, seem to be available in print.

12. Saleem Jahangir, *Aj Di Vaar* (1989) 72-4. The poet died in 1988 in Lahore.
13. See also chapter 15 below.
14. The birthplace of the emperor Akbar.
15. Refers to the fairer complexion of the Mughals.
16. Translation by Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature* (1992) 21-2. The decisive and fearless role that women played before and after each battle indicates the equality of status and the liberty of function enjoyed by them in traditional Indus society.
17. See chapter 18, section I below.

Resistance, Opportunism and Consumerism

I. INDUS DETERS BUT INDIA BECKONS

It is true that in some uncertain interregnums, the fortunes of Indus fluctuated between Central Asia and India, and the pendulum swung between Kabul and Delhi. Such fluctuations, however, were never without resistance on the part of Indus states and peoples. They stoically but actively resisted the pull of both sides. It is because of this resistance that the periods of independence of the Indus were always much longer than the periods of annexation by the one side or the other.

The cosmic battles of the Vedas were fought by Indus men heroically resisting, with a combination of courage and guile, the invasion by the unending waves of the Aryans. It was therefore only natural that Ashok's exiled grandfather, Chandragupta, picked up here those vital lessons of guerrilla warfare and those invaluable martial traditions that were to win him an empire. It was in this region that Porus finally put an end to Alexander's ambitions and further advance. As none other than Taimur blazed a trail of fire, pestilence and

death, all the way to Delhi and back, it was an Indus chieftain, Sheikha Gakkhar who displayed the audacity to attempt to block, both ways, the march of that 'Scourge of the Earth'. The Delhi sultan, Muhammad Tughlaq, spent the last four years of his life in a luckless and frustrating campaign in Sindh, sometimes pursuing his slave-general, Taghi, who had betrayed him. Contrary to popular belief, Babar himself made three unsuccessful attempts to cross Indus to Delhi, and succeeded only in his fourth attempt. It was again a lion-hearted and vigorous young Abdullah who managed to pin down the emperor and all his Mughal might for almost a decade in the Punjab. A hundred years after Abdullah, Khushal Khan, a soldier and a poet, set up an independent state in the Khattak territory on the banks of the Indus and resisted Mughal might with full vigour and valour.

But no century saw more blood and blazing wheat-fields in Indus than the eighteenth. The death of Aurangzeb and the constant fratricidal intrigues and wars amongst his successors sapped the empire of all its energy. Only Indus with its hardy tribesmen and peasants and its brave warriors stood in the way of expeditionaries peering through the narrow mountain passes to its north-west. Indus deterred them even as India beckoned.

II. BANDA BAIRAGI'S LAND REFORMS

One coincidental fact may be noticed in passing. The founding of the Mughal Empire by Babar and of the Sikh religion by Guru Nanak had been contemporaneous. The two had even met and discoursed with each other. The passing away of the last important emperor of Babar's line and the death of the ninth and last guru of Nanak's order, were also contemporaneous. The death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and of Guru Gobind in 1708 created two enormous voids at the advent of the eighteenth century. These voids were to gravely affect the Indus region.

Aurangzeb's throne was occupied by Prince Bahadur Shah, the governor of Kabul, who marched to Lahore where he was crowned. Then he took Delhi. But a small stone could not fill up the cosmic breach in the Mughal edifice caused by Aurangzeb's death. The Sikhs were luckier in the succession of leadership: this passed to the vigorous Banda Bairagi.

The Sikhs had had a chequered relationship with the empire. Initially patronized, they fell foul of its might in the reign of Jahangir and were then persecuted relentlessly by Mughal governors for a hundred years. Guru Gobind's two sons are said to have been bricked inside a wall by the governor of Sirhind a few years before his death. On his deathbed, the guru had named Banda as his successor.¹ In contrast to the Mughal dynasty's predicament, Sikhism's loss was minimized by Banda's initiative and energy.

A bandit for the Muslims, a hero for the Sikhs, Banda held sway in the upper Indus region for eight years. His exploits were daring, his speed unmatched, his retribution upon Muslim populations cruel, his escapes dramatic, and his life remained on the edge until his final arrest and public execution in Delhi in 1716.

In the short span of a few eventful years, Banda Bairagi brought about a substantive transformation in landholdings. Large estates belonging to Muslims on either side of the Sutlej were confiscated and distributed among Sikh and Hindu peasants. This attracted a greater following for the new creed, even as it also invited more reprisals from Delhi. Farrukh Siyar, the king who had decreed Banda's death, continued to support desperate and expensive campaigns against the Sikhs until the king was himself captured, deposed and blinded in 1719.

III. RESISTANCE AT EVERY STEP

The next six months saw the accession and deposition of three young emperors. One of these was a raw prince who was hurriedly taken out of the state prison at Salemgarh, adjacent to the palace, and placed on the throne. He had no time even to bathe and clean himself. A string of pearls was merely thrown over the dirty robe of the prince as he was proclaimed emperor. Then,

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in September of the same year (1719), Muhammad Shah rose to be the king. His reign was long though precarious, lasting till 1749, but his predilection for debauchery and lethargy earned him the odium of the title 'Rangeela.'²

It was during his reign that a series of Persian and Afghan incursions afflicted Indus and the Gangetic valley. In 1739, Nadir Shah, the Persian king, cut a gory route to Delhi through the Frontier Province and the Punjab.

Nasir Khan, the governor of Peshawar, blocked the Khyber Pass even though he had received no support from the degenerate Mughal court at Delhi. The Persians circuted the Peshawar army by employing an old route and fell suddenly upon the defenders.³ A fierce battle ended in victory for the invader and a relatively easy passage to the banks of the river Indus. The Persian army crossed the Indus and camped at Attock in the Punjab.

The resistance that the Persian army met in the Punjab is well documented in Punjabi poetry. Najabat, the eighteenth century contemporary of Nadir Shah, wrote an entire ballad narrating the step-by-step march of the invader and of the consistent resistance that he faced. One episode recounts his march in the doab⁴ between the rivers Indus and Jhelum:

ATTOCK TOUN CHARRHYA NADIR SHAH, RUNN BHERIE KUTTAY

TAY WHEY PYAY PUNJAB PASTAY, SAY MAARAY MOTHAY
KHATTAR, GHEBAY TAY GHAKKHAR PAY BHAINEE LUTTAY
KOH PUNJAH JURUTNEY LARR AAHUN CHUTTHAY
DAYRAY UTAY JHELUMAY AAN LUTTAR CHUTTHAY

Nadir Shah started from Attock, the military drums were beaten,
The troops cantered across the Punjab, killing and plundering
hundreds,

The Khattars, Ghebas, and Gakkhars⁵ who resisted were routed,
The wings of the army spread out to a width of fifty kos,
They encamped at Jhelum and flashed their canon.⁶

As the Persian king crosses the river Jhelum and enters upon the
Gondal-Rajput Bar, Najabat recalls:

DOBAREIN RAH NEE GONDLAN LAJPUTAN AAHAY
TAY DILLU TAY SAIDU WADDHIAN ASMAANEEN SA-AY
OHNA HIMMAT KEETEE SOORMIAN CHIK SEON LANGHA-AY

On either side of the route were Gondal Rajputs,⁷
Dilloo⁸ and Saidoo⁹ had risen to the sky,
They fought bravely with their piercing lances.¹⁰

As Nadir Shah went past Gujrat and came to the river Chenab, there were other battles to be fought, other impediments to be overcome. Mirza Qalandar was waiting on the banks of the river with his inadequate but brave band of soldiers.

MIRZAY QALANDAR BEG DA WICH KACHEE DAY THANA
TAY MIRZA KAHAY SIPAH NOON IK SUKHAN SIYANA
YARO EHA JO SIFT ASEEL DI, PIRR CHADD NO JANA
ASAN SOHNIAN NAL GAWAHIYAN, WICH SHAK NA AANA
SINJ JURRAY TAY BAKHTAR PAIHDIAN, HATTH PAKAR KAMANA
TAY CHUTTAN TEER MEEHN ANAN, WANG SARR GHATI BANA
OATHAY CHUTTAN BANDOOQAN, KARR KARR KAHWAT
URRANAN
JEWAN AGG LAGI SI NARR NOON, TOUN BHUJAN DHANA.

Mirza Qalandar Beg had his headquarters along the riverbed,

And the Mirza gave sound advice to his soldiers:

'Friends, the test of good birth is that one should not turn back
from the battlefield,

We have heard an authority that cannot be doubted.'

They put on their soldiers' accoutrements, and took their bows in hand;

The arrows came down like rain, and caused burning wounds.

The muskets went off crack, crack, where could man take shelter?

Men were burnt like grain being singed in fire of forest reeds.¹¹

When Mirza sought reinforcements from Lahore, he was not unconscious of the historical circumstance that the sons of Indus had always been the defence line of the entire subcontinent:

AISAY MULK PUNJAB WICH CHARH HUKAM CHALA-AY

TAY AITHOON BHAJJAN KAND DAY, JAG LAANAT PAA-AY

PAR SIR DAINA MANZPPR AY, JAY HIND NA JAA-AY

I have ruled the state of the Punjab.

If I turn turn my back and flee, the world will condemn me.

I would rather lay down my life and save India.¹²

The passages illustrate the resistance put up by the Khattars, Ghebas, Gakkhars, Gondal Jats and Rajputs. Despite another spirited resistance near the river Ravi by the general Khoja Yaqub, the Persian treated Lahore as his own rightful fief. The Perso-Afghan 'claim' to Indus seemed so 'natural' to the rulers of Kabul that the Persian invader patronizingly spared Lahore from pillage by his army. He did, however, extract two million rupees and a number of elephants. But his claim to the city was not to be waived by his acceptance

of the sum. Nor did it entirely restrain his Kizilbash troops from exercising their pre-emptive right to indulge in pillage and orgy in the villages and suburbs, such as Mahmud Booti and Mughalpura, that bordered Lahore. In more than a symbolic declaration of his claim, Nadir Shah minted gold coins at Lahore.¹³ And then he marched on to Delhi.

IV. DELHI'S WOES

The king of Delhi, Muhammad Shah (Rangeela) was convinced that Indus would compel the invader to retrace his steps. He had been hearing of the resistance and had reason to believe that the Persian had not obtained easy passage. As it was, Nadir overcame Indus resistance and closed in on Delhi. Rangeela was incredulous of reports that Nadir's forces were at his doorstep. He disdainfully turned informers away with the famous words:

HANOOZ BIRAU, HANOOZ DILLI DOOR AST

Go away for now, Delhi is yet far away (from the invader).

Rangeela surrendered without a fight. This procured for Delhi an initial moratorium from pillage and plunder. But a rumour that the Persian invader had died emboldened some residents of the unfortunate city to attack and kill a number of Persian soldiers. Nadir Shah was outraged. He went into

Shahjahan's mosque and unsheathed his sword. This was a signal to his troops. By the time he put it back into its sheath many hours later, there had been a veritable massacre. Twenty thousand had been put to the sword. Delhi had also been plundered. The Peacock Throne and the Kohinoor diamond were among the spoils.¹⁴

As Nadir Shah pillaged Delhi in 1739, a horrified and wide-eyed sixteen year old had watched the cruel and bloody scenes from behind the shadows. Some years later he would leave Delhi forever and settle further east in Lucknow. But the events that he had witnessed in Delhi would be reflected in his melancholy poetry to make Mir Taqi Mir one of the foremost poets of the Urdu language. Responding to a question about Delhi, he had broken down and recited:

KYA BOOD-O-BAASH POOCHO HO PURAB KAY SAKINO
HAM KO GHARIB JAN KAY, HANS HANS PUKAR KAY
DILL JO AIK SHEHR THA AALAM MAIN INTIKHAB
REHTAY THAY MONTAKHIB HEE JAHAN ROOZGAR KAY
USS KO FALAK NAY LOOT KAR VEERAN KAR DYA
HUM REHNE WAALAY HAIN USSI UJRAY DYAR KAY.

Why do you ask me about my past and home, O citizens of the east?
You consider us poor and laugh at us:

Delhi was a metropolis without parallel in the world,
The most select people and the elite used to live there.
But Delhi was looted and made desolate.
I belong to that very ruined city.

On his return, Nadir Shah detoured via Sindh, celebrating Nauroz (the Persian New Year) at Larkana. He formally annexed Sindh and all the lands of north-west Indus, maintaining the 'suzerain's claim' over the rest of the Indus region. The Afridis had the temerity to once again close the Khyber to Nadir Shah. The king was then led through the Tirah area by a friendly Orakzai sardar, across the mountain ranges back to Persia.

V. ANOTHER FEUDAL STATE

Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747. His able and ambitious young commander, Ahmed Shah of the Abdali tribe, proclaimed himself sovereign of Afghanistan with authority over Indus. He assumed the title of *Durr-e-Durran* (the Jewel of Jewels) and thus gave himself and the Abdali tribe the name Durrani.

Abdali's rise and his ability to undertake foreign campaigns was facilitated by the growth of feudal relations in some important Pashtun areas. He was,

thus, to forge the first feudal state of the Pashtuns.

The areas inhabited by the Pashtun tribes were vast and largely barren, or, at best, shrubland with only some isolated pasturelands in the mountains. The tribes had remained overwhelmingly pastoral and tribal in their economic and social organization. The Pashtun areas were insulated and inaccessible to the outside world, often to each other as well. The Pashtuns had been toughened by providence and circumstance. Confined to tribal areas, they had also become insular, rugged and clannish. Their pride was in their adherence to the tribal code. Reduced by fortune to mere pastoralism, despite a growing population, some Pashtun tribes were inducted as mercenaries in Persian and Central Asian armies as these proceeded towards Indus and India.

But two extensive tracts of the lands inhabited by the Pashtuns were fertile and arable. In these areas, agriculture was able to supplant pastoralism and the family was replacing the tribe.¹⁵ In the north-west there was the Peshawar valley and its adjoining areas. In the south-east was Kandahar. The agricultural surplus of the former was supplemented by the incomes yielded by the Khyber trade route into the northern regions of Indus and India. The latter was en route the caravan tracks via the Gomal and the Bolan Passes from Iran to the southern reaches of the Indus.

Agrarian and trade surpluses changed the lifestyles of the Pashtuns. From the time of the early Mughals, the more powerful Khans and Maliks had begun to collect taxes and command their own military retainers.¹⁶ Feudalization of these areas had thus started in those times. A stable feudal structure, based on prolific agriculture and capable of overpowering the pastoral and lean tracts, developed in the areas around Kandahar. Other feudal states of a smaller size developed in Akora and Teri, mainly on the lands inhabited by the Khattak tribe.

Since no such transformation comes about without resistance, this process of feudalization also met with opposition. In its initial stages, the sixteenth century Roshnai movement led by Bayazid Ansari was such a movement. It rose against the compact between the Mughal overlords and the Pashtun feudals. But the process of feudalization of relations of production was historically irreversible. By the time of the Persian king Nadir Shah's invasion of Indus and India, it had matured and was yielding rich profits to the feudals of Kandahar. It was an area developing on the basis of agrarian wealth and the relatively more progressive relations of production. Therefore, when Abdali rose to wrest power in Kandahar, he could entertain imperial visions. It did not take him long to begin his advance towards Peshawar, Indus and India.

Abdali was to invade Indus several times. Each time he was challenged. But

by then the Indus elite was also beginning to add a new trait to its character.

VI. ADEPT, WORLDLY-WISE GOVERNORS

The mid-eighteenth century saw the rise and fall of several adept, worldly-wise governors of Lahore and Multan. By their valour restrained by a discerning opportunism, they would become the prototypes for several succeeding generations of fleet-footed administrators. Zakria Khan, Lakhpat Rai, Mir Manu, his widow Murad Begum and Adina Beg, each had the occasion to be invested into their high offices by Delhi, the courage to confront and obstruct the path of the superior Afghan force coming from Kabul and the cool sense to switch loyalties upon defeat, retaining the office by the gift of the invader.

Mir Manu (Moinul Mulk), for instance, blocked Abdali's first march to Delhi in 1747, forcing him to retreat to Kabul.¹⁷ He stalled the Afghan's second march into the Indus region and saved Lahore, although Sialkot, Emnabad and Pasrur were ceded to the invader.¹⁸

Manu's faculties of head and heart were to be tested in the third invasion, in 1752, during the battle for Lahore which was fought after a prolonged siege in the village Mahmud Booti, outside the city. After a fierce battle, Manu finally admitted defeat and rendered allegiance to Abdali. Upon the Abdali

summoning him, he went without guards and companions. Asked the proverbial question about how he ought to be treated by the victor, Manu is reported to have said: 'If you are a shopkeeper, sell me [for ransom]. If you are a butcher, kill me. But if you are a *badshah* [king], then grant me your grace and pardon.' Manu won back the governorship.

In 1756, Mir Manu fell from his horse and died. This brought to his widow, Murad Begum, the viceroyalty of Lahore. By artful tightrope-walking the Begum achieved the impossible. She won the patronage and recognition of *both the Delhi and Kabul sovereigns simultaneously*.¹⁹ This dextrous diplomacy could not last for long. She fell to a clever stratagem executed by Ghaziuddin, the Amirul Umarah of the Mughal king. Pretending to come to Lahore on the pretext of seeking the hand of the Begum's daughter, the clever wazir took the would-be mother-in-law prisoner, and appointed the Mughal governor of Jullundur, Adina Beg, in her place.

From her captivity, Murad Begum warned Adina Beg of the wrath of the Abdali. She was right: Abdali was infuriated. He rushed to Lahore and Adina Beg fled. Abdali moved on to Delhi. Following the tradition of his nephew and predecessor king, Muhammad Shah ('Rangeela'), Delhi's monarch, Azuddin Alamgir II came out of the town to meet the invader. Not in battle, but to welcome him with open arms. The Abdali, however, was not placated. He

vindicated Murad Begum's prediction by allowing his men a free hand to plunder the fallen town for two months. Mathura was also sacked. Before returning to Kandahar, the Afghan restored Alamgir II to Delhi's throne, but annexed Punjab and Sindh. He appointed the Afghan prince Taimur Shah to govern these regions.

In 1758, the confederate forces of the Marathas took Lahore. The Marathas were strong. They were also then the most vigorous force in the entire subcontinent and at the peak of their power. Abdali could not forgive such a transgression. By taking Lahore they seemed to have overstepped the 'historical limits' of India. That they had earlier taken Delhi was not of as great a consequence to the Afghan king as was their taking of Lahore. As far as Abdali was concerned, they had now overstepped their own sphere and transgressed upon his. From India they had trespassed upon Indus. He could not condone this trespass, no matter how strong and awe-inspiring the Maratha power might be. He was also motivated by an invitation from the Muslim scholar and religious leader, Shah Waliullah of Delhi, to invade India.²⁰ In 1761 Abdali fell upon India.

The Marathas, too, had decided upon decisive action. They gathered all their strength. The troops of the Maratha confederacy were led by the Peshwa's son, Vishwasrao. Their commander was none other than Vishwas's famous

cousin, Sadashivrao Bhau more popularly known as Bhaosahib. He was assisted by the capable Malhar Rao. The vigorous Raja Suraj Mal, the Jat ruler of Bharatpur, duly flanked by his renowned artillery commander, Ibrahim Khan Gardee, also pitched in his troops and swift cavalry on the side of the Marathas.

Gardee's presence among the ranks of what the Muslims would call the 'infidels' was not unique. It happened quite often that military commanders fought across the communal divide.²¹ Hindu Rajputs had stood by Aurangzeb, even in his frenzied and ill-advised battles, though most of these were directed against his own father, his brothers and the Shia states of the Deccan, all of which were, of course, Muslims. Some have interpreted this inter-communal solidarity as 'nationalism'. Others have used it as a basis to establish that there did not exist two different nations in the subcontinent. In all probability, such instances were motivated by plain and simple mercenary impulses of the commander, Hindu or Muslim. This was a frequent occurrence in Indus and India, and particularly in the anarchic conditions of the eighteenth century.²²

In this case, the entire Maratha confederacy could not prevail. The smaller but spirited Afghan army, fighting with a self-righteous vigour seeking the recovery of their inalienable 'rights' to the Indus territory, routed the Marathas in the field of Panipat.

Abdali's invasions continued as he pillaged the Indus region nine times. In each successive invasion, he met increased resistance from the Sikhs and the Punjabi peasants, Hindu and Muslim. His son Taimur Shah and grandson Shah Zaman repeatedly tried to emulate his military feats. But, like Ahmed Shah, neither was able to consolidate his administrative hold upon the region. Sikh legions ensured that Indus, even when it was engulfed in turbulence and uncertainty, remained independent. There came a time during the later invasions when Afghan sovereignty in the Indus region was confined only to the actual camping ground occupied by Afghan troops.

In the lower Indus valley in the meantime the Talpur chiefs²³ had broken away from Delhi, tacitly recognizing the King of Kabul as their suzerain. The revenues of Hyderabad and Shikarpur under Mirs Fateh Ali and Sohrab Ali amounted to as much as Rs 57 lakh. Amarkot was under the Raja of Jodhpur and Karachi under Nasir Khan Baloch of Kalat. It yielded a fairly rich revenue of Rs 6.16 lakh.

VII. THE ROOTS OF CONSUMERISM

Each Persian and Afghan campaign was vigorous but of short duration. The invaders were content with collecting revenue and booty, and then returning to their homelands across the mountains. What perspective the Indus person had

of such campaigns of Central Asian expeditonaries is best described in the words of F. S. Aijazuddin, commenting upon the incursions of Taimur and Babar (more than a century apart and several centuries before Abdali): 'In both incidents, the Mongols that Lahore had seen appeared no better than a destructive rapacious scourge, stripping every place they entered until there was nothing left to flay when they discarded it, denuded of all vestiges of wealth, property or civic order.'²⁴ Taimur, Babar, Nadir Shah and Abdali thus left several lasting imprints upon the Indus psyche.

The belief in the futility of savings and in the advantages of instant consumption seems a permanent cultural imprint and one of the dominant traits of the Indus region. But the trait of consumption and consumerism became indelible in the days when an endless series of military campaigns and expeditions left neither crops nor seed nor draft or farm animals. Pillaging armies plundered and took everything from the local population forcibly for their own food and provisions. What was then the purpose of saving at all? The attitude is reflected in the idiomatic refrain:

KHAADA PEETA LAA-AY DAA

TAY BAQI AHMED SHAH-AY DAA

Only that which you eat [or consume] is yours;

The rest will be appropriated by Ahmed Shah.

Unlike the inhabitants of most other parts of the world, Indus people, as a race, to this day are willing to spend rather than save. And they do so ostentatiously, because it is not considered a flaw, but a virtue of sorts. They will *borrow to overspend* at marriages and betrothals. After all, 'whatever you spend is yours, as Ahmed Shah will take all that you have saved'.

Consumerism and ostentation are not merely contemporary modern phenomena. They are the legacy of the anarchy of several centuries.²⁵ Contrast the simplicity of the attire and lifestyles of the majority of the Indian elite and political leadership.

Another lasting impact has been the minimization of expectations of the people of their administrators. There were no permanent administrators, just an endless stream of marauders. Nobody in the period of anarchy ruled as the guardian of the people, responsible for their welfare. *Darbari*, originally used for a minister commanding respect and honour, became a term of derision for any low and parasitic character, given to sycophancy. The main object of the government was to collect revenue and to expropriate. Citizens had to be coerced into submission and then fleeced. This raised the threshold of tolerance that the Indus elite displayed towards oppressive and cruel rulers.

Perhaps one of the primary reasons for the break-up of Pakistan in just the third decade of its existence was this conditioning to brutality of the elite and intellectuals of West Pakistan (Indus, now Pakistan). The Bengalis did not have the same tolerance threshold as Indus. And so they separated.

A third abiding trait manifested by the ruling classes during this period was the ease with which governors could switch loyalties to retain their titles. Since many of them had fought with valour before submission, they were also genuinely admired for their peerless courage. The *volte face* was thus disregarded without any social stigma attaching to it. The survival instinct and the success ethic, even in the midst of defeat and anarchy, were all-important. A strong, boisterous leader would be held in awe, even if he displayed inconstant loyalties. To remain in power was essential and assured continued public esteem, regardless of which side you had fought for. Those who take such umbrage at the events and shifts in loyalties in present times might do well to reflect upon this aspect of our history. Of course, in those uncertain times, the penalty for steadfastness was death, often of the most brutal and painful variety. The opportunists of today have much less at stake, but follow a cultural trait with the benefit of history and the facility of an easy conscience.

As Kabul and Delhi alternately held sway upon Indus, with governors carrying out orders of the one or the other, another imprint upon the Indus

thought-process became the attribution to alien hands (now foreign hands) of everything that happened. The actual seat of governance was really outside Indus, and even as Indus rejected the one, the other would take advantage of the conflict and assume government. In recent times, only under Ranjeet Singh, the Mirs of Sindh and the Mir of Kalat did Indus have its own indigenous rulers. And that, too, not for long. An imperial power was already poised to take advantage of all the inherent fissures within the Indus body-politic, as it had already done in the case of India.

Finally there was also the reaction to all this opportunism, conflict, discord and anarchy. This took the shape of the responses of sensitive men with a vision of their own. These were the responses of leaders and thinkers sick of the anarchy and chaos. The Bhakti saints tried to forge one response; Nanak endeavoured another. The Sufi saints of the Indus region provided a third option.

1. Wolpert, *New History*, 169.

2. One given to a colourful, wasteful, and an entirely imprudent way of life.

3. See S. M. Latif, *History of the Punjab: From the Remotest Antiquity to the Present Time*, 200.
4. Literally, the land between two streams or rivers.
5. These are names of three important tribes of the *doab* between the Indus and the Jhelum rivers.
6. Translation by Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, 29.
7. Nadir Shah was obviously passing through the Gondal Bar, or the Gondal scrubland located in the *doab* between the Jhelum and Chenab rivers, largely inhabited by the hardy Gondals, a prominent Jat tribe of the Punjab.
8. Short for Dilawar.
9. Refers to a defender called Said.
10. Translation by Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, 29.

11. Ibid., 30-1.

12. Ibid., 33.

13. Latif, 202.

14. See Wolpert, *New History*, 173. V. D. Mahajan, *India Since 1526* (1985) 307. Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (2nd ed. 1984) 88.

15. Although strong undercurrents of both pastoralism and the tribe were retained in the overall ethos of Pashtun society.

16. See Gankovsky, 137-8.

17. See Muhammad Baqir, *Lahore, Past and Present* (1984) 175-6, where the author describes how the Durrani were completely repulsed, forcing a retreat upon them even after the Mughal commander, Mir Manu's father, had died of a cannon shot.

18. Returning from this campaign along the southern route, Abdali had settled his Afghans in Rahimyar Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Dera Ismail Khan.
19. This adeptness was not new to borderland governors. Bhakkar, for instance, was a borderland state. Its governor, Sultan Mahmud, during the time of Akbar, gave the hand of his daughter, appropriately called Bhakkari Begum, to the Mughal overlord on the one side, and made a submission of allegiance to the Safavid King of Persia on the other. See Muhammad Saleem Akhtar, *Sind Under the Mughals* (1990) 47-8.
20. See Mujeeb, 277-82; 389.
21. See also chapter 24 section II.
22. See also chapter 24, section II below.
23. See further chapter 21, section IV.
24. F. S. Aijazuddin, *Lahore: Illustrated Views of the 19th Century*, 10.

25. See also chapter 19, section 1.

Bhakti, Nanak and the Sufis

I. ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE A CIVILIZATIONAL CHASM

We have seen above how, for centuries on end, Indus and India had remained distinct and exclusive, *inter se*. We have seen the two civilizations run along parallel courses, contemporaneously, the one never really fusing into the other, never becoming one indistinguishable whole. We have seen the greater affinity of culture, ethnic stock, language, trade, commerce, political systems, religious beliefs and dogma between the inhabitants of Indus and Central Asia than between Indus and its eastern neighbours on the banks of the Ganges. We have seen, therefore, that the gentle and imperceptible 'no man's land', dividing the Punjab and the Gangetic plains, has been the greater obstacle to the crossing and intermingling of cultures than the tall, barren and seemingly formidable ridges of northern India separating the Oxus from the Indus. We have seen also that the contacts of Indus with the Arabs did not go beyond limited trade and commerce excepting the short-lived and unremarkable dominion over a part of the region, i.e., Sindh.

Having thus examined the distinctness of Indus and India, we must not

become insensitive to some significant attempts to fuse the two. There were notable though singularly unsuccessful movements from time to time to create a 'continental unity' out of diversity, to pull, as it were, Indus irrevocably into India. This was, in fact, the reaction of the founders and pioneers of those movements to the strife, discord, chaos and anarchy brought about by wars in pursuit of power.

Amir Khusrau (AD 1253-1325)¹ epitomized this urge for perfection. He had lived in the heart of the Indus region, in Multan, and then settled in Delhi. He was the first poet of a vernacular language who picked up local, Indian images, rejecting consciously the idiom of the rulers. He discarded Persian references. He was therefore perhaps the first naturalist poet, using allegorical references to the nature around him and to customs indigenous to Indus and India. Indeed, in this sense, he was the first nationalist too. No one else was able to speak with such spontaneity of *charkha*, *kutta*, *dhol* and *kheer*.² Later, Bulleh Shah, Sultan Bahu and Shah Latif were able to continue with the spontaneity of his expression and reference to the objects that formed their environment. Khusrau's contribution to music was also second to none. He devised new *ragas* and Indianized many Persian tunes.

Another of the famous syncretics (as they have been called) was Ramanand, the Hindu teacher (AD 1400-1470) and the most renowned name

of the Bhakti sect. More important than his actual works was his legacy of the new thought-processes that he generated. He inspired a new trend and thought. So his pupil, Kabir (AD 1440-1518) broke into an altogether new direction.

Kabir connected by contrived logic Islamic monotheism with the Hindu belief in the transmigration of the soul. The poems, songs and sayings of this weaver of Benares are popular to this day. He assailed, both the worship of idols and the authority of all holy scriptures. He challenged the exclusive use of any learned or sacred language. Kabir personified creation and the world as *Maya*, and denounced man's proneness to evil.

The Bhakti saints, with their emphasis on faith, devotion, and love, generated a movement of urban artisans and tradesmen. They admitted all castes and creeds into their ranks, including Muslims. Their ideology was also drawn from the lowest castes of artisans, including the untouchables.

But neither Amir Khusrau's attempts to interconnect the two cultures by opting to write in the vernacular Hindi, nor Kabir's rustic poetry could go very far. Nor, indeed, were Akbar's more authoritarian efforts to forge, by decree, a common religion, the *Din-e-Ilahi*, any more effective. All were still-born efforts. Imperial marriages between Muslim emperors and Hindu princesses were also

not sufficient to bridge the gap between the two cultures, two races and the peoples of the two regions.³ Though these marriages had a certain effect in abating *communal* hostilities among the broad masses of India,⁴ they had only a marginal influence upon that *other divide*: the divide between Indus and India. Deep down, the differences and dissimilarities remained.⁵

II. OTHER SYNCRETIC EFFORTS

There were also other major movements at the same point of time and in the same areas of contact in an effort to minimize, if not eliminate the differences. In fact, the two most energetic and lasting movements to fuse the two subcontinental civilizations into one were initiated, with passion and dynamism, in those very areas where the two cultures intermingled, in peace or in conflict.

When two divergent peoples or civilizations come into contact, there is often a tendency in both (and particularly in the weaker one) to recoil and withdraw defensively into itself, as an attempt to close the doors to the influence of the other upon it. It is only in the borderline areas, on the margins, that any synthesis can successfully be attempted. The eastern fringes of Indus and the imperceptible 'no-man's land' (what I have called the Gurdaspur-Kathiawar salient) were, thus, the only areas in which a culture,

drawing both from Indus and the Indic strongholds of the Gangetic and peninsular India, could be developed. Here, in the eastern Punjab and Sindh, Central Asia met India. Little wonder, therefore, that Kabir's syncretic contemporaries, Gorakhnath and Nanak, were able to achieve greater success in establishing two somewhat durable orders on the eastern tributaries of the Indus. Little wonder, also, that this soil nurtured the Sufi strains of an outstanding Islamic movement, tempered by moderation and love for all mankind irrespective of religion.

Guru Gorakhnath, though he lived in the fifteenth century, has a certain timelessness about him. In the legend of Raja Rasalu, many feats are attributed to him, such as the rescue of Puran Bhagat from the well near Sialkot.⁶ But, as shown earlier, since the legend is 'dated' around AD 400-500, there is an unbridgeable gap of almost a thousand years. Gorakhnath, however, remains an ever-present legend in Indus tales, always helping good people in distress.

In his own lifetime, Gorakhnath, reacting to the conflict and anarchy of his times, chose escape from the uncertain world of woes and renounced contact with it. If his sect was indeed not able to gain much political influence, despite its widespread dispersal, it was on account of the highly abstract nature of its teachings. The doctrine that intense mental abstraction etherealized the body and gradually united the spirit with the all-pervasive soul of the world was an

exhortation to the complete renunciation of all worldly things. But he admitted all persons, Hindus as well as Muslims, into his order where they were distinguished by holes bored in their ears, and were known as the *kanphattas* or *jogis*.

III. NANAK'S 'SACHA SAUDA' AGAINST OPPRESSION

According to Cunningham, Nanak,⁷ the founder of the Sikh order, was so called because he had been born in the house of his maternal grandparents at Kana Kacha, near Lahore, and not in his father's house at Talwandi, as is popularly believed. A Hindu by birth, Nanak was tutored by Syed Hassan, a pious Muslim. A scion of the influential Bedi caste, Nanak displayed his humane disposition at an early age. Sent by his father to purchase some goods in wholesale for his business, the young lad spent the entire amount of forty rupees on feeding a party of starving *faqirs*.⁸ Admonished by his father, Nanak replied that he had indeed contracted the *sacha sauda*,⁹ thus giving this name to the place in Sheikhpura district where the *faqirs* had eaten.

As he grew up, Nanak found the established order unbearable. Leaving his wife and two sons in the care of his elders, Nanak went Buddha-like out into the world. He was to travel far and wide to the ends of the world, but he never really broke his ties to his home, his people or his soil. Returning, he took to

his chosen vocation: teaching.

Nanak is reputed to have travelled even to Mecca, preaching that God was omnipresent. Admonished for sleeping with his feet disrespectfully pointed towards the House of God, he is said to have inquired: 'Then tell me on which side the House and presence of Allah is not?' On his return Nanak held dialogues with the expeditionary and future emperor, Babar, in Emnabad. He went on to Afghanistan and on the way is reputed to have prevented a landslide near Hasanabdal by the sheer strength of his hand; he held back a huge rock, leaving the imprint of his palm and fingers upon it. Hence the place came to be called 'Punja Sahib.'¹⁰

Nanak drew from both the dominant creeds of the time in an attempt to found a new syncretic system of beliefs and rituals combining Islam and Hinduism. He preached the unity of the one, indivisible God and strictly prohibited idolatory. He accepted the validity of Islam, but at the same time he respected the doctrines of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. Above all, what was beginning to attract a substantial following were Nanak's egalitarian principles.

Nanak had been accompanied in his travels by a motley crowd. Among his companions was Mardana, a *mirasi*¹¹ who played the flute to soothe the tired companions; the aging Ram Das was already called '*Buddah*,¹² and would be

remembered in history by that informal epithet; and Lehna, who earned his living by spinning hemp ropes.

It was a time when the Indian nobility had ceased to inspire and hold the popular mind. The kings of the Delhi Sultanate had degenerated into despots. Their revenue collectors were squeezing the people. Their nobles had become despotic and erratic in their favours and cruelties. Even after the fall of the Delhi Sultanate, for three decades, there was no stability. That would come only in the time of Akbar. Nanak had died before Humayun regained the throne of Delhi.

In those most troubled of times, Nanak's disregard of caste, his independence from institutionalized religion and the use by him of the vernacular language attracted the oppressed peasants and artisans to him in large numbers. Women were also encouraged to join in his gatherings. The inhibitions and the seclusion already in vogue among the upper classes were not practised. His message was one of peace and coexistence. His methods were egalitarian and non-violent. His precepts were simple and, unlike Brahminical *mantras* or Arabic and Persian texts, were easily comprehensible even to the unlettered broad masses.

Nanak's successors were to continue the dissemination of Nanak's

message of peaceful coexistence. Nearing his death, in 1539, Nanak put all his disciples to a test. Lehna alone demonstrated complete loyalty to his master by biting, on command, the flesh of a human corpse, when all the others had hesitated. Nanak chose him as his successor, renaming him Angad. Angad continued to earn his living by spinning hemp ropes even after attaining that exalted position.

Amar Das succeeded in 1552 and was equally unassuming and humble. He drove a carrier pony for a living. The Guru's discourse with the Emperor Akbar established the prescribed method of creed dissemination by peaceful propagation. The Emperor was so deeply impressed by the Guru's logic and conviction that he readily acceded to his request to exempt the Lahore region from paying a year's land revenue, thereby adding to the Guru's stature. Amar Das became confident enough to disassociate from the *udassis*,¹³ a sect founded by Nanak's own son, Sri Chand.

Circumstances and oppression were, however, to push the successors of Amar Das away from the path of peace and tolerance. His successor, Arjan, was the scholarly compiler of Sikhism's holy book, the *Granth Sahib*. But he fell foul of Lahore's Mughal governor, Chandu Shah, by refusing the hand of his daughter to the governor's son in marriage. Thereupon, Chandu Shah poisoned Emperor Jahangir's mind and obtained orders for the arrest of the

Guru Arjan was subjected to the severest torture and died an untimely death.¹⁴

Arjan's execution proved to be the turning-point in Sikh history. Henceforth, the saintly sportsman, Har Govind (or Gobind), would become a determined warrior upon his release from eleven years of detention at the Gwalior Fort. Three times he repelled Mughal expeditions, pitching his strength in support of the ill-fated Prince Dara Shikoh. So popular did he become within his own community that on his death in 1645 many brave young warriors, moved by emotion threw themselves on to his funeral pyre. Guru Har Rai, stepping into the shoes of his grandfather, continued his support of Dara Shikoh. Henceforth, Aurangzeb's retribution upon the Sikhs was severe and unrelenting.

It was Sikhism's sixth Guru, the daring Tej Bahadur, who first organized the Sikhs as efficient and speedy predatory raiders, in the agricultural districts of the Punjab. Such became his aura and so widespread his reputation that supernatural powers were attributed to him. Finally, after an energetic campaign, Tej Bahadur was arrested by Mughal troops. Legend has it that by the time Tej Bahadur was brought in chains before the Emperor, he was sick of torture meant to extract information about his following and its strongholds. Asked by the king to give a display of his supernatural powers, Tej Bahadur claimed that the charm tied round his neck would prevent the blow of the

sword from doing any harm. The blow that was struck severed the Guru's neck. The bewildered emperor then read the note that was removed from the charm. It read: *Sar diya, sir na diya* (I lost my head but not my secret).

The Sikhs were then transformed into a martial race. Guru Govind undertook the organization of the Khalsa¹⁵ and continued with the insurrection. In one encounter with the imperial army in Sirhind, Govind's mother and four sons were put to death. He retaliated like a man possessed. This time he defeated the imperial army at Muktesar. But retaking the town of Sirhind, he spared it, in keeping with Nanak's teaching, symbolically pulling out only two bricks.

Sikhism's strength and following drew from the impoverished peasant and the unemployed artisan. Govind encouraged all of them to carry arms. Aurangzeb's death brought the Sikhs some respite and Govind decided to join the service of the new emperor, Bahadur Shah. Govind was, however, assassinated in the Deccan in 1708, by a Pathan.

IV. SUFIS

Another movement that displayed great vibrance and shine was the movement of the Sufis.¹⁶ The term was derived from the word *suf*, meaning wool, because

they wore woollen garments, indicating, that they had renounced the world and become ascetics. The Sufis were saintly Muslim evangelists, most of whom had left, or had been compelled to leave, the unstable regions of Central Asia, making the outlying stations in Indus their homes.

In the beginning, the Sufis in northern India were only preachers who sometimes managed to obtain royal patronage to convert the people to Islam. The first great name in the line is that of Sheikh Ali Makhdum Hajveri, Lahore's Data Ganj Bakhsh.¹⁷ He came here with Masud, Mahmud Ghaznavi's son and successor, who was also the Governor of Lahore. Although the government was in the hands of Muslim rulers, this was no easy time for Islam in Indus. The large mass of the population was still non-Muslim. However, Data Ganj Bakhsh, with his piety and learning, was able to obtain a great following. Much later, Nizamuddin Aulia¹⁸ also remained close to the court during the time of the Sultanate. With their patience and humane disposition, in times of turmoil, intolerance and uncertainty, these saints converted the lower castes and classes to Islam.

Not all the Sufis, however, came to Indus and India with the blessings of ruling monarchs. In AD 1161, Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti came to Lahore from Ghazni. He soon moved to Ajmer, an area which was still under Prithviraj, the Rajput prince.¹⁹ Another great name of the Chishti order, Sheikh Fariduddin

Ganj Shakar (AD 1175-1265), also came and settled in the Indus region at this time. He was an early Punjabi poet, although all Sufis of this period had not yet adopted the medium of poetry. Known as Baba Farid to the Sikhs, many of his verses were included in the Sikh scripture, *Granth Sahib*, by Guru Arjan.

Besides the Chishti order, the Suhrawardy order was also founded in the time of the Delhi sultanate. The founder, Sheikh Bahauddin Zakariya settled in Multan, where he died in AD 1263. The Qadri order was founded in the region in the fifteenth century and the Naqshbandi order in the sixteenth. Before the advent of the Mughals, all the four major Sufi orders had obtained a large body of disciples and adherents in the Indus region and India.

Around the time of Aurangzeb, there was a change in the medium and message of sufism. Aurangzeb was known to be a strict disciplinarian and a person zealously committed to authoritarian adherence to dogma. The Sufi mind reacted. Sheikh Muhammad Ikram²⁰ points out that Sufis did not even insist upon the conversion of any non-Muslims to Islam, freely admitting into their presence and sittings men of all persuasions, castes and religions. They would rather induce a Muslim to mend his own ways than persuade a Hindu to convert to Islam. Sufis were, in fact, the friends and protectors of oppressed minorities.

Poetic expression was not new to the Sufi tradition, but earlier it had not been the common style of the Sufis. Until the time of Aurangzeb, only a few of the Sufis, such as Baba Farid and Shah Hussain (AD 1539-1593/4) had adopted the medium of poetry to convey their message. Aurangzeb's puritanical approach to religion served as the catalyst. When Aurangzeb began to persecute the Sikhs in the Indus region and to assault the Shia Muslim states of the Deccan, the Sufi mind was outraged. The emperor, as the embodiment of the state's establishment, appeared to the Sufi as a most intolerant ruler. The Sufi decried the persecution by imperial decree. And when he was not able to prevent it, his anguish was expressed in song. The Sufi now adopted the medium of poetry.

Almost all the great Sufis of the time of Aurangzeb, and thereafter, when the state had become intolerant of dissent and was also pursuing and persecuting the minorities, were poets par excellence. They included Sultan Bahu, Rahman Baba, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Shah Latif, Sachal Sarmast and Mian Muhammad.

There were efforts to crush the Sufi tradition, which was blamed for activism against the established administrative and ecclesiastical orders. The extreme example of this state repression was the case in 1708 of the Sufi Shah Inayat of Jhok in Sindh, who (like Mansoor Alhaji) was finally executed for his

teachings. Inayat was more than a mere thinker. He was an activist who shook the foundations of the oppressive economic structure by introducing collective farming for poor peasants. This early display of socialistic trends was his great sin and he paid for it with his life.

Persecution gave a new dimension to the Sufi's message. Only Shah Hussain had reacted in this manner earlier, and his reaction had also been in rejection of the persecution in the Indus region during the time of Akbar.²¹ From the time of Aurangzeb onwards, the Sufi message changed altogether. It rejected orthodoxy outright, both Muslim and Hindu. It reacted against the rigidity of social norms and the chaos in the political environment. In a milieu full of conflict, war, intolerance and death, the Sufi preached the lesson of love and forbearance. To divert minds from the injustices and cruelties of the world, he propagated a belief in the instability of all creation and the deception played by the illusion of this world. The Sufi decried ritual and the rigidity of dogma. He therefore vilified and poured scorn upon the priest and the mullah.²² He shunned the imperial court. The Sufi wanted to relieve an entire people of fear and hatred. He held that love was supreme and beyond all religious and social barriers; it provided a balm for hurt and desperate minds. These ideas expressed in poetry are perhaps the richest legacy of the Sufi tradition. Bulleh Shah's verses even today provide solace in times of

oppression and uncertainties:

ISHQ DEE NAWEEEN-O-NAWEEEN BAHAR
VED QURANAN PARRH PARRH THAKKAY
SIJDAY KARDIAN GHIS GA-AY MATHAY
NA RAB TEERATH, NA RAB MAKKAY
JIS PAYA TISS NOOR ANWAR
ISHQ DEE NAWEEEN-O-NAWEEEN BAHAR

Love is always in new and fresh glory.
Reading the Vedas and the Quran (they) are tired.
By bowing to the ground, the foreheads are worn out.
God is neither in the temple nor in Mecca.
One who has found love, his light is powerful.²³

Waris Shah has the same message for the mullah, who styles himself as the learned man and the custodian of Islam's values:

PARRH PARRH ILM QAZA PA-AY KARAN MUFTI
BAGH ISHQ DAY REHN MAJHOOL MIAN
PARRHIAN ILM NA RAB DI TAM HUNDI
IKKO ISHQ DA HARF MAAQUL MIAN

Believing they are well-read, muftis²⁴ feel they can give judgement;
But without love they have remained ignorant.
Mere studying gives no knowledge of God.
For that there is only one apt word: Love.

In the same vein Sultan Bahu pronounced:

PARRH PARRH ILM HAZAAR KITABAN
AALAM HO-AY SAARAY HOO,
HIKO HARF ISHQ DA NA PARHDAY
BHULLAY PHIRAN WICHAARAY HOO.

Having read a thousand books they feel they know;
But as they have not read the one essential word, Love,
They wander astray, and the poor ones are lost.

V. THE INDUS WOMAN

In their poetry, the Sufis told touching stories of love, pain and villainous deceit. Heer Ranjha, Sassi Punnu, Mirza Sahiban, Sohni Mahiwal were all popular Indus folk tales. In retelling these stories, the Sufis took the opportunity to preach the lessons of love and tolerance, and to denounce rigid social customs as well as the intolerance of the rulers and the clergy.

Their poetry employs common household images of the Indus region, like *toomba*, *charkha*, *penja*,²⁵ *jharoo*²⁶ and *bhambar*,²⁷ and tells us much about life in Indus three to four centuries ago. It also reveals how important, independent and full of initiative Indus women were. Heer is the main character who dominates and leads Ranjha, the passive flute player. Sohni swims the Chenab, even in flood, as Mahiwal passively waits on the other side. Sahiban's is the wise counsel that Mirza ignores inviting their end. Sassi walks the desert to her beloved and to death. The woman, in Sufi tradition, must dance to win her beloved, and repeating endlessly the refrain of his name herself becomes the man:

RANJHA RANJHA KOOKDI MAIN AAPAY RANJHA HOEE.

I kept on crying for my beloved (Ranjha), until I became Ranjha myself.

Unfortunately, the cultural rejects of the Indus ethos, the fundamentalists, could not perceive the respect and equality that Indus society naturally extended to the woman. Nor could these rejects of the Indus cultural tradition perceive a new power gradually but surely moving across India towards the Indus region.

1. See Mujeeb, 171-5.
2. The words respectively mean: spinning wheel, dog, drum, and rice pudding. A thirsty, travelling Khusrau is said to have been asked by a group of girls standing by a well to use each one of these disparate objects in his verse as a precondition to the girls pulling water in their vessels for him to drink. Khusrau took no time in coining the verse: You cooked rice pudding with great effort, and burnt the spinning wheel as fuel; The dog came and ate it all, now you sit and beat the drum.
3. Akbar married the daughters of the Rajas Puran Mal (1561) and Kalian Mal (1570). Jahangir was married to the daughters of Raja Bhagwan Das (1585), Rai Singh (1586), and Uday Singh, Raja of Marwar.
4. See further chapter 24, section II.
5. This refers to the cultural differences along the geographical divide between Indus and India. Later, in chapter 24, I will revert again to this aspect, but to show its effect upon the communal divide between the Muslim and the Hindu.

6. See chapter 7, section III above.

7. See chapter 13, section IV.

8. Beggars.

9. An honest bargain.

10. *Punja* means the open palm of the hand.

11. A man of a lower caste not working on the land.

12. Literally, an old man.

13. Literally, the dejected ones.

14. According to some legends, the Guru, while a captive, persuaded his captors to let him take one last bath in the river Ravi flowing by the Lahore Fort. He is stated to have then dived into the water and disappeared, never

to have been found thereafter. See Dhillon, *Sikhism*, 111.

15. Literally, the pure, applied to Sikh military units.

16. See Mujeeb, chapters VI, VII, and XIV; Syed Abdul Quddus: *Punjab: The Land of Beauty, Love and Mysticism*. (1992) chapters 7, 8 and 9; article by Annemarie Schimmel entitled 'The Sufi Tradition in the Eighteenth Century' in *Bhitai: The Message of the Master*, 79-104; Lajwanti Rama Krishna, *Punjabi Sufi Poets: AD 1460-1900*; T.C. Rastogi, *Sufism: A Dictionary with Profiles of Saint-Poets* (1990).

17. See Quddus, 135, 151.

18. See Mujeeb, 114.

19. See chapter 11, section I.

20. Sheikh Muhammad Ikram: *Aab-e-Kausar* (1984) 190-1.

21. According to some traditions, Shah Hussain was present on the occasion of the public execution of Abdullah Bhatti, and was deeply moved by the heroism of the ^ young martyr. See also chapter 13, section V above, and Shafqat Tanveer Mirza's significant contribution, *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature*, 18.

22. In the Sufi tradition, this refers to the orthodox and rigid priest.

23. Could Bulleh Shah have written these lines in contemporary Pakistan without fear of prosecution under laws recently formulated and applied?

24. The scholars and teachers in the Islamic traditon. This again applies to the rigid orthodoxy

25. *Toomba*, *charkha* and *penja* are tools used for spinning and weaving.

26. Broom.

27. Fire and conflagration.

PART TWO

The Two Worlds

AD 1600 to AD 1897

Introduction

We have examined so far the cultural differences as they manifested themselves between Indus and India over a period spanning more than four thousand years. We have endeavoured to make out the 'Indus person', as distinct from the Indian, by focussing on these differences. Important influences that have shaped the contemporary individual and his responses towards, and his interaction with, his fellow-citizens and compatriots have been examined. Unless we understand these impulses, we cannot understand the Indus person (the modern-day Pakistani). Unless we discern his past objectively, we cannot comprehend his present, nor enable him to shape his future. We must now come to an even more important phase in the shaping of the contemporary citizen of the Indus region where Pakistan came into being. This is the period spanning the last four hundred years.

In examining the influence of the past four hundred years, we will have to undertake two separate exercises. First, we must endeavour to determine and examine the influence of European colonization over Indus together with India. What were the different ways in which the Raj touched, changed, and exploited Indus and India? What impelled the colonizing power to treat the two regions differently? And in what different ways, therefore, did the two react to the Raj, seeking different solutions upon its eventual liquidation in the 1940s?

The second issue that we must also attempt to discern is whether there was any inherent schism in the polity of the Indus region itself. If there was, was it based on a difference of religions alone, or was it also rooted in cultural and socioeconomic distinctiveness? Was a Hindu-Muslim divide also coterminous with a bourgeois-feudal division? Was there a contradiction between the Indian bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the Indus feudal on the other, with the incipient Muslim bourgeoisie on either side of the divide playing a critical role?

We therefore enter upon two further inquiries. So far, we have only examined how the Indus person was different from the Indian. Now we must also examine whether the Indus person was different from the European, and then further, whether, if at all, the Indus Muslim was different from the Indus Hindu. If the answers to these queries are positive, were these differences confined to any one feature or quality, or were these differences more wide-ranging? To find meaningful answers to these questions, we will have to travel back and forth beyond Indus: to Europe and to India.

The present generation in England is gripped by nostalgia about the Raj. E. M. Foster's *A Passage to India* (in countless reprints and as a film), M. M. Kayes' *The Far Pavilions*, Paul Scott's *Jewel in the Crown* quartet, James Morris' trilogy on the global empire, Collins and Lapierre's *Freedom at*

Midnight, Christopher Hibbert's *The Great Mutiny* and Philip Morris' *A Matter of Honour* are only some of the more famous titles that have flashed from bookshelves across England and the English-speaking world. The lifestyle of the Englishman in the colonies, - out in the jungles, on the distant frontiers, or in colonial bungalows with armies of 'native' servants, the daintiness of the 'memsahibs' accompanying them, displaying great heroism in times of insurgency or revolt - are portrayed as the spirit of the Raj. The 'natives' form the necessary, contrasting backdrop to this stage that has been set for the Englishman to perform his expected acts of valour and courage.

The strain of thinking in this literature of nostalgia is not new. Nor has it been the exclusive privilege of English authors to eulogize the Raj. More than one hundred years ago, S. M. Latif appeared to have gone overboard in the very opening paragraph of his otherwise valuable *History of the Punjab*:

In the pages of *History* there is probably no story at once so grand, so romantic, and so pregnant with instruction, as that of the British conquest of India and the progress of the British Nation in the East. What deeds of noble daring, what examples of calm resolution and untiring devotion, does it not unfold! Over what fortresses, once deemed impregnable, has not the 'meteor flag of England' waved triumphantly! Through what forbidding mountain passes, what dreary defiles, and what tangled glens

have not the notes of her bugles echoed and her bright arms gleamed! In what majestic halls, dainty pavilions and jewelled domes have not the strains of her martial music and the cheers of advancing soldiery resounded . . . In their submission to her sway, the children of the sun, the founders of the mighty Empires of Kanauj and Ajuddhia, enshrined in the legends of Rama, feel honoured... At Britain's feet lay, equally humbled, the hardy Marhatta, who had so long successfully baffled the power of the Moghal, and the proud Afghan, who more than a century before, had challenged the might of the stern Nadir.¹

Latif was an Extra Judicial Assistant Commissioner in the service of the imperial government and the profusion of his sentiment can well be understood. But the questions remain: How could a power so distant and remote achieve such a vast and effective conquest? Was this conquest achieved without resistance? What historical role, for their good or detriment, did this imperial power play in the development of the colonies?

¹. Latif, *History of the punjab*, iii.

The Europe that came to India

I. MARCH OF DISCOVERIES AND INVENTIONS

The Europe that came to India was a fully-developed imperialistic capitalist world-order, straining to enter the higher stage of capitalist imperialism. The old feudal order no longer enjoyed unbridled or monopolistic control over the politics of the European nations. It had been replaced by a vibrant expanding capitalist system that was ceaselessly in need of raw materials and markets. India, with its fabled riches, was an attractive and vulnerable destination.

Europe had taken the road to capitalism in medieval times. The gradual change from barter trading to money economy had begun with the Crusades and had spread from central and upper Italy, by way of south Germany, France and the Netherlands, throughout Europe. An aristocracy of money was thus born. The Fuggers of Augsburg for instance, originally a peasant family of weavers, grew to become bankers to all the important houses of finance in Europe, as also to the popes in the fifteenth century.

Gradually, new standards were prescribed for entry into this aristocracy of money. Land holdings, pedigree, descent and family had been the touchstones

of feudal aristocracy. These were discarded. Credit, cash balances and monetary securities became the levers of power and the touchstones of class superiority.

The general liquidity of currencies also changed the relations of production. It facilitated the introduction of fixed monetary remuneration instead of produce. The 'wage nexus' became an alternative to bondage as a serf of the manor. Urban centres began to grow. As early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries they even began to obtain 'corporate' status.¹ They undertook to protect and employ the runaway serf from the pursuing clutches of the oppressive feudal lords. By the thirteenth century, large urban centres, like London and Paris, were attracting enterprising serfs from rural areas, providing them substantial protection, and absorbing them in the urban industrial proletariat. There was also many a Dick Whittington being summoned by the bells of metropolitan cities, with legendary streets paved with gold, promising prospects unimaginable in the outlying rural backyards.

There had already been a growth in private corporations. To expand long distance trade, merchants established their own trading companies. This was a new and enabling concept. Capital could be accumulated as well as dispersed over large areas at the same time without loss of essential control. Even the Church took to trading through its Knights Templars. Banks, first established

in Genoa, Florence, Augsburg and Antwerp, had grown in size and numbers; and from the sixteenth century, associations of merchants began to develop. These were, in fact, to carry out and implement the colonial policies of several states, including France and England.

Cities grew in size and population, though they did not as yet provide any civic amenities. Trade flourished. As early as 1305, the House of Taxis, a most appropriate and lasting name, had begun to run a kind of pony express service. In time, the service covered the whole of Europe. By 1628, it employed as many as twenty thousand men. 'Its couriers, clad in blue and silver uniforms, criss-crossed the continent carrying messages between princes and generals, merchants and money lenders.'² This specific service lasted till 1800, though it was not the only one of its kind.

The strength of the bourgeoisie and the new proletariat began to be felt early. There were several outbreaks of artisan unrest in cities across Europe. The fourteenth century alone offers many instances of the conflict. AD 1302 saw it in Flanders, AD 1357-58 in the uprising of the Paris guilds. In AD 1378, there was an uprising of the workers who wove wool in Florence, and in AD 1381 there was the uprising of the peasants in England. These uprisings and unrest pushed agriculture through a transition to a productive relationship with a partially free and mobile wage labour. In India, this century witnessed

pillage and plunder of the Indo-Gangetic plains.

By the time Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut on the west coast of India, a whole new world had opened up to Europe and its burgeoning new classes. The successful siege and conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman king, Muhammad II (the Conqueror), in AD 1453 scared away the Byzantine monks with their carefully cloistered libraries. This gave a crucial fillip to the European renaissance. New techniques for the manufacture and use of gunpowder (earlier employed on a limited scale by the English army in the Hundred Years' War against France [AD 1339-1453]) were made available.

John Gutenberg of Mainz had already (c.1445) started a revolution of his own by devising a movable metallic type for double-faced printing on linen paper. His first remarkable production, the 42-line Bible, came out in AD 1455. Thence the printing press spread knowledge and ideas like a forest fire.³

Then there was the Mariner's Compass. With such accessory navigational instruments as the 'Jacob's staff', used to fix position at sea, it had far-reaching consequences, no less, in fact, than the printing press. Coastal sailing matured into confident cross-oceanic shipping. In AD 1487, Bartholomew Diaz circumnavigated the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope. In AD 1492, the Genoese Christopher Columbus, seeking the westward sea-route to

India in the service of Isabella of Aragon discovered the Americas. In AD 1498, Vasco da Gama arrived upon the south-western coast of India.

This march of discoveries and inventions was to go on. In AD 1500 Peter Henlein invented the pocket-watch, the 'Nuremberg egg' as it was then called. Long before the East India Company was incorporated, Ferdinand Magellan's fleet had circumnavigated the earth in the years 1519-21. Francis Drake followed some fifty years later. In 1543, Nicolas Copernicus of Torus published his revolutionary work on the as yet unproven heliocentric system.⁴ It blasted the prevailing Aristotelian concept of the world, the rigid idea-forms, the anthropocentric universe (having become 'Vatico-centric' in ecclesiastical teachings).

The consequence of many of these scientific advances was to render European seamen and entrepreneurs more confident and enterprising. They changed Europe's socio-economics and, later, the world's. The countries and ports on the Atlantic seaboard replaced, in importance and pre-eminence, the princedoms and ports on the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. Lisbon, Seville, Rotterdam and Portsmouth took the place of Venice and Genoa. The introduction of colonial products (potatoes, corn, tobacco) led to an enormous increase in world trade and large enterprises developed. An increased demand for money and capital for entrepreneurs gave further

impetus to the development of monopolies. There was a consequent vast increase in the size and strength of the class of merchants, bankers, traders and industrialists.

II. MERCHANTS BACK STRONG NATION-STATES

In intruding upon the agro-feudal world, the merchant was treading upon hostile territory. The gradual spread of agriculture and later of feudalism in Europe had sought a new unity of concepts within an ecclesiastical superstructure. Mythological polytheism was replaced by the necessarily monotheistic creeds of the Mesopotamian region. The pantheons of Roman and Teutonic gods and goddesses were replaced, in Europe, by the sole God of the Christian Church.⁵ The Church provided an appropriate superstructure for the European unitarian feudal order. At the risk of oversimplification it may be stated that there was the Pope at the top, with countless bishops, barons, dukes and feudal lords all over Europe owing direct allegiance to him. Though both the serf and his feudal overlord had the obligation to bear arms on behalf of the 'king', there was no strong nation-state, nor any strong and nationalistic line of kings, independent of this one vast ecclesiastical unit.

Europe had been simultaneously a vast unity and a mosaic of countless minor manorial estates. The unity was provided by the allegiance of all Catholic

barons to the Church of Rome. The Holy Roman Empire, blessed by the popes, was the suzerain of all. It was in keeping with this scheme of things and his authority under it, that Pope Alexander VI purported to partition the world between his two foremost allies, Spain and Portugal.

Under the overall umbrella of papal 'sovereignty', bishops and feudal lords ruled countless small principalities. They levied taxes and fees on all goods passing through their lands. The village serf, paying a tithe (one-tenth) and other taxes to the feudal lord, was, along with the village artisan, the basis of the economy, the producer of material goods that circulated in the self-sufficient agrarian community.

This was not the system for the merchant. Heavy duties were levied on merchandise by each feudal chief as it passed through his dominions. Each chieftain exercised the power of taxing trade by prescription and distress of goods. Duties levied and fees imposed by each lord and overlord every few miles made the prices of goods-in-trade more burdensome.

Peace on the highways was impossible as roads passed through the estates and dominions of countless feudal lords. The responsibility for the maintenance of the peace against robberies could never be established. The robber from one estate found sanctuary in the next. It was as Voltaire

complained: in travelling across Europe one had to change laws as frequently as horses.⁶

It was in the interest of the merchants to put their weight and strength on the side of the national sovereign against the feudals.⁷ In England, the monarch had been somewhat fettered by the thirteenth century Magna Carta. But that had only rationalized and legitimized the emerging power structure. Finally, the sixteenth century saw the Tudors break away from Rome and openly begin to support the merchant and the mariner. The attempt by Stuart kings to reverse the clock resulted in the execution of one king and the flight of another.

When a fresh spurt of energies was released, leading European mariners, merchants and soldiers to new and distant lands, new and different criteria had to be adopted. These prescribed new norms for the determination of social classes and for entry into the dominant aristocracy. Old feudal values were discarded in the manner in which tribal norms had earlier been repudiated. With the advent of feudalism, the tribe had shrunk to the extended family of uncles and cousins. Later, under the capitalist order it contracted to no more than parents and their issue. The European serf, the successor of the slave, was replaced by the capitalist system's factory worker.

The new system offered opportunities to many oppressed in the old order to enter the ranks of the elite in the new. The non-landowning and formerly detestable merchant, the despicable Shylock of feudal times, became the respectable trader or banker, controlling vast interests in the new order. Likewise, many of the elite of the old order were ruined and many feudal estates were auctioned to pay the debts of the unenterprising and unimaginative landowning aristocrats.

As the merchant gained economic and political strength, so did the independent and sovereign nation-states of Europe. The merchant needed the nation-state to suppress and absorb the small and autonomous feudatories. Commerce and trading could be facilitated by the emergence of political units with larger territorial expanse and sway. The new class of emerging and established merchants, the bourgeoisie, was obstructed by and therefore hostile to the old, relatively small, feudal lords of the manor, expropriating a levy or a tax every small distance that the goods travelled over land. And it could obtain no protection from the distant overlordship of the Vatican, or from the Vatican-blessed Holy Roman Empire of the Hapsburgs, landlocked in Vienna. The feudal order, split up into manorial village communities, also lacked the muscle to protect the flag of any merchant vessel susceptible to the predatory raids of pirates or of navies under hostile flags. Merchants and

seamen needed a strong national monarch presiding over a cohesive nation-state with effective seapower. The myth of papal overlordship had to be challenged and discarded.

III. STATE AND RELIGION SEPARATE AS PARLIAMENTS EMERGE

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses at the castle church of Wittenberg. This triggered off the process of reform in the Church. The Reformation was impelled by the new, emerging bourgeois world order, which denied papal primacy and challenged the infallibility of the Vatican. In the past, agriculture and feudalism had facilitated the adoption and consolidation of the belief in monotheism. Now, in its various forms, Protestantism was to become the ideological creed and justification for the bourgeois nation-state of heterogeneous beliefs. The state would, henceforth, have no religion. The bourgeois state was the vehicle of the new capitalist world order.

The growth of the bourgeoisie, the early development of a strong and assertive class of merchants, had one other tangible effect upon the socio-political fabric of Europe. The merchant was interested in a peaceful continuity of the system. He invested his capital in peace and tranquillity, and was interested in ensuring their continuity. His stake in this continuity was of a

higher order than that of the landowner. As long as an army did not actually march through his lands and devastate its produce, the landowner had not been particularly perturbed about who governed the kingdom. His self-sufficiency, the distance from the capital city, and the indifference towards market conditions as far as the produce of the farms was concerned, had transformed the feudal world into an introverted mosaic of feudatories and principalities. He was concerned with the affairs of the centre only when called upon to provide levies for the monarch's wars or when the latter's armies marched towards the domain of a recalcitrant prince, defaulting in the payment of the centre's share of land revenues.

Barring the ambitious and more prosperous feudal lords, the counts and dukes, the rajas and the nawabs were hardly bothered about who governed at the centre or how he came to power or was removed. The peace of the king's realm was in true significance the peace within one's own principedom or chieftainship. If anarchy in Delhi did not spill over into Jaipur, the raja of that state was scarcely concerned about the bloodshed in that distant city. Concerned only with his own dukedom, a duke would seldom be concerned about the identity or fate of the royal inmates of the Tower of London.

The merchant's outlook was otherwise. Operating from Glasgow, he was worried about the safe passage of his goods warehoused in Southampton on

their way to the Mediterranean. Sitting in Scotland, he was concerned about the affairs of London. And he was concerned about peace in the transit areas also. The Pope was too distant, and the feudatories too many. So the merchant pitched in his weight with the intermediary: the sovereign of a reasonably-sized, compact and governable nation-state.

Europe split up into a jigsaw puzzle of nation-states, each large enough to support a rich internal market, yet compact enough to be administered as one law and order unit. As the king's peace spread along the highways, and the king's assizes began touring the realm, prosecuting brigands and highwaymen, nation-states began jostling their frontiers, expanding at one, withdrawing at another. Some mergers were also the compulsive outcomes of the pressures of this new class. When James VI of Scotland became James I of England, the bourgeoisie had arrived.

But the merchant was not prepared to trade one tyrant for another. No national monarch would be permitted absolute authority. If necessary, a new struggle would be waged as the bourgeoisie was keen to curb the arbitrary authority of the king. There could be no absolute divine right of kings. The Tudors had broken off from the Pope and now wielded enormous discretion themselves. In many respects, the strong-willed Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were all-powerful dictators, the only sources of authority and legitimacy during their

eras. But their successors, the Stuarts, were compelled to submit to the will of the new class. This was the compulsion of the times, the writing on the wall. Henceforth, the king could not be a totalitarian fountainhead of justice and law, the only source of authority and legitimacy.

The king was now to be limited and reduced by the overriding jurisdiction of the newly developed institutions of the bourgeois world: parliaments, courts and the cabinet. A failure to perceive the winds of change took Charles I to the scaffold in the seventeenth century, and Louis XVI to the guillotine in the eighteenth. If the Reformation and the emergence of the nation-state marked the arrival of the bourgeoisie in Europe, its victory was manifested in the Glorious Revolution in England and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in France.

Europe had already been introduced to the social contract theories. Tudor totalitarianism, justified in the Hobbesian *Leviathan* (an absolutist product of the social contract), had soon been bound down by the 'peoples' authority to dissolve the 'contract'. John Locke theorized the authority of the bourgeois parliament. This concept was soon to be followed by the supremacy of Rousseau's 'general will'. This enervating concept released such ferocious energies that it brought down the *ancien regime* in France with the fall of the Bastille.

The French Revolution epitomized the concluding stages of the bourgeois revolt against the old order in Europe.

IV. THE TECHNOLOGICAL GAP

Before Babar won the battle of Panipat in 1526, Europe had printing presses, advanced forms of gunpowder, well-organized navies and merchant fleets guided by the mariner's compass and pocket watches, and had made its first tentative landing upon the coasts of India. By the time of the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, European bourgeoisie had obtained a definite ascendancy, and had limited the power of the monarch in Europe. There had been no such development in the subcontinent comprising Indus and India.

By this time, moreover, there had been an entire spectrum of other scientific discoveries and inventions which Europe had put to the use of its own expansionist imperial designs. The greater general prosperity, these inventions, and a vast increase in the understanding of natural phenomena, provided impetus to the new capitalist order in Europe, and, in turn, served to transform it into an ever-expanding world order. Expansionist global imperialism was thus born.⁸

The eighteenth century was to further widen the technological gap between

Europe and the subcontinent. The growing capitalist demands promoted further discoveries and inventions: cast steel (1735), the roller loom for spinning (1738), the spinning jenny (Hargreaves, 1764), the all-important steam engine (Watt, 1768), the mechanical power loom (Cartwright, 1785), the hydraulic press (Bramah, 1795), paper manufacture (Robert, 1799) and, finally, the steamship (Fulton, 1807). All these reduced intercontinental distances and made the world one large market for the manufacturer.

Large-scale mechanical production became both possible and expedient. The industrial giants of Europe, in search of inexpensive raw materials, began to devour the cottage industries of Asia and Africa. It was this technological leap more than its administrators or armies, which was the secret of Europe's inevitable triumph over the states and peoples of the subcontinent, as it was in other parts of the world.

The Mughals, with all their splendour and might, had not yet developed a printing press as their era came to a close.

While universities such as Cambridge and Oxford already had, by the close of eighteenth century, a continuous existence spanning five centuries, the subcontinent slept upon an archaic educational system that discouraged doubt, dissent and inquiry. V.D. Mahajan points out:

The educational system of both the Hindus and the Muslims was unprogressive and hence both of them were equally backward educationally. Neither of them had any idea of the progress sciences had made in the West. They also knew nothing about the new methods of observation, experiment and criticism. Although the Europeans dominated the seas around India and made landing stations and factories both on the Western and Eastern coasts, the Indians of Gujarat, Konkan, Kerala, Chalamandal, Orissa and Bengal remained intellectually wholly unaffected by their presence. The princes and noblemen of India showed some interest in European animals and birds, mirrors, toys, wines and spirits, but they showed no interest in their social, economic or cultural affairs. Although almost every branch of knowledge of the Muslims was studied in the Christian universities of Spain, Italy and France, the new discoveries of Europe remained almost entirely unknown in India till the end of the eighteenth century. This was not due to the lack of schools in India and there were plenty of them. The real trouble was in the quality of education. Education was organized on communal basis. There were in fact two altogether different systems for the Hindus and Muslims.⁹

Mahajan further points out that 'The Hindu schools were divided into two watertight compartments. One section imparted elementary education.'

Courses spread over five to eight years. Pupils were taught reading, writing and arithmetic. The purpose was to enable them to become petition-writers and accountants. Incidentally, this facility would later enable Hindu boys to integrate smoothly into the commercial activities of the East India Company.¹⁰ In the higher schools, the system was much worse. The courses were primarily theological. The students of law, for instance, 'devoted 8 to 23 years mastering the various branches of Hindu law and rites.'¹¹

The educational system of the Muslims was, in many respects, even worse. The Muslims did not have any system of education for the public at all. Education 'was intended only for the upper classes and did not offer any instruction to the Muslim masses. In all Muslim schools Persian was the medium of instruction. Neither Urdu nor any other Indian spoken language was used.' (Would any European man of thought and letters have been able to grasp his subject, had he been forced to learn in a language other than his own? Latin had dominated the ecclesiastical and juristic fields during medieval times and was discarded with the advent of the Age of Science.) One other means of standard learning imparted by some mosque *madrassas*, often to the disabled alone, was the memorizing of the Holy Quran, without any essential understanding of its meaning. There was virtually no teaching of the applied sciences, except in a very bookish and unquestioning manner. There were no

laboratories or observatories. At a time when Europeans were disentangling the unperceived molecules of air into oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen, experiment, inquiry, and doubt were punished in the subcontinent. Blind adherence to the precept of the teacher was strictly enforced. No female whatsoever received any education except on a private one-to-one basis.

IV. THE VANGUARD

It is thus that in many ways the year 1498 is of far greater significance than the year 1526.

Babar's descent upon India in the latter year was no doubt a momentous event, but it was different from that of Taimur in 1398 only to the extent that while Taimur withdrew, Babar made the conquered country his permanent home. The 'Sultanate-e-Taimuria', established by Babar, in making its capital at Delhi, was only a continuity, in a far more glorious and effective manner, of the reigns of Tughlaq, Alauddin Khilji and Ghiasuddin. In imperial glory the Mughals far outshone the Sultanate, but the difference was merely quantitative, not of quality or genus.

Vasco da Gama's arrival on the coast of southern India in 1498 was entirely different. He came at the vanguard of an expansionist and restless capitalist

order from distant Europe. The Sultanate and the empire of the Mughals had been at the apex of a feudal and agrarian world order. Da Gama's three ships and his mere 150 men were the vanguard of the industrial and trading bourgeoisie searching for raw materials and captive markets.

1. Mujeeb brings out the difference between European and subcontinental cities of those times: 'it is necessary also to appreciate the difference between the European and Indian concept of the city. In Europe, the city had an entity, a legal existence; it grew physically by the addition of new buildings and the acquisition of new rights. In Muslim India the city had a physical existence, and its decay or destruction entailed a great loss. But it had no legal entity; it was not even a corporate body.' Mujeeb, 372.
2. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (1980) 47.
3. Compare how, more than a century later, Akbar would refuse to be won over to the idea: See chapter 17, section I below.
4. Humayun, at this time, was wandering at the periphery of the future

Mughal empire, hoping to win back his father's erstwhile possessions by resort to reading the stars and presumed signs of providence. Science was not on his mind. See chapter 20, section III below.

5. The conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity merely symbolized and formalized this socio-economic compulsion.
6. Toffler, 93. Though Voltaire's complaint was of a much later time and, perhaps, only justified Napoleonic expansionism.
7. In the subcontinent the merchant had, many centuries earlier, helped destroy the tribe for the same reason. He had thus contributed to a transformation to, and the consolidation of, feudalism. (See chapter 3 above.) Since this merchant did not, however, have the facility of the industrial technology available to the European merchant, he could not impel a transformation in the industrial and capitalist socioeconomic order.
8. Jansen's microscope facilitated Harvey's and Leeawanhok's advances in biological knowledge, Galileo's kinematics (the motion of falling bodies), Kepler's telescope, vital for the formulation of his laws of planetary motion,

Newton's calculus, his laws of gravitation, and the reflecting telescope, Torricelli's mercury barometer, were all gifts of the seventeenth century. All aided the bourgeois merchant's fleets on the high seas. All facilitated the expansive reach of Europe.

9. Mahajan, *India Since 1526* (16th ed.) 331-2.

10. See chapter 24, section IV.

11. Mahajan, 332.

The India that awaited Europe

I. INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS INNOVATION

At the time when the Europeans were purposefully spanning the oceans in the eighteenth century in their decisive advance towards it, India lay divided and exhausted.

Until that century, the European advance had been slow and tentative, though not insignificant. Captain Hawkins had established the first contacts with Jahangir's court (1607-11) and Sir Thomas Roe's embassy to that court had opened the doors for an Anglo-Mughal dialogue. But the first breakthrough came in 1618: the emperor gave the British vital privileges in return for their undertaking to protect Indian sea traffic from the Portuguese.

Roe had befriended the young prince Khurram while accompanying him on his campaigns in the Deccan. When Khurram became emperor Shah Jahan, the English East India Company was able to obtain full benefit from those earlier contacts. In the year of his accession, Shah Jahan reduced the Portuguese post at Hooghly. In 1640, the Company was allowed to establish a factory at Madras on a plot of land leased from one of the last Vijayanagar rulers. In 1674, the

royal Portuguese bride Catherine brought her husband, England's King Charles II, the colony of Bombay in her dowry. This was promptly transferred to the control of the Company, which immediately moved its headquarters from Surat to Bombay. In 1690, the Hooghly factory in Bengal was shifted to Calcutta. Imperialism was shuffling its feet to obtain solid footholds on the fringes of its future empire.

By comparison, India betrayed a certain lack of inspiration. Even at the height of their glory and power, for instance, the Muslim emperors had failed to perceive the utility of such obvious vehicles to progress and intercourse as the printing press or the navy. In 1582, Akbar had been presented at Fatehpur Sikri by Portuguese missionaries with a copy of a polyglot Bible in four languages. Akbar is said to have kissed the images of Jesus and Mary, and placed the book on his head to the great delight of the donors. He questioned them about the printing. But he was not impelled, not even by curiosity, to undertake the process in India itself. He was proud of his calligraphers who did a much better job by hand, he said.

It was not as if Indian kings had not been introduced to European manufactures. The printing press was not the only concept or product to which they were exposed. But the land-based Mughals found it simpler to let sea-faring Europeans ship in manufactures from the West. Sometimes, they

even put these imports to ingenious use. Muhammad Shah, the emperor, died in 1748. The heir apparent, Ahmad Shah was out on a campaign in Sirhind. To suppress the news of the emperor's demise till the return of his heir, Queen Malika Zamani (Farrukh Siyar's daughter) hid the body in a long wooden packing-case, which had originally contained a clock. The clock and the box were, of course, of European manufacture. But there seemed to be no compulsion, or even the use of expediency on the part of Indian rulers to substitute imports with local manufactures even by copying and fabricating the industrial craft of Europe.¹

Sometimes even compassionate and most altruistic motives apparently underlay the reticence to adopt new methods and modern technology. A certain English lady, who had married an Indian gentleman early in the nineteenth century, had this to say of another episode in a letter she wrote home:

The Chuckee, before mentioned, is two flat circular stones (resembling grindstones in England), the upper stone has a peg or handle fixed in it, near the edge, with which it is forced round, by the person grinding, who is seated on the floor; the corn is thrown in through a circular hole on the upper stone, and the flour works out at the edges between the two stones, This is the only method of grinding corn for the immense population

throughout Oude, and most other parts of Hindoostan even to the present day. The late King of Oude, Ghauziee ood deen Hyder, was at one time much pressed by some English friends of his, to introduce water-mills, for the purpose of grinding corn; he often spoke of the proposed plan to the Meer, and declared his sole motive for declining the improvement was the consideration he had for the poor women, who by this employment made an excellent living in every town and village, and who must, by the introduction of the mills be distressed for means of support. My poor women, he would often say, shall never have cause to reproach me, for depriving them of the use and benefit of their chuckee.²

Little wonder that over the centuries in which Europe had all but transformed itself, India had changed but little. The rustic, centralized, all-pervading and arbitrary authority of the king had not been challenged by a strong, vigorous and indigenous bourgeoisie. Neither parliamentary nor judicial institutions could therefore develop. India continued to be ruled and administered by princely feudatories. It thus remained static and quiescent over the centuries.

But India was also stagnant at another level.

II. THE STATIC VILLAGE AND THE CONCEPT OF MINIMUM PRODUCTION

The Mauryan, Indo-Bactrian, Kushan, Gupta, Delhi and Mughal empires had risen to splendour and glory and then split up into countless small states. In the south, the states of Vijayanagar and Gulbarga had succeeded the Cholas, Pandyas, and Pallavas; they had flowered, disintegrated and been absorbed by larger political powers. The slave-owning system of the Mauryas was gradually replaced by the feudalism of the Rajput, the Jat, the Afghan and the Mughal. Dynasties had spent productive generations attracting men of letters and arts, architects and poets, revenue experts and administrators, soldiers and philosophers. But at the level of the village, India had continued its course, through the centuries, undisturbed, unchanged. The autonomous and self-sufficient, inward-looking village, has indeed been 'India' for the vast majority of its people and for the greater part of recorded time. In an incisive observation, Karl Marx noted how society, at the village level remained 'untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky.

Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day are based on possession in common of land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme already cut and dried. Occupying areas of from 100 to several thousand acres, each forms a compact whole producing all that it

requires. The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence production here is independent of that division of labour brought about in Indian society as a whole by means of exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind.

The constitution of these ancient communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among the members. At the same time spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses, thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the 'chief inhabitant' who is judge, police, and tax-gatherer in one; the book-keeper who keeps the accounts of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto; another official who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through, and escorts them to the next village; the boundary man, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities; the water-overseer, who distributes water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the

schoolmaster, who on sand teaches the children reading and writing; the calendar-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed-time and harvest; and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber; the washerman, who washes clothes; the silversmith, here and there the potter, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expense of the whole community. If the population increases, a new community is founded, on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land . . .

The simplicity of the organization for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name - the simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of the Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economical elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky.³

At the grass-roots level, at the village level, India was indeed 'unchangeable'. It

was also unique, despite being rigidly static, more so than any other political or economic section. Here it was the most vibrant and here it was the most debilitated. Here it had a fair measure of democratic autonomy and at this level it displayed the ill effects of its greatest failing.

We have seen that in terms of its administrative organization the Indian village had initially displayed all the promise of a vital and potent system, progressive in its democratic organization, and egalitarian in its economic structures. But the promise of this system was not to hold in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the first place, the peasant was sapped of all initiative, not on account of any impediment to production within the village framework, but by external factors. Within that framework, in fact, he was free to increase, even to diversify his produce. His will was destroyed by the oppressive system of taxation to which the entire village was subjected. The ruling classes deprived the peasant, and thus the village, of the entire surplus and often more than the surplus, frequently creating famine conditions.

In the second place, the system of land grants, introduced by the Guptas, was another impediment. It became the basis of Indian and Indus feudalism. It linked the amount of revenue to the value of the yield. The government's share

became proportionately greater in case of better crop yields. In an expropriatory system, this meant that the peasant, or village, producing more had to turn over a greater quantity to the tax collector. The revenue collector was not paid the Mauryan-style salary but was allowed to retain the surplus extracted from the peasantry, after having paid the amount due to the king. Since the village was merely geared to production approximating the local demands, and because its surplus was invariably expropriated by the feudatories, the peasants resigned themselves to the concept of minimum production. Any drive to increase production was thus throttled. And this, in turn, discouraged the adoption of any new, even available, efficient modes of farming. Consequently, technology also remained stagnant. The methods of cultivation and harvesting were wasteful. An anachronistic plough scratched only the top skin of the earth. Mixing the seed of several crops in one field was the farmer's rustic method of insurance. Though no one crop would obviously be good, all were in any case unlikely to fail together. And the hand-and-sickle harvesting still left, by contemporary standards, substantial droppings of the grain on the field.

The economy of Mughal India was marked by a curious paradox. Almost certainly, the great majority of the people mainly consumed what they themselves produced or secured from their neighbours on the basis of

customary arrangements. It is equally certain that virtually everyone was involved in exchange as producer or consumer, usually both. Again, as some 50 per cent of the agricultural produce was given as revenue - paid in or eventually converted into cash - and presumably the tax burden on the artisan was comparable, in a predominantly subsistence-oriented economy an incredibly high proportion of the produce was meant for exchange. The paradox is thus explained by the massive extraction of revenue, a job in which the Mughals probably succeeded better than all their predecessors. The range and volume of exchange were correspondingly greater. The producer who surrendered some 50 per cent of his gross produce could have very limited scope for buying anything. Those who as rulers, functionaries, dependants or dealers shared this surplus provided the great bulk of the domestic demand ... The increasing demands of commerce, inland as well as overseas, were met comfortably within the existing structures of trade and manufactures. Nothing happened to undermine the impressive structure of the country's traditional commercial organization. No basic innovations occurred. They were not even necessary.⁴

Although there were indeed no basic innovations, Indus and India were not altogether underdeveloped.

III. TEXTILES AND ANCHORS

There were areas and sectors in which Indus and India excelled and in which they retained their ancient precedence. India was not entirely uninitiated in craft and industry. The coastal areas thrived on rich trade and industry, and much of it flowed into and out of the central Gangetic plains.

In the fourteenth century, Ibn Battutah, the Arab traveller, wrote of the prosperity of the Indian cities and their citizens, describing Delhi as 'one of the greatest cities in the Universe'. Ibn Battutah had seen many a metropolis from Cairo and Constantinople in the west to the cities of Central Asia and China in the far east. Nehru tells us that as early as the days of the Delhi Sultanate, Muhammad Tughlaq had set up a textile factory weaving cotton cloth and employing no less than five thousand workers! Ahmedabad in the west was renowned for the manufacture of silks and velvets.

The Bengal cities of Murshidabad and Dhaka excelled in the manufacture of silks and muslins. Clive observed that Murshidabad was 'as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London', with the difference that there were citizens in Murshidabad who possessed 'infinitely greater property' than any citizen of London. So advanced indeed were the Indian textile and allied industries that the more developed cloth manufacturing giants of Lancashire required the umbrella of stringent tariff barriers working both ways: against the export of Indian manufactures to England, and facilitating the import of the

former's manufactures to India.

In metals, Indus and India had long been manufacturers and suppliers. From the swords of the Achaemenian army in the fourth century BC, to the export-oriented and high quality manufacture of ships anchors at Multan during the days of Aurangzeb, Indus and India had been supplying goods to China, Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East. Bengal had also made great advances in ship-building. One of the flagships of an English admiral during the Napoleonic wars was of Indian manufacture. Fabrication of machinery was another department that was subsequently to be strenuously discouraged by the British. They banned the manufacture and import of machinery in the nineteenth century.

Though corporations - those fictional 'persons' so necessary to the capitalist mode of accumulating capital - were not known to Indus or India, they had developed credit economies. What may be described as banking activity was widely being practised and the 'hundis' (the equivalent of bills of exchange) of some of the more reputable business houses of the western coast could be cashed in the distant cities of Tabriz, Herat and Kabul. Finally, we are told by Bari² that in Aurangzeb's time the export duty receipts from the twin cities of Surat and Ahmedabad were as high as Rs 1,300,000 and Rs 10,300,000 respectively! Bari is, indeed, carried away and remarks that agrarian

India was, up to the nineteenth century, an industrial state, trading with every country of world. It appeared to him thus to be a country poised to enter the capitalist world order, as highly developed as a pre-industrial economy could be. Many other modern-day analysts, including Nehru, share this view.

IV. BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONS IN EUROPE

These analysts, however, miss one vital point. Implicit in the statement that India was a highly developed pre-industrial economy is the admission that it was, obviously, not an industrial state. Nor had it developed its own indigenous bourgeoisie. It is true that the Mughal era had seen the revolt of the Satnamis, described by a contemporary as 'a gang of bloody miserable rebels, goldsmiths, carpenters, tanners, sweepers and other ignoble beings'. They were, however, yet a far cry even from the early stages of a bourgeoisie. Nor were they the industrial proletariat. There were no such class phenomena in Mughal India as had been seen in the Europe preceding Luther and as were to develop later into the strong political classes in the English uprisings of the seventeenth century and the French Revolution of the eighteenth. The opinion shared by Bari⁶ and Nehru⁷ among others, therefore, that India, at the time when it was prematurely subjugated by the British, was poised for that crucial breakthrough from the agrarian relations of production to the industrial mode of production does not find substantive support from the evidence of

historical facts. There had been no pre-industrial apportionment of power between the monarch and the bourgeoisie. There was, indeed, no bourgeoisie whatsoever to wrest, or even demand, a share in a new framework of political power. We have seen the early manifestations of bourgeois growth in Europe. India saw no such transformation or growth.

The tragedy with India and Indus was that even when some demand was generated by the expropriated surplus, it did nothing to improve the conditions in village India. Village society remained static. And, above all, it was inwardly eaten up by its peculiar organization of labour: the caste system. By this time, this had degenerated into an arthritic embrace.

V. THE CANCER OF CASTE

In the context of ancient times, the Indian system was not entirely unique in its class divisions. Similar class divisions had been prevalent throughout the slave-owning ancient world. The slaves of Egypt are remembered in legend and history for their miserable condition as also their frequent rebellions against the Pharaohs. At the same time, the pyramids remind us of the extravagance of the ruling elite, undertaking prestige projects by brutally harnessing to their command the labour of the slaves.

The ruling elite of Greece in the heyday of its 'democracy' prospered on the surplus extracted from the labour of the slave. Even in the days of Periclean oratory, the slave was himself a mere chattel, an ordinary bargainable product. He had a status no better than that of the domestic or farm animal, and was perhaps worse off in living conditions and comfort.

Both Greece and Rome denied to the vast majority of their inhabitants the privilege of citizenship. The slave could be bought, sold, whipped and killed without culpability. Beneath the surface of the democracy of Athens and the Senate of Rome, there was a most tyrannical class system. Class distinctions were clearly delineated not only between the citizens, *inter se*, but also between the citizen and the non-citizen. The priests, the statesmen-rulers, the soldiers and warriors, the tradesmen and merchants, were all citizens. Below this structure the slaves were the outcasts, equivalent in status to the shudras and untouchables in ancient and medieval India. The labour of this vast majority was employed to build the lasting landmarks of those democracies and republics.

In the course of the centuries, this division of the human populace in Greece and Rome, this early European 'caste' system, gave way to another order of classes. This was the equally harsh and unjust class system of feudalism.

In this vast and panoramic span of time, spread over the centuries between Plato and Rousseau, Europe saw the monumental changes from the slave-owning system to the feudal, 'universal' papist 'state', and then to the capitalist world order, split into more homogenous nation-states. In all this time, Indus and India remained almost static and unchanging at the core. Even though the productivity of their increasingly inefficient system had declined, they clung to the village-and-caste infrastructure, with guilds operating in the towns. The vast majority of the people also continued to adhere to the ancient Vedic (later to be called Hindu) animistic religious order, although the introduction of agriculture and feudalism had greatly denuded this pantheon of countless lesser deities and injected into it elements of monotheism. Each region had its own god. The transformation from the nomadic pastoralism of the Aryans to the static agrarian settlements divided into households, particularly after the introduction of iron, had also encouraged the development of the family and the disintegration of the tribe. Yet, a vicious caste system had retained its dominant and by now severely debilitating influence.

The caste system had deteriorated to become a rigid barrier to progress. It was inflexible. But it continued. By its prohibition on exogamy (inter-caste marriages), and its intricate and strictly enforced criteria of endogamy

(intra-caste marriages), it had naturally obstructed enterprise and initiative.

While there have been frequent apologists for the caste system, and even a man as enlightened as Nehru himself joined their ranks in the modern era,⁸ few have been able to explain why the phenomenon could continue into modern times, at least until the last century.

The important factor, perhaps, was that rural India was never truly a feudal order in the European sense. Indian feudalism had its own distinct features: most of the land was commonly owned and the villages were autonomous. The village council directed and organized the farming of the land. The live and dynamic village, which had produced large surpluses to support successive armies, had, by the end of medieval times, become a dormant, quiescent institution. The rigidity of caste laws prevented social mobility. The autonomy and self-sufficiency of the village inhibited trade and commerce. Both impoverished the merchants and the guilds.

The feudal system, widespread circa AD 600 onwards, obviated the need for a salaried central bureaucracy but continued its dependence upon the village and the caste as the agencies of production and expropriation. Village assemblies lost their pre-eminence in the presence of the feudal master. The surplus produced by the peasant was squandered in internecine wars and

Rajput pageantry. Underneath it all, caste became so indelibly a part of the infrastructure of life that even the parsimonious moneylender knew that the brahmin was to be charged only two per cent interest while the shudra was required to pay many times more on the same capital.

The caste system and the corporate entity of the village together prevented the generation of that revolutionary dynamism which could impel a gradual but definite change in the social order. The relations of production thus remained static for two thousand years in what has been called the Indian or 'Asiatic mode of production'. As raider upon raider, dynasty after dynasty, came, expropriated and expired, the Indian village remained unchanging, perhaps because of the 'security' of the caste system. In a world of turbulent and comprehensive changes, it opted for security rather than progress. And this option was to cost India dearly. The caste system had already become a cancer eating into the vitals, a repressive structure destroying spontaneity of talent and consistency of effort. It gradually became an arthritic force, gripping the Indian social fabric at the very body joints where mobility and flexibility were required. The progressive, democratic society of the Indian village was sapped of all its natural, inner vitality by the curse of caste. India was already dead in the soul as the British entered upon its land mass.

There were many other factors that impeded the development of the

bourgeoisie in Indus and India. The working of the Mughal court was one of these factors.

1. European manufactures apart, the concealment of the death of the ruler was a necessary Indian defence mechanism. It was intended to avoid civil strife and wars of succession so as to facilitate the accession to the throne of the chosen heir. Empress Nur Jahan is believed to have buried the entrails of her deceased husband, emperor Jahangir, near Gujrat where he had died. She then rushed to Lahore with the dead body propped up on the emperor's elephant. She disclosed the death of the emperor only after she had mounted the throne herself. Although she thereby provided an immense advantage to her son-in-law (and stepson) to succeed to the throne, the unfortunate prince could not make it.
2. Mrs Meer Hassan Ali *Observations on the Mussulmauns of India* (1974) 111. Meer Hassan Ali, a gentleman of Lucknow, (also known as Meer Londoni, or the Meer from London) had gone to London in 1810 as an assistant to the oriental scholar, John Shakespear, professor of Hindustani at the Military College, Addiscombe, from 1807 to 1830. During his stay in England, Hassan Ali married an Englishwoman who returned with him in

1816, and lived with him and his extended family in Lucknow until 1828. Hers is a first-hand account of an outsider's view of Muslim society in northern India. Her detailed accounts of the minutest observations give us many insights that insiders do not focus upon, or take for granted without specific interpretation.

3. See Palme Dutt, *India Today* (1979) 85-7. This social ordering and structure of the Indus (and Indian) village continues to this day, although social mobility, introduced by the modern means of transport and information, has somewhat broken the rigidity and invariability of this system. Yet, as Professor Farrakh A. Khan points out in a paper entitled 'Chaudhry-Kami Culture' (1995), 'The general pattern of village social order in the Punjab is the same as depicted in the *Rig Veda*.' (October 1995).
4. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (1982) 358-9.
5. Bari, *Company Ki Hakoomat*, 62.
6. Ibid.

7. Nehru, *Discovery*.

8. Nehru, *Discovery*, 258-61; 263-70.

Uneasy Heads on the Peacock Throne

I. THE KING'S PREROGATIVE

The court of the Mughal emperor was the hub of all official activity throughout the subcontinent. That the state apparatus of the Mughals had remained, throughout their dynasty, centralized, monolithic and feudal in its organization and working is evident from the extract that Bari reproduces regarding the functioning of the state in the time of Aurangzeb, derived from contemporary chronicles.¹ There was a total absence of any corporate restraint, such as that of parliament, even in its earliest and embryonic form. The emperor's audience with the public (the *darbar-e-aam*) was no such affair: there was nothing public about it. It was, at best, a forum in which a select few were allowed to formally present their petitions. Entry was restricted; no debates were allowed; the emperor was not under obligation to hear the affected party. This remained his absolute discretion and a rare favour. The emperor himself appointed all his governors and generals, down to lowly captains in command of a mere forty horsemen. In one case, we find the emperor directing an inquiry into the theft of four horses. We see him personally taking decisions in such diverse matters as roads, buildings, camps, orchards and sports.

There was no independent hierarchy of courts under the Mughals. The emperor or king transferred cases to his own court for his decision at will and was not bound by any formalistic procedures. A directive of 3 May 1730, for instance, required the governor of Deccan to report to Emperor Muhammad Shah directly, in respect of a minor revenue dispute and to send his recommendations under sealed cover. Nor were the limits of the emperor's authority prescribed. He was thus overburdened and, even though he sometimes endeavoured to do substantial justice, he was unable to dispose of all the cases and complaints. Though twenty-five civil suits were transferred to the emperor's court by the imperial decree dated 3 April 1696, not more than twelve could be decided, that too after much delay.²

By contrast, the discretion of the king of England had begun to be restricted early by the gradual evolution of parliament and the courts. No king ruling England in the same period that Akbar or Jahangir ruled the subcontinent could have been as absolute in his authority and discretion as the Mughals were.

The seeds of a parliament that could limit the king's prerogative and discretion had been sown in medieval times. As early as 1215, King John had accepted the principle that there should be 'no taxation without representation',³ and enshrined it in his compact with the nobles in the Magna

Carta. By Tudor times⁴ it was well recognized that 'the king should govern but Parliament should tax.'⁵ After the case concerning the Duchy of Lancaster (1562), a distinction between the king's natural and political capacities began to be drawn. In the former capacity, the king's prerogative was absolute, but not so in the latter.

The Stuart kings⁶ ran into a storm resisting judicial authority. At first, a further subtlety was added to the distinction between the king's natural and political capacities. These were now styled respectively as the 'absolute' and 'ordinary' powers, thus restricting the area and categories of the former.

A certain Bates, a merchant, had refused to pay duty on some currants that had been imported by him. The duty had been levied by James I by resort to prerogative power. Bates challenged the imposition in the Court of the Exchequer. Although the court ruled (1606) in favour of the king,⁷ it did so by holding that the prerogative *in this case* was 'absolute' because the matter fell in the ambit of foreign relations. It was thus accepted that the king would have no such absolute authority in domestic affairs.

Four years later, in 1610, in the Case of Proclamations 'it was resolved by the two Chief Justices, Chief Baron and Baron Althum, upon conference betwixt the Lords of the Privy Council and them, that the King by his

proclamation cannot create any offence which was not an offence before, for then he may alter the law of the land by his proclamation . . . and that the King hath no prerogative, but that which the law of the land allows him.'⁸ The Stuarts continued to run a collision course until the Civil War of the 1640s and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 established once and for all the limits of the king's prerogative and discretion. By 1703, the right to vote had been accepted as a fundamental right,⁹ and an already established tradition of peaceful transfer of power (broken only in the Civil War of the 1640s) was thus formalized for all times to come. At this time, Aurangzeb's heirs were readying to fall upon each other, in anticipation of the octogenarian's death.

The evolution of the system of courts, the definition of their jurisdiction and powers, and the concept of their independence from the executive authority of the king, was also coterminous with the developments that were bringing parliament into prominence. The principle of the recognition of their judgments as precedents enabling a consistency in the application of the law was also gradually evolving.¹⁰

Was the king to apply the law himself or was this the function of the courts? The Delhi sultans and the Mughals had sometimes deferred to some decisions of their justices, but that was always the exception. They adhered, at most times, to the principle that the king could do no wrong. In other words,

he was not liable for any actions and was not answerable to any court. He alone determined what was wrong and what was right for him to do. The king was, thus, himself the judge of his own competence and powers.

If we except the precepts of the Islamic *Sharia*,¹¹ which were seldom applied in any case, no document or binding compact had restrained a Delhi sultan or a Mughal king as the Magna Carta had done as early as 1215: 'No free man shall be arrested, or imprisoned, or dispossessed of his land, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any other way harassed, nor will we [the king], impose upon him, nor send him our commands, save by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.'¹² In the same century, the jurist Bracton had pronounced that the king ought to be subject to God and the law, because the law makes him king.¹³

Although the authority and independence of the courts waned in the Tudor era yet during Stuart times, the courts began to establish and assert both. The invaluable writ of *habeas corpus*, along with the other writs, had come to full maturity. It was also for the courts, and not the king, to decide what was wrong and what was right in the eyes of law.¹⁴ The growth of the bourgeoisie had dictated the rule of law as against the rule of the king. There had been no such development in the subcontinent at this time.

II. THE UNCERTAINTY OF SUCCESSION

Europe generally, and England in particular had developed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a trade and manufacturing bourgeoisie which had a tangible economic interest in the stability of government, the certainty of succession, and in the continuity of bourgeois governmental institutions (such as a parliament and an independent judiciary). India's failure to develop such a class was to cost it dearly. Without the stabilizing influence of parliamentary and judicial institutions, Indus and India continued to be convulsed, even at the height of Mughal power, by wars of succession and usurpation, and by internecine struggles.

Unlike most European states, there was no certainty of succession. As each ruling emperor or king lay upon his deathbed, each prince began to perceive his own brothers as his mortal enemies. 'Each of them had as good a right to the throne as he had himself, for there was no law of succession among Mughal princes.'¹⁵ Sometimes revolts began even during the active lifetime of the emperor. Always, the successor confronted conflict, even tragedy.

The indefatigable Babar died after a short reign of four years. His son was ousted from power. He regained the throne after fifteen years of wanderings.

Within days of Babar's death in the winter of ad 1530, one of his sons, Mirza Kamran, then the governor of Kabul and Qandahar, saw an opportunity for himself as a candidate for the throne of Delhi. He hurried to Lahore and appropriated it by stratagem before the new ruler Humayun could secure it for himself. Humayun indulgently overlooked this sibling challenge and confirmed his younger brother's claim to the city. Ten years later, when Humayun was forced from his kingdom by Sher Shah Suri and he fled with his family out to Lahore for sanctuary, he assembled his nobles in the garden built by Mirza Kamran (of which now only a fragment remains stranded on an island in the river Ravi), directing 'that all the principal inhabitants of the city from seven to seventy years of age (young and old) should attend' (Jouher, 1882, p. 26). To no one's surprise, least of all Humayun's, Mirza Kamran had made a separate peace with Sher Shah, having secretly ceded the Punjab to his brother's enemy.¹⁶

The great Akbar, born to the deposed Humayun at Amarkot, crowned at Gurdaspur at the age of thirteen, was forced into battle at that tender age. He had to win back the empire on the field of Panipat through a sanguinary war. He then consolidated the Mughal empire but was challenged by his own son, Salim (later Jahangir), to be reconciled to him after much bloodshed and loss of life. Jahangir in his turn encountered the revolt of his eldest son Khusrau.

His successor Shah Jahan first saw his own sons at war amongst themselves for the title to the crown that he still wore and at length became the prisoner of the most capable and shrewd of the combatants. Aurangzeb, fearing the influence of his own example, ensured the elimination of his brothers, a son and nephew. On his death in 1707, Aurangzeb's eldest son, Moazzam Shah, hastened from Kabul to secure his succession. He had to vanquish and slay one brother, Azam, near Agra; marching to the south, he eliminated the other, Kam Bakhsh. Only then was he able to assume the title of Bahadur Shah.

Bahadur Shah's death at Lahore in 1712 brought on another contest for the throne. His eldest son, Jahandar Shah, succeeded him and in pre-emptive strikes eliminated every princely claimant. But Banquo's Fleance still remained. His nephew Farrukh Siyar, survived to defeat Jahandar Shah and to put him to death in the following year. An interregnum controlled by the 'king makers', the so-called Syed Brothers, followed their murder of Farrukh Siyar. Then in 1719, Roshan Akhtar ascended the throne of Delhi with the aid of the Syed Brothers and assumed the imperial title of Muhammad Shah (Rangeela).¹⁷ Muhammad Shah held on to his throne for thirty years, but was seldom fully in control of it or of his realm. The age of the Persian, Afghan, Rohilla and Maratha raids upon the imperial Mughal seat at Delhi was now at hand. The throne of Delhi was an open invitation to many an adventurer from the time of Muhammad Shah

onwards, even though it continued to remain notionally the seat of a vast empire until 1857.

Two of the first five imperial descendants of the hardy Babar were in fact themselves taken prisoners. On his journey to Kabul in 1626, Jahangir was taken prisoner by Mahabat Khan, who was opposed to the influence of his queen, Nur Jahan. Jahangir was kept captive until the imperial caravan reached Kabul. There, Mahabat Khan sought forgiveness.¹⁸

Shah Jahan was less fortunate. His illness in 1657 sparked off a fratricidal war between his sons. Murad, having been taken prisoner by Aurangzeb's stratagem, was executed in the Gwalior Fort. Dara Shikoh was betrayed by the Sindhi Raja of Jun and made over to Aurangzeb while fleeing to Kandahar. Condemned by a 'tribunal' for heresy, he was humiliated publicly and then executed in Delhi. Shuja fled to Arrakan. However, he met a fate no better than his ill-fated brothers. Aurangzeb thus ascended to the throne of the vast empire while his father, the emperor, was still alive. Shah Jahan was then imprisoned in the Agra Fort where he remained his son's hostage for eight long years till his death in 1666.

Aurangzeb's example was not the first, nor would it be the last, of fratricide as a prelude to the assumption of imperial status. Delhi had seldom seen any

different method of transfer of power since the emergence of the feudal order. The ferocity and the inhuman barbarity increased with the decay of the feudal order. An over-stretched empire, in desperate need of revenues, became more violent and less tolerant of dissent and competitive claims.

III. BLINDINGS AND FRATRICIDE

The two hundred years that followed the death of the Pathan king Ibrahim Lodhi at Panipat witnessed the blinding of no less than a dozen active or suspected aspirants to the throne of Delhi, and the violent killing of countless others. Humayun had his brother Kamran's eyes gouged out after an unsuccessful defence of Kabul in 1553. In the same year, in Delhi, Feroze Shah, the twelve year old Suri king, third in line from Sher Shah, had his three-day old reign brutally ended when Muhammad Shah Sur Adili dragged him from his mother's lap and blinded him shortly before putting an end to his life.

Of his successors, Jahangir had preferred the claim of his youngest son, Shahryar, husband of Lado Begum, Nur Jahan's daughter by Sher Afgan. But the queen's own brother, Asif Khan was to defeat and capture his sister's son-in-law, while campaigning the cause of his own son-in-law Khurram, Shah Jahan. And Lado's uncle showed no mercy to Shahryar. The prisoner was blinded without the slightest qualm.

The fear of regicide and fratricide induced Aurangzeb's grandson Jahandar Shah to seek the elimination of all probable claimants to the throne. Farrukh Siyar, the son of Jahandar's elder brother, the ill-fated Azmul Shah, was among the few to survive. And Farrukh Siyar's retribution, following his victory at Agra in December 1712, was as brutal as it was callous. Jahandar was slain and his body was paraded through Delhi with his severed head impaled on a spear. Several princes of blood including Humayun Bakht, the challenger's own ten year old brother, were blinded with red-hot needles.

In 1788, the chieftain of Rohilkand, Ghulam Kadir Rohilla, gouged out the eyes of Delhi's emperor, Shah Alam. The incident was thus reported by a contemporary source:

He [the Rohilla] sent for the dethroned king and all the princes of the royal family to the audience chamber; on their arrival, he sternly commanded Shah Aulum to discover his concealed treasures; in vain did the king plead his degraded state, and the consequent inability to conceal even the smallest article. Inflamed by a continual debauch, which had thrown him into a paroxysm of rage, the tyrant threatened his sovereign with instant loss of sight; What! exclaimed the suffering prince, (we quote the literal expressions of a native author), What! will you destroy those eyes which for a period of sixty years have been assiduously employed in perusing the

sacred Koran?

Regardless of the pathetic appeal, the Rohilla, with characteristic inhumanity, commanded his attendants to seize the king. Having thrown him on the floor, the ferocious ruffian implanting himself on his bosom, transfixed with a poignard the eyes of his venerable sovereign! On the completion of this horrid deed, Gholaam Cadir ordered the king to be removed to a distant apartment. The miserable Shah Aulum, pale and bleeding, was conducted to his retreat; there, in all the bitterness of anguish, to contemplate on his now ruined fortunes.¹⁹

The poor king survived another twenty years, bearing the marks of the Afghan's rage. Though avenged by his Maratha ally, the Scindia of Gwalior, he always remained a picture of his tormentor's venom.

Indeed, it was the same Ghulam Kadir Rohilla who derived sadistic pleasure in witnessing the diabolical dance of death, the *raqs-e-bismil*. The neck of the accursed victim having been put to the sword and cut clean with a sharp precise blow, a red-hot steel tray held with tongs was instantaneously brought down upon the gaping round wound between the shoulders where the head had been. The heat apparently impelled the circulation of the blood in the remaining body. The headless wretch danced in demonic frenzy for a few swift

moments before falling to the ground. The Rohilla chief was best pleased by the macabre number with the most feverish steps.

It was also this Muslim chieftain who, after ordering the princesses of the royal blood to dance for him, pretended to fall asleep with his dagger placed away from him in studied negligence. He was disappointed when none of the humiliated princesses even attempted to employ the dagger to kill their captor in his sleep. It is the recounting of this incident that compelled Iqbal to spell out thus the disease that afflicted the progeny of Babar:

HAMEEYAT NAAM THA JIS KA GAYEE TAIMUR KAY GHAR SAY

The House of Taimur is bereft of solidarity.

IV. CONDITIONED TO VIOLENCE

There were several reasons why, in Indus and India, the retribution of the victor would always be swift and cruel. The lines of succession and the rules ensuring their purity and guaranteeing adherence to the prescribed hierarchies were not established. Such rules can only be enforced by the sanction of socio-political forces or classes extraneous to and apart from the contenders. But here there were no arbiters of power willing to support only the contender with the legitimate title against the pretender. In other words, there was an

absence of the social factor of the bourgeoisie, and an absence of such bourgeois institutions as a parliament and an independent judiciary. Britain had developed some initial forms of both by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Parliaments and the courts had already begun to act as the checks and balances upon the use and misuse of royal prerogative. Britain also had established rules governing succession.²⁰ Not so the subcontinent.

Ironically, in the subcontinental culture of rebellion, assassination, execution and conflict, bereft of any judicial process, manifestly speedy and brutal vengeance seemed to be the only deterrent to rebellion. But brutal preventive measures once taken only became the measure of subsequent retribution and revenge. Sons would fight for the throne and ultimately ascend to it, after having been conditioned by their own fathers to the need for violence and retribution in grievous proportions. Thus, when Prince Khusrau's armies had been routed at Lahore by Emperor Jahangir in 1606, and the errant prince had been arrested attempting to cross the Chenab, he was brought in chains before his father in the garden of Mirza Kamran on the Ravi. His confederates, Hussain Beg and Abdul Aziz, were on either side of him. The emperor himself described the event in his memoirs:

The Prince stood between them trembling and weeping. Husain Beg, suspecting that he would be made the scapegoat, began to speak

sorrowfully but he was not allowed to continue. Khusrow was placed in custody. I then ordered the two villains to be enclosed in the skins of a cow and an ass respectively, and to be put on asses, their faces towards the tails, and to be paraded in this manner round the city. Husain Beg, who was enclosed in the cow's skin, lived only to the fourth watch, as the skin of that animal dries quickly, and then died. Abdul Aziz, who was in the ass's skin, which is less affected by moisture, survived a day and a night. Then he died... Having directed a number of sharp stakes to be set up in a double row, from the garden of Mirza Kamran to the gates of Lahore, I caused 700 traitors who had conspired with Khusrow against my authority to be impaled alive upon them. There cannot be a more excruciating punishment than this since the wretches lingered a long time in the most agonizing torture before they died, and the spectacle of their agony was most frightful.²¹

Along this ghastly avenue, the wretched prince was paraded on an elephant to see for himself the writhing and shrieking of the victims of his father's fierce revenge and his own vaulting ambition.

While blinding and emasculation of the body were the particularly draconian methods of punishing a fallen foe, assassinations after battles were no less frequent. Ibrahim Lodhi, Sher Shah Suri, Humayun's brother Hindal,

Hemu, the Hindu prime minister of the Suri Afghans, met their ends in battles for sovereignty. Shah Jahan publicly executed the sons of the princes Danial, Murad and Pervez upon his accession in February 1629 at Agra. His son and grandson followed the gory precedent, before and after their accession to the throne.

The French doctor, Bernier, who visited the court of Aurangzeb and had seen the gruesome wars of succession in which the emperor had fought and killed his own brothers, observed:

My readers have no doubt condemned the means by which the reigning Mughal attained the summit of power. These means were indeed unjust and cruel; but it is not perhaps fair to judge him by the rigid rules which we apply to the character of European princes. In our quarter of the globe, the succession to the crown is settled in favour of the eldest son by wise and fixed laws; but in Hindustan the right of governing is usually disputed by all the sons of the deceased monarch, each of whom is reduced to the cruel alternative of sacrificing his brothers that he himself may reign, or of suffering his own life to be forfeited for the security and stability of the dominion of another. Yet even those who may maintain that the circumstances of country, birth, and education afford no palliation of the conduct pursued by Aurangzeb, must admit that this Prince is endowed

with a versatile and rare genius, that he is a consummate statesman, and the great King.²²

The passage, written contemporaneously, must establish two distinct cultures. Europe already had the settled rule of primogeniture governing succession to the throne when Aurangzeb was fighting his fratricidal wars. And the year after Aurangzeb died (1707), leaving in his wake other heirs to kill each other for his throne, England enacted the Act of Settlement (1708), sanctioning the royal line and determining its constant application through the following centuries. The two different systems, the bourgeois and the feudal provided different answers to same questions.

Aurangzeb's decision to publicly humiliate and then kill his captive brother Dara Shikoh perhaps provides the key to the understanding of why such procedures were deemed necessary.

In private session with his grandees, Aurangzeb now invited pro and con arguments. For the moment it seemed that Dara would be taken to Gwalior state prison, but the debate centred on the question of whether or not there should be a humiliating parade through Delhi's streets. A few nobles counselled caution: it could only spatter mud on the royal family to make a degraded spectacle of the prince, and there was even the possibility of a

riot or rescue attempt. The opposition countered with blunt insistence: Dara had to be exposed to public gaze in order to terrify the mob with the reality of Aurangzeb's power; besides, only seeing was believing, and nothing less than an open display could make it quite clear that Dara was incontrovertibly a prisoner. Aurangzeb finally decided that future fake Daras must be prevented from stirring up trouble. Dara and his son Sipihr Shikoh would be dragged in squalor under military guard through the main thoroughfares of central Delhi, for every Indian to see.²³

The throne at Delhi was not the only subject of contention in India during the eighteenth century. India was now an obviously splintered polity. Engaged by its own enormous problems, the grip of the central authority had been broken. Indus and India had become a matrix of small, divisive and feuding states. Under British dominion there would be six hundred of them.

V. TWO CLARIFICATIONS

Two issues must, however, be clarified. It may appear from the foregoing that it has been implied that the British, as compared to the Muslim and Hindu rulers of the subcontinent were benign, benevolent and enlightened rulers. It may also seem that it has been suggested that Europe, unlike India, had always witnessed entirely peaceful transfers of power.

In recounting the barbarities of the Indian contenders for power, and in contrasting these with industrialized Europe's evolution of rules of peaceful succession, it is not intended to suggest that the British, in contrast to the Indian rulers, were a gentle and benevolent regime in India. That was not the case. The sad fate of the weavers and peasants of Bengal, and the absolute terror, indeed carnage, following upon the British success in the war of 1857 are only two of the countless examples of uncalled for, in the former, and ostensibly (though unjustifiably) retributive brutality in the latter example. Who has not read accounts of the punishment of death by being tied to cannon and being blown to smithereens, a punishment that so many British Courts Martial so readily pronounced? And then there would also be detentions, externments, special court trials and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar.

The benevolence of the British is not being attested to. What is being definitely averred, however, is that in respect of *their own* governance, and in regard to the transition from one sovereign or government to another, the British had established their own rules. The line of succession was predetermined and the transition itself peaceful. They had also devised some stable norms concerning the relationship of the citizen with the state. These were mainly based upon the social contract as expounded by Locke in England and by Rousseau in France. These were the bourgeois philosophies

sanctioning the rights of man. No such philosophy was propounded in the subcontinent until the twentieth century when the struggle for independence from the imperial power was well under way.

It must also not be understood that it is being implied that the transition process has been so well-oiled in Europe that it has not witnessed any regicide. Charles I and Louis XVI were both executed, the one in 1649 and the other as late as 1792. Yet the point is that they were done away with for the precise purpose of establishing a system which would put an end to such forms of transition. This may seem paradoxical, but is as logical as the concept of a 'war to end wars.'

There is another perspective on these episodes. The contention which led to these two executions was not the contention between two individual adventurist contenders to the crown. Their executions were the high points of the contention between feudal authoritarianism and bourgeois institutionalism. The victor was thus not an individual; it was a widely dispersed *class*. The absolutism of the rulers was gradually restricted as a result of these uprisings. The discretion of the monarch was subordinated to the interests of the class that brought him and his issue to the throne.

Indian struggles for power, by contrast, were factionalist conflicts led by

individual claimants in repeated free-for-all bouts, giving to the victor the fruit of unfettered and arbitrary power, and inflicting upon the vanquished the most abject suffering and a painful and gruesome death. With stakes and risks so unevenly distributed in India, little wonder that the latter-day elite was unable to retain the sense of honour, chivalry and national pride that had been the strength of the early Rajput and feudal kingdoms.

In Europe, the 'cowherd' and the 'cow', as we have seen, had entered into a working arrangement. There was already a compact. This was the new social contract. The national sovereign guaranteed all the conditions necessary for the conduct of prosperous commerce; the merchant employed a substantial proportion of his wealth and assets to finance the security of the realm and the status of the monarch. The king kept the peace; the merchants funded his wars. It was to the mutual benefit of both. The profit and surplus acquired by the merchant under favourable conditions created by the state ensured the perpetuation and expansion of both. It was such an expansionist Britain that was circuiting, ominously, around the shores of India.

Backed by the penetrating weapons of technological advances, its naval dominance, printing presses and, later, the steam engine and the telegraph lines, Britain was marching towards India at an opportune time. India was splitting at the seams. And Britain made the most of this opening in an

unabashed, opportunistic and expropriatory manner.

1. Bari, 57.

2. Ibid., 60.

3. The king had, in fact, found that it was easier to tax with 'representation', in other words with the assistance of the nobles and the feudal lords.

4. Almost the whole of the sixteenth century, a period preceding and coterminous with the reigns of Babar, Humayun, and Akbar.

5. D. L. Keir and F. H. Lawson, *Cases in Constitutional Law* (4th ed. revised) (1962) 65. What Mughal king would have subjected himself to any such restraint?

6. James VI of Scotland had succeeded Elizabeth I as King James I of England and Scotland, on the nomination of the issueless queen, to establish the House of Stuarts in 1603.

7. See O. Hood Phillips, *Constitutional and Administrative Law* (1967) 240.
8. See Keir, 81.
9. See the judgment in *Ashby vs. White*, a case of 1703, where Ashby had brought an action against the respondent mayor of Aylesbury (White), for maliciously refusing to accept his vote. Phillips, 188.
10. See Phillips, 229.
11. The Islamic laws.
12. See William Bennett Munro and Morley Ayearst, *The Governments of Europe* (4th ed.) (1959) 39.
13. See Phillips, 240.
14. For Darnel's Case (or the Case of the Five Knights), see Keir, 49-50.

15. Stanley Lane-Poole, *Aurangzib and the Decay of the Mughal Empire* (1987) 62.
16. Aijazuddin, *Lahore*, 10-11.
17. See chapter 14, section III above.
18. For this episode see, in the words of Stanley Lane-Poole, the courage and presence of mind of the empress Nur Jahan. After Mahabat Khan had the person of the emperor when he was separated from his guards while crossing the Jhelum, Nur Jahan 'far from being daunted by this unexpected stratagem, lost not a whit of her splendid courage. She secretly escaped to the imperial guard, and marshalled her husband's troops against the division of his captor, riding at the head of the army on her tall elephant, armed with bow and arrows. Mahabat's Rajputs had burned the bridge, but the empress was among the first to cross the ford and engage the enemy on the other side. A scene of universal tumult and confusion ensued: choked with horses and elephants; some fell and were trampled under foot; others sank in the pools and were unable to regain the shore; and numbers plunged into the river and ran the chance of making good their passage or

being swept away by the stream. The most furious assault was directed at Nur-Jahan: her elephant was surrounded by a crowd of Rajputs; her guards were overpowered and cut down at its feet; balls and arrows fell thick round her howdah and one of the latter wounded the infant daughter of Shahriyar, who was seated in her lap. At length her driver was killed; and her elephant, having received a cut on the proboscis, dashed into the river and soon sank in deep water and was carried down the stream. After several plunges he swam out and reached the shore, where Nur-Jahan was surrounded by her women, who came shrieking and lamenting, and found her howdah stained with blood, and herself busy in extracting the arrow and binding up the wound of the infant.' Despite such jeopardy to her life and a major strategic setback, Nur Jahan did not give up. 'Open war had failed, and the brave woman resorted to other methods. She boldly entered the camp and for months shared her husband's captivity. By degrees her arts lulled to rest the watchful suspicions of the general; she won over some of the leading officers to her side; and finally one day the emperor found himself at liberty with his faithful queen beside him and the army at his command.' Stanley Lane-Poole, *Mediaeval India under Mohammadan Rule (AD 712-1764)* 323-4.

19. W. Francklin, *The History of the Reign of Shah Aulum* (reprint 1988) 176.

20. Oliver Cromwell, the only deviationist from the norm after the seventeenth century, could not hold on for long and the monarchy was restored in the rightful succession upon his ouster.
21. Jahangir's was not the first example of a father demonstrating to his son the cruelty of the monarch's retribution. After suppressing the rebellion of his governor Tughral in Bengal, Balban had similarly arrayed rows of gibbets on which the rebels were strung. The prince who was made the governor of Bengal in place of the deposed Tughral was also made to witness the sight, with the aged king pointing out that such was the punishment of any governor who rebelled against his government. The prince certainly got the message. Lane-Poole, *Mediaeval India*, 86-7.
22. Quoted by Lane-Poole in *Aurangzeb*, 63-4.
23. Waldemar Hansen, *The Peacock Throne: The Drama of Mogul India* (1972) 372.

Tombs, Ostentation and Land Tenure

I. THE PEACOCK THRONE AND THE TAJ MAHAL

While the Glorious Revolution in England (AD 1688) represents most vividly the bourgeois concern for a certainty regarding future events, the belief in the 'offerings to Ahmed Shah' epitomized the pessimistic view that was taken in Indus and India of the events ahead.¹

The peculiar Indian practice decreeing the lapse of assignments and landholdings upon the death of the feudatories had a similar effect upon the lifestyles of the elite. The consequence of the danger of losing all one's wealth at the whim of the emperor and the inability to pass it on to one's chosen or natural heirs was also disastrous. Barrington Moore puts it aptly: 'The risk of accumulating wealth and the barrier to its transmission by testament put a tremendous premium on display. Spending, not hoarding, was the dominant feature of the time. Such appears to be the origin of that magnificence rooted in squalour that still strikes visitors to India today and that made a vivid impression on European travellers in Mughal times. The Emperor set the example of magnificence to be followed by his courtiers.'²

The feudatory would obviously reflect with Percival Spear:

Why not get the glory to be derived from ostentation and public works when you could pass nothing on to your family? Thus the Mughal nobles were notable for their ostentation, their crowds of retainers with even more than the average insolence of office, their works of piety in the shape of mosques, wells and rest houses, of ease like their gardens and summerhouses, and of remembrance like their great domed tombs. The Mughal nobility was thus an official aristocracy which was hereditary as a class but not as individuals, which was landholding but not feudal.³

In life and death the emperors were the most prominent exponents of the culture of ostentation and extravagance. The mere six feet by four feet Peacock throne, inlaid with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds in solid gold, adorned by two gilded peacocks with their tails spreading out, cost a precious sixty million rupees by the value in Shah Jahan's own time. Little wonder that in 1739 Nadir Shah was able to take away hoarded wealth worth six hundred million rupees, exclusive of the jewels which included the Kohinoor and the Peacock Throne.

While British monarchs of the past several centuries from Henry III to George II, lie side by side in one rather cold Westminster Abbey, the remains of the Mughal dynasty lie under expansive domes in areas as far apart as Delhi,

Sikandra, Shahdara, Agra and Aurangabad. On the Taj Mahal's icy marble structure, some twenty thousand workmen and artisans laboured for no less than twenty-two years. By present standards, the wages of the workmen alone would perhaps exceed ten billion rupees! This estimate does not take into account the cost of materials and the salaries of architects and craftsmen imported from distant lands.⁴ The construction of the grand mosque in Delhi employed five thousand workmen for six years. By the above measure, labour alone cost eight hundred million rupees. A greater sum was spent by Aurangzeb on the Badshahi mosque in Lahore, perhaps the largest mosque in the world.

Although the two basic architectural forms, the mosque and the mausoleum, in the words of Mujeeb, led to and defined each other, and constituted an organic whole in which the concepts of truth, beauty and power were realized,⁵ we have also to agree with Moore when he observes that, by skimming off most of the economic surplus generated by the underlying population and turning it into display, the Mughal rulers for a time avoided the dangers of an aristocratic attack on their power. At the same time, such a use of the surplus seriously limited the possibilities of economic development or, more precisely, the kind of economic development that would have broken through the agrarian order and established a new kind of society.⁶

Babar, the first Mughal, had been a self-denying ascetic although he is ascribed the precept:

BABAR BA AISH KOOSH KAY ALAM DOBARA NEEST

O Babar, make merry because you will not live again.

Babar gave up drinking, once he had won Delhi in 1526. But his progeny could not restrain themselves. They soon sank into lives of luxury and revelry. In fact, Humayun and Jahangir drank so excessively that the habit cost them their lives.

II. THE OBSESSIONS OF THE PRINCES

The feudatories of Delhi, from Jaipur to Murshidabad, were not far behind the emperor in expending lavishly upon splendour and a false sense of prestige. Millions were spent by them upon their feasts and retainers. There can perhaps be no exact measure of what they cumulatively spent each year upon such occasions as betrothals and marriages, but the example of the sultan of that inconsequential half-desert principality of Bhakkar may serve as some indicator of the general cancer.

Sultan Mahmud could not restrain himself while celebrating the marriage

of his daughter Bhakkari Begum. No doubt, the young lady, to the delight of the Sultan, was being sent away to marry Emperor Akbar, as one of his several wives. But what Sultan Shah Mahmud spent on the ceremonies, even though the groom was not personally present, is reflective of the elite's uncontrollable propensity to squander and waste. When,

... on 20 Safar/2 July, Akbar's envoy, I'timad Khan arrived at Sultan Mahmud's court to escort the latter's daughter, Bhakkari Begum, to join the ladies of the harem, [he] brought the following gifts from the Emperor for Sultan Mahmud: an elegant dress of honour, a bejewelled scimitar-belt, a horse with a saddle and reins, and four elephants. The Sultan celebrated the occasion by holding extravagant feasts for fifteen days . . . On the day of the wedding (*aqd*), these festivities reached their zenith and the *ulema*, saints, and nobles were adequately honoured with rewards. Sultan Mahmud offered 30,000 rupees in cash and kind to I'timad Khan and saw off his daughter with a grand dowry and an impressive entourage.⁷

How psychopathic these princely obsessions were to become by the twentieth century is illustrated by some of the astounding facts about their ostentatious spending, cited by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre: 'With their average of 11 titles, 5.8 wives, 12.6 children, 9.2 elephants, 2.8 private railway cars, 3.4 Rolls Royces and 22.9 tigers killed,'⁸ the princes and the rajas had carried the

predilections of their ancestors into modern times. Some of the stories recounted are quite incredible.

The self-assumed grandiose titles that matched only their own pretensions of greatness were fascinating. The seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, for instance, was the Rustam-e-Dauran, Arustu-e-Zaman Wal Mumalik, Asif Jah, Nawab Mir Usman, Alikhar Bahadar, Musafzul Mulk Nizam al-Mad, Sipah Salar Fateh Jang, His Exalted Highness, Most Faithful Ally of the British.

Their fascination for everything that was expensive was astounding. The Maharaja of Baroda, for instance, was so fond of gold that 'his court tunic was of spun gold and only one family in his state was allowed to weave its threads. The fingernails of each member of the family were grown to extraordinary length, then cut and notched like the teeth of a comb so they could caress the gold threads into perpendicular perfection.'⁹

Incidentally, by the twentieth century this obsession of the princes with precious stones was in itself a legend. Baroda boasted the Star of the South, the seventh biggest diamond in the world.

The largest topaz in the world gleamed like a Cyclopean eye from the turban of the Sikh Maharaja of Kapurthala, its apricot brilliance set off by a

field of 3000 diamonds and pearls. The fabulous treasure of the Maharaja of Jaipur was buried in a Rajasthan hillside, the site guarded from generation to generation by a particularly bellicose Rajput tribe.... Among the marvels was a necklace composed of three tiers of rubies, each the size of a pigeon's egg, and three enormous emeralds, the largest of which weighed 90 carats. The centrepiece of the great Sikh Maharaja of Patiala's collection was a pearl necklace insured by Lloyds for one million dollars.¹⁰

The most valuable collection in stones and gold was, of course, that of the Nizam of Hyderabad. His paperweight was the Jacob diamond, 'a stone the size of a lime, 280 sparkling, precious carats . . . In the overgrown garden was a convoy of dozens of trucks mired in mud up to their axles from the weight of their loads, solid gold ingots. The Nizam's jewels, a collection so enormous it was said the pearls alone would cover all the pavements of Piccadilly Circus, were spilled like coals in a scuttle on the floors of his cellars; sapphires, emeralds, rubies, diamonds mingled in indiscriminate heaps. He had well over two million pounds in cash - sterling, rupees - wrapped in old newspapers, stuck in dusty corners of the palace's basement and attic. There they earned a kind of negative interest from the jaws of the rats who annually gnawed their way through thousands of pounds of the Nizam's fortune.'¹¹

A most interesting tale is one of a southern maharaja.

An early Maharaja of Mysore was informed by a Chinese sage that the most efficacious aphrodisiacs in the world were made of crushed diamonds. The unfortunate discovery led to the rapid impoverishment of the state treasury as hundreds of precious stones were ground to dust in the princely mills. The dancing girls, for whom the resulting potions were meant, in a sense to benefit, were paraded through the state on elephants whose trunks were studded with rubies and whose ears were decorated with elephant earrings composed of the prince's surviving diamonds.¹²

'The Maharaja of Baroda went about on an elephant even more gaudily arrayed. The animal was a 100 year old monster whose great tusks had skewered twenty rivals in as many combats. All his equipment was in gold: the howdah in which the prince rode, his harness, the great saddle-cloth, or *shabrack*, covering his back. Like pendants, ten gold chains hung from each of the pachyderm's ears. Each chain was worth 25,000 pounds and each represented one of his victories.'¹³

While the elephant remained the symbol of royalty, at the turn of the twentieth century the princes took to cars. And the most favoured of cars was the Rolls-Royce. Patiala had twenty-seven; Bharatpur had the most exotic one: it was a silver-plated convertible. 'The most extra-ordinary princely vehicle in India, however, was a Lancaster styled to the bizarre design of the Maharaja of

Alwar. It was gold-plated inside and out. The chauffeur, manipulating a steering wheel in sculptured ivory, reposed on a gold-braided cushion. Behind him, the body of the car was a perfectly reproduced replica of the coronation coach of the kings of England. By some mechanical miracle its engine was still able to hurl that weighty vehicle along the road at 70 mph.¹⁴

The ostentatious orgies with money in which these princes indulged are best epitomized by the expenditure that the Maharaja of Junagarh lavished upon the 'wedding ceremony' of his favourite bitch. '150,000 people crowded the route of the nuptial cortege which was led by the prince's bodyguard and the royal elephants in full regalia. After the parade the Maharaja offered a lavish banquet in the canine couple's honour before they were led off to their beautifully appointed bridal suite. Those proceedings could have financed the basic human needs of 12,000 of his 620,000 impoverished subjects for an entire year.'¹⁵

Their palaces, too, were enormous, luxurious, and expensive. Mysore's palace had six hundred rooms. 'Nine hundred and fifty-three windows, each set in its hand-carved marble frame, covered one facade of Jaipur's marble Palace of the Wind (*Hawa Mahal*). Udaipur's white marble palace rose ghost-like from the mists of a shimmering lake.'¹⁶ The Maharaja of Kapurthala, that miniscule state in the foothills of the Himalayas, built for himself a replica

of Versailles.

III. STATIC HOARDING BENEFITS NO ONE

The development of a bourgeoisie presumes, of necessity, the existence of certain socio-economic impulses that encourage savings and the funnelling of the accumulated surplus towards trade and commercial enterprises. It presupposes the availability of investment possibilities, potentially far more profit-yielding than land and its cultivation. Above all, it assumes that the acquisition of forms of wealth other than landholding is also a method, albeit new, of acquiring status and position. Saving and investment, as distinct from spending to hoard, become the basic *sine qua non* of such development and growth. In this area also the Indian subcontinent displayed a unique and entirely retrogressive feature.

The nature of the wealth hoarded by the princes and the magnificence of the palaces and tombs built by them had one deleterious effect upon the economy of the entire subcontinent. Their hoarding of precious stones, gold, and currency was not the kind of 'saving' that is necessary for the economy to grow. This 'static saving', hidden in vaults and dungeons, never benefitted the merchant. This 'wealth' neither generated any economic, commercial, or industrial activity, nor became stock-in-trade. It never came into commercial

circulation. The Indian and Indus merchants and industrial entrepreneurs therefore never had the resources available to them that their European counterparts did.

Concentration of urban populations, depending upon the transport and supply of commodities and necessities of life not produced within the urban centre itself, is another factor necessary for the development of the merchant classes. But the strait-jacket of caste in India impeded mobility and therefore urbanization. The Indian and Indus merchants were thus deprived of the progressive benefits of urbanization. These, too, were dependent upon the movement of troops, or of the imperial court. Anarchy in the countryside smothered the impulse to travel, to leave the security of the known for the uncertainty of the unknown. Paradoxically, anarchy compelled India to opt for the 'security' of the pre-existing system. And that system only bred further anarchy.

Bereft of any developmental investment of an economic surplus and of a social ethic of saving, held tight and static by the suffocating grip of the caste and the 'sleeping village', India could not put an end to its odyssey of anarchy and turmoil. No class with a tangible and dominant stake in all-pervading and long-term peace, tranquillity and order could develop. No class and no economic interests sought the development of institutions, parliamentary or

judicial, inhibiting the exercise of unbridled and arbitrary authority by the king. Nor, therefore, could a stake in successive peaceful transfers of power develop. The stability imposed by every one of the grand and powerful Mughals was invariably broken by sanguinary wars of succession upon the demise of each monarch.

IV. ASSIGNMENTS FOR LIFE ONLY

Afraid of their own example, as also the example of their predecessors, the Mughals endeavoured to eliminate the possibility of rebellion by the nobility in several ways. The aristocracy was arrayed in an imperial service comprising some thirty-three tiers, from commanders of ten men to ten thousand. Commanders of five thousand upwards were the nobility, but these titles, or *mansabs*, were not hereditary. Moreover, Akbar paid his *mansabdars*¹⁷ in cash, though the cumbersome salary system was done away with by Akbar's successors, and the system of assignments of land revenue restored. This had the disadvantage of enabling individual lords to become powerful and strong by clever management or by taxation.

The rich feudatory is more prone to rebellion than the impoverished prince. The rich lord is in a position to pay for retainers and for long expensive campaigns. The assignment system also provides him with the essential

territorial base; and few were more conscious of these dangers than those whose necks were at stake.

The Mughal kings countered the risk in two ways. One was by rotating the officers. We are told that governorships and other such high offices were seldom held for more than three or four years at a time. Akbar practised frequent transfers from one region to another to deny his mansabdars territorial bases for revolt. The second method was the resumption of the property of the feudal assignee at his death. Assignments of land were for life only.¹⁸ Each succeeding generation had to start from the very bottom of an official career. Moreover, during the lifetime of a feudatory, payments were always in arrears so that most feudatories were only able to make ends meet by means of advances from the treasury. Upon the death of each feudal lord, his entire property was sealed and nothing was released until all the arrears and advances had been recovered by the imperial state. The process involved the recovery of death duties as high as almost a hundred per cent, leaving next to nothing in the estate. A remarkable example is provided by Asif Khan, father of Shah Jahan's favourite queen, the much-remembered Mumtaz Mahal. The Emperor was willing to build the massive Taj for the mortal remains of his late queen but did not spare the estate of her deceased father and his own minister. The entire wealth of several hundred million rupees, belonging to the

emperor's own father-in-law, was escheat to the imperial treasury on his death in AD 1641. Only two hundred thousand rupees were allowed to pass down to Asif Khan's widow and issue!

The elite and the populace were thus impelled to devour all prospective savings. There could, therefore, be very little capital formation. All this impeded the growth of the mercantile class. Where there were any merchants, they fared no better than the nobility. Barrington Moore is quite incisive in his judgment that: 'In general the attitude of the political authorities in India towards the merchant seems to have been closer to that of the spider towards the fly than that of the cowherd towards his cow that was widespread in Europe at the same time. Not even Akbar, the most enlightened of the Mughals, had a Colbert. In the Hindu areas, the situation was probably somewhat worse. Local authorities, such as the governor of a town, might at times take a different view, though they too were under pressure to make and spend their fortunes rapidly. All in all, I believe it safe to conclude that the establishment of peace and order (of a sort) did not create a situation in which the rise of mercantile influences could undermine the agrarian order to the extent that it did in Japan. *The Mughal system was too predatory for that.*'¹⁹ (Emphasis added).

Then in 1757, Britain wrested its first significant political dominion at the battlefield of Plassey.

V. FURTHER GROWTH IS ARRESTED

The apologists for the Raj, notably Percival Spear, have tried to establish that the Bengal foothold of the East India Company was uneconomical and that further conquest was necessitated by the sole object of the defence of this and other similar footholds themselves. The truth, however, is anything but this.

England, armed with its superior back-up of resources and technology, was the worst thing yet to have happened to Indus and India. These had, no doubt, lagged behind in the race for socio-economic development. They were, as we have seen, not even at the pre-industrial stage when their further growth was arrested in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries by England. Europe had, of course, marched well ahead. Yet, independent Indus and India, exploiting their own resources, employing for their own development their hardy and dexterous manpower, harvesting their own crops, and marketing their own manufactures, would have certainly got into the race. But captive Indus and India were to labour under the imperial yoke and be subjected to the expropriationary policies of imperial Britain. They were, in short, to be made agrarian appendages to the empire.

The contest was not equal. Europe's resources, drawing upon its material and technological advances and its new overseas colonies, were a powerful

combination against the pre-industrial mode of production prevalent in Indus and India.

1. See chapter 14, section VII above.
2. Barrington Moore Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (1979) 320.
3. Percival Spear, *A History of India* (1979) 41-2.
4. The Taj Mahal has evoked the most contradictory emotional responses. To the Uzbek girl whom Akbar S. Ahmed met in Bokhara, 'It was the symbol of love, of romance, of imperial luxury and extravagance; a symbol that was both Muslim and human, that spoke to her of her identity and, above all, that expressed human love, the love of a husband for a wife.' Akbar S. Ahmed, *Living Islam*, 95. To the Indian poet, Sahir Ludhianvi, it was a cruel joke played by an emperor upon the poor in the guise of his love:

A Shahinshah, with the aid of wealth
Has mocked the love of us poor
people.

5. Mujeeb, 184.

6. Moore, 321.

7. Saleem Akhtar, *Sind Under the Mughals*, 53.

8. *Freedom At Midnight*, Collins and Lapierre, 131.

9. Ibid., 133.

10. Ibid., 133.

11. Ibid., 144-5.

12. Ibid., 134.

13. Ibid., 134.

14. Ibid., 136.

15. Ibid., 137.

16. Ibid., 137.

17. Ibid., 137.

18. Commanders.

19. Only Akbar decreed some exception to this rule. See chapter 13, section V, above.

Sea Power and Military Tactics

I. CONTRASTING COASTLINES

Other critical factors ensured Europe's pre-eminence over India. The inequality of seapower, for instance. To all intents and purposes, the empire of the Mughals, with its seat at Delhi, far removed from the endless deep, was, in effect, a 'landlocked' state. The emperors, never having even seen the ocean, far from having embarked upon a sea-going vessel, could not fully comprehend the proportions of a sea or an ocean. The subcontinent was such a large landmass that, by the time the imperial writ reached the distant seas, the line had already been stretched thin. There was scarcely any energy to contemplate a trans-oceanic journey.

None of the dynasties that had preceded the Mughals as rulers of Delhi had been conscious of the need, or the facility of the use, of seapower. The Afghans and the Central Asians were singularly 'intra-continental' peoples, with no access to the ocean in any direction. They brought their concepts with them to the subcontinent. They had little need for a navy, even though the arrogance of a Mughal court was quite astounding. The Afghan, Kasim Khan, the general

who conquered Kashmir for Akbar in 1586, was styled the *Amirul Beher* (the Commander of the Ocean), though he had never seen the inside of a ship and could hardly tell the bow from the stern.

Seafaring as a state enterprise had never been held sufficiently important to merit the official patronage of a Delhi sultan or emperor. Opening up and maintaining the trade routes to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf or the Bay of Bengal was task enough. Without the mariner's compass, navigation had necessarily to be coastal. The long coastline of peninsular India led to nowhere except to more areas of India itself. As there were no 'across the channel' states, there was no impetus or compulsion to take to the sea.

India had very few islands bordering its clear-cut coastline, though its peninsular south protruded into the Indian Ocean. The subcontinent was a vast state, with enormous depth, and with a proportionately small coastline. The European states were small by comparison, with little depth and endless coastlines. Delhi is about one thousand miles from the sea on either side. No spot of land in England, by comparison, is more than one hundred miles from the sea. What the horse was to the Central Asian Mongol, the ship was to the Briton. And the mariner's compass, backed by an affluent trading class, had come to emancipate Europe's seamen from a constant dependence upon the coastline.

Ship-building as we have seen, had no doubt been an important industry in some parts of India. While Bengal had been supplying ships to the fleets of the world, Multan was smelting the sturdiest anchors. The Mauryas had, in fact, looked wistfully out at the sea not a very long distance from their capital at Pataliputra, intending always to support a prestigious fleet. The kingdoms in the south had maintained substantial merchant and martial navies. The Cholas were at home on the sea. Their successors, the Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Pandayas had fought naval battles, *inter se*, and employed naval vessels for the transport of troops and trade. Vijayanagar maintained ports and ships.

The Delhi Sultanate had never been able to master the peninsula, but, with Mughal ascendancy in the south, the concept of a navy as a means of transport or war was discarded as if by conscious policy. In any case, the Mughals thought little of the matter. Mughal power ended at the coasts of India.

II. THE CRITICAL MASTERY OF THE WAVES

The enormity of this handicap became evident very early. With European pirates ruling the waters around India, even Indian pilgrims crossing the Arabian Sea to Mecca were under threat. They were often looted and killed. The Portuguese appeared to be the foremost tormentors and they soon began to determine the balance of power between Indian states. The Hindu kingdom of

Vijayanagar, for instance, entered into friendly relations with the Portuguese. With their help, it began to obtain horses from Persia and Arabia. At the same time, Portuguese seamen denied the import of horses to the Muslim sultanates of the Deccan. This put the latter at an enormous disadvantage in relation to their hostile and hegemonic neighbour.]

Then in AD 1612, two vessels belonging to the British East India Company defeated a much larger force of the Portuguese. Thereafter, the Company became the dominant seapower along the coasts of India. It also undertook the protection of pilgrims.

In AD 1618, as we have seen, the Company obtained Surat for undertaking to protect Mughal sea traffic from Portuguese piracy off the western coast of India. As Spear puts it: 'The [East India] Company tacitly became the naval auxiliary of the [Mughal] Empire.'² Britain had trained its bows at the Achilles' heel of the empire. And how successful it was! Towards the end of the century, in Aurangzeb's reign, the British extracted Hooghly and other concessions in Bengal on their undertaking that they would desist from attacking the coastal traffic in trade and pilgrims. Poachers were promising to play gamekeepers. The omnipotent Mughals, bathed in all the splendour that worldly power could obtain, vainly styling themselves as the 'Shadows of God on earth', were impotent in the waters surrounding their empire.

Nor was Mughal shipping susceptible to the attack of European men-of-war alone. The Maratha leader, Shivaji, exposed the utter defencelessness of the coastline of the Mughal Empire. With a small, light fleet he was able to raid both European trade and the defenceless Mughal ships. So irritating did this activity become that Aurangzeb directed his general, Mirza Jai Singh, who had been sent out to suppress Shivaji, to persuade the Maratha chieftain to attend his court for a dialogue on the matter of Maratha piracy. Shivaji was persuaded, but the emperor was so bitter about his empire's demonstrable vulnerability on the high seas at the hands of the Maratha leader that he ordered the arrest of Shivaji and his son. He was also so indebted to Jai Singh that the general was allowed to found the dynastic house of Jaipur.³

At many critical points in battle, a mastery of the waves also provided the British a safe haven beyond the range of the adversary's land-based cannon. When Sirajudaulah took Calcutta, much of the Company's garrison retreated and took to the water. Once far out at sea, and beyond the range of the land-bound cannon, they waited for reinforcements from Madras. These arrived unimpeded, by sea. On other occasions, naval ships would penetrate deep into land-locked areas on navigable river routes and surprise the enemy. In the 1840s, during the struggle for supremacy in the Punjab, Lahore was bombarded by British ships that had come there up the Indus and the Ravi!

The unhindered use of the sea gave to Britain a speed and mobility altogether unknown to India. Even if Bombay, Madras and Calcutta were separated by vast tracts of land in the control of hostile intermediate suzerains, the sea provided an undisputed and free route. The absence of Indian seapower implied that no hostile armies, no difficult terrain, no alien territory lay in Britain's way as its ships sailed upon the seas. Resources could be concentrated at will and then diversified. Movement could be undertaken without fear of loss of men or material. Troop movements across land, by contrast, inevitably entailed crossing the borders of some jealous and vigilant princedoms. And towards the end of the eighteenth century, India was by no means a unified state or empire.

With the Mughal influence on the decline, the eighteenth century had seen the emergence of several small states, most recognizing the nominal overlordship of the Mughal kings, but all of them independent in all other respects and with exclusive command over their own armies. Bengal of Ali Wardi and Sirajuddaula, Awadh of Shujauddaula, Rohilkhand of Zabita Khan and his son Ghulam Qadir, Maharashtra of the Marathas, Sindh of the Kalhoros and Talpurs, Mysore of the brave Hyder Ali and the gallant Tipu, with Nizamul Mulk of Hyderabad awaiting his chance along the north of Mysore, and, of course, the rising power of the Sikhs in the Indus region were the most

prominent of a matrix of small states. Maritime mobility gave the British the crucial advantage of permitting approach to all the coastal states and adversaries without the need of crossing the territory of any hostile intermediate power, unnecessarily inviting its resistance and opposition. India's peninsular coastline and its many rivers sometimes provided Britain with relatively safe but penetrating access to unsuspecting states. The element of surprise in the attack from the sea was often a decisive factor in the fate of a battle.

Seafaring thus also facilitated diplomacy and imperial expansion. Adversaries could be selected, isolated and fought one at a time, without the need for compromises and alliances. Europe had an edge on the seas before it landed on Indian shores. Once on the land, it also employed military tactics that were scientific and therefore superior.

III. SUPERSTITION VERSUS THE SCIENCE OF WAR

The age of European science had brought with it advancements in all material aspects of life. It had also become the age of research and of the application of new techniques. Research led to the introduction of new methods and processes in every area of human activity and endeavour. Obviously, research was concentrated in disciplines where stakes were high and profits higher.

Money went where more money was to be had. One such department was war.

Europe had begun to apply the concepts of science to all the aspects of war. India was as yet not out of the medieval mode and impulse of warfare. Many crucial decisions, in fact, were taken by Indian commanders on the basis of superstition and without reference to any scientific norm or principle.

Humayun had been driven out of India in 1540. When pursued by Sher Shah, he had fled to Sindh, and thence to Iran where he was hosted by the Safavid king, Tamasap. By AD 1553, Sher Shah had died and Humayun had gained great confidence after having won first Kandahar and then Kabul from his brother Kamran. His contending brothers were out of his way. Askari Mirza had died on the way to banishment in Mecca. Hindal had been killed in battle. Kamran had been blinded. Humayun was strong and secure when he received an invitation from India, which was labouring under the anarchic conditions perpetrated by Sher Shah's progeny. Yet Humayun's strategy and designs could be put into action by nothing but superstition and fortuitous circumstance. Three horsemen were dispatched in three different directions of the city (Kandahar) and detailed to bring back the name of the first traveller each met. The names Daulat, Murad and Saadat were deemed propitious.⁴ Humayun decided to launch his attack upon Delhi. In an era when Europe was employing new and scientific methods of fighting battles, decisive Indian war

strategies were being dictated by chance.

Europe had evolved new strategic patterns and was using more efficient and practical tactics. Formations that had the greater capacity to inflict loss on the enemy, and to protect one's own troops had been devised. The Indian method, typified by the frontal Maratha onslaught (when the Maratha was not playing the guerrilla), was met by more sophisticated formations. The command structure, the signals' procedure, the cavalry marches, the artillery formations (including the 'square' and the 'fortress') were all quite advanced and were practised by well-drilled soldiers. At a time when the loading and reloading of a musket after each discharge was a time-consuming and cumbersome process, these formations were immensely effective as they calibrated the fire and reloading in a series that exposed the enemy to endless uninterrupted volleys.

Another important European advance was horse artillery. Guns had never been able to keep pace with cavalry, or even the infantry. And yet the new battle formations required artillery engagements before any cavalry charge. When the technique of drawing six-pounder guns by horses was devised, with the crew also on horseback, these light guns became more effective in battle than the heavy guns of the Indian armies, pulled by slow-moving bullocks. Europeans obtained an edge by rationally sacrificing some fire-power for a substantial

increase in speed.⁵

IV. MODERN TRAINING AND SLOVENLY LEVIATHANS

New concepts in training and discipline were also in use in Europe. By now it already had its specialist military academies. Sandhurst was sending a skilled class every year on to the battlefields of the world. The French elitist Ecole Militaire had been founded in Paris as early as 1751 and its most renowned and promising pupil, Napoleon Bonaparte, qualified a few years later. At the turn of the century, the Royal Military academy was founded in England by the Duke of York. In 1812, this academy moved to Sandhurst.⁶ A few years later, the East India Company's college for gunners and engineers at Addiscombe was founded. Here these officers received special training. Yet when they reached India and joined the corps, they were required to pass another set of examinations. The subjects in this examination included logarithms, practical geometry, plane trigonometry, the use of the chain box, sextant and theodolite, and the officers were required to be able to make a 'route sketch'. Mason reminds us that 'fourteen months from joining, the young officer must be able to show a well-finished plan of a system of fortification drawn by himself, and his knowledge of Vauban's system of fortification would be tested.'⁷ Which soldier or officer in any indigenous Indian or Indus army had worked on these various disciplines or systems?⁸

There were other debilitating factors in the manner and style of the Indian war machine. For the six generations between Babar and Aurangzeb, there had been no significant material or technological advance. Neither the methods nor the implements of warfare had fundamentally changed. If anything, they had become more inefficient and far less vigorous.

In Babar's time, the speed of his army had been phenomenal. He and his generals rode horses, never mounting an elephant in battle. By the time of Aurangzeb, the imperial army was slovenly and sluggish. The emperor and all his generals had discarded the horse for their personal use in battle and placed themselves in luxurious, not too secure *howdahs*, atop slow-moving elephants.⁹ When Babar invaded India, he swam all the rivers that came his way. Akbar had been an untiring horseman and could walk unending miles on foot. By contrast, his successors in the eighteenth century were being carried, even to battle, in palanquins, often in the company of their favourite women. And then there were other inessential accoutrements of pomp and grandeur that merely impeded speed.

Speed, the great ally of the hardy Babar, had lost out to pomp and grandeur by the time of his great-grandson Jahangir. By this time, the population of an entire city had begun to move with the emperor. Only a very small portion of this vast multitude were fighting officers and soldiers. Sir Thomas Roe,

ambassador of James I of England, saw the city of tents where Jahangir had broken march. It was twenty English miles in compass. In the middle there were properly aligned streets, with shops and market-places. The plan and placement of the tents at each stop was so constant and regular that every person knew where he should go for whatever he might want. The emperor's tent was itself a mini-palace with many rooms. Before it was set up, its fortification, by means of a ditch or barrier, was arranged. There were always two identical sets of all tents: the one being used, and the other that was being put up by an advance party at the place of the next halt. How could such a vast population and the paraphernalia that must accompany it together move at a rapid martial speed? Obviously the collective speed could only be the speed of the slowest component of the entire mass.

Although Shah Jahan's army 'numbered more men, its fighting potential was inferior to what it had been in the past. During its campaigns the numbers of the camp-followers and servants greatly exceeded those of the soldiers. In battle it became the custom to rely less on cavalry or infantry than on war elephants that rammed into the ranks of the enemy.'¹⁰

By Aurangzeb's time, the entire imperial treasure also moved with the imperial army. One hundred camels were loaded with gold and two hundred with silver. All the official records, the emperor's hunting establishment, his

hawks and cheetahs, also moved along. Fifty camels and a hundred carts carried the wardrobe of the emperor, the nobles and the women. Thirty elephants bore the ladies' jewelry and the presents that would be given to commanders showing valour or success in encounters.¹¹ 'Alamgir's moving capital alone - a city of tents thirty miles in circumference, some two hundred and fifty bazaars, with half a million camp followers, fifty thousand camels, and thirty thousand elephants, all of whom had to be fed - stripped peninsular India of any and all its surplus grain and wealth the quarter century of its intrusion.'¹²

This structure of the army had another deleterious effect upon the generals and men. It infused a kind of 'camp-follower culture'. As long as one was within the emperor's sight, or as long as the emperor was effectively in control, you remained with him. Out of his reach or, though near him, any indication of weakness on his part, and you were free to switch sides and to betray him. It was, thus, a fatal mistake for an occupant of, or contender for the throne to dismount from his royal elephant, no matter what the circumstances. Dara lost the battle of Samugarh, the throne of Delhi, and his life, by dismounting from his elephant at the point when he had almost defeated Aurangzeb's army. An empty *howdah* signified the flight of the commander, although Dara had only mounted a steed to himself join the thickest area of battle. A few weeks later at

Khajuha, Shuja committed the same fatal mistake. The 'significant byplay illustrated the vulnerability of the royal command over an entire Indian army . . . Shuja left his exposed elephant and mounted a horse . . . Immediately, as with the defeat of Dara at Samugarh, it was all over: Shuja's empty howdah became a signal for mass retreat. His officers looked around and saw themselves abandoned; hopelessly Shuja shouted that he wasn't dead, but some of his men had already rushed to embrace the opposition.'¹³

Aurangzeb was a better judge of character, and, of course, a far better general. He was aware of the need to remain visible in the face of adversity. At that critical moment, at Samugarh, when he seemed to have been abandoned by fortune and left with only one thousand men around him, Aurangzeb ordered that the legs of his own elephant be chained together so that there was no question of retreat. This gesture inspired his men to such feats of valour that they turned the tide against the adversary. But it also established a major weakness in the command-structure of the Indian troops.

Such a sluggish, slow-moving and top-heavy military leviathan that depended solely upon the safety and visibility of one man could not confront or resist the speed and strike-successes of the Maratha bands. With the British, of course, it was a different ballgame altogether.

V. NATIVE VALOUR VERSUS DISCIPLINE

Since the Raj was won and established and its frontiers guaranteed by soldiers, the life of the soldier became the nerve-centre of the Raj. Wherever they went, the British laid out sprawling green cantonments, containing well-planned locations for soldiers' barracks and officers' bungalows, cemeteries and churches, dairy farms and slaughter-houses, military hospitals and officers' clubs; a host of rituals also set them apart from the native populace. The last post was sounded every night as a sacred ritual. The soldiers were kept apart, divorced from the populace, as a privileged imperial body of specialists, concentrating on drill and discipline, on training and technique. Status and privileges were well-defined and manifest. Discipline was justly and rigorously imposed. How different this was from the part-time, booty-sharing levies of the military system of the native rulers!

The two opposing methods of warfare stand out so graphically in an account of a battle given by Kali Karanjan Qaunoongo,¹⁴ in which the brave and inspiring general, Chandu Gujjar, Commander-in-Chief of Bharatpur's army, himself led a fearless, but ill-fated action:

. . . The valiant Gujjar Chief charged the enemy's artillery at full gallop, animating his brave followers. But the volleys of musketry and artillery

fearfully shattered the attacking column; only a small body of troops headed by their wounded leader succeeded in penetrating the lines of the sepoys and fell there, pierced by bayonets, after performing prodigies of valour. The battle raged furiously for two or three hours; it was an awful struggle of native valour of man, against science and discipline.

The contrast is further highlighted by what Stanley Wolpert remarks about the battle of St Thome (1746): 'The Indian force was defeated at St Thome by 230 Frenchmen supported by 700 of their trained sepoys, using cannon, muskets, and European methods of disciplined warfare with deadly efficacy.'¹⁵ James Burnes saw the other side almost a century after the battle of St Thome, but nothing seemed to have been learnt of the modern methods by the Ameers of Sindh. 'Though the iron rod of the Ameers has repressed the daring spirit of the military classes of their subjects, and the general tranquillity of the province has left their energies to slumber for a while, they may yet be considered as a body of marauders ready to take arms for any cause which will afford them support, or which offers a prospect of plunder . . . In the field the Sindian soldier has no discipline; and as his pay is generally contemptible, and frequently uncertain, he conceives himself fully privileged to supply his wants at the expense of the villages on his march . . . The Army of the Ameers, when collected, presents a motley and ill-accoutred assemblage of mercenaries from

all quarters; and it is composed chiefly of adventurers who have descended from the mountains of Beluchistan, to one of the tribes of which, that of Rind, the reigning house traces its origins.¹⁶ Sixteen years later, this 'army' was to confront the British at Miani.

Some accounts of the battle at Miani¹⁷ again highlight the particular edge of discipline and scientific method that England had over the Indus and Indian armies. In one such account,¹⁸ Seth Naomal observes that 'the Talpurs collecting their men advanced with an army of 30,000 strong to Miani, about four koss (12 miles) from Hyderabad, to check the progress of Sir Charles Napier, who had by that time arrived at Hala. Sir Charles commanded a force of 2,500 fighting men only, but they were all well-disciplined and well-trained, while the Army of the Amirs was a crowd of hastily collected and ill-experienced Baloochis under unskilled generals, unacquainted with the tactics of war. The battle of Miani followed, in which the army of the Talpurs was defeated, and it fled. The Baloochis fought well and used the sword bravely, but they were all untrained otherwise.'

The account of another who was probably present at the Battle of Miani in 1843, and is quoted in the Sindh Gazetteer of 1907,¹⁹ refers to it as 'a dispersing of what was little better than a vast mob . . . They had no discipline, and bands of twenty men rushed out at a time with no order or method, only to

impale themselves on the bayonet, or to be swept away by grape.'²⁰ Yet another analyst believed that 'had the Baloch tribesmen possessed the elements of discipline, and their sardars been kept under effective control, with cool and resolute direction, their host must have prevailed; but all three were wanting; the clans mustered together shoulder to shoulder along the bed of the Fuleli looked only to their front. And so, undirected, the desperate valour of the Mir's feudatories spent itself in vain; their rushes were uncoordinated, mere individual efforts of tribal sardars leading a knot of devoted clansmen.'²¹

Discipline alone was a very substantial advantage. It is quite amazing how, at times, the people of the same race and extraction behaved as such disciplined soldiers under the British when they had displayed no such characteristic under commanders of their own race. When Henry Lawrence installed Gulab Singh as the Raja of Kashmir under the terms of the Treaty of Kashmir in 1846, after the First Sikh War, he led a force of 10,000 disciplined Sikhs to accomplish the task. Gulab Singh was not even a Sikh, he was a Hindu. And Henry Lawrence was accompanied by only one other Englishman. Yet the Sikhs obeyed their English general more assiduously than they would have a Sikh commander.

When Herbert Edwardes, a lone Englishman, led another Sikh army and marched to Bannu to subdue fierce tribesmen, he imposed some norms that

were entirely new to the soldiers. The Sikhs, who had until only a few months before, been fighting the British, obeyed Edwardes' strict command not to cut any standing corn for their horses, nor to loot any grain from the peasantry to feed themselves.

Such was the obvious superiority of the British battalions, in fact, that in the early period of their presence in India - the time of Warren Hastings for instance - the British used these skills, expertise and discipline in a dual manner. Naturally, they employed them in furtherance of their own designs and conquests. But they also put these out 'for sale', for employment of their skilled manpower as mercenaries. It was under this latter policy that Shujaudaula of Awadh was obliged to agree to pay Hastings, by the treaty of Benaras in 1773, a sum of four million rupees for the use of the Company's troops against Rohilkhand.

IV. NATIONALISM: A CRUCIAL FACTOR

To the obvious martial superiority of the Europeans in India was added the crucial factor of nationalism. At a time when the Indian regions, states, princedoms and chieftainships were engrossed in innumerable battles *inter se*, when mercenary troops and commanders were changing sides at the spin of a coin, the Europeans displayed a far greater commitment to their mother-states.

In the interests of their own states, they would change Indian masters as and when required. The French adventurer, M. Madec, for instance, abandoned a highly lucrative mercenary service with Raja Nawal Singh of Bharatpur at a crucial time when his master needed his skill to combat the Marathas and the Rohillas. Madec readily relinquished the lavish pay and a vast fortune at the instance of M. Chevalier, the French governor of Pondicherry. In response to further advice from the governor he entered the service of the emperor, Shah Alam.

'The Moghul army,' by contrast, 'then, consisted of a number of bands of horsemen, each of which might be linked together by some personal loyalty to the man who had brought them into service, but wholly without any national spirit and with little idea of joint loyalty to Islam; the enemy was often Muslim and there were usually Hindu princes among the emperor's allies. Nor was there much personal loyalty to the emperor; the normal occupation of his courtiers was *hasad-wa-fasad* (jealousy and intrigue) and there was hardly a battle in which some great lord did not stand aside or go over to the enemy. But above all, from top to bottom there was a sense that nothing was permanent. In the imperial family, father warred with son and brother with brother; it was common for each new monarch to build himself a new palace or even a new capital to mark his rejection of his father's taste. When the son

came to power, his father's favourites usually did well to hide. The favourite of today was the condemned criminal of tomorrow.'²²

This is one important reason for the failure of nationalism or, for that matter, any another value in the subcontinent. But one must, of course, ponder other causes which made the bond of nationalism stronger among the Europeans than among their Indian contemporaries. Several reasons come to mind.

The first is, perhaps, the very reason that is the basis of the present analysis. The Europeans were citizens of a world apart. Such earlier conquerors as the Turks, Afghans and Mughals had settled down and absorbed the ways of India, and India had accepted them as its own feudatories. But the Europeans were different. They belonged to a different world order. It was not as if the feudals of one area were subjugating the feudals of another and merely supplanting them. In this case, a new kind of politico-economic system had come to conquer India (and Indus). This was the conquest of agrarian India by a capitalist world order. The latter would not be assimilated by the former. In fact, the more developed capitalist order had the capacity to mould the new colony to its own needs and specifications.

This new breed of men and conquerors stood, as it were, always at a

distance, removed from the scene even in the thick of battle. They were all part of the entire socio-political matrix, and yet stood out and apart. Their values and norms were of another world and age. There was no similarity between them and the subject races. They were not assimilated into the native society.

Secondly, a 'progressive' and rich Europe could offer and guarantee much more in wealth and prospects of fortune than the decadent feudals of India could offer. These latter were useful paymasters, but the ultimate economic stakes lay with Europe. There was a material premium on being a nationalist.

Finally, the Europeans were in a minority. Had the European wars not spilled over into India (as they doubtless did), there may have even been greater warmth between the several nationalities of Europeans in India. Minority status is itself a cohesive factor.

Some Indian princes had indeed taken to European military tactics. As early as 1763, Mir Qasim had trained an army on European lines. It gave a very honourable account of itself and, but for an impetuous, abortive and totally unnecessary campaign against Nepal, may well have inflicted an effective blow on the Company's troops, reversing the fortunes at Buxar. The Mahadji Scindia of Gwalior had such an army under de Boignue, but met defeat for reasons not merely of military incapacity. And then there was the highly disciplined,

well-organized army of the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh. It was a fair match for the Company's troops.

1. See Antonova, 221; and S. A. A. Rizvi, *The Wonder That Was India*, Part II, (1994), 83. In fact, the Portuguese willingly joined battle as partisans whenever invited by one coastal prince or another. And sometimes they made their fire-power known even when not participating in the actual hostilities between such states. Thus, for instance, when Isa Tarkhan, ruler of lower and coastal Sindh sought the help of the Portuguese pirate, Pedro Barreto Rolim in his dispute against Sultan Mahmud Bhakkari (whose extravagance at his daughter's wedding we have noted earlier), but did not employ his fleet in battle, Rolim demanded compensation nevertheless, and, on being denied it, sacked Thatta, killing 8,000 people and destroying property worth Rs 20 lakhs. He also carried away enormous booty. See Saleem Akhtar, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 47.

2. Spear, *A History of India*, 1, 67.

3. The first ruler of the state was also the chief architect of its capital city at Jaipur. Shivaji, meanwhile, greatly added to his mystique and legend by

effecting a dramatic and daring escape from the captivity of the emperor.

4. As if it would have been equally likely to encounter a person with a name with a negative or offensive meaning.
5. See Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men*, 145.
6. *Ibid.*, 179.
7. *Ibid.*, 147.
8. Some of these retrogressive cultural inhibitions to learning are latent in us even now, and sometimes surface in the most negative manner. When, as the Federal Education Minister in 1993, I offered to recognize the certificates of some of the *deeni madrassahs* in Islamabad, provided they included in the curriculum some such subjects as mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, and geography, to be taught by federal teachers, I was accused of trying to misguide the students devoted to learning the *Shariat*.

9. See Thapar, 237.

10. Antonova, 249. In fact, the movement of the presumptive heirs to the Central Asian speedsters Changez Khan (Genghis Khan) and Taimur had become so sluggish that on one journey, in 1634, Shah Jahan reached Lahore on 16 November after having left Kashmir on 16 September. See Dhillon, *Sikhism*, 122. In the time of Babar, this journey could have been performed six times in the same number of days.

11. Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 45.

12. Wolpert, *New History*, 167.

13. Hansen, *The Peacock Throne*, 312-13.

14. *The History of the Jats* (Lucknow University 1925), a rare copy of which I discovered in 1981 in the scant and musty Library of the Central Jail Multan. The book is no history of the Jats as a race. It is only an account of the royal Jat House of the State of Bharatpur. But it gives several insights into the social fabric and the state of military and political tactics current at that

time.

15. Wolpert, *New History*, 176.

16. James Burnes, *A Visit to the Court of Sinde* (First printed in 1834) 116-17.

17. In which Sir Charles Napier won Sindh in 1843.

18. Reproduced by H. T. Lambrick, I.C.S., in *The Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*. See Mubarik Ali (ed.). *Sindh Observed: Selections from the Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*, 182.

19. *Ibid.*, 190.

20. 'Grape', in this case being the pellets discharged from cartridges.

21. Lambrick, 'The Sindh Battles, 1843', in Ali, *Sindh Observed*, 165 ff; 174.

22. Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 48-9.

The Sikhs and the Subsidiary States

I. THE CHIEF OF THE SUKERCHAKIAS

Tipu's fall and Napoleon's *coup d'etat* of 18 Brumaire happened in 1799. It was also the year in which Ranjit Singh, the teenage son of Mahan Singh Sukerchakia, chieftain of the Gujranwala region, took Lahore and became the sovereign of the Punjab. After a 'raucous coronation on 12 April, 1801',¹ he was to organize one of the most efficient governments ever known to the territory of the five rivers. At its height, when the death of the brave and fearsome General Hari Singh Nalwa in the battle with Barakzai Afghans at Jamrud inhibited further expansion towards the north, the state of the Punjab spanned the entire area from the Khyber to the Sutlej, stretching north to Kashmir and Ladakh. It stretched south to include Multan, while its ruler looked wistfully beyond towards Shikarpur, then under the suzerainty of the Talpur rulers of Sindh. Expansion beyond the Sutlej was impeded by the Treaty of Amritsar signed in 1809 between Ranjit Singh and Sir David Ochterlony. The British had already issued a proclamation declaring the 'cis-Sutlej states' under British protection. By this treaty, the river Sutlej was accepted as the border between the Sikh state and British India.

The rise of Ranjit Singh had come with the gradual ascendancy of the Sikhs. We have seen how Sikhism, in origin a syncretic, Bhakti-type movement had developed, through precept, martyrdom and military campaigns, into a forceful and disciplined organization of martial tribes.² As it had spread and the number of tribes (*misl*s)³ expanded to twelve, it had become a confederacy of tribal chiefs, broadly supported by the ravaged peasantry of the Punjab. The wars of Mughal succession, the campaigns of the Persian Nadir Shah and the Afghans, Ahmed Shah and Shah Zaman, the constant threats and occasional attacks by the Marathas, all had impoverished the Punjabi village and its cultivator. Severe persecution by the Mughals had pushed the Sikhs out of the Punjab and into the foothills of Kashmir. But as the Mughal empire began to disintegrate, the Sikhs offered to a large population of able-bodied men the only means of livelihood: a share in the booty recovered from predatory raids upon Afghan and Mughal caravans, even armies. They were soon operating in most of the upper reaches of the Indus, sweeping from the Salt Range to the outskirts of Delhi itself. Gradually, they set up a number of chieftainships. One of these was the miniscule state of the Sukerchakia *misl* in Gujranwala to the leadership of which Ranjit Singh had succeeded his father.

A happily portentous marriage increased the young Ranjit's strength on the chessboard of tribal politics, though a strong-willed mother-in-law assumed

the public functions of the uncrowned queen. Then, in 1799, Ranjit Singh became master of Lahore, and thus of the state of Punjab. Ranjit was an efficient administrator even though his adversaries, the British, inspired many stories and gave currency to innumerable crass jokes about him. He ruled with a strong but just and generous disposition for forty years till his death in 1839.

Ranjit recognized the power of the British inexorably expanding towards the north-west and, at the same time, resented it. He had his own dreams and to realize them he had been equipping his army with the latest weapons and techniques. He displayed considerable interest in the contemporary wars in Europe and was eager to study and to learn the strategy employed by the protagonists. He was particularly impressed by Napoleon and was ever keen to discuss the career of the French leader and general. He asked all the visitors to his court many questions about the French campaigns and strategy. When, in 1837, a Colonel Wallis, who had been at Waterloo, visited Ranjit's court as a member of Sir Henry Fane's official delegation to the marriage of the young prince, Naunihal Singh, the Maharaja discussed the battle with him at length. He seemed to regret the result and was sorry, even after so many years, that the French had lost, though he was diplomatic enough not to express his regrets.

Ranjit Singh was anxious to keep abreast of the more modern techniques,

weaponry and arms. 'Ranjeet had gone much further than any other Indian leader in adopting European methods; he had borrowed both from the French and the British, perhaps more from the French . . . In training, weapons, organization, tactics, clothing, system of pay, layout of camps, order of march, regular units of the Sikh army resembled their opponents as closely as they could; indeed, in battle, it was possible to tell the scarlet-coated sepoy of the Bengal Army from the scarlet-coated Sikh only by the colour of his belt.'⁴

The reform of the Sikh infantry had begun with the employment of the Frenchmen Ventura and Allard in 1822. The few English adventurers who had occasion to witness the Sikh soldiers in drill were deeply impressed by the discipline and coordination of movement. 'They marched past, formed into line and fired volleys with great precision. They next formed to receive cavalry; squares were formed with a gun at each corner, and file firing opened, which was very sustained.'⁵

Ranjit was, perhaps, the one ruler who understood the European mind. He was conscious that the loyalty of his European commanders was not necessarily infallible. As an observer wrote about the position of Allard in Ranjit's court and military establishment: 'He is well paid at 100,000 francs a year, but is half a prisoner of Ranjit Singh, who takes care to make him spend the whole of his income every year in order to destroy any desire to leave him.

He pursues the same policy with all European officers.'⁶ On the other hand, he wanted to indigenize production and European technology. Being curious about the process of the manufacture of silicon shrapnels cast in zinc shells he had obtained, as early as 1812, 500 muskets manufactured in England with the sole intent of discovering the exact metal content and then smelting the requisite quality of metal in his own foundries at Lahore. He personally supervised the manufacture of the larger cannon. It is said that Ranjit Singh even sought copies of the pay regulations of the British Indian Army and of the rules of procedure and practice of courts martial convened by the Company's officers. So keen, in fact, was Ranjit to imbibe the details of European warfare that he approached his obvious potential adversaries, the British, to admit a unit of his gunners at the British Artillery School at Ludhiana.

II. CONQUEST AS A COMMERCIAL NECESSITY

By this time, the British had long entertained entirely different designs. They had become conscious of the greater profits to be had from the Punjab. Thus, as early as in 1802 when, at Benaras, Lord Wellesely met the adventurer George Thomas, who had recently been brought to heel by the Company's troops, the Governor-General's sole interest in the celebrity was Thomas's views on the possibility of bringing the Punjab under British rule. In 1821, Alexander Burnes, formerly of the Bombay Native Infantry and a specialist in languages,

transferred to the Political Department in the service of the Company and travelled up the Indus to the court of Ranjit Singh. He carried with him a present of six English horses on behalf of the Company.⁷ But his real mission was to survey the navigability of the Indus, a project in which the British were displaying increasing interest. This was to be attested to by his elder brother, Dr James Burnes, who, in 1827, was able to elicit an invitation from the Talpur Amirs of Sindh.

In a comprehensive report, James Burnes predicted that 'the river Indus might once more become the channel of communication and of wealth, between the interior of Asia and the Peninsula of India.'⁸ Of Sindh, he felt that 'heaven has blessed her with a constant and never-failing boon in the river Indus - that source of commerce and fertility of which no tyranny can despoil her; which enables the cultivator not only to till his fields with little trouble or expense, but to look forward in due season to a certain harvest, and to transfer, should he wish it, with facility and profit, the abundant product of his toil to other countries.'⁹ His report was read with great interest in Bombay, Calcutta and London as he 'alluded to the moderate means possessed by the Ameers for repelling an invasion of their territory; and a single glance at the Indus will show the easy passage into the very heart of their dominions, which that river offers to a maritime power. The state-barge which conveyed me to Sitah,

although flat-bottomed, was, in my opinion, capable of transporting half a regiment.’¹⁰

Initially, the navigable water channels of the Indus and the Sutlej had introduced them to prospects of new riverine routes for military aggression and profitable commerce, but the British Governors-General, notably Bentinck, continued to stress only the commercial aspect in their contacts with the Talpurs of Sindh and the Sikhs in the Punjab. Within their own internal discourse, the British also emphasized the relevance of these channels in the context of the threat from the north in the shape of a French, and later Russian, march into northern India.

The focus was purely economic. The Lancashire textile mills were in need of cheap raw cotton. American independence had deprived the British industry of large quantities of cheap cotton harvested in the southern states of the USA, with the low-cost labour of the African slave. Downward business trends in 1815-20 had hit the British textile industry severely. ‘Visionary New Imperialists at home thought the Punjab might become a granary for the whole Empire, as the North African provinces had fed Rome.’¹¹

The establishment of spinning mills from 1790 onwards, and of weaving mills after 1815, had required relatively small initial capital. The processing

cycle had been simple, though draconian. It was based upon the transport of slaves to American cotton plantations, the import of raw cotton from the American colonies, and the export of cotton manufactures to India, Africa and the Americas. This process was finally disrupted by strict measures against the slave trade, necessitated by the need to placate and propitiate resource and raw material-rich African regions that began consciously resisting the abduction of their citizens. There was also the crisis of the tariff barriers raised by the United States on the export of raw cotton and the import of manufactures in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Raw cotton became an overriding and imperative requirement of British imperial power. Industrial activity and expansion in Britain would come to a grinding halt if new sources and suppliers of cotton were not immediately found. The Nile and the Indus were the two important producers of raw cotton. The Nile valley was not to come under British administration until 1882, and then too was not to be made a part of the empire. It continued to owe allegiance to the Sultan of Turkey, even after the digging of the Suez Canal. Moreover, the French campaign under Napoleon in 1789-90 was fresh in memory and it made Egypt look a shade insecure. The focus would, therefore, be upon the Indus region.

A supplier of raw cotton was an imperial imperative. Indus offered the

greatest potential. Its flat, endless plains, imperceptibly sloping towards the sea, draining a network of rich, alluvial rivers, was ideal for irrigated cultivation; its mild winter months had, for centuries, nurtured the soft cotton crop along the flood-swept riparian regions. It was no doubt more distant than America and Egypt, but then Fulton's steamship (1807) and Stephenson's locomotive (1814) had made distances somewhat less relevant and certainly surmountable.

The potential was obvious. The Punjab was 'a hundred thousand square miles of India's most fertile soil',¹² and was 'destined to become the breadbasket of the British Empire'¹³. While treaties of friendship and coexistence with the Sikhs existed, the Company was calculating the odds in the way of the acquisition of the Punjab. There was no doubt that the Punjab was vital to the regeneration of the cotton cycle. It alone could 'bale' Lancashire out. In the Raj, commercial interests were supreme and the stage for the attempt upon the Punjab had been set early in the nineteenth century.

By the time the British turned to Indus, they seemed to have decisively conquered India. Before the first quarter of the nineteenth century was over, they also seemed to have settled the remaining scores. The Gurkhas had been engaged in 1814-16, though a peace based on mutual respect was the maximum advantage that the Marquis of Hastings (Earl of Moira) was able to

extract. Dissension had been sown in Maratha ranks. The Scindia of Gwalior was attracted by the offer of retaining his state, but relinquishing his control of Rajasthan. Severally, the venerable head of the erstwhile confederacy - the Peshwa of Poona, the valiant Bhonsla of Nagpur and the spirited Holkar of Indore took up arms; but they were individually defeated. By 1818, the Marathas had been subjected to decisive losses and had given up.

A new phase was emerging. Spear seems to have interpreted the mind of England's rulers aptly when he recalls how they must have felt at that point of time: 'In 1815 Napoleon was finally defeated. Already, in 1813, when the Company was given a new charter, commercial interests in England had grown strong enough to break the Company's trade monopoly. The feeling was now strong that India contained great potential wealth and that according to free trade principles, monopoly would hinder rather than encourage its exploitation. The corollary of this principle was the completion of British supremacy *as a commercial necessity* and a practical, economic way of arranging for the development. It would be far cheaper to keep your armies on the Sutlej and police the rest of India than to maintain a circle of forces around an anarchical centre as well as man far longer and more complicated frontiers. The benefit of supremacy for the internal flow of trade is too obvious to need stressing. The Indian situation and British opinion were thus ready for action.

The clearing of European skies provided the opportunity.¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

III. A WEDDING AND A MAP

All eyes were now trained on Indus.

As British commercial interests focused on the Punjab state of Ranjit Singh, and as their states rubbed shoulders on the river Sutlej, an uneasy relationship between the British and Sikhs set in, lasting in an unpredictable manner for two decades. That was while Ranjit was too well-established and sufficiently popular among his subjects to be confronted. The British recognized his stature and deferred to it. But by 1837, he was old.

1837 witnessed a grand and colourful wedding ceremony. It was an important political event: the marriage of Ranjit Singh's grandson, Naunihal Singh. But that circumstance alone did not make it significant. Nor was it significant merely on account of the fact that the bride was the daughter of the important chief, Sham Singh of Atariwala. The fact that the Governor-General (Auckland) and the Governor of Agra (Charles Metcalffe) had declined the invitation 'to grace the occasion' was noteworthy, but still a matter only of detail. What made the event pregnant with insidious meaning and historical circumstance was the seemingly innocuous presence of an Englishman, Sir

Henry Fane.

Fane was as sharp an observer of military means as ever there was one. In 1837, while the two sides were yet bound by the Treaty of 1809, he formed an estimate of the force that would be required to subjugate the Punjab. Indeed, the perceptive Fane gave such a vivid account of his journey from Delhi to Lahore, particularly of his reconnaissance of the land and its topography, that his detailed written accounts enabled the cartographer, Colonel Garden, to compile a detailed map of the country. This formed the basis of all the maps used by the Company's commanders when hostilities were initiated and action undertaken against the Punjabi state and the Sikh *khalsa*.

On account of its involvement in Afghanistan, the Company had so far dealt with the Punjab with some caution and circumspection. Maintaining a safe distance from it, the Company had obtained the active cooperation of the Sikhs as a buffer zone. The Company had been anxious, at first, not to jeopardize the privilege of passage through the Punjab, though the Treaty of Amritsar of 1809 had not settled this issue. The *darras*¹⁵ of Bolan and those south of Dera Ismail Khan could be approached through Talpur territory. Even when passage through Dera Ismail Khan was sought and allowed, the British troops kept a safe distance from the capital at Lahore while traversing the Punjab. First Moorcroft and then Captain Wade had made feeble overtures,

seeking the concession of overland trade. These had, however, not been pressed further. At the same time and from other directions the British were gaining ground and territory, slowly but surely.

The cis-Sutlej states had been declared British 'protectorates' by a unilateral declaration. In 1835, the petty chieftainship of Ferozepur, only forty miles from Lahore, was occupied as an escheat due to the same self-assumed responsibility to 'protect' all Sikh states except that of Lahore. In all this time, Ranjit had moved about adeptly and with diplomatic craft. 'It had been the wise policy of that wise ruler Ranjit Singh to muster sufficient strength to make the English respect him but to avoid direct conflict or spineless subservience. In this he had been singularly successful.'¹⁶

But then Ranjit died in 1839. His death split the Sikhs in internecine struggles for power. There was chaos in the Punjab. And at this time the British extended their territorial sovereignty into Punjab's southern flank: Sindh.

IV. PECCA VI

In 1783, the Talpurs had overthrown the Kalhora dynasty which had been ruling Sindh. By mutual agreement, the state was divided among three Talpur families, with their capitals at Khairpur, Hyderabad and Mirpur respectively.

The premier family, however, was the one ruling from Hyderabad. Mir Fateh Ali Khan was the founder of this dynasty. As early as his reign, the Company had sent Nathan Crow of the Bombay Civil Service to Sindh to establish factories in the state. It is stated that Persian and French spies aroused the fears of the Talpur chiefs about the growing strength of the British in India. Crow was expelled in 1780. The Company ignored the insult on account of its preoccupation with the Marathas. On the other hand, locked in an intensifying contest with Napoleon's France for the sea-routes and markets of the world, the British were interested in covering their flanks. They therefore sought to draw Sindh into alliances that were obviously more expedient than sacred.

The Mirs of Sindh were not the most enlightened of rulers. Burnes had observed that 'the great misfortune of the people, next to the circumstance of their being entirely at the mercy of the rulers, is, that the latter are ignorant of the important truth, that in a well regulated kingdom the interests of the prince and the people are identical. Like all Asiatic governors, the Ameers have no idea of sacrificing present gains, however trivial, for future advantages; and, as they unfortunately consider the stability and grandeur of their dynasty as depending chiefly on the accumulation of wealth, their course of internal policy is directed to this object, and is pursued with comparatively little benefit to themselves, and great detriment to their people.'¹⁷ Crow made another pithy

observation: 'There is no zeal but for the propagation of the faith; no spirit but in celebrating Eed; no liberality but in feeding lazy Seyuds; and no taste but in ornamenting old tombs.'¹⁸ Because of such indifference towards development and public good, the conditions in Sindh had deteriorated under the Talpurs. In the seventeenth century, Thatta had been a bustling commercial capital and an industrial centre with as many as 300,000 looms. By 1809, its population had fallen to 20,000. By 1851, it had only 7,000 inhabitants.¹⁹ Other towns like Karachi, Sindh's major port, and Shikarpur, upper Sindh's largest trade centre, had not fared any better. Even Hyderabad, the principal seat of the Mirs, had stagnated.

In 1808, Captain David Seton came to Hyderabad and concluded a treaty with the Mirs which included a term that 'when assistance of troops is required by either of the parties, it shall be granted when asked.' An Agent of the Company was also assigned to the court of the Mirs under the treaty. The next year, another mission arrived. This was headed by Nicholas Hankey Smith. Despite several manifestly intended slights, Smith clung to the court of the Mirs. In the end, his labours and patience paid off. He managed to persuade the Mirs to sign another agreement that contained the clause that 'enmity would never appear between the two states.' This treaty was renewed in 1820. Another treaty was concluded in 1832. Although it opened up the Indus for

navigation, it bound both parties 'never to look with the eye of covetousness on the possessions of each other.' The British also undertook that 'no armed vessels or boats' and 'no person' bearing 'military stores' of any description would be sent by them into or through Sindh along the Indus.²⁰

Treaties, however, could not hold the British from pursuing their interests. In fact, these treaties were decoys: British intent was otherwise. In a paper read before the Sindh Historical Society in 1942, H. T. Lambrick of the Indian Civil Service records a wistful remark by a Sindhi who, on seeing the survey of the river Indus by another visiting Englishman, James Burnes, sighed: 'Alas, Sindh is now gone for the English have seen the river.'²¹ The Company wanted to use the river for its trade and for military purposes. Its obligations under the Treaty were therefore savagely violated by the imperial power at Miani and Dubba.²²

In 1843, Sir Charles Napier took Sindh after the battles at Miani and Dubba. In the backdrop of the treaties of friendship and cooperation, he is attributed the famous telegraphic message with a double entendre: 'Peccavi' (I have sinned [Sind]). He was appointed the first governor of the newly-won territories.

After the 1841 humiliation in Kabul of the seemingly invincible 'superpower', British morale had been low. The conquest of Sindh was a shot

in the arm. It provided a fresh impetus to British expansionism and a new confidence to its expansionist lobbies. Telescopes could once again be trained across international borders. Governor Napier now started pushing towards the southern regions of the Punjab.

With the Sikh state, too, the British were bound by a treaty. But they had no further need of the 1809 Pact. Cunningham had admitted that 'the relations of 1809 were nevertheless cherished by the Sikhs although they may have been little heeded by the English amid the multifarious considerations.'

V. INDUS FALLS

Before the British actually turned to the Punjab, they had been engaged in Balochistan. During his journey up the Indus, Alexander Burnes had exchanged some correspondence with the Khan of Kalat. But some misunderstanding had been created between the two by intermediaries.²³ In the meantime, the Baloch tribals, especially the Bugtis, the Marris and the Jhakranis were causing disruptions in the communications of the imperial power. Young Lieutenants John Jacob²⁴ and Mereweather²⁵ spent several months engaging the tribes in skirmishes. In December 1839, the Bugti chief, Bibrak, was captured which brought Bugti hostilities to an end for the time being. The Marris were engaged next and the honours were shared in the battle of Naffusak Pass in 1840.

Without access through the Punjab, the British were convinced that Jacob was right in his estimate that the Bolan Pass would be more useful to their trade and defence needs than the Khyber Pass.

With the death of Ranjit Singh, the prospects of taking the Punjab had again become real. The British now trained their guns upon it and the Punjab front became live and active.

The First Sikh War (1845) was a clash of peers, though the British emerged with an advantage and dictated the setting up of a 'sponsored state' under the 'supervision' of Sir Henry Lawrence as Political Agent. The *Khalsa* was resentful and only the charisma of Lawrence held the arrangement intact. It fell apart in 1848 when he proceeded on leave.

The Second Sikh War (1848-49), encompassing several battles, ended in the rout of the brave Sikh army and the annexation of the Punjab. Yet the defeat of the valiant *Khalsa* would not have been possible without internal treachery. Gulab Singh, who was rewarded with Kashmir, acted the Mir Jaffar of the Sikhs. But even he could not have persuaded the fearless *Khalsa* of Ranjit to lay down arms without a fight. It was secretly agreed, therefore, that while the Sikh army was actually engaged in battle with the British troops, it would, at that critical hour, be abandoned with conspicuous exhibition by its own generals. The

result of the ensuing Battle of Sobraon was thus a foregone conclusion. Cunningham observed that 'under such circumstances of discreet policy and shameless treason was the Battle of Sobraon fought'. The Battle of Chailianwala turned out to be a battle of nerves and wits, and the Battle of Gujrat was the last stand. The Punjab was taken by General (later Lord) Gough on 21 February 1849.

The Punjab was the last great battleground of the subcontinent. The Sikh resistance was the last attempt on the part of any indigenous power to resist the inexorable march of industrial imperialism across the vast subcontinent until the War of Independence of 1857. The Punjab had 'offered the English the fiercest resistance they had yet encountered from Indian soldiers.'²⁶ The fall of the Punjab was the result of Britain's advances in the fields of industrial production, communications, military strategy, weapons and the intelligent use of modern cartography. The planning of campaigns with the help of contoured maps was not known to India. For the British, the Fane-Garden maps were invaluable and perhaps of critical significance.

Not of the least importance was the ethical aspect. Capitalism had brought with it its own values. The end justified the means. How shocking was this concept to the code of ethics to which the hardy Rajputs, Jats and the Baloch adhered? Battles were meant to be decided in the open field, not by

treacherous intrigue. The machinations of the British at Plassey, Seringapatam and Sobraon, the inspired desertions by Jaffar, Sadiq and Gulab Singh were repugnant even to the decadent feudal code. They served the objectives of the emerging bourgeois culture. Markets had to be won at all cost. The end justified the means.²⁷

The British won their battles before the fighting. This was a dreadful prospect which neither Sirajuddaula nor Tipu could have imagined and which the Sikhs were unable to avert. Thus were the Punjab battles lost as had been the battles of Plassey, Seringapatam and Miani.

VI. THE EXPORTER BECOMES AN IMPORTER

Daleep Singh, born in 1838 to Rani Jindan, was formally recognized as the Raja in 1846, but the Punjab was henceforth to be a 'subsidiary state', a status which proved a stepping-stone to formal annexation in 1849. Punjab, the granary of the subcontinent was now under the Union Jack as its most productive region. 'The revenue surplus derived from the conquest and pacification of the Punjab was so substantial that, even from its first year, the total cost of the two army corps needed to control that turbulent region, in addition to all expenses of civil government, could be paid from it, and still leave a permanent surplus of fifty lacs [5 million rupees] per annum. In

addition, British irrigation technology was applied to the Punjab's fertile soil and soon augmented the region's yield so greatly that the directors of Leadenhall Street assured Dalhousie of their warmest support.¹²⁸

Henceforth, Manchester would not be short of raw cotton and Britain was now to take another giant leap forward. With the consolidation of the Empire, and with the maturing of the Industrial Revolution in England, the expropriation of the raw produce of the subcontinent was still the most profitable activity; 'but once the Industrial Revolution had been achieved in England with the aid of plunder of India, the new task became to find adequate outlets for the flood of manufactured goods. This necessitated a revolution in the economic system, from the principles of mercantile capitalism to the principles of free-trade capitalism. And this in turn involved a corresponding complete change in the methods of the colonial system.'²⁹

The demands of the new English classes and the dominance of the manufacturing industry over simple commerce required a complete structural change in England's relationship with the subcontinent, comprising Indus and India. The colonies had to be transformed from exporters of cotton goods to importers of cotton manufactures. The monopolistic trading of the East India Company had to be discarded. Instead, state-sponsored free export of manufactures from England would be facilitated. To some extent, legislation

had already enhanced the role of the state in the affairs of the Company. Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773 had provided for the Governor-General, his Council and a Supreme Court. Pitt's India Act of 1784 had provided for the Secretary of State for India and a Board of Control in London. The monopoly of the Company was ended in 1813.³⁰ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Company had itself become anachronistic. It was time then for the Queen to take the reins of the Raj into her own hands.

The British government would be persuaded to invest the Queen with direct control of the subcontinent only by the great convulsions that shook the empire in 1857.

VII. THE SUBSIDIARY SYSTEM

A word about the 'subsidiary states' system. This was a pernicious method of expanding British dominion and was typically British. Depending upon how you defined a 'state', there were between 300 to 600 princely states in India, varying in size literally from village kingdoms to large nation-states with a population of about eighty million. Many a decadent feudal ruled over these states and their inhabitants. There was little merit in the system and the hegemonic British made full capital out of the intrinsic weakness of the princes.

The concept of subsidiary states initially involved the introduction of a British resident or agent at the head of a substantial force into a friendly Indian state, ostensibly to advise the local raja or nawab and to secure for him continued sovereign authority. Having gained this first advantageous foothold, all manner of pretexts were devised to swing an effective palace *coup d'état* and to annex the state. Combinations of intrigue, bribery, promise and savagery precipitated events which the ruler was incapable of tackling with his own depleted resources and energies. At an opportune time, the sovereign was accused of misgovernment of his state or repression of his subjects. Britain then 'reluctantly' intervened in the interest of both; else the state merely 'lapsed' to the British Empire upon failure of a direct descendant of the ruler.

The exponents of the Raj, gripped by a contemporary nostalgia for it, exult unabashedly in Dalhousie's 'benevolent policies' which, according to Spear, were 'capped by his most spectacular measures, the annexation of the Indian States.'³¹ The moral justification was readily improvised: 'Dalhousie considered British rule so superior to Indian that the more territory directly administered by the British the better it would be for the Indian people.'³² There is no attempt to veil this, even when most of the instances of misgovernment can be attributed directly to the machinations of the British Residents themselves.

Under the subsidiary system, power was in the hands of the British government. Often, even the ministers were imposed upon the ruler by the British Resident. Not infrequently, they were themselves British officials. The subsidiary states could not normally employ British subjects without the permission of the imperial government. The rulers had to act on the advice of the Resident in all important matters. Since the selection and appointment of governesses for the grooming of young princes was certainly considered important, even governesses were often supplied by the Raj. In the words of James Morris, 'Moulded by nannies, tutors, advisers, the example of visiting officials and perhaps the schooling of Eton and Oxford, many of the princes became quasi-Englishmen themselves - English aristocrats buffed to an oriental polish.'³³ The Oxford-educated prince, in turn, was all the more dependent upon the 'advice and counsel' of the imperial Resident. The ruler of the subsidiary state thus had a constricted role. Yet the entire responsibility for good governance and efficient administration was placed upon the ruler. The Residents 'had the harlot's privilege of having power without responsibility.'³⁴

Henry Lawrence, the British Resident in Lahore and the architect of the 'Punjab system'³⁵ of administration, noted, (after the first Sikh War), that the system was conducive only to bad government. Having observed firsthand the functioning of the system, he wrote: 'If there was a device for ensuring

mal-government, it is that of the native ruler and minister both relying upon foreign bayonets and directed by a British Resident.'³⁶ Thirty years before him, Sir Thomas Munro had been no less critical when he had remarked: 'Wherever the subsidiary system is introduced, unless the reigning prince be a man of great abilities, the country will soon bear the marks of it in decaying villages and decreasing population.'³⁶ By the frequent employment of this system and the unprincipled reliance upon the 'Doctrine of Lapse', Dalhousie alone annexed eight states, including that still prestigious Muslim state of Awadh (1856).

By the time the last and most important war between the two systems (an agrarian and feudal India versus an industrial and imperial Britain) broke out, Britain already had the vast subcontinent almost entirely under its flag. The last imperial descendant of Babar and Akbar, the last in the line of the House of Taimur, Abu Ghazi Zafar Sirajuddin Muhammad Bahadur Shah II, reduced to a feeble pensionary, retained a merely titular sovereignty and little more than a palace backyard for his kingdom.

This is when the War of Independence or the Uprising - which the British call 'The Mutiny' - broke out in 1857.

1. Aijazuddin, *Lahore*, 13.
2. Chapter 13, section IV, and chapter 15, section III.
3. *Misl* was originally applied to a unit of the Sikh army, but later also came to designate separate sub-groups of the Sikh nation.
4. Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 228.
5. C. Grey, *European Adventurers of Northern India: 1785-1849*, (1st ed. 1929) 29.
6. *Ibid.*, 83.
7. For an interesting account of the visit, see Michael Edwardes, *Playing the Great Game*, (1975) 21 ff.
8. Burnes, *A Visit to the Court of Sind*, 121.

9. Ibid., 75.

10. Ibid., 131.

11. James Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of the Empire* (1979) 359.

12. Wolpert, *New History*, 224.

13. Ibid., 224.

14. Spear, *History of India*, II, 104 (Emphasis added.)

15. Passes.

16. Mason, 228.

17. Burnes, *A Visit to the Court of Scinde*, 74. How aptly these words may apply to some of our rulers in contemporary times!

18. Ibid., 114.

19. Gankovsky, 119-20.

20. Wolpert, *New History*, 218.

21. Ali, *Sindh Observed*, 131.

22. For accounts of the battle of Miani, see chapter 20, section V. The battle of Dubba, near Hyderabad, was merely the final, less significant act of the formalization of the English victory in Sindh.

23. See Awan, 59-61.

24. Who gave his name to the town of Jacobabad.

25. Who is remembered in a Karachi landmark, the Mereweather Tower.

26. Grey, *European Adventurers*, 17.

27. How abhorrent was Shivaji's disposal of the Bijapur general, Afzal Khan, who had been lured into a fatal embrace with steel claws in 1659? Feudal India had considered it treacherous. And even though Shivaji had Rajasthan, he was considered a brigand by many of his feudal contemporaries. His cult was revived in the late nineteenth century with the development of the Hindu bourgeoisie: those early Indian industrialists who considered feudal values old-fashioned.

28. Wolpert, *New History*, 226.

29. Dutt, *India Today*, 112.

30. *Ibid.*, 99.

31. Spear, *History of India*, 141.

32. *Ibid.*.

33. Morris, 272.

34. Nehru, *Discovery*, 329.

35. A system in which the local English administrator had greater autonomy, settling lands upon the cultivator rather than on tribal chiefs, opening up the interior with roads, railways and rural market towns, collecting revenue, acquiring and allotting land, and meting out a rough and ready justice. See Spear, *History of India*, 138-9.

35. Nehru, *Discovery*, 328.

36. *Ibid.*, 329.

1857

I. 9 MAY 1857

For a decade after the annexation of the Punjab, the pride of the British army had been the Bengal regiments. Most of the men and non-commissioned officers were drawn from the areas of the present-day Uttar Pradesh of India. They served the British, but retained a notional allegiance to the titular king of Awadh and the pensionary emperor of India.

King Wajid Ali was deposed in 1856, again in violation of a treaty that had subsisted for more than half a century. Troops were moved from Kanpur to Lucknow. Most of them were his 'subjects'. But the king disappointed even his adversaries. Not a shot was fired. Wajid Ali appeared in mourning robes to place his imperial turban in the hands of Sir James Outram, the Chief Commissioner. He pleaded like a tearful supplicant for his 'rights and privileges'. When these were denied, he quietly left for Calcutta to plead his case before the Governor-General. Disappointed, he left for London, never to be reinstated. Even the Awadh soldier serving the Company had expected more from his 'King'. But whatever he may have thought of him, 'the annexation of

Awadh undermined the Bengal Army's faith in the Raj that it served.¹

There was soon another irritant. In the same year, Lord Canning,² promulgated the General Service Enlistment Act. This made possible the posting of the Company's soldiers anywhere, even far beyond the confines of their own home provinces. There had already been a financial set-back to the sepoys of the Bengal Army whose domicile was Awadh and the present-day Uttar Pradesh. They had fought with the British to subjugate the Punjabis. As long as the Punjab was outside the Company's territories, they had been entitled to extra pay. On the annexation of the Punjab, the auditor general held back the extra emoluments. It was difficult for the sepoys to comprehend this as a prize for their loyalty to the Company and the victories that they had secured for it. Already, disaffection was afoot.

'There is a most mysterious affair going on through the whole of India at present,' an Englishman had written home in March 1857. 'No one seems to know the meaning of it . . . It is not known where it originated, by whom or for what purpose, whether it is supposed to be connected with any religious ceremony or whether it has to do with some secret society. The Indian papers are full of surmises as to what it means . . . It is called the "*chupatty* movement".³ Any man receiving a *chupatty*⁴ was expected to send more out to other people. It was an unending relay. It was a reaffirmation of the solidarity of

the disaffected individuals. The one who received a *chupatty*, and those to whom he sent other *chupatties*, were supposed to be of the same mind. By one estimate, these were being distributed 'over a distance of between 160 and 200 miles in a single night.'⁵

The loyalty of the sepoy was already under strain when the issue of the new breach-loading Enfield rifles and their lubricated cartridges broke out. It was believed by the largely Hindu and Muslim sepoy that the cartridges had been greased with cow and pig fat. By the motions of the prescribed drill, the soldiers were required to bite the ends off with their teeth. Soldiers of both communities, Hindus and Muslims, were outraged at the prospect.

On 9 May 1857,⁸⁵ sepoy of the 3rd Light Cavalry, the 11th and 20th Native Infantry, the first battalion of the 60th Rifles, the 6th Dragoon Guards, a troop of horse artillery, a company of foot artillery, and a light field battery, stationed at Meerut, both Muslims and Hindus, who had refused to handle the cartridges, were disarmed and humiliated as an example for the others. They were stripped of their uniforms and their shoes. Each one had his ankles shackled. The humiliation was unbearable for all the other sepoy present. The next day, they all 'mutined'. The prisoners were freed by the sepoy regiments, and most of the Englishmen and their families in the Meerut cantonment were put to death. The 'insurgents' then headed for Delhi.

The Delhi sepoy regiments rose and occupied the cantonment. The feeble Bahadur Shah II was 'restored' as 'Emperor' of India. It was not until 20 September, after storming Delhi from the Kashmiri Gate, that the British won back the city. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar II, was arrested from the tomb of his great predecessor, Humayun, outside Delhi. Confined to prison, he was displayed to European visitors and was tried on charges, *inter alia*, of 'not regarding his allegiance as a British subject, and having allowed himself to be proclaimed as the reigning king and sovereign of India.' In 1859, he was sentenced to transportation to Rangoon, where he spent his days composing poetry till he died at the age of eighty-seven:

KITNA HAI BADNAZEEB ZAFAR DAFN KAY LIYAY

DO GAZ ZAMEEN BHI NA MILLI KOO-AY YAAR MAIN

How unfortunate is Zafar: when it came to his burial

He did not obtain even two yards of space in the land of his beloved.

II. A COMPLIMENT RETURNED

British dominance through the war of 1857 implied the destruction of a centuries-old static agrarian lifestyle. Success in commerce and industry, instead of the feudal criteria of descent or family heritage, determined social

status under the new system. Demonstrable competence in an entire spectrum of new jobs, particularly concerned with supporting Britain's expropriatory policies, gradually became more significant than inherited legacies. For the first time in almost three thousand years, the fabric of society and the edifice of caste was in actual jeopardy.

Europe's secular attitudes exerted their own influence. Family relations seemed threatened by the vision of an emancipated woman of an industrialized metropolitan society. Urbanization of society and migration of population began to break the structure of the extended joint family system. Age-old social relations were being fundamentally threatened, as were concepts, ethical norms and moral injunctions that had been passed down from generation to generation. Essentially, the Uprising of 1857 was a feudal outburst, led by feudal chiefs and their followers, drawing mass support only in Delhi, the state of Awadh and some parts of central India and Bihar.

Britain had won Indus with the aid of the Indians. Now it was able to harness India decisively with the aid of troops recruited from Indus. The Sindhis and the Punjabis had not forgotten that the Bombay Foot Artillery, the Bengal Native Infantry, the Bengal Sappers and Miners, the Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Guides Cavalry, the Third Hussars, the Ninth Lancers, the Bengal Lancers and the Wiltshires⁶ that had subjugated them in the fields of Miani,

Dubba, Subraon, Chaillianwalla and Gujrat, had been fully manned by soldiers from what today are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra.⁷ Only the officers and a few units had been British.

The callous cruelties and indignities perpetrated by the victorious generals Napier and Gough live on in Indus folklore and legend to this day. Who carried out their orders? The *poorbi* native foot-soldiers, of course. Areas like the Punjab and Sindh stood exhausted, having been engaged till only a few years before in long and unsuccessful struggles against the British. Both the Punjabis and the Sindhis were still smarting under the assault of the *poorbias*⁸ and the *Dilli-walas*⁹ as they were called in Punjab and Sindh. It had not been forgotten that a large proportion of the troops commanded by Napier, Gough, and other British generals that had fought against them, and then had pillaged their towns in the years 1843 to 1849 had been *poorbias*. The Punjabis and the Sindhis had been proud of their military prowess; and they were well aware that this time 'they had been beaten by an army of which less than a third was of British stock and the rest Purbiyas from Awadh and Bihar.'¹⁰ In the words of John Harris:

The Punjab had always been different, however. It had benefitted from the annexation and its tribes were virile fighters who had given the British a hard battle. Proud of their resistance, they did not resent the British half as

much as they resented the despised and swaggering sepoy from Awadh whom they felt they could eat alive but who, under British leadership, had conquered them.¹¹

Now the Punjab and Baloch Regiments went along to Delhi to return the compliment. Indus was thus perceived as repaying India for its own earlier humiliation and subjugation. Indus and India were once again out of step with each other. This was to the immense advantage of the alien power. It first played the one, then the other.

It should not, however, be taken to mean that the Punjabis and the Sindhis were alone in their assaults upon Delhi. This time, too, Hodson's Horse and Probyn's Horse were, as in the past, manned by *poorbias* and *Dilli-walas*. These still constituted the majority of the troops. The *Dilli-walas* were storming their own kinsmen in Delhi. They themselves manned the Bengal Lancers, Skinner's Horse and Probyn's Horse,¹² all engaged in the assault of Delhi. Only this time, flanking the Seventh Hussars, the 9th Lancers, the Royal Munster Fusiliers and the Northumberland Fusiliers were some regiments from Sindh and Punjab as well.

The Calcutta Council had remained at its Headquarters and directed the British war effort through telegraphic dispatches and Bengali carriers. Troops

were moved on to Delhi from Barrackpur in the east, and from Punjab and Sindh in the west. When the Sikh Pioneers, the Second Punjab, the Seventh Rajput, the Tenth Baloch, the Eleventh Sikh and the 12 FF¹³ advanced to besiege the cities of India, Indus had, in fact, provided only the supplemental troops that launched the counter-offensive whereby the British ultimately recaptured Delhi.

III. THE HERO OF NEELIBAAR

It would, however, be unfair to say that Indus did not participate at all in the War of 1857 against the British, even though in many cantonments the British were able to pre-empt any uprising. The British officers stationed in all garrisons across the subcontinent including Indus, with the advantage of the telegraph, had been able to find out about the revolt in Meerut long before any reports could seep through the travellers' grapevine. They were thus able to disarm many units before any outbreak of mutiny in the Punjab and Sindh. The Indus sepoy units were thus unaware of the events in Delhi when they were brought out on to the marching grounds and deprived of their weapons.

Despite these pre-emptive actions, and despite their aversion to their erstwhile tormentors - the *poorbias* and *Dilli-walas* - many Indus units rebelled.

This is a fact that is seldom taken note of. In Ferozepur, for instance, hundreds of sepoys broke out of barracks with their arms, burnt the houses of all the English officers and stole away towards Delhi. Some were captured, tied to cannon and executed. In Jullundur the 6th and 7th Light Cavalry and the 36th and 61st Punjab took over the cantonment, as did the 55th Infantry in Hoti, near Mardan. Several sepoys of the 14th Punjab were court-martialled for participation in the 'Mutiny'. The 9th Light Cavalry rose in Sialkot and caused great damage. Similar uprisings took place in Peshawar, Mianwali, Multan, Ambala and Thanesar.¹⁴

Although pre-emptive action had been taken at Lahore, there was nevertheless trouble. 'On 30th July, 1857, the disarmed 26th Bengal native Infantry broke out from Mian Mir Cantonment. Equipped with *talwars*¹⁵ and hatchets, they killed the commanding officer, Major Spencer, the regimental sergeant and two havildars. They were pursued along the left bank of the Ravi by Montgomery and his armed police. One hundred and fifty were killed near Ajnala, 300 were shot and buried in a common pit at Ajnala. Another forty-five were brought to Lahore and blown from cannon mouths at a parade of the whole Lahore garrison in Montgomery's presence.'¹⁶

The undisputed Indus hero of 1857 was Ahmed Khan, the chief of the Kharal tribe, commanding the entire area between Sahiwal¹⁷ and Multan called

'Neelibaar.'¹⁸ He was an old man of eighty when he took up arms, but he wielded them with the vigour of a strong young man. In this old age too, he was a great horseman, and the Kharals whom he led performed many skilful guerrilla operations with speed and valour. Murad Fateyana, Nadir Shah and Mardana were other brave chieftains who had joined hands with the Kharals.

On 21 September 1857, Ahmed Khan died fighting near Gogera. His head was severed and placed atop an earthen pitcher for display to the general public. But the Kharals manifested initiative even in defeat. The head was secretly removed and buried with Ahmed Khan's body. To this day, bards sing of Ahmed Khan:

DHOKAN YAAD KARAINDIAN HAIN

IK WAAREE MURR AWEEN HAN

RAI NATHOO DYA AHMED KHANA

The hamlets remember you,

Come back just once,

Ahmed Khan son of Rai Nathoo.¹⁹

Yet by and large, the people of those Indus areas suppressed by the British between 1843 to 1849, with the aid of the Bengal Army comprising mainly of

Awadh soldiers, remained indifferent to the fate of Delhi from where their own tormentors had earlier come.

IV. AN OCTOGENARIAN POET AND THE PRINCES

The 1857 uprising was unsuccessful for other reasons too. Bahadur Shah was no leader of men. At eighty-two, he was old and sick. He had, no doubt, been allowed to maintain a semblance of royal pretence by the Company, but he had been dependent upon the Company's allowance of Rs 100,000 a month. Considering his habits, the upkeep of the entire palace, and the number of his useless dependants, this was a paltry sum. He sat on the throne with a fictional sovereignty and himself lived through poetry sessions and court rituals, in a make-believe world of Mughal glory. Even though the general public of all persuasions did look upon him as 'the sovereign', he was politically impotent and insignificant. He was seldom granted permission to come out of his palace and fort. He composed verses and was a recognized poet in his own right. But even the poetry of his younger days and middle age reflected the declining state of affairs. It 'is the image of his own mind. It was a distressing sense of the disabilities imposed upon him, and his inability to break through them. Significant in this respect is the nature of his imagery, the use of words like fowler, chain, captive, cage, snare, etc. The persistence with which he returns to them shows how overwhelming and unbroken must have

been his sense of frustration. He is not uniformly gloomy; there are eager longings and fugitive gleams of hope as well, but they are few and far between, and serve only to throw his gloom into still sharper relief.'²⁰

The king was not entirely alone in this melancholy. A dominant sense of gloom and melancholy pervaded the works of such masters of Delhi's literary world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Mir Anis, Ibrahim Zauq, Asadullah Khan Ghalib and Hakim Momin. The Lucknow School went further. Its leading lights of the nineteenth century, Mir Babar Ali Anis and Salamat Ali Dabir were obsessed with the *marsiya* (the dirge). But while great poets like Ghalib and Momin could also often be vigorous, witty, perceptive, philosophical, full of the ardour of life and detached from themselves, 'Zafar's poetry is wholly personal, a dirge on his blighted hopes and the misfortunes that dogged his heels.'²¹ Has any other king had the occasion or the inclination to express himself in such terms as these?

DASHT-E-VEHSHAT KO IRADA HAI KEH ABAD KAROON

KHOL DAY KAASH MAIRAY PAAON KI ZANJEER HAREEF

I intend to go and live in the desert of madness,

Would to God that the enemy remove the chain from my feet.

KARWAN MANZIL PAY PAONCHHA AUR MAIRAY HAMSAFAR
MISL-E-GARD-E-KARWAN, IK MAIN BICHHARR KEH REH GYA

The caravan reached the destination along with my companions,
Tis I alone who was left behind like the dust raised by the caravan.

ISS CHAMMAN MAIN KYA KARO GAY MAI KASHO HANS BOL KAY GHUNCHA
SAN KHAMOSH KHOON-E-DIL KO HEE PEE KAR RAHO

O wine-bibbers, what will you get by talking and laughing in this garden?
You had better drink your heart-blood in silence like the bud and then go to
sleep.

BAAT KARNI MUJHE MUSHKIL KABBHI AISI TOA NA THEE
JAISEE AB HAI TERE MEHFIL KABBHI AISI TOA NA THEE

Never did I find it so hard to speak my mind to thee,
Never was thy assembly so awe-inspiring as it is today.

AI ASEERO AB NA PAR MAIN TAQAT-E-PARWAZ HAI
KYA KARO GAY TUM NIKAL KAY DAAM SAY, BAITHAY RAHO

O captives, your wings have lost the power to fly;
What will you get by leaving the net, better stay where you are.²²

A younger man may perhaps have led the battle with vigour. The task was beyond the last in the line of that hardy chieftain of Ferghana, the untiring Babar.

There was also a lack of coordination and timing in the uprisings in different parts of the empire. It had the character of a series of isolated combustions. The subcontinent was too divided for a concerted, unified and synchronized action on a subcontinental scale. Moreover, barring a few defections such as the brave and beautiful Lakshmi Bai, the twenty year old Rani of Jhansi, the Nana Sahib, the queen Hazrat Mahal of Awadh and the energetic princes of Mahmudabad, the Indian princes not only remained indifferent, but in some cases actually assisted the British in subjugating India. Many of their deeds find mention in the Imperial Gazetteer.

The Raja of Jind, for instance, was the first man, European or native, to take the field against the mutineers, and his contingents collected supplies in advance for the English troops marching upon Delhi. The Raja was also present at the Battle of Alipur and his troops took a significant part in the final assault on Delhi in September 1857. Raja Randhir Singh of Kapurthala marched into Jullundur and held the *Doab* which was virtually denuded of British troops. He then led his men right into Awadh to suppress the great uprising. Faridkot placed himself under the orders of the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur

and assisted him in guarding the Sutlej ferries. He also personally led the attack on the stronghold of Sham Das, an energetic 'revolutionary' and destroyed him. Nabha held Ludhiana for the British and helped in suppressing the Jullundur insurgents at Phillaur.

V. AN UNEQUAL BATTLE

While the passivity of the Deccan and southern India was another factor that contributed to the success of the British, a far more important reason was that the two contesting sides were at two unequal stages in their historical, socio-political and economic development.

Throughout the period during which Delhi was in the control of the Mughal emperor's enthusiastic supporters, that is, between May and September 1857, the British troops camped a few miles beyond the confines of the city on a mound outside the Kashmiri Gate. An obelisk today reminds the visitor of that site. It also records the names of the persons killed in the final assault upon the Gate. What the monument does not tell us, however, is a far more significant tale which casts light upon the real strength and power of the two opposing sides.

The small British garrison that was stationed precariously for these several

months upon the mound outside Delhi remained in unbroken contact with the world beyond. This is attested to by the numerous letters written by Lieutenants Thomas Cadell and Charles Ewert, by Captain Barter and by Brigadier Archdale Wilson.

By the early 1850s, the British had begun laying both railway and telegraph lines. It was said later that the telegraph saved the British Raj in India. Even as Meerut was burning, 'and although the line from and to Agra had remained open long enough for the Postmaster's sister to send a message to her aunt telling her not to pay a proposed visit to Meerut as the sepoys had risen in revolt, when the second, official telegram was dispatched to Agra the line was cut after the transmission of the opening sentence.'²³ Even this incomplete message enabled the communication of the situation in Meerut to British garrisons in distant places. After Delhi had been taken over by the 'mutineers', 'two young Eurasian signallers, William Brendish and J. W. Pilkington, in their cabin between the Ridge and the city walls, sensing that the Postmaster, Charles Todd, had been murdered while out seeking the fault in the line to Meerut, had the sense to send a signal to the Commander-in-Chief at Simla.'²⁴ What Indian technology could have matched this facility?

While sanctioning the first major telegraph line from Calcutta to Peshawar, Governor-General Dalhousie had predicted that this would be the most

important political and economic asset of the empire. He was proved right the day the word 'mutiny' was instantaneously transmitted from Agra across more than 800 miles along the electric wire to Calcutta. He had himself mapped the route of the first major Indian telegraph line, from Calcutta to Banaras, Allahabad, Agra, Ambala, Lahore and Peshawar. These communication links were to prove vital. The news was out. Pre-emptive preparations could be made and actions could be taken well in advance to disarm other regiments elsewhere before their native sepoy came to know of, and were inspired by, the brave deeds of their own compatriots. 'The telegraph had clearly proved its worth throughout the war, its humming wires helping to "hang" many a "mutineer".'²⁵ Even the ultimate assault on Delhi could be fully planned and accurately timed to coordinate with the arrival of reinforcements. Lawrence and Nicholson, the troops from Barrackpur, and the instructions from Calcutta, all went into the well-coordinated final successful assault upon Delhi.

Speed and communications have so often been the decisive factors in wars. Napoleon's successes depended upon them. In India, the Central Asians had established their superiority over the Indian empires and principalities in the several centuries between Mahmud Ghazni and the Mughals, by the speed, mobility and fast communications on horseback. The horse had always outmatched and outmanoeuvred the sturdy but slow and sluggish Indian

elephant. The British, equipped with the power of steam and the speed of the telegraph, also outmanoeuvred India.

In 1853, Karl Marx had summed up his assessment of the Indian state of affairs in these words:

Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it an unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies.

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the

unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.²⁶

VI. 'SANDEMANIZATION' AND THE FORWARD POLICY

With the Indian empire consolidated, and with the annexation of Indus, the frontier of the British Empire extended to the north-west of the subcontinent where some major changes were initiated. One of the architects of these changes was the Deputy Commissioner of the border district of Dera Ghazi Khan.

Captain Robert Groves Sandeman had come to this district after service in the army, and after civilian service as an Assistant Commissioner in Kohat, Peshawar, Hazara and Bannu. He was only 31 when, in 1866, he was given charge of the outlying district inhabited by fiercely independent Baloch tribes at constant war with each other, impeding commerce and trade through the mountain passes which could have yielded great revenues to the tribes themselves, besides securing their borders for the British. Sandeman played upon tribal weaknesses, and the weaknesses of the tribal chiefs. Until that time, self-aggrandizement had marred the potential that the territorial position of the tribes offered them. Sandeman began to bring them together, at the same time endeavouring to enhance the position of the tribal chiefs within each tribe. The tribes were also enriched through road-building and

canal-digging contracts.

The Bugtis had been relatively quiet since the arrest of their chief, Bibrak. But in 1867 Ghulam Hussain Bugti attacked the Herring Fort, killing some British subjects. Sandeman himself pursued the Bugti raiders, took 200 of them prisoners, and sought to penalize the tribe *as a whole*, while seeking reparations from its chief as a price for the release of prisoners.

Sandeman made the tribal chiefs responsible for discipline and order within their tribe. The tribal chiefs were henceforth also required to give into the service of the British government certain tribal levies that were paid for by the government. This came to be known as the 'Sandemanization' of the tribal system. The success of Sandeman's system is attested to by the fact that in 1876 he had become the master of Quetta and Bolan.

The annexation of the Punjab had resulted also in the annexation of much of what is today the North-West Frontier Province because the Sikh state had extended right up to and beyond Peshawar. What Sandeman did in the Baloch territory, Warburton²⁷ would do, in his own way, in the North-West Frontier. He became the real architect of the 'Forward Policy' against the fears of Russian expansionist policy which envisaged a buffer area of several 'Agencies', as distinct from the settled Districts. The Agencies enjoyed a

certain tribal autonomy and were looked after by Political Agents, exercising loose administrative control. These Agencies remained within the defined and recognized borders of the British imperial state.

In 1878 the British won a decisive victory in the Third Afghan War. The third 'Universal State' thus came to full maturity.

1. Wolpert, *A New History*, 232.

2. The last Governor-General of the East India Company and, after 1858, the first Viceroy of India.

3. See Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny, India 1857* (1980) 59.

4. Flat paper-thin bread.

5. Hibbert, 59.

6. For the names of the regiments and units, see H. C. B. Cook, *The Battle*

7. See Lambrick, *Sindh Battles*; Ali, *Sindh Observed*, 165, 197. Lambrick observes that out of the names inscribed on the monument at Miani of the Indian soldiers killed in the battle, 'the great majority of the men of the Bombay Infantry Regiments were Marathas, with a few "Purbias", the Cavalrymen being "Purbias" and Muslims.'
8. Broadly speaking, those who belonged to the present-day Uttar Pradesh, including Awadh.
9. Applies, as the name suggests, to those who belonged to Delhi itself.
10. Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 235.
11. *The Indian Mutiny*(1973) 57.
12. The Bengal Lancers was one of the crack Indian units deployed. Skinner's Horse and Probyn's Horse were the pride of the British army.

13. See Cook, 88-99.
14. See Professor Aziz-ud-Din Ahmed, *Punjab Aur Bairooni Hamla Aavar*, 146-7.
15. Swords.
16. M. Athar Tahir, *Punjab Portrait* (1992) 87.
17. For about one hundred years between 1870 to 1970 the town and the district were called Montgomery.
18. For the meaning of Neelibaar, see chapter 23, section VI.
19. Ibid., p. 147.
20. Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (1984) 277.
21. Ibid.

22. All the translations of Zafar's verses are taken from Sadiq, 278-9.
23. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, 89.
24. Harris, 46.
25. Wolpert, *New History*, 243.
26. Karl Marx's letter in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 June 1853, reproduced in *Selected Works* 1, 492-3.
27. Sir Robert Warburton, effectively the first British Political Agent in the North-West Frontier region, was the son of a British Army Officer and an Afghan lady. See Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (1992) 357 ff.

The Third Universal State

I. IMPERIAL RETRIBUTION

In 1858 the East India Company was dissolved. The British Government took over the direct administration of India. Delhi paid heavily for the 'rebellion'. For one whole week, the victors officially permitted their English officers and Indian soldiers to loot the inhabitants in true medieval style.

Even such an enthusiastic proponent of the Raj as James Morris, who is able to condone the Bengal Plunder, the humiliation of the Begums of Awadh, the savage suppression of the textile artisans, laments that: 'Since the Mutiny the British Government in India lost much of its old humanity.'¹ He goes on to quote an eye-witness account of the execution in the 55th Native Infantry: 'The first ten prisoners were lashed to the guns, the artillery officer waved his sword, you heard the roar of guns, and, above the smoke, you saw legs, arms and heads flying in all directions. Since that time we have an execution parade once or twice a week and such is the force of habit we now think little of them.'² Other accounts corroborate this. 'The trials - when trials were held - were often mere formalities. Officers were heard to swear that they would hang

the prisoners whether or not they were found to be guilty; and, after being condemned to death as a matter of course, prisoners, mutineers, rebellious villagers, and escaped convicts from the goals were sometimes tortured before their execution by private soldiers whose officers did not interfere. The bravery and resignation with which prisoners died struck all who witnessed their executions.’³

Torture was often devised so as to hurt and degrade the most. According to John Harris ‘Muslims were sewn up in pigskins and smeared with hog fat before being killed.’⁴ For the Hindus the same treatment was meted out, with cowskins substituted for pigskins. ‘The British attitude was common almost everywhere. John Nicholson, Deputy Commissioner of the Peshawar Division and a good churchman who after the battle of Gujerat [sic] had allowed prisoners to go home quietly, wrote “I would inflict the most excruciating tortures on them with a perfectly easy conscience.” Even wholesale castration was talked of and a young man at the Cambridge Union was applauded when he said, When every bayonet is red with blood, when every gibbet creaks beneath When every bayonet is red with blood, when every gibbet creaks beneath its ghastly burden; when the ground in front of every cannon is strewn with rags and flesh and shattered bone - then talk of mercy’.⁵

II. AN ENTIRELY NOVEL PHENOMENON

India had previously experienced two kinds of foreign invaders. There were those like Alexander of Macedon, Mahmud of Ghazni, Taimur, the Persian Nadir Shah and the Afghan Ahmad Shah Abdali, powerful and sometimes iconoclastic, but temporary visitors. They entered India, subdued her peoples, extracted tribute and booty, and returned to their capital cities in their own home states. There was also the other type, the Aryans, the Scythians (Shakas), the Yeu Chi (Kushans), the Seljuk Turks and the Mughals. They had entered India, subjugated its tribes or princes, won and consolidated kingdoms or empires, and made themselves a part of its life. They became Indian and established 'Indian dynasties'. The centre of gravity of this latter variety of ruling elite had always remained within India.

The Mughals did not build their Taj Mahal and Shalimar Gardens in Ferghana or Kabul. They assimilated themselves in the subcontinent. Their officers did not return to their Central Asian homes upon retirement from service. They lived, died and were buried (except Babar) in Indus and India. This was their home. Nor did they effect any material changes in the economic structures prevailing in India. Neither their conquests nor their governments brought about any change in the economic life of the village, the social system of caste, or in the relations of production. India, with its bullock cart and spinning wheel, was virtually the same India on the death of Aurangzeb (AD

1707) as it had been on the accession of Babar (AD 1526) or, for that matter, of Qutubuddin Aibak (AD 1206).

In this manner of thought, India had never previously lost her independence. She herself had conquered and absorbed her conquerors.

The British conquest of India was an entirely novel phenomenon. Britain shattered the very foundations of the system of production and exchange, and impacted upon the existing social relations in the subcontinent. While earlier conquests had left the economic structure intact, the conquerors indeed integrating into the structure, the British conquests brought in an entirely new set of ideas, technologies, tools and relations of production. The ox-cart was replaced by the steam engine and the railway locomotive, and the spinning wheel by the textile mill. The surplus profits of the government and the surplus income of the state went into the investment houses of London and Manchester. They would not be ploughed back or reinvested in the subcontinent to any significant extent.

III. GENTLEMEN REQUESTED NOT TO STRIKE SERVANTS

Except in the very early years of the British presence in India, there was no question of 'assimilation' of the governing race with the subject natives. The

early days of the Englishman in India had seen some compulsive mixing among the races and interracial marriages. But all trust was lost with the uprising of 1857. With the advent of the steamship, the *memsahibs* back home had begun to join their husbands. The opening up of the Suez Canal, late in the nineteenth century, perpetuated the racial divisions and distinctions between the rulers and the ruled.

New towns and suburbs, called civil lines and camps, were now built for British officials and their wives, with grand 'bungalows' on wide, tree-lined streets and spacious roads through which a regiment of troops could gallop swiftly, if needed, to put down any 'trouble.'

The post-mutiny separation of the 'races' brought a boom to the overseas market for brides, now that fear of the treachery of Indian 'housekeepers' made most young servants of the crown prefer the comfort and security of a British spouse to the availability of a native mistress.⁶

Elitist seclusion became the rule. The whites became a race apart. An unannounced apartheid began to be practised. Racism came to the fore.⁷ Exclusive railway carriages, waiting rooms, clubs, residential colonies and even bazaars dotted the face of India, emphasizing the difference between the two Indias: the pink and the brown.

It was now not uncommon to see notices in Indian hotels reading: 'Gentlemen are requested not to strike servants.'⁸ Soldiers arriving fresh in India, as close in time as the 1940s, were warned by old heads not to hit 'natives', yet this was not an infrequent occurrence in British dominions.⁹ The word 'native' itself began to assume a derisive and disdainful meaning.

The distance that the British kept, the contempt that they retained for the native, was not merely the result of the obvious difference of colour. The Turks, Afghans and Mughals had all been fairer and perhaps stronger than the Indians. But they had adopted India, mixed with her citizens, married amongst her inhabitants and assumed their ways.

More than their colour, the British stood apart as an industrial power and race. Their arrogance and conceit sprang from the pride in their advancement. Racism was the product of the sense of socio-economic superiority. So acute was the elitist feeling and reserve that when, according to Paul Scott, Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy, invited some Indian guests to a private banquet at Bombay's Royal Yacht Club, they were turned away in their Rolls-Royces before the host knew what was happening. No one at the door could even imagine that 'natives', of whatsoever station in life, could have been invited by the Viceroy. And to the Bombay Royal Yacht Club? It was unheard of!

IV. AN OFT-REPEATED QUESTION

The agonizing and oft-repeated question is: why did Muslim Mughal India allow itself to be conquered by a distant and alien power? The answer must be, as we have analysed, that defeat was inherent within the decadent Indian system. Britain merely blew down the dead tree camouflaged by the ostensible green of parasitic creepers and foliage.

For Europe, its advancement in science and conquest was accompanied by a regression of religion. In fact, it was this regression which facilitated the progress of science and thought in Europe. Preconceived notions like the 'Vatico-centricity of the Universe' could be disputed and disproved. Scientists were allowed to demonstrate that the man did not have one rib less than the woman, the rib from which she was believed to have emerged. An environment which respected doubt and encouraged enquiry into everything had been forced. The advent of earthshaking inventions and technology was irrepressible.

The birth of capitalism was the logical outcome. The reversal of inflexible religious dogma together with the growth of capitalism provided a further impetus to the flowering of science, technology and democratic values. As religious dogma shrivelled before scientific attitudes, feudalism too was

overwhelmed by capitalist forces and democratic institutions. Each development furthered the others, as it furthered itself.

Not so in India. Here, under long centuries of decadent Muslim rule, co-partnered by Hindu satraps, the system had remained static, archaic and dormant. India fell before the new power. It was then made a passive colonial and agrarian appendage to a distant imperial Britain. British markets had long been closed to Indian manufactures, while British products were freely sold in Indian markets. Internal and domestic duties now prevented the free flow of even Indian manufactures within India itself. Local rates and cesses were imposed on lines criss-crossing the entire subcontinent. The Indian textile industry had been the first victim. Hundreds of thousands of artisans and weavers between Plassey (1757) and Meerut (1857) had lost their jobs. All manner of crafts, ranging from paper, glass and metal products to ceramics and pottery were subjected to controls and price-enhancing taxation. By contrast, the expanding network of the railways was opening up new areas of the vast subcontinent to British goods, freely sold and exempt from the burden of all duties, fees and taxes.

V. THE PRICE OF DEVELOPMENT

A word, finally, of the development that Britain actually brought to Indus and

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V. THE PRICE OF DEVELOPMENT

A word, finally, of the development that Britain actually brought to Indus and

India: the roads, railways, barrages and canals. In one respect, the staggering figures speak for themselves:

By 1892 nearly 43,800 miles of main canals and distributaries had been constructed in British India, irrigating 13.4 million acres at a total capital cost of Rs 382.6 million, and returning net revenue annually at a rate of 4 to 5 per cent on the investment. Fifty years later, when the imperial account books were closed, just over half of British India's total irrigation, some 58.8 million acres, was provided by public works, 74,656 miles of main canals and distributaries which served approximately 32.8 million acres, approximately one-quarter of India's total cropped area.¹⁰

From its beginnings in 1853, India's railway system expanded rapidly to become, by 1910, the fourth-largest in the world. This network, which covered most of the subcontinent, radically altered India's transportation system. Vastly increasing the speed and availability of transport, it also lowered costs substantially, thereby permitting new opportunities for profit. Regional specialization began to occur and trade expanded. From a country of many segmented markets, separated from each other by the high costs of transport, India became a nation with its local centres linked by rail to each other and to the world. Railways, by establishing these links, had an impact throughout the Indian economy.¹¹

But were Indus and India benefited more than they were robbed by the provision of these infrastructure facilities? Railways, were no doubt constructed, roads built and canals dug. But most of the railway lines were either strategically motivated or designed solely to serve British commercial interests. As early as 1853, Karl Marx had predicted: 'The ruling classes of Great Britain have had, till now, but an accidental, transitory and exceptional interest in the progress of India. The aristocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy to plunder it, and millocracy to undersell it. But now the tables are turned, The millocracy have discovered that the transformation of India into a reproductive country has become of vital importance to them, and that, to that end, it is necessary, above all, to gift her with means of irrigation and internal communication. *They intend now drawing a net of railways over India.* And they will do it. The results must be inappreciable.'¹² (Emphasis added.)

The cotton-growing areas of Indus were directly connected with ports to facilitate the ready export of raw cotton to Lancashire. The cotton-growing areas of the Punjab and Sindh were also supplied with a vast network of canals and barrages, in addition to railways. Yet though Lancashire had its spinning mills in the eighteenth century, Indus and India, the home of cotton, were not permitted to instal a single mill until 1887 when the Parsee, J. N. Tata, was allowed to instal the Empress Mill at Nagpur. Even this was at first a mere

spinning unit, intended only to complement the weaving complexes of Manchester. 'The industries that developed in the country were either export-oriented or were developed to meet the requirements of foreign enterprise in India.'¹³ The ambit of industrial production in the colonies was kept to the minimum even when some industries were indeed allowed to be set up. 'Locomotives are a case in point. Indian railway workshops had proved capable of manufacturing competitively-priced locomotives as early as 1865 when a locomotive was made at the Byculla works in Bombay. Yet, between 1865 and 1941 Indian workshops produced only 700 locomotives, while British firms exported 12,000 to India.'¹⁴

Once the Suez Canal had been commissioned, even this belated and limited delegation of productive activity was discontinued. Until 1860, the import of machinery into India was completely banned. The jute industry, Bengal's world monopoly, was entirely British-owned and Scots-managed. Indian jute was shipped to and processed at Dundee in Scotland. The coalfields in Bengal and Bihar were under British proprietorship.

Some fresh 'delegation' of industrial output was allowed only when the seas became unsafe during the First World War. Then too, it was kept to the unavoidable bare minimum. Yet more than the cost of its own development was extracted from the colony. India paid back many times over for the

railways and the canals and, in addition, 'was to bear the cost of her own conquest, and then of her transfer (or sale) from the East India Company to the British Crown, for the extension to Africa, Persia, etc., and for her defence against the Indians themselves. She was not only used as a base for Imperial purposes but had further to pay for the training of part of the British Army in England - "capitation" charges these were called. Indeed India was charged for all manner of other expenses incurred by Britain, such as the maintenance of British diplomatic and consular establishments in China and Persia, the entire cost of the telegraph line from England to India, part of the expenses of the British Mediterranean fleet, and even the receptions given to the Sultan of Turkey in London.'¹⁵

It is plunder no irony that twenty million people in India, spread over 70,000 square miles, were in the cruel grip of the Famine of 1897 just as a euphoric England was celebrating the glory of Queen Victoria, Empress of India, in her Diamond Jubilee year.¹⁶

The plunder of Bengal had, alone, given the most decisive impetus to the industrial revolution in England. It is no coincidence that a series of inventions had begun to flower after the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London soon after the Battle of Plassey. Prosperity brings in its wake scientific advancement. Inventions themselves are dormant, waiting, as it were, for a sufficient

accumulation of demand and purchasing power to set them working. This triggering force is that of money in motion, money in circulation, money chasing new commodities. The plunder of Bengal provided this necessary element back in Britain.¹⁷ Bengal's wealth had brought the age of scientific advancement to England ahead of continental Europe, although up to that time scientific advancement in the European continent had been at a greater pace than the advances in England. Bengal, indeed, made England the home of the industrial revolution.

VI. A SPLINTERED POLITY

There were, thus, several factors that aided British supremacy. Seapower and technology were only two of these. Bengal's plunder was perhaps the single most important resource base that further enhanced Britain's technological and naval capabilities. For the rest, a selection of facts alone is necessary. No account can, however, omit mention of the British denial of an Indian colony to the French in the south.

The French had surrendered at Trichonopoly in 1749 with the arrival of Clive in India. Their general, the renowned Dupleix, saddened and defeated, soon returned to France. Three years after Plassey, the French were decisively defeated at Wandiwash (in 1760), when the Seven Year War spilled over into

India and the French general, de Bussey, was taken prisoner.

Not that the French had been far behind Britain. In fact, the energies released and generated in Europe by the extensive impact of the French Revolution had first been felt in the Napoleonic expansions (which included contacts with Tipu of Mysore). But the industrial revolution had given Britain the crucial head-start and the British bourgeoisie had already overtaken all its rival powers in the race for world markets. Napoleon's global dreams died with him in the isolation of St Helena in 1823.

With the French pushed out of the subcontinent, the British had only to confront a splintered and divided polity. Notice in this behalf must be taken of the peerless Tipu Sultan, victim as much of a more organized and resourceful foe as of treachery within his own ranks, living the life of a lion and dying a death of unmatched valour and martyrdom; of the decrepit state of the Mughal empire and the predatory raids of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali; of the massacres in Babar's capital city committed by Afghan troops under the Persian monarch and the Afghan King; of the meteoric rise of the marauding Marathas and their own Waterloo at Panipat in 1761, and later their final defeat at the hands of the British in 1818; of the irrepressible Rohillas, matched by the triumverate of the emperor, Awadh, and the Company, retaliating to humiliate the emperor Shah Alam, that unworthy and unfortunate occupant of the throne

of the Great Akbar. The Mughal empire had disintegrated into a matrix of kingdoms and confederacies. These had then splintered into countless states, princedoms, and chieftainships. The Marathas, the Afghans, the Rajputs, the Jats, the Sikhs, all added confusion to the scene, just as their ever-changing alliances and pacts made confusion worst confounded. The political landscape of Indus and India was in utter chaos. Europe was marching upon them; and Britain was unquestionably ahead of all other European powers and Indian adversaries.

VII. LOTTERY CULTURE AND WINDFALLS

The purpose of this discussion is not to simply trace chronologically the history of India. The object is to attempt to deduce and analyse the root causes of Britain's success in mastering an entire continent of some 250 million through the efforts and campaigns of a fraction of that number of their own men, and the effect of British rule upon the Indus person. There is one other aspect, therefore, that needs special mention.

The development of the canal system, the opening up of much of the Indus region through railways and roads under the Raj, and particularly the policy of 'colonization' of lands that accompanied these advances, left another lasting imprint upon the psyche of the Indus person.

Before the modern canal system, much of the Indus region was shrubland, called *baar*. Even today, such names as the Neelibaar and the Gondalbaar, signify the areas lying away from the riverbanks, between the rivers Sutlej, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum. Many other areas were desert. Although there was a rich and primordial tradition of agriculture from the times of Mohenjodaro, which had given impetus to the the development of the family, most of the agriculture was confined to the *belas* or *kutchas*, areas contiguous to the river banks. Seasonal floods provided the necessary water for crops like wheat, cotton and sugarcane. The scale of cultivation was necessarily limited.

The British, in seeking to open up more lands to the cultivation of cotton and wheat, in particular, found that even the soil under the *baars* or shrubland was fertile. The deserts also displayed great potential. Only water was required. An enormous network of barrages and canals was planned. Millions of acres came under cultivation. But these had to be actually ploughed and harvested by people. These 'new' lands were 'colonized' and allotted to the local landless or to settlers brought from other lands.

The allotment of lands was a windfall for the populace of Indus. Thousands of peasant families were moved from distant villages to the new lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In some areas, such as Sargodha and Jhang, large tracts were gifted. In others, such as Sahiwal and

Faisalabad, smaller parcels were given out. Overnight, the fortunes of families changed; landless peasants became land-owners; and robber-barons became landlords. If the District Collector, or even his assistant, was pleased with some aspirant, the largesse of the state suddenly descended upon the beneficiary. The Sahib's milkman became a landowner; the Sahib's supplier of local brew, a landlord. Those who had collaborated in the wars against the Punjab and Delhi were, of course, not to be forgotten. They got the lion's share and became the new, economically powerful ruling class. The brother of a beneficiary, even though more deserving, may have been left behind by the social high-jumper, but soon the latter's origin and manner of climbing were forgotten. Collaboration and submission had their rewards.

This was not a ruling class born out of a struggle, or a ruling class that had won its place through wars or sacrifice as in Europe and America. On the contrary, the new ruling class had obtained its position of pre-eminence by doing just the opposite. Yet it ruled; and it dominated and had all the good things in life.

Nothing succeeds like success. The end justified the means. This unfortunate value system was being imbibed by the Indus (Pakistani) society at a time when public schools in Britain were teaching their young the contrary. The 'success ethic' became the principal social norm of Indus society. It laid

the basis of the 'get-rich-overnight-and-irrespective-of-merit' syndrome. This syndrome, and the 'success ethic', were to be consolidated with more lotteries in later times, greatly eroding the moral fabric of society and opening it up to the more contemporary 'heroin-kalashnikov culture' as we shall see.

It all started with the 'colonization' policies in the Indus region after the canals and railroads had been constructed. The construction of those was, however, crucial to the imperial exploitation of Indus and India. Henceforth, England would develop with Indian wealth, and would use her own developed methods to suppress and subjugate more Indians, both Hindus and Muslims.

1. James Morris, *Pax Britannica*, 136.

2. *Ibid.*, 137.

3. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, 123.

4. *The Indian Mutiny*, 97.

5. Harris, 99.

6. Wolpert, 245.

7. More than a little racism was endemic in English society. 'In 1688 the London Gazette offered "a guinea reward" for a "black boy, an Indian, about 13 years old, run away the 8th inst. From Putney with a collar about his neck with this inscription "The Lady Bromfield's black, in Lincoln Inn Fields'." Another advertisement in 1737 was searching for an "East India Tawney Black" while another in 1743 tried to find a "Run-away Bengal Boy". In 1772 Thomas Hornsey, "a black, a native of the Coast of Malabar" had runaway from his master. The runaway in question was said to have "long hair", was "well-made, likely featured" and spoke English well. The notice warned that anyone who harboured him would be prosecuted, while two guineas were offered as a reward for returning him.' Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, 14.

8. Morris, 137.

9. In 1946, during his first week in Egypt, James Morris 'boarded the Cairo train at Port Said with an English Colonel of particular gentleness of manner and sweetness of disposition. As we walked along the corridor to

find a seat we found our way blocked by an Egyptian, offering refreshments to people inside a compartment. Without a pause, apparently without a second thought, the Colonel kicked him, quite hard and effectively, out of our way. I was new to the imperial scenes, and I have never forgotten this astonishing change in my companion's character, nor the absolute blank indifference with which the Egyptian accepted the kick, and moved.' Ibid., fn 1, 137.

10. Dharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India* II, 677.

11. Ibid., 737.

12. From Marx's letter in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 8 August 1853 in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 494. (Emphasis added.)

13. Tara Chand, *The History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. II, 328.

14. *Cambridge Economic History*, vol. II, 749.

15. Nehru, *Discovery*, 323.

16. See Mahajan, *India Since 1526*, 394.

17. Bengal was won in 1757. The flying shuttle appeared in 1760, as coal began to replace wood in the smelting process, generating greater quantities of energy. The rapidity of the subsequent breakthroughs in technology is unmatched: 1764, Hargreaves's Spinning Jenny; 1768, Watt's Steam Engine; 1776, Crompton's Mule; 1785, Cartwright's Power Loom.

PART THREE

The Two Nations

AD 1757 to AD 1947

Introduction

In the two preceding parts of this volume, we have endeavoured to carry out a measured exercise to identify and discover the 'Indus person' (the Pakistani citizen of today), by establishing his territorial and permanent 'nationality', and by highlighting what he is not. The essential purpose of those parts of the book, therefore, was to assure the Indus person of his own distinct identity on the one hand, and to show how this was different, socially, politically and culturally, from all other extraterritorial peoples, including the peoples of Gangetic and peninsular India, of the Arab world and of Europe.

Yet Indus was not inhabited by Muslims alone. Pakistan largely is. The important feature of the Pakistani nation, the Indus region of today, is not merely that it is a nation, broadly speaking, of the Indo-Aryans settled around the riparian areas of the Indus and its tributaries. They were Hindus and Muslims. The point remains that Pakistan is primarily and predominantly a state inhabited by Muslims. That fact alone does not, of course, make it an 'Islamic state'. But the point being made is that not all the inhabitants of Indus and north-western India sought a separate state. The Hindus and Sikhs of Indus did not seek this result, even though they formed a substantial part of Indus population.

Had 'Indus' itself been the sole basis for the formation of the state of Pakistan, no Hindus or Sikhs would have migrated out of it upon its establishment. There was, surely, some other factor that separated some Indus persons from other Indus inhabitants. What was that?

The geographical boundaries of the state of Pakistan were initially so determined as to comprise within them the areas of such of 'India's ' provinces and states the majority of whose population was Muslim. This aspect was pivotal to the entire movement and struggle for the partition of the Indian subcontinent in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Muslim character and compulsion of the movement was indeed pre-eminent. But was it a religious movement? Was it led by the clergy, or by a liberal, progressive leadership? Did it have to do only with religion, or were there some underlying economic interests, no doubt of the Muslim community itself, that impelled the demand for a separate state for the Muslims of the subcontinent?

Many Pakistani analysts insist that religion alone was the sole necessity and rationale of the entire brief justifying the creation of Pakistan. From this conclusion, they infer the inherent right of the religious parties to determine the mode of government and, indeed, the right to govern. Yet most of those

who so insist had themselves opposed the demand for the creation of the state when that demand began to gain popular support among the Muslim masses. This, however, is the very aspect in which the movement that led to the establishment of Pakistan and which provided the *raison-d'être* of the state itself has often been grossly - often deliberately - misinterpreted. The present-day ideologues of Pakistan, most of whom had themselves been opposed to its demand, by playing upon obscurantism and emotion, prefer to confuse this very aspect so as to establish their own authority as the fountainheads of the 'ideology of Pakistan'. And they depict the concept of Pakistan as one of an intolerant and fundamentalist Islamic state. This conclusion, in turn, generates a 'hate-India' syndrome as, according to this view the dominance of a Hindu India was all that the Muslims sought to avoid in demanding Pakistan. The result is an inevitable conflict between the old and the new, between the orthodox and the modern, between the obscurantist and the realist.

Strictly avoiding dogmatic polemics, the remaining part of this book seeks to examine the differences of socio-economic standing and cultural outlooks between the two major communities of the subcontinent, Hindus and Muslims, that were the competing forces behind its partition in 1947. Naturally, if the differences have at all to be identified, it will be necessary to

examine the similarities as well. And this may bring us to some interesting conclusions.

It may appear, indeed, that while there was greater convergence in ritualistic and social practices than we are prepared to accept today, the two communities were, in the final analysis, torn apart, not as much by dogma or religion as by their economic disparity. It all seems to have started with the fortunes, the misfortunes, and the opportunities provided by Bengal in the eighteenth century, the point from which the two communities, coexisting for centuries, adopted different economic routes to development.

Many more questions arise out of the controversies generated by the present-day ideologues. How much of the communal divide was, in essence, based upon the dichotomy between the emerging bourgeois system enthusiastically adopted by the Hindus and the decadent feudal order to which the reluctant Muslim remained committed? To what extent, in other words, were economic disparities the underlying reason for the parting of the ways? Did the founders of the state of Pakistan, particularly the man who led the people to their final victory, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, envisage a 'Muslim' or an 'Islamic' state? Did he, that is to say, expect the country to be ruled by liberal laws or by the Islamic orthodoxy and religious parties?

I will endeavour not to brush aside any similarities and common attributes and features shared by the adversaries. But my focus will remain upon those features that differentiate the two principal actors in the events leading up to a reversion to the historic divide between Indus and India in the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

The Character of the Hindu Muslim Divide

I. THE 'COMMUNAL DIVIDE'

That the Hindus and the Muslims of the subcontinent are two distinct communities is not entirely disputed. No fundamentalist zealot on either side of the divide needs to remind us of this reality. The iron grip of the British Raj had held the two communities together under one yoke. The British bureaucracy had successfully forced the two opposites to exist in joint captivity. Yet at the beginning of the twentieth century, the mere prospect of even a modicum of self-governance at once brought all the differences to the surface. The Muslim League's demand for separate electorates preceded the Councils Act of 1909, better known as the Minto-Morley Reforms Act.

The socio-religious differences between the Hindus and the Muslims of the subcontinent have often been highlighted. Hindu idolatry is pitched against Muslim iconoclasm. The original Hindu polytheism has been contrasted with Muslim monotheism. Though some Muslim ascetics permitted some forms of devotional dance, nevertheless the devotional and

tantric cults of shaivistic Hinduism were alien to Muslim rituals. The Hindu practice of Sati¹ and the strait-jacket of caste offend the Muslim conscience, though the Muslim rulers of India did little to eradicate the former and, in fact, profited (in revenue and the maintenance of the peace) by a clever employment of the latter. (Sati was finally prohibited by *British* legislation in 1829.)

That should not imply that Muslims were any the kinder to their women, or any the better in the treatment of their own lower castes or classes. If there was no 'Sati', there was always killing of women 'for honour', trading them as the price for ending feuds, and the sale of the girl-child disguised in child marriage. High class Muslims also shunned, and still shun, eating food or drinking water out of utensils used by the lower classes. But they continued to style themselves as egalitarian in contrast to Hindu casteism.

After AD 1192, for a continuous period of about five hundred years, Muslims ruled most of northern India. Hindus, including the exclusive brahmins and the proud kshatriyas, were their subjects. The highest positions the Hindu elite could aspire to were those of confidants and courtiers of Muslim kings and emperors. At best, they could hope to become semi-autonomous but, nevertheless, subject feudatories. Nor could the iconoclasm of Islam, personified in the form of the Sultan of Ghazni, be readily forgotten by Hindu minds. That had been the highpoint of the clash of the two

communities. We have already noticed Romila Thapar's most vivid and elaborate account of the frenzied destruction of Somnath and its lasting imprint upon the Hindu mind.² But the sacking of the temples in the time of Feroze Shah and later by Aurangzeb was intended both to augment the decreasing revenues of impoverished states in a decadent feudal system as well as to prevent the allegedly conspiratorial potential of anti-government congregations. The declining empires had none of the permissive and liberal confidence of Alauddin Khilji or Akbar.

II. THE MIXING OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES

It would, however, be a distortion of history merely to highlight the differences that existed between the two communities. Even though the fundamentalists on both sides of the divide may not like to admit it, the fact remains that the two communities had coexisted harmoniously for several centuries. Hindu ministers had served in Muslim courts and vice versa. Often, Hindu and Muslim feudatories had formed alliances. At least at the level of the ruling elite, the Delhi kings and Mughal emperors had practised inter-marriage, and Alauddin Khilji, Akbar and Jahangir had all taken Hindu Rajput princesses for wives and queens. In fact, the Mughal system was substantially dependent upon the support of the Rajput princedoms.

Prior to the Delhi Sultanate, firm contacts between the two religions began along the coastal regions. A narrow strip of land along the peninsular coastline of India had been initiated in Islam by Arab traders and seamen. Since the fall of Rome, the Arabs had been the richest intermediary traders between the East and the West. On their journeys across the seas, they colonized small coastal areas, such as Malabar, on the peninsular coastline. But their sights were focused only on maritime trading routes. They made no effort whatsoever to penetrate inland and they had a very limited effect upon the mainland.

The sole early Muslim invasion, that of Muhammad Bin Qasim,³ was also not aimed at territorial conquest. Its main purpose was the protection of maritime traffic in trade and pilgrims. The Rashtrakatas and Pratiharas, the neighbouring and successive regional dynasties, were thus able to successfully resist any extensive Arab advance. The suzerainty of the Ummayyads and the Abbasids over Sindh lasted only about one hundred and forty years. And since Sindh was at the periphery of the Islamic empire, their hold was weak and intermittent. Islam could therefore not be established on a very large scale anywhere in the subcontinent by direct Arab impact. By the time the Central Asian Muslim kings began their incursions upon Indus, more than a century had passed since Arab suzerainty upon the southern reaches of the Indus had been terminated. Even the Muslim pockets that remained had shed Arab ways

and customs. Their Islam drew more from Indus than from the Arab culture. They had also learnt to coexist in a multi-religious environment with people of other persuasions.

When vast and stable Muslim states and empires were finally established, communal harmony continued to remain the norm. Most of the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal dynasty (excepting Feroze Shah and Aurangzeb) strove to maintain a balance between the two communities.⁴ Recently Professor R. Nath⁵ has authenticated a will of the first Mughal emperor, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar, in which the imperial testator counselled his son that it was 'incumbent that religious bigotries should be wiped off the tablet of the heart, and justice meted out to each religion according to its tenets . . . The temples and places of worship of whatever religion under the royal authority may not be desecrated.'

Babar's grandson, Jalaluddin Akbar went much further. He took Hindu princesses as his wives. In 1563, he abolished the tax levied on all Hindus visiting their shrines and temples. The next year he abolished *Jazya*, a special tax that was levied exclusively on non-Muslims. In doing so, Akbar was, in fact, bestowing upon them an equality of citizenship. The emperor employed non-Muslims in high positions of state and the army. At the height of his power Akbar also devised and tried to introduce a new religious doctrine, the

Din-e-Ilahi, which sought to fuse the two major religions, Islam and Hinduism, in a new blend of precepts and practices.

Although he went much further than all the others, Akbar's was not a complete and novel departure from the tradition of his predecessor kings. The Muslim kings of Delhi and the Muslim emperors of the Mughal dynasty had always needed the support of the martial confederacy of Hindu Rajputs. In fact, countless Hindus were retained as generals and feudatories,⁶ while *Jazya* had, at all times, remained only a very minor source of state revenue, even though an overwhelming majority of subjects qualified for this imposition. Even where this tax was imposed, it was confined to artisans and the urban population, implicitly exempting both the rural elite (the military retainers) and the already over-taxed peasantry.

While the armies of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal empire derived substantial strength from recruits marshalled by Hindu feudatories, even the lesser dynasties frequently entered into inter-communal alliances.

In 1751, Nawab Wazir Safdar Jang of Awadh sacked the Muslim principality of Rohilkhand and the entire Rohilla country, with the aid of the Maratha army of Malhar Rao Holkar,⁷ Mahadji Scindia⁸ and the Jat troops of Raja Suraj Mal.⁹ In 1757, an enlightened Hindu, Diwan Ram Narain, had supported the brave

Nawab Sirajuddaula in the battlefield of Plassey. The Muslim Nawab had been betrayed by his most trusted *Muslim* general, Mir Jaffar. It was Ram Narain, the Hindu noble, who mourned the defeat and death of the Muslim ruler, in words that have moved the hearts of many:

GHAZALAN TUM TOA WAQIF HO, KAHO MAJNOON KAY MARNAY KEE
DIWANA MARR GAYA AAKHIR KO, WEERANON PAY KYA GUZRI

O gazelles, since you know, tell us how did love die?
He died at last, and then what happened to the wastelands?

Upon hearing of the humiliation and blinding of the Muslim emperor Shah Alam at the hands of a Muslim chieftain (Ghulam Kadir Rohilla),¹⁰ it was the Maratha chief, Scindia, who ordered his general, Rana Khan, to rescue the blinded Muslim emperor from the clutches of his persecutor. On the Delhi fort being surrounded by the Maratha troops, the Rohilla fled to Meerut, taking with him all the princes of royal blood as hostages. He was pursued, taken, and then put to death. More than a dozen Muslim princes and an equal number of Muslim princesses were beholden to a Maratha Hindu army for their release.

In 1857, both the communities together entered a life-and-death battle

against the British in the uprising of that year. It had been triggered off by the greased cartridges that had incensed soldiers of both communities to rebel at the Meerut garrison in May that year. Hindu and Muslim soldiers were equally outraged by the procedure required to load the new Enfield rifles. As the patriots galloped the forty miles to Delhi, the population of that town and the Awadh peasantry that rose to welcome them drew from both communities.

While most of the princes, both Muslim and Hindu, either sided with the British or maintained a significant neutrality,¹¹ the name of Lakshmi Bai, the attractive, twenty year old Rani of Jhansi who bravely led her cavalry to her defeat and death cannot be omitted from the ranks of the Indian heroes of the independence struggle against the *farangees*.¹² Nor can the valour of Nana Sahib and his guerrilla commander, Tantia Tope be denied. They took up arms at a time that their people, the Marathas, were actually exhausted, and continued their resistance well into 1858, even after Delhi with its Muslim king, had fallen to the British.

The Hindus and the Muslims were fighting together for the posterity of a feeble Muslim emperor. The emperor himself recognized this contribution of both the communities. The proclamation issued by him on 27 August 1857, before his final defeat and capture in September, began: 'It is well known to all, that in this age the people of Hindoostan, *both Hindoos and Mohammedans*,

are being ruined under the tyranny and oppression of the *infidel and treacherous English*. It is therefore the bounden duty of all the wealthy people of India . . . to stake their lives and property for the well being of the public.’¹³ (Emphasis added.) Though the proclamation did not evoke much response among the ‘wealthy people’, it did indicate that for the emperor the Christians, but not the Hindus, were ‘infidels.’

The uprising of 1857 demonstrated that the Hindu-Muslim peasantry and the middle classes had common interests, and were willing to fight side by side to protect them. It also established the common concerns of the Hindu-Muslim aristocracy. The divide manifested itself on class and geographical (or regional) lines, not on the basis of any communal differences.

III. COEXISTENCE AT ALL LEVELS

Muslim kings and emperors had married Hindu princesses.¹⁴ The imperial court had adopted many Hindu practices, including the association of divinity with kingship, a concept entirely alien to Islam. Mughal emperors had assumed the exalted and flattering title of *Zille-e-Ilahi* - literally, the shadow of God - implying, of course, His appointee, or delegate. Many Muslim kings and emperors of Delhi enthusiastically participated in such Hindu festivals as Holi, Dussehra and Diwali. Some other festivals, like Basant and Baisakhi, were

seasonal festivals, celebrated by all communities.

As is evident from the common celebration of several festivals at a popular level, the mixing of the two communities was not confined to the imperial and feudal elite. It was equally obvious at lower levels even if prominence to this circumstance has not been allowed by historians more concerned with dynastic fortunes and palace rituals than with the common man. The fact is that the migration of Muslims into India had definitely been limited. There was never any mass migration into Indus or India along with the Central Asian soldiers. The armies of the Turks, the Afghans and the Mughals were accompanied only by the usual crop of camp-followers and retinue. The consolidation of Muslim governments in India did, no doubt, induce some Muslim traders from Central Asia to create outposts in Indus and India, and several artisans and architects to migrate. Arab traders had also built settlements along the peninsular coastline, particularly around the ports of Broach (near present-day Mumbai) and Malabar. But all these 'aliens' together formed only a fraction of the Muslim population in India.

The vast majority of Indian Muslims were converts from Hinduism, especially from the lower castes. By conversion, they expected to shed their inferior status. Once a decision was taken, the tendency was for entire communities to convert at once. But when a class of artisans thus converted to

Islam, there was no immediate and sudden change in the lifestyle or status of the converts. The artisans, for their own survival, had to continue to practise the same craft which they were experts in, and which they had inherited from their forefathers. The practices of the trade, the mode of living, the standard of life and the social status underwent little change. Weavers, for instance, are one such community that by and large converted to Islam *en masse*. Yet their status, in the all-pervading caste-order (that unfortunately remained the back-drop of all Indian social activity at the popular level, whether Hindu or Muslim) remained as low as it was when they were Hindus.

Because the artisans were organized in 'craft-castes', the caste distinction continued even after conversion, particularly in terms of social relations and inter-marriages.¹⁵ The process of conversion was itself slow and gradual. The majority, with no real prospect of an instant change in status, remained Hindu even under long centuries of Muslim rulers. This in itself contributed towards assimilation of the two communities as there was no sudden break with the past or with the contemporary local environment.

It may be difficult for us to conceive today how the two communities, although distinct in essential aspects, learnt to coexist at all levels at the time that the Mughal empire, already past its prime, was heading towards its decline. The inter-communal marriages among the royalty and princely families

levelled some inhibitions. People participated freely in each other's rituals and communal celebrations. A common form of literary expression and a common literary heritage had developed. Though initially derived from Persian traditions, *buth* (idol), *buthkada* (the temple), *mae* (wine), *maekhana* or *maekada* (the wine shop), had become idyllic images of the Urdu and the vernacular works of Muslim poets, even when these were abhorrent in the eyes of the Islamic orthodoxy. Literature had fused many images and absorbed them in its soft, fertile soil. See, for instance, how the images of *buth*, *kufr* and *khuda* merge, with the full play of poetic licence in a pluralistic Hindu Muslim society:

LAA-AY USS BUT KO ILTIJA KAR KAY
KUFR TOOTA KHUDA KHUDA KAR KAY

After pleadings, the idol (beloved) came along,
The heathen's will was broken, thank god.

The syncretics, the Sufis, and the Bhakti¹⁶ saints also played an important part in forging links and developing the spirit of coexistence between the two communities. Their message spanned several centuries, and it was consistent and unwavering: they pleaded for harmony. In moving verse, they spread the message of communal tolerance. They focused on, identified and derided the

agents of conflict. By their practice and verse, they demonstrated the virtues of peaceful coexistence. They targeted the fundamentalists, decried intolerance and dogma, and preached the love of man. They were essentially advocates of the dignity of man and communal harmony. To the Sufis, man was the supreme creation, to be defended regardless of religion, creed or caste. In this belief they were boldly iconoclastic.

MASJID DHA DAY, MANDIR DHA DAY
DHA DAY JO KUJ DHAINDA
IK BANDAY DA DIL NA DHA-EEN
SOHNA RABB DILAN WICH REHNDA

Pull down the mosque, and pull down the temple,¹⁷
Pull down everything that can be pulled down,
But do not pull down the heart of a man,
For God lives in the hearts of men.

Communal coexistence did, of course, break down at times; there was occasional conflict, sometimes quite gory. But the periods of harmonious coexistence were always far more extended than the times of conflict. Also, the conflict would be confined to geographically specific and limited areas. It merely highlighted the fact that while the two communities might indeed be two

different nations they could yet always coexist in peace. Quite often the disputes were extra-communal.

But though communal harmony and cooperation held for more than a century after it, the most significantly divisive event, perhaps in the entire history of Indus and India, was the Battle of Plassey (1757). It ushered in some notable new players; and a new power. In thus doing its effects continue to be felt to this day.

To the Battle of Plassey, therefore, we must revert.

IV. THE DIVIDE AFTER PLASSEY

The one hundred and ninety years between Plassey (1757) and Partition (1947) eroded all the factors that had contributed towards peaceful communal coexistence. They made way for active and intense hostility between the two major religious communities of India.

It is not being simplistically suggested that this corrosion of the spirit of communal coexistence was the result merely of any conscious 'divide and rule' policy of the new rulers. The policy did also play its part. But the divide was never artificial. It was indeed tangible and real. It was too much a product of the inevitability of circumstances to go unnoticed; and it had its roots less in

religious differences and more in the differing circumstances of class, profession, calling, means of livelihood, status and perceptions.

Traditionally, Muslims had either been rulers or workmen: the invading migrants had ruled; the caste-converts had been lowly artisans or peasants. Although there were many proud and powerful feudal dynasties of Hindu princes and maharajas, the broad masses of Hindus had continued to pursue the professions of business, accounts and book-keeping. They filled the ranks of the merchant class.

As the British tradesmen found their first decisive foothold in the subcontinent at Plassey (1757), Hindu merchants easily integrated into their system. The British and the merchants (mostly Hindus) accordingly became partners. But the imperialists had to defeat Muslim rulers of Bengal and later of Bihar (1764) to gain power. The British and the Muslims became adversaries. The very objects and purposes of the Raj thus also made adversaries of the two Indian communities.

Hindu merchants soon began to play a complementary role to British commercial and industrial expansion in India, a role for which they had a natural facility. They took to commerce and industry as well as to participation in the administration, albeit in subordinate positions, from the very early days

when the British set foot in Bengal. This taking to commerce and industry by Hindu entrepreneurs in an imperial system was to set about a momentum of its own. By the turn of the century they were establishing factories and mills. The twentieth century saw a widespread and truly national *Hindu* bourgeoisie, straining to break out of unjust and uneconomical imperial controls, which were restricting its growth while preserving British monopolies.

The Muslims, by contrast, had always looked down upon such vocations as trading, moneylending and book-keeping. The Muslim aristocracy was not forward-looking. It had been feudal and land-oriented. It could fall into debt to the Hindu moneylender but looked down upon his profession as unworthy of its own sons. The caste system, which had by now assumed easily discernible classifications along occupational lines, was also instrumental in preventing inter-trade or inter-occupational mobility. For a Muslim feudatory to take to trading was a preposterous idea.¹⁸ While the Arab traders had for centuries undertaken commercial transactions and continued with the prevalent trade practices, the more puritanical Turks and Afghans were somewhat inhibited by the Islamic injunction prohibiting usury. This again restrained Indian Muslims (other than the coastal Arabs and the itinerant Pathans) from taking to trade.

The Muslims thus stayed away from the British system of trade and industrial expansion. While the vaishya (the Hindu caste of merchants)

grasped the opportunity, the Muslims stood by and let it slip past them.¹⁹

V. THE EFFECTS OF THE BOURGEOIS-FEUDAL CONFLICT

The essential occupational differences between the Hindus and Muslims accentuated other more deeply ingrained differences of attitudes and cultures. These were, again, less the product of dogmatic divergencies and more the outcome of the distinct and differing circumstances and the resultant social status.

The trader in India was not supported by a legal and administrative system whereby his credit could be recovered or guaranteed. He faced the prospects of sudden losses, distraint of goods, breaches of contract and denials of pecuniary liability. His only insurance, therefore, was his own monetary savings. He became known for his thrift. The bourgeois retained all surplus liquid deposits.

The feudal, by contrast maintained, and was allowed the aid of, coercive revenue collecting retainers. He could employ these levies to extract revenue from the peasantry or forcibly expropriate what crop there was. He required no insurance except the loyalty of his men. His ways were, consequently, extravagant.

The primary distinction, therefore, that coincided substantially with the Hindu-Muslim divide was that the Hindu community had a vigorous bourgeoisie while the Muslim society was still agriculture-based and feudal. The two communities were in different historical time-zones. Even if this divide had not coincided with the religious divergence, it may perhaps still have been grave enough to impel a division of the subcontinent.

This distinction was to remain, and was ultimately to become the prime motivating factor behind the Pakistan Movement in the mid-twentieth century. The predominantly feudal and agrarian society of Indus was to be repelled by the prospect of becoming subject to predominantly bourgeois India.

The use of the word 'predominantly' is deliberate, as the contrary elements on either side were not insignificant. The peasantry and many feudals, Hindus and Muslim, supported that sole spokesman of the Indian bourgeoisie, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, as did many bourgeois Muslim politicians and intellectuals. At the same time, the Bengali bourgeoisie and the Muslim commercial communities of the west coast were an important element in the Pakistan Movement. Doubtless, the Muslim bourgeoisie expected a protected, monopolistic market in the new state, and that is exactly what it did manage to obtain.

Bengal, which featured so prominently at a very critical juncture of the history of the subcontinent, provides many key elements necessary to the determination of the effects of the bourgeois-feudal conflict of interests, and to the discovery, ultimately, of the Indus person. If we are interested in identifying the attributes of the Indus person and determining the essential core of the Hindu-Muslim divide in the subcontinent, many events and developments in the history of Bengal will throw much light on the subject. The conquest, plunder and administration of Bengal by the British hold the key to the Hindu-Muslim divide. To Bengal we must, therefore, turn.

1. The widow's immolation on the pyre of her deceased husband.
2. Thapar, 232-3.
3. See chapter 9 above.
4. See Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqi, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India*, viii to x (Introduction), for examples of many Hindus who occupied high positions in the Delhi Sultanate. Also Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 48, where

he observes of Mughal times that 'the enemy was often Muslim and there were usually Hindu princes among the emperor's allies'. See also chapter 14, section VI above.

5. Professor of History, Rajasthan University, Jaipur, India.

6. While Muslim generals often served Hindu rulers. See chapter 14, section VI above.

7. The ruler of the Maratha state of Indore.

8. The ruler of Gwalior, Scindia had in 1785, been designated the emperor's *vakil* (attorney), a position supposed to be even higher than that of the *vazir* (principal minister).

9. The Jat Raja of the State of Bharatpur, who ruled from 1756-63, is described thus by one historian: 'Though he wore the dress of a farmer and could speak only his Brij dialect, he was the Plato of the Jat tribe. In prudence and skill, and ability to manage the revenue and civil affairs, he had no equal among the grandees of Hindustan except Asaf Jah Bahadar.'

See Mahajan, 302.

10. See chapter 18, section III above.

11. See chapter 22, section IV above.

12. Foreigners.

13. See Wolpert, *New History*, 236.

14. See chapter 15, section I above.

15. Only the brahmin found no equivalent status upon conversion to Islam as the village *maulvi* was not very highly placed in the Muslim social order. (See the Professor Farrakh Khan, 'Chaudhry-Kami Culture' (1995) This impeded *brahmin* conversions to Islam.

16. For Sufis and Bhaktis, see chapter 15 above.

17. The verse could perhaps put the poet in jeopardy of prosecution today under one of the recent laws inspired by fundamentalist pressure.
18. It is only recently that these barriers have been broken, with the pre-eminent feudal gentry of the Punjab and Sindh taking on what are today certainly more profitable occupations but which would, doubtless, have been scorned by their grandfathers.
19. This is not to suggest that there were no elements whatsoever among the Muslim population of the subcontinent that would provide any support to the Raj. During, and particularly after, 1857, an entire elite of the Muslim community did, in its own way, assist the Raj. The Muslim collaboration with the Raj would come in the role of Muslim princes and the lower feudatories or *zamindars* collecting revenues and harvesting crops suited to the Lancashire industries. These crops were mostly also grown upon newly 'colonized' lands, opened up for cultivation by massive irrigation works and allotted to landowners by the imperial administration. The Muslim elite, which had lagged behind in commerce and industry, would thus, in its own way, support the Raj. As landowning feudals, enjoying almost arbitrary revenue-collection and law-enforcement authority over the peasantry, the

Muslim feudatories complemented the Raj, just as the Raj ensured their privileges and status. While the interests of the Hindu merchant and industrial bourgeoisie would in the twentieth century conflict with the Raj, the relationship of the Muslim feudals and the Raj would never become competitive.

The Hindu bourgeoisie was, at the turn of the century, becoming impatient with the restraints placed upon it by the monopolistic trading policies of the Raj after 1857. The two Indian communities, the Hindu and the Muslim, thus now stood well apart, and the distance between them was rapidly increasing. The harmony and coexistence of the recent past was soon to become a fantastic, unbelievable tale of some distant age, long since forgotten. This conflict of interests was to ensure the parting of the ways, and to lead to Partition in 1947. For further discussion of this aspect, see chapter 28, section V, and chapter 31.

Sonar Bangla

I. THE SPECIAL GIFTS OF BENGAL

Of all the European sea powers, Britain was fortunate to have secured an early foothold in Bengal though it may have had a preference for other lands and areas.

The Dutch had already occupied most of the Indonesian islands. A British attempt to found a settlement there was effectively repelled in 1623. Denied territory in the Far East, the British began to concentrate on the Indian coastline. Yet the founding of factories by them at Surat (1612) and Madras (1640) was of no consequence as compared to their setting up a small settlement in Bengal.

Bengal was to become Britain's launching pad into India. It was well suited and equipped for this role. Bengal was on the route to the rich coastal shipping trade to the Far East. It offered Britain a vast commercial-cum-merchant class and a navigable river system that was the point of entry and a veritable 'highway' into northern India.

We have noticed earlier how, in the period preceding and including the Delhi sultanate, the twin menace of the introvert-village and the caste order rang the death-knell of the Indian merchant, the guilds and the town. Nor had the village and caste system benefited the lot of the Indian peasant, who was impoverished by over-expropriation by a constantly-warring class of feudal overlords. Even in this period of the decadence and desolation of the Indian countryside, Bengal had been a world apart. Trade with south-east Asia had guaranteed the prosperity of its towns and led to an early development of a money economy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, contemporaneous with similar developments in Europe. By the fifteenth century, Bengal was well ahead of the rest of India.

Bengal had abundant resources. Its alluvial deltaic soil was rich and the plentiful rainfall was ideal for the cultivation of rice and jute. The humidity was well suited to the spinning of the hair-thin thread which was used in the weaving of the finest, lightest cloth in the world, the renowned Bengali muslin. The climate favoured the culture of the silkworm and the manufacture of silk. In a world of conflict, in India¹ and in Europe,² Bengali reserves of saltpetre, so necessary to the manufacture of gunpowder, were heavy revenue earners.³

Artisans and landowners in Bengal were Muslim. Merchant trading, since the time of the Mauryans, had been in the hands of the vaishya (Hindus). The

Bengali Hindu trader was somewhat of a natural ally of the new fair-skinned English-speaking traders. By the time that the East India Company shifted from Hooghly to Calcutta, in 1690, it already had a substantial staff of Hindus. There were also a large number of vaishya middlemen and intermediaries assisting in as also profiting by the Company's trade. This partnership was to last well into the nineteenth century.

While the British gains were phenomenal in themselves and were consciously pursued, the Bengali merchant (the Hindu vaishya), also profited by a combination of circumstance, commercial instinct and smart opportunism. For the British, the vaishya became indispensable as clerks, accountants, book-keepers and store-keepers. The British provided the vaishya opportunities in his own occupational group and he, in turn, with his knowledge of the land and its trade practices, opened up the province, and ultimately the subcontinent, to the British.

Yet another crucial aspect of Bengal was its location. Unlike Surat and Madras, Bengal provided a direct and convenient *riverine* route to the seat of the Mughal empire's capital, Delhi. Madras was too far south and Surat, even though it lay between the mouths of the Narmada and Tapti rivers, offered no equal advantage. The Yamuna, along with its tributaries, was a ready route to the heart of north India. It was the highway to Delhi. The 'Bengal-Yamuna

advantage' was thus denied to the French and the Portuguese as they remained confined to the coasts of peninsular India in such southern points as Pondicherry and Calicut.

The Ganges-Yamuna course provided a series of rich trading centres where agriculture was not the only occupation. Dhaka and Murshidabad led on to Patna (the age-old Pataliputra), to Agra and finally to Delhi. All these were ports along the busy inland waterway. Factories and trading houses, credit groups and port facilities, all were available. A rich community of merchants spread all along the Yamuna right up to the borderland with Indus, and then beyond into the Indus region itself.

Plassey had brought Bengal under the restless feet, and into the expansionist designs, of the East India Company and the Calcutta Council. Though it fought and won several crucial battles after Bengal, the Company was seldom called upon to break new ground. Its economic ambassadors, the vaishya merchants, seemed always to precede its armies. Consolidation in the south (Tipu's defeat at Seringapatam, 1799), and in the west (the final defeat of the Marathas, 1818) would follow as natural and irresistible events.

A very substantial trading class and the Yamuna 'highway': these were the two special gifts of Bengal.

II. BENGALI ABUNDANCE AND CENTRIFUGAL TENDENCIES

Until its subjugation by the British, Bengal had nearly always been a rich though peripheral state. Only in the time of the Mauryan Empire and of the Magadh kingdom of the Guptas had the province been anywhere close to the capital city of India,⁴ and it was in these eras that Bengal enjoyed the benefits and suffered the disadvantages of being proximate to the central authority. It was in these periods an integral and primary province of prosperous empires. In all other eras, the sheer distance of Bengal from such political centres as Taxila or Delhi ensured its substantial autonomy. At this distance from the central authority, Bengali character developed an inherent and everlasting, centrifugal impulse. It was this impulse that became its hallmark, and many an emperor and king was compelled to travel to Bengal personally to suppress centrifugal uprisings. Of the Delhi sultans, Iltutmish (1225), Balban (1280), Muhammad Tughlaq (1333) and Feroze Tughlaq (1358) had to undertake such campaigns, and Sher Shah Suri constructed the Grand Trunk Road to enhance the reach of the central authority into Bengal.

These centrifugal tendencies were the surest evidence of Bengal's abundance. Its resource base was fecund enough to support its own independent ruling dynasties and their armies. It had adequate earnings for the purchase of arms for military campaigns and a surplus to trade with.

It is little wonder, therefore, that several of the Bengal governors of the Delhi sultanate and the Mughal empire rebelled and attempted to shake off Delhi's yoke. Balban's governor, Sultan Tughral, is said to have decided to raise his standard upon seeing the riches of Bengal and particularly its army of elephants. This course was to prove fatal to him and his entire army. An ageing Balban took to the saddle himself after two attempts by his generals had failed. And while appointing his son governor of Bengal in place of the ill-fated sultan Tughral, the king demonstrated to the new governor the heavy price of revolt. He took particular care to ensure that his son saw the executions and got the message. This was an example that many a king and emperor would later emulate. Jahangir's account, adverted to earlier, was therefore not the first demonstration of its kind.

Tughral's revolt was aborted by the intervention of the king himself, but three other Bengal governors succeeded in actually humiliating the central authority. One of these, Sher Shah of Sur, not only defeated Babar's son and Akbar's father, Humayun, at the field of Kanauj, but also drove him right out of the subcontinent. He thereupon installed himself upon the throne of Delhi.

Sher Shah proved to be one of the ablest administrators India has known. The endless highway from Sonar Gaon (in Bengal) to the Khyber region (in the north-west) is a befitting monument to his great capabilities. Punctuated with

wells and rest-houses, inns and fruit trees, the road traversed unending plains and the rugged, inhospitable Himalayan foothills. He reassessed land revenue and streamlined the administration before he died prematurely in battle at Kalanjar.

Sher Shah was only one example of a rich tradition of able administrators of Bengal. Others, such as Hussain Shah⁵ and Ibrahim Shah,⁶ as also Shah Jahan's son, Shuja,⁷ were men of peerless qualities of head and heart. And perhaps the best in this tradition of the governors and rulers of Bengal was the much-maligned last Indian ruler of Bengal prior to the British conquest of the province, Sirajuddaula.

III. SIRAJ BETRAYED

Sirajuddaula⁸ was a youth of only twenty when, in 1756, he succeeded his grandfather, the astute Aliwardi Khan, to become the Subedar⁹ of Bengal. By this time the Company's interests in the province were substantial. The prosperous port of Hooghly flourished as the concessions that had been granted to it by Emperor Aurangzeb were bettered many times over by his successors. Despite initial resistance by Bengal's erstwhile governor, Shaista Khan, the emperor Farrukh Siyar had, in 1717, granted several unimaginable concessions to the Company. The transport of its goods was exempted from

octroi duties and local fees. The Company was allowed to purchase forty-eight villages near Calcutta. The Murshidabad Mint was directed to allocate at least three days in every week minting the Company's coins. In an incipient money economy, this was of the most vital economic as well as political significance as it partook of the sovereign's own exclusive power to circulate a legal tender. And, as if to spite Shaista Khan, the governor was directed by the emperor to apprehend all the debtors of the Company and to hand them over to the Company's own officers! These privileges and the enhanced coercive authority of its employees multiplied the turnover of the Company's trade many times. Such rapid generation of wealth could support more than one capital city. By 1757, Calcutta had also become a prosperous urban centre.

By that year, the Company had also begun to entertain more manifest political designs. As its trade and economic interests expanded, its governors began to strive for territorial gains and dominion to enable the Company to protect these interests. The trading company began to construct its own fortifications around Calcutta. Nawab Sirajuddaula thought this was not permissible. The Company could trade, not raise its own levies. When his warnings were not heeded, Siraj took Calcutta.

At this time, an energetic Englishman from Shropshire, Robert Clive, held the office of Governor of Fort St David and Madras. Now Clive was sent to

recover the city. Clive came to Bengal by sea along with 900 Europeans and 1,500 Indians.

In 1757, Mir Jaffar, a general of the young Nawab Siraj, entered into a treacherous alliance with Clive. This alliance sealed the fate of Bengal. Siraj was defeated in the field of Plassey by Jaffar's betrayal after the battle lines had been drawn. Siraj lost his life. And thus began the rape of Bengal.

Within thirteen years, Bengal was plundered with such thoroughness that the lush green, fertile land of plenty came, in 1769, in the fierce grip of the most devastating famine the region has known.

1. The Mughal wars of expansion and succession, the criss-crossing across the subcontinent of the Persian, Afghan, Maratha, British, and French armies.
2. The Wars of Austrian Succession, the Seven Years' War.
3. The British would, of course, add tea to the great export-earners of Bengal.

4. Pataliputra, now Patna.
5. The 'syncretist' who endeavoured to narrow the communal gap.
6. The younger brother of that beautiful empress, Nur Jahan.
7. Who was defeated by Aurangzeb in the battle for succession, and made to flee to the Arakans.
8. As I first wrote about him in Kot Lakhpat Jail, Lahore, it was the 224th anniversary of the death of the brave young nawab: 2 July 1981.
9. Governor.

The Plunder

I. CONTRIBUTIONS AND 'GRATUITOUS' PAYMENTS

The Battle of Plassey heralded a new chapter in the history of the subcontinent. The victors began their business by unabashed plunder. Thus began what Spear calls the 'the financial bleeding of Bengal.'

Mir Jaffar was installed as the titular Nawab on agreeing to pay Rs 20,000,000 to the Company. The amount was so unrealistic that, despite draconian measures and cruel extortion rates, Jaffar could not collect this amount from Bengal's peasantry. He was able to make only a part payment. Due to his inability to coerce more out of the peasant, Jaffar was removed from the *diwani*¹ in 1760. His son-in-law, Mir Qasim, was then placed on the throne.

Mir Qasim had bought British patronage through the promise of a vast sum, but the treasury had already been impoverished by his predecessor in the three short years of his reign as an appointee of the Company. Qasim, therefore, undertook further heavy taxation to pay his debts and enforced severe and ruthless collection of taxes. The number of tax collectors was increased. Tax inspectors were invested with vast and arbitrary powers. Heavy

finances were imposed and extracted for the slightest default. Defaulters were arrested and their properties forfeited.

Qasim paid Rs 20,000,000 in the first instance and Rs 1,000,000 towards the salaries of the Company's troops. He contributed another Rs 500,000 towards the Company's expenses in its wars with the French in southern India. Additionally, he allowed the Company to collect and appropriate the entire revenue from three of the richest Bengal districts.

Despite all his compromises, there was a limit below which even Qasim was not prepared to descend. He knew when enough was enough. It must, therefore, be said of him that having obtained power, he did endeavour thereafter to wean his government out of the Company's control and influence. He began raising his own army and undertook the fortification of his principal seat, Munger. He even resisted the Company's surreptitious designs to raise and arm a garrison at its Patna factory, and to exercise the sovereign right to search the traffic of goods carried on the Company's barges up the Ganges.

The Company reacted strongly when six of its barges, that should only have been carrying textile products but were loaded with arms, were caught by Qasim's men. It decreed the removal of Qasim. He was pushed out of Bengal and Bihar in 1763. He took refuge at Allahabad and planned a campaign against

the British with the help of Shujauddaula of Awadh. The emperor of Delhi, Shah Alam, gave his blessings to the allies, but cautiously refrained from joining battle himself.

The allied forces were routed at Buxar in 1764. This happened more because of their *inter se* differences than on account of the superior military strength of the Company's regiments. But happen it did. Qasim fled. The emperor did not engage in the hostilities. Shujauddaula sought peace by offering to pay Rs 5,000,000 to the Company. The Company, pleased with the emperor, sought further concessions for him. Shuja had to accede. These concessions included the supply of the entire provisions for the emperor's residence at Allahabad where English officers would be retained to advise him on matters of government.

Having won concessions through the aegis of the Company, the emperor became a pawn in the hands of the Company after the Battle of Buxar. After Qasim's unsuccessful attempt to confront the Company, Mir Jaffar was reinstated. On his death in 1765, his fifteen-year old son, Najamuddaula, was installed as the nominee of the Company.

A new ruler implied the revision of all previous mandates. A fresh 'treaty' was therefore dictated by the Company, enabling it to push its interests further.

It obtained the sole and unfettered authority to hire or fire all revenue officials of Bengal. British traders were granted a complete and blanket immunity from all taxes, rates or fees. The size of the nawab's army was reduced in perpetuity to the minimum force required to coerce the payment of taxes and land revenue. The nawab's administration was burdened with having to contribute Rs 500,000 annually towards the payment of the salaries of the Company's troops. This was not all. The individual members of the Calcutta Council of the Company were themselves privately paid Rs 3,003,506 as a measure of the young nawab's gratitude.

Such 'gratuitous' payments to the Company's officers were a substantial and regular burden on Bengal's resources. Mir Jaffar had been directed to distribute £ 1,238,575 (Rs 12,385,750)² 'in gratitude' for British assistance in his treachery. Clive alone received £ 31,500 (Rs 315,000) in cash. 'Gratitude' for his services was, of course, overwhelming and a vast land grant (jagir) was bestowed on him, making him the first European jagirdar of Bengal. Qasim paid £ 200,269 (Rs 2,002,690) to the Company's officials in addition to what he had paid on being installed. Jaffar, on reinstallation, was once again called upon to measure his 'gratitude' with the rather impressive sum of £ 500,165 (Rs 5,001,650). Young Najmauddaula's 'gratitude' was evaluated generously at £ 230,356 (Rs 2,303,560)! In addition to the income of the Company itself and

the penalties and 'gratuitous' payments extracted by it into its own accounts through pre-emptory and onerous treaties, its officers dredged no less than £ 2,169,665 (Rs 21,696,650) to the credit of their personal fortunes. The Company's income in these seven years, as entered in its books, amounted to the astronomical sum of £ 32,770,650 (Rs 327,706,500).

James Morris³ is compelled to admit: 'In fact, one imperial end was basic to all others: profit. Many nobler and subtler motives played their part, and many passionate imperialists did not stand to gain at all, but the deepest impulse of the Empire was the impulse to be rich. It had always been so. *Loot of a more respectable kind* [sic] had been a fundamental of British imperialism since the first adventurers went to India in search of spices or indigo.' (Emphasis added.)

Only an Englishman, perhaps, could have coined the phrase: 'loot of a more respectable kind' Perhaps expropriation by a *native* ruler would be the *less respectable* kind of *loot*. The British expropriation could not be called mere loot, and that too of a less respectable kind. Robert Clive, the conqueror of Bengal and its first governor, had reported, in 1765, that 'such a sense of anarchy, confusion, bribery, corruption, and extortion was never seen or heard of in any country but Bengal; nor such and so many fortunes acquired in so unjust and rapacious manner.'⁴ Call it what you will, the rape of Bengal by the East India

Company was not confined to this avaricious and cruel extortion. It was accompanied by still other draconian measures.

II. SUFFERING FEUDALS, PEASANTS AND ARTISANS ARE MUSLIMS

The peasantry was not the only class to suffer the cruel impact of the Battle of Plassey and the ensuing British hegemony. The miseries of Bengal were compounded by the most heartless suppression of the artisans. These adept and dextrous craftsmen had, for several centuries, produced some of the finest textiles in the world. So gifted was the weaver, so light and nimble his touch, that one variety of Bengali cotton cloth, the muslin (malmal), was so fine as to be hardly visible. Legends abound even today of its fineness and smooth finish: of how an entire length of forty yards could be squeezed inside a man's palm, and how, when compressed into a small ball, it could pass through the ring on a lady's finger. Yet it was tough and durable. It was sought after, not only by the elite of ancient Rome but also of contemporary Europe. It was a most valuable textile manufacture. Other textile products of Bengal were also of the highest quality.

The techniques of manufacture were kept as family and caste secrets. They were passed down from one generation to the next. No handloom in the world could compete with this rare craft, not even the newly developed flying shuttle

and spinning jenny. Lancashire's spinning and weaving mills, the first giants of modern technology, had to be protected from the heat of Bengali competition.

The Company's soldiers put draconian restrictive measures into effect by crushing the Bengali handloom industry. Strict prohibition on the production of quality textiles was imposed upon pain of the severest penalties. Trading in several local products was also prohibited, such goods being declared contraband and subject to immediate confiscation and destruction. Entire communities of artisans were driven out of their urban craft centres. Operational factories were converted to the Company's use for purposes other than textile manufacture.

The Bengali industry was put to an end. Production of fine muslins and cloth of all superior qualities was prohibited. Heavy duties were imposed on the export out of India of even the coarser varieties of textile products. Expropriation of taxes and the confiscation of produce continued unabated throughout this period. Agricultural implements and farms animals were impounded in case of the slightest default. Even seed preserved for future crops was siezed. By contrast, import of the Lancashire manufactures was encouraged and there was no corresponding tariff on these being brought into India. Some time later, the Bengali weaver was prohibited outright from working in any 'native' unit.

It may have been a coincidence, but the first sufferers of the success of the British, as signified by Plassey, were the Muslims: the feudal aristocracy, the peasants and the artisans. At the same time, the first beneficiaries were the Hindus: the traders, rentiers and the other sections of the vaishya caste. In the early stages of the Raj, the Muslims were left out in the cold while the Hindus had smoothly integrated themselves into the new system. Muslims had lost, Hindus had profited.

The economic divide was also to deepen with the passage of time, though this inverse equation would not necessarily remain identical in all areas. It was not that all Muslims in all parts of the subcontinent, and at all times under the British, would be the constant losers. When the British took the Punjab, for instance, almost a hundred years after Plassey, their rule directly benefited the Muslim aristocracy and the peasant proprietor. Muslim feudals and newly settled peasant proprietors gained by the opening up of new cotton-growing lands with the construction of the barrages and canals. Naturally these feudals remained overwhelmingly pro-British, eventually providing them with the safe constituency of the Unionist Party, patronized by the British until the very last. They moved away from the British only in the very fullness of time: 1946.

But the wounds suffered by Bengal in the one fateful decade after Plassey would never heal. The scars were to be etched on to the mind and soul of the

subcontinent by what was the inevitable result of the plunder: famine.

1. The sanction or licence to collect revenue.
2. The pound value is calculated at the rate of Rs 10 per pound sterling.
3. That most graphic and vivid fabulist of imperial Britain, who asserted that the Raj 'was a part of that divine order which had made Britain supreme and Victoria sixty years a Queen... It was more properly ordained - a charismatic anointment of the British, like a Higher Summons.'
4. See Wolpert, *New History*, 187.

The Famine and Settlement

I. FROM THE FEUDAL TO THE BOURGEOIS

The Bengal famine struck in the winter of 1769 and continued through 1770.

The enormity of the suffering of the 1769 famine is beyond description. Within thirteen years of the Company's military victory, Bengal's prosperity dwindled into crowds wandering around aimlessly, with sunken eyes and swollen stomachs. People sold their children or resorted to cannibalism when nothing else availed.

The famine was to bring about a veritable revolution in Bengal. This had two aspects. First, it replaced the old relations of production with the new. This was perhaps the first material and critical change in the quality of relations of production anywhere in the subcontinent in three thousand years. Henceforth, bourgeois relations of production would dominate. But the second aspect was even more significant. In substituting bourgeois relations of production for the feudal, it also created a new economic divide and upset the economic system precisely along the Hindu-Muslim demarcation.

The famine wiped out one-third of Bengal's population and one-third of the impoverished peasantry. The Calcutta Council insisted upon the recovery of land revenue, rejecting all pleas for remission. Its officers were directed to employ the normal coercive methods and to continue the distress of farm animals and implements in all cases of default. Despite the ferocity of the famine, the Company's revenue collectors had gone about their job of confiscating crops, reserves and even seeds. Soon there was a shortage of both manpower and inputs. People fled their lands and agricultural produce and grain became scarce. Only the Company had well-fortified godowns at the Fort William factory near Calcutta. It was able to hoard and build up stocks. The Company's officials took to hoarding of grain and were happily profiteering.

As famine conditions wore off, the agricultural tiller found that he had become a scarce and, therefore, once again a wanted commodity. There had been a sharp and sudden fall in population. The peasant could, for once, demand a price for his services and contract with the highest bidder. Peasants fled their villages, breaking their feudal bonds, aware that the weakened landlords were in no position now to pursue them to distant districts. There was a major inter-district migration of the peasant population. Large tracts of fertile land lay fallow and barren for want of tillers. For the first time, cultivable

land in Bengal exceeded the number of capable hands available to farm it. Landowners, under pressure of revenue officials, began to seek peasants, offering more attractive terms. The scarce manpower was at a premium and the nature of the landlord-peasant relationship underwent a radical change.

The peasant, conscious of his bargaining superiority, did not want to jeopardize his newly acquired mobility, as demand for his labour was widespread. He was not prepared to be tied down again to specific plots of land. He had obtained his freedom. His attitude had also changed. He would not now wait for the crops to ripen and then receive a share of the produce after many months of labour. He wanted ready cash. He demanded regular wages. This implied the 'wage-nexus' and a non-resident wage labour. This, in turn, demanded financial and monetary liquidity in the master. From 1771 onwards, agriculture required substantial investments and inputs. Both were beyond the financial means of the Muslim feudatory and the occasional peasant proprietor.

This is where the Calcutta rentiers stepped in. They alone had the capital to invest. The high price of crops, induced by the famine, was incentive enough to investors. The Hindu merchants had already benefited as the natural economic allies of the British. They now bought lands belonging to Muslims, at throw-away prices. The 'wage nexus' was thus also accompanied by

absentee landlordism. The power to collect revenue passed from the landlords to the bourgeoisie, from the Muslim to the Hindu. This new economic nexus not only split the polity along new class lines but also decisively drove an economic wedge in the already existing communal seam. The divide became, in essence, one of contradictory economic interests.

II. CLIVE, HASTINGS AND EXPROPRIATION

The 'wage nexus' was a new relation of production, different from that of the bonded serf or the land-tied tenant. It spelt a revolutionary change in the status of the peasant, allowing the teeming millions of his kind an amazing independence, a new-found confidence, and the first lessons in self-assertion. The agricultural proletariat could now sense the importance and value of its labour and was in a position to negotiate its own terms. It was only the beginning, of course. It could have gone a long way. And for this very reason, it had to be smothered well in time. Bengal's new rulers sensed this. The trend towards proletarian and peasant freedom had to be arrested. In due course, the Permanent Settlement would do just that.

The famine in Bengal was to have one other important social impact. On the one hand, the Calcutta Council realized that indiscriminate and unlimited plunder resulted in subsequent losses of revenue. On the other, the new

'landed class, Britain's allies, began to protest the high rates of land revenue and the system of institutionalized corruption practised by the 'Nabobs' of the East India Company.

The brash vagaries of the famine and the contribution made to these by the callous barbarities of the Calcutta Council might have gone unnoticed in England had the victims remained the peasantry and the feudals. But now the junior partner of the British Indian system, the Indian bourgeoisie, was on the receiving end. This class of bourgeois allies carried a more effective voice than that which the farming lords had had at their command earlier on. Its voice reached out across the high seas to Westminster. This was a time when two Englishmen of great talent, but corrupt proclivity, succeeded each other in the command of the affairs of the Company.

Robert Clive had been appointed the Governor of Fort St David in 1755, but attained fame as he sailed into Calcutta to recover it and Fort William from Sirajuddaula in 1756. Subsequently, the Battle of Plassey made his a household name in India and back home in England. Between 1756 to 1767, Clive spent two terms as governor in India. He had come as a pauper, but returned as a millionaire. Soon after his second return, the Company appealed to the imperial government to save it from bankruptcy. Clive's conduct became an issue. He defended himself in an all-night debate in the House of Commons,

complaining that he was being treated like a sheep-stealer and asserted: 'I stand astonished at my own moderation.'

Warren Hastings was Governor and then Governor-General between the years 1772 and 1785. Hastings earned a reputation for arbitrariness, avarice and inconstancy in India on account of his frequent breaking of treaties, his selling off of whole Indian districts, his hiring out of British troops as if they were his personal retainers, and the deliberate, and quite unjustified humiliation of the Begums (ladies) of the princely house of Awadh. But what had by this time already 'roused British parliamentary concern over the state of Bengal was not the plight of India's peasantry, but the Company's professed inability to pay a promised annual tax of £ 400,000 to the treasury in 1767. As every member of parliament could see, many individual servants of the Company returned home from India with larger private fortunes than that they could have carried in their gunny bags. Clearly something was wrong with the state of Bengal.!'

The cavalier jobberies of Governor Robert Clive and the inscrutable and despotic actions of Governor-General Warren Hastings were the subject of heated parliamentary debates in London, in which the libertarian instincts of Edmund Burke sparkled with a lustre rare in those times rich with the new imperial loot. Although both were acquitted, both the erstwhile heroes of the Company were humiliated in England by the debates and controversy. Clive

took his own life in despair. Hastings married again and receded into retirement until his death in 1818.

It would be too much, however, to conclude from these proceedings that England was somehow ashamed of the expropriatory policies of her sons. Most Englishmen were, indeed, smug about the benefits accompanying the plunder. Prime Minister Pitt expressed that sentiment when he made a pointed and bitter reference to Edmund Burke in the course of a debate in the House of Commons in 1782: 'We now see foreign princes not giving vote but purchasing seats in this House, and sending their agents to sit with us as representatives of the nation. No man can doubt what I allude to. We have sitting among us the Members of the Rajah of Tangore and the Nawab of Arcot, the representatives of petty Eastern despots.'

The allusion to a raja and a nawab was, of course, inappropriate. The heroically articulate Burke was never a spokesman of feudal India. His passionate speeches were evoked by the distresses of the Indian bourgeoisie. This class continued to petition and press upon parliamentarians in London. It had its lobbyists. It emphasized that the prevalent rate of unbridled and unsystemized plunder would jeopardize Britain's dominion in India. The indiscriminate plunder could result in losses of revenue, and even the antipathy of the new land-owning allies. England's wisdom knew that the

goose that laid the golden eggs could not be killed. It had to be sustained at the same time that it was exploited. Cornwallis came to India, accordingly, to rationalize the Company's administrative and revenue system.

III. THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT, THE PEASANT AND THE RENTIER

The Bengal Famine had all but killed the goose. Plunder had dried up the very source of revenue.² The 'loot-machine' had therefore to be properly streamlined. As James Morris points out, the main work of the Indian administration was the assessment of the land tax, the chief source of revenue. Lord Cornwallis was the man given this mandate. He was a landowner in his own right and belonged to the inner circle of the close friends of Prime Minister Pitt.

In 1793, Cornwallis promulgated his 'Settlement' policy. It fixed the rates of land revenue and the terms of the landholding. This Settlement was later made permanent and came to be so called. As long as the landlord continued to pay the 'settled' amount, his holding would be secure. He could retain all he was able to extract from the peasant in excess of the settled rates. Thus, while the peasant was still exposed to extortion and arbitrary levies, the landowner was given the respite of the predetermined and fixed (settled) demands of the

government (the Company). The landlord became a revenue collection agent for the Company. But to enable him to play that role effectively, he had to be invested with certain powers enabling him to employ coercive force, and to keep the countryside quiet. The new landlord thus became a pivotal confederate of the Raj, in conjunction with the bureaucracy, by assuming responsibility at the lowest levels of both the primary concerns of the British Government in India: collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order.

Cornwallis' measures continue to be admired by the revenue-minded and Raj-oriented bureaucratic elite of the subcontinent to this day. They style him a genius, a revenue expert and an administrator of the rarest qualities. Yet what he in effect did was only to rationalize and systematize what Clive and Hastings had done before him: plunder. He had come to oil the machine that had been used for the expropriation of Bengal's surplus produce. From the previous cumulative 'settlement' (collection) of £ 2,818,000, Cornwallis raised the settled revenue to £ 3,400,000.³

Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793) was ostensibly intended to rid the landowner of the vagaries and arbitrary assessments of the revenue collectors. Land was assessed throughout the province and the revenue 'settled' upon the landowner, initially for a period of ten years (later this rate was made permanent). As long as the landowner continued to pay the fixed

revenues, he was secure in his tenure and immune from eviction. How he obtained the revenue and what he extracted in excess of it was none of the Company's business. The Company and the newly-formed Hindu landowning class thus arrived at a working relationship, a partnership in furtherance of mutual interests. It was only the peasant who was being short-changed in the bargain. And the peasant had no voice.

For the vast majority of the Bengali populace, therefore, the Settlement spelt disaster. The peasants had enjoyed a short period of rare status since the famine, when, being in short supply they had been wooed and offered attractive terms. Before that they had, no doubt, shared the burden of the expropriatory revenue extractions with the landlord, but the latter's disposition towards them had been milder and his authority more restricted. The Settlement once more relegated the peasant to an insecure tenancy. The landlord escaped the unpredictable vagaries of the collector, but the tenant was made subject to an equally unprincipled absentee landlord.

Custom had made the erstwhile feudal lord responsible at least for the peasant's expenses at births, marriages and other necessary ceremonies, besides some subsistence insurance in case of ill-health. Age-old practices, norms and traditions that placed a paternal, albeit cruel, responsibility upon the landlord's shoulders towards the survival of his serf, had also prevented

the excessive collection of land revenue in certain adverse circumstances. The peasant had also had the right to plead these before the feudal lord to obtain mitigation of his burden. But not so before rentiers, the absentee landlords, nor before the Company. The new Calcutta-based landed aristocracy was not bound by, or initiated in, any such usages or traditions. And the Company's Directors were motivated only by profit. They therefore continued to devise means to extract the most. This eliminated the remaining old feudals who were now caught between tradition and the new demands. There was another spate of sales of lands. The Calcutta rentiers took them all.

The distant Calcutta rentier was concerned only with the surplus. The concept of the 'surplus value', to his mind, was far in excess of the surplus expropriated under the feudal order. Despite his authority, the earlier zamindar could not have fleeced the peasant beyond a particular level. The new men from Calcutta, the financial speculators who had stepped in to buy the lands, bought the land cheap and squeezed the tenant hard. The agrarian surplus began to fatten all the *Calcutta-wallas* the officials of the Company and this new class of absentee landlords, the Calcutta rentiers.

The British with their profit motive, were indifferent administrators, but unsparing merchants. In the zeal to make the most of everything, the Settlement at first decreed astronomically high rates of land revenues and

pathetically low prices for the farmers' produce. The justification for the high rates was ostensibly an inducement to increase productivity; for the low prices, to enable the Company's officials to unabashedly profiteer in black-market trade by hoarding.

The peasant, whose surplus was in effect what the entire game was all about, lost that recent independence that the cruelty of the famine had ironically given him. He was again relegated to the status of an insecure tenant-at-will. He was downgraded once again to the lowly position of the serf, held captive by the landlord's absolute authority and his propensity towards the brutal use of force.

This state of affairs was, however, a turning point in the Bengali character. The brief period of twenty-five years in which hitherto unknown privileges had been gained was not to be easily forgotten; nor the privileges readily surrendered. The fact that the peasants had, over the years, adopted the Islamic beliefs of their old masters, and were now under the dominion of the absentee Hindu landlords, must also have contributed to the hostility of the new landowners towards the peasantry, although the very nature of the economic relationship between them itself evoked this antagonism. Henceforth Bengal would see more peasant uprisings, more popular unrest, than most of the other regions of India.

What the large-scale sale of their lands by the old Muslim land-owners implied, in short, was the early emergence of the Hindu bourgeoisie. Its integration in the processes of governance in the early days of the British Raj provided the mainstay of the Company. There were mutual benefits for both. The socio-economic topography of Bengal thus underwent a radical and absolute change. The ruthless policies of the British instantly and savagely transformed the social fabric of Bengal, largely along the Hindu-Muslim divide. This socio-economic divide would, one day, extend to India and Indus.

IV. THE SPENDERS AND THE SAVERS

There were yet other ways in which the Bengali Muslims were adversely affected by the Company's victory, leaving room to be filled by the more enterprising Hindus. For centuries, India had obtained justice either from the local panchayats, the tribunals of the guilds, or the courts of justice set up by the government. Since the introduction of Islam, substance and procedure had been regulated by the precepts of Islamic law. Cases of more serious crimes, relating to law and order, and other prominent or inter-guild disputes ended up in the Islamic courts, whether of the local qazi⁴ or the provincial governor, and sometimes indeed the court of the emperor. These courts normally followed fairly arbitrary methods though they were supposed to apply the norms of the Islamic Sharia.⁵ A vast body of petition-writers, munshis,⁶ advisers, and

experts in the language and forms of the Sharia had developed, though there was no tradition of lawyers, since vicarious representation was known neither to feudal nor Islamic justice. The position of these courts was being undermined as the British revised public law. They began to supplant Islamic law with their own procedures, rules of evidence, substantive precepts, and precedents, practised before a new hierarchy of civil, criminal and revenue courts. Countless Muslim petition-writers, *munshis* and Sharia experts were out of jobs.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Hindus were far ahead of Muslims, both in the levels of western education and in the proportion of jobs in the subordinate civil services of the East India Company. The trend led to an early spread of a bourgeois development amongst the Hindus, while the resentful Muslims remained backwardly feudal. The nationalist movement in India also broke out first in the bourgeois-dominated areas and among the bourgeois middle classes. By the late nineteenth century, the Hindu bourgeoisie, fully matured, wished to break the bonds of its partnership with the British and to undertake the struggle to replace the British merchant, manufacturer and government. The Muslims were, as yet, far behind. The religious divide merged in the divide of the two different classes, of the two different social orders. Although the religious differences would in time

become more prominent, the essential contradiction would initially emerge less out of dogma and more out of the divergence of economic and social interests.

There was one other significant cultural and attitudinal difference. 'Muslim religion and culture militated against hoarding and exercised almost irresistible pressure in favour of display, use and, necessarily, waste. Muslim women wore gold ornaments on their feet - which Hindu women avoid. Muslims used gold and silver plates and utensils, and gold and silver leaf for the decoration of eatables, thus consuming what in all amounted to a considerable quantity of precious metals as food. Hindu beliefs and social forms reduced the cooking utensils and plates and dishes to the minimum that could be kept ritualistically, and actually, clean; Muslim culture made the manufacture and utilization of a number of cooking utensils of large sizes necessary, because the entertainment of guests was a social duty.'¹

In short, the Muslims were given to spending; the Hindus to saving.

¹. Wolpert, *New History*, 188.

². Yet even today, the apologists of the Raj skip over the Famine. Spear

makes only a passing mention of the Famine. To him this was a period in which 'the threatened bankruptcy of the Company' induced the Governors to appoint Warren Hastings in 1772 and the Government to establish state control over the Company. Of the period just prior to the Famine, and at the time of Clive's second departure from India, Spear admits the plunder but grossly underplays the British intent: 'If still more rapacious than an average Indian State or Mughal *subah*, in that a larger proportion of the national income was creamed off by the rulers and less returned to the ruled, at least the open plunder of the early sixties had been stopped.' (Spear, *A History of India*, vol II, 87). Some consolation indeed! What then caused the Famine if the plunder had been stopped in the early sixties? But of course, hardly a mention of the Famine, except as an impediment to revenue collection! (*ibid.*, 96).

3. See Dutt, 116.

4. The judge in the Islamic system.

5. The Islamic legal system and doctrines.

6. Generally applied to the local scribe, petition-writer, clerk.

7. Mujeeb, 352.

The Economic Divide

I. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Language had been a barrier to British consolidation. The British had, no doubt, preferred and encouraged the use of the English language in the administration of the affairs of the Company. Expediency had, however, dictated a gradual switch-over from the popular vernacular languages. They were keen to avoid both provocation of the 'native' population and its hostility. But by the time that Lord William Bentinck came to India as Governor-General (1828), the British had become sufficiently confident of their grip on the greater part of India. The governments in Bengal and Bihar had been fully consolidated. The south had fallen with the heroic Tipu at Seringaptam (1799) and the Nizamul Mulk of Hyderabad was a safe ally, having been allowed, for his treachery, to assume dominion upon some part of Tipu's Mysore. The Marathas had been crushed conclusively in 1818. Most of the princely states were feudatories secured by 'subsidiary treaties' The residents or agents of the imperial government, often with substantial bodies of troops, were present in all capitals of the subcontinent.

In 1835, Bentinck decreed English as the language of official governmental and legal business. In the same year, education in the English language was introduced. Knowledge of the language soon became the crucial qualification, even for a subordinate official career. Muslims were reluctant to learn the new language. Besides the fact that they were conservative,¹ their feudal order had little use for English. The urban classes were the ones that found it expedient to keep up with the changing world. Urban Hindus had previously taken to Persian out of expediency. They now took to English. They were soon able to monopolize the subordinate services under the Calcutta Council.

II. BRITISH FIFTH COLUMN

The Bengali Brahmin, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj Society,² was born in Bengal in 1772 at the time when Hastings was entering upon its pillage and plunder. Yet Roy could perceive little of that and spent the better part of his life advocating a change in attitudes. Although he reverted to Hinduism's fundamental and ancient texts, he borrowed heavily from the Christian ethic as is evident in his book *Precepts of Jesus*. In 1818, he began the printing of the first Indian newspaper (in English, of course). On criteria of rationality borrowed entirely from the West, he set out to reform Hinduism, opposing caste, sati, and idolatry. He pleaded for raising the status of women.

These were doubtless noble objectives. But underlying this reformist zeal was a fundamental message: accept and submit to the 'New Order', take up jobs in the service of the 'Company Bahadur', the Western sun is rising from the East (Bengal), join its onward march, for in the advancement of your careers lies the advancement of your community. In 1816, Roy had helped in the founding of a college for Western learning. He died while in England as the Calcutta Council's nominated ambassador to Britain, representing the last Mughal emperor. Characteristically, this premier modernizer of Bengal was buried in the Alno Vale cemetery after his death in Bristol in 1833.

A word of caution: it is not as if the entire Hindu community had embraced European standards on Roy's exhortations. As we have seen, the War of 1857 was to see the Hindu fighting side by side with the Muslim in many areas, whereas in other regions members of both communities (such as the majority of the princely states from Kashmir to Hyderabad) remained indifferent or participated on behalf of the British. Indeed, it was these states, Muslim as well as Hindu, which were aptly described as 'Britain's fifth column'. In most cases, the subsidiary states system held them captive. In some cases, like Hyderabad and Kashmir, the rulers were the beneficiaries of the British power which aided the defeat of their own community. The Nizam had carved out areas from the Muslim state of Mysore, subsequent to Tipu's heroic fall at Seringapatam in

1799. The Hindu Gulab Singh obtained Kashmir at a 'bargain price' for betraying his own tribes of Sikhs in 1846.

One must ask what impelled the Bengali Hindu to support the British in the first half of the nineteenth century while Hindus elsewhere, (Meerut, Delhi, Cawnpore, Jhansi) rose against the Raj, and in support of a feeble Muslim emperor. Why should the Muslims, too, of these regions rise, while their own community elsewhere, including Bengal, Punjab and Sindh remained dormant?

III. THE ESSENTIAL DIVIDE: THE FEUDAL AND THE BOURGEOIS

One essential truth needs to be comprehended. In the nineteenth century, the lines between the patriots and the collaborators were generally drawn not so much along the Hindu-Muslim divide as on the distinction between the bourgeois and the feudal, representing two different systems.³ The communal divide was not significant at this stage.

In Bengal, the interplay of many factors (the presence of a Hindu trading class at the mouth of the rich Ganges, the plunder, the famine, and the Permanent Settlement) had completely destroyed the feudal mode of production. Land was being cultivated through rich rentiers who were profiting by the trading operation of the Company. The more the British dominion

expanded, the wider their intermediary interests would run. It suited these Indians to help the British subjugate and suppress the rest of India. They made available to the British a readymade class that would profit from the international and overseas trade of the imperial power. The earnings of this ever-expanding trade were phenomenal. The Hindu traders and merchants of Bengal were, for a half century at least, the exclusive intermediaries of British trade in India. They were also, almost solely, the bureaucratic resource of the Company although Cornwallis by his policy of 'Europeanization' had restricted them to subordinate posts. Those were truly the days of the fair-skinned 'nabobs' and their native confederates. This circumstance created in the minds of many Muslim analysts an indelible impression that all Hindu subjects supported the Raj and joined in its plunder.

To the feudal, even when he had been deprived of his entire landholding, the position of an account-keeper or a munshi was anathema. He was far too conscious and proud of his caste and birthright. Such jobs were, in the age-old caste system, for the vaishya Hindus. Howsoever strongly Islam may have disclaimed the caste order in India, it had itself fallen victim to this all-pervading scheme of things.⁴

The feudal was also afraid of the new order because it brought with it an altogether new value system. It threatened the old order. The prospective

onslaught of a capitalist world was like a sentence of death to the feudal order. Since economic power leads to political power, the new system was shifting power to 'low caste' merchants. In the old order, land had been the symbol of wealth as well as of power. The right to collect land revenue, and the duty of raising a regiment in the service of the imperial authority were, to the feudal, the two most honourable of circumstances. Both these were linked to land and to the centuries-old dominion of the feudal landlord over the peasant. The peasants were bound to surrender their surplus produce; they were also obliged to send the best and the sturdiest amongst them to fight for the lord. Not so the system or the army of the Company. District collectors and salaried troops would replace the old system.⁵

Secondly, and this important point can bear repetition,⁶ even the feudal code of Rajput honour developed, by fact and legend, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, had no place in the expedient policies of the British who perpetrated the sacrilege of creating a fifth column; of winning their battles by pre-planned, and often conspiratorial design; of breaking the flanks of the enemy by crafty and secret diplomacy before embarking for the battlefield. The battles against the rulers of Murshidabad, Seringapatam and Lahore were won by the application of stratagems that were inconceivable in the feudal code. How Shivaji's fatal grasp of the Bijapur general, Afzal Khan, had shocked feudal

India! The Maratha leader, in spite of his romantic guerrilla image, had failed to generate widespread support among the Rajputs. In fact, Jaipur and others had actively opposed him. To the latter-day Hindu bourgeois, he was a hero. But not to the feudal, Hindu or Muslim.

Even here there was a cleavage. As we have seen, all the feudal princes had not joined the war of 1857 on the side of the patriots. Those who had been benefited by the British stood aside, or actively aided the foreigners. In the words of Barrington Moore, 'The main cleavage in Indian society that the "Mutiny" revealed was one between a deeply offended orthodoxy supported through definite material interests and a lukewarm attitude among those who either gained by British policy or were not too deeply disturbed by it. This cleavage *cut across religious lines* and to some extent material ones as well,² by and large feudal India (Hindu *and* Muslim) rose against the British, while the nascent bourgeoisie gave support to the Company.' (Emphasis added.)

IV. 'UNIVERSAL IDEAS' AND THE FRONTLINE TRADER

There are some exponents of the Raj, like Spear, who first formulate the questions: 'Why did they not trust Western civilization as something to be lived with like Islam, but not to be absorbed? Why did the chrysalis break, or at least crack, under the impact of the West?' and then proceed to answer them

thus: 'I think the answer is that the Western influence came, not as the challenge of a closed religious system, but in the form of *universal ideas* in a *secular* setting, which could be accepted and even acted upon to some extent, without open treason to social and religious tradition.'⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Many reservations can be expressed with respect to such over-simplistic conclusions. First of all, the so-called 'universal ideas' were perceived quite differently in the subcontinent. These 'universal ideas' merely spelt plunder by an alien and oft-times racist community. What 'universal ideas' permitted the brutal reprisals in 1857? What 'universal ideas' supported the torpedoing, in 1882, of the Ilbert Bill, an innocuous proposal to put qualified Indian judges on the same footing as their European counterparts in dealing with all cases in the Bengal Presidency? The prospect of the trial of a European by an Indian judge, however competent and impartial, incensed the 'universal' conscience of the English Community!⁹ What 'universal ideas' decreed separate and exclusive railway carriages for the European minority? What 'universal ideas' justified the unprovoked massacre of an unarmed gathering of civilians at the Jallianwala Bagh?¹⁰

The contempt with which the British colonialists continued to look upon the 'natives' of India had been summed up in Cornwallis' prejudiced judgement: 'Every native of India, I verily believe, is corrupt.'¹¹ And seldom

were the successors of Cornwallis to disguise this contempt, or to refrain from multifarious and daily manifestations of it.¹²

India was a colony. It was an agrarian appendage to a gigantic and insensitive industrial machine. It had to provide raw materials for English manufactures, and then as a captive market buy the product back. At both ends, price controls and differentials were made to work to India's disadvantage. It was required, moreover, to suffer this exploitation without a protest or a murmur. Law and order were of primary significance to the Raj and had to be maintained, regardless of the cost or suffering to the natives.

A passive agrarian appendage - this, perhaps, was the only 'universal idea' of the Raj. All institutions, administrative, judicial, and legislative, were based upon this one principle. All development was to this one purpose. We have examined, earlier, the construction of the railways, for instance. 'Railways, it was believed, would assist the economic development of India and provide *both a market for British goods and a source of raw materials*. They would also aid in the rule and protection of India by *facilitating the defence* of the frontier and by transporting troops within the subcontinent.'¹³

Secondly, what Spear calls a 'secular' influence may have had an aspect of the scientific advances introduced by Europe which jeopardized the older

religions of India. But Britain never intended its influence to remain secular, especially after it was realized how the religious missions could also help in the dissemination of 'universal ideas.'

In the early years of the Company's rule in the subcontinent, Christian missions were perceived as meddling impediments in the way of the conscious plunder of the Indian peasant. India thus remained closed to Christian missionaries till 1813. But the success of the Scottish Presbyterian, Alexander Duff, and the Baptist William Carey (who translated the Christian gospels into Indian languages at the turn of the century) established the value of missionaries in the furtherance of imperial ends.

In 1813, Christian missionaries were allowed into India and bestowed substantial patronage. Within a few decades, Christian missions, convent schools, and missionary hospitals dotted the entire land from one end of the vast British dominion to the other. Land grants and exemptions from local and governmental dues were given to these missions. The church tower and the spire became part of the new Indian skyline. The successful missionary made the native yearn for liberation from his own superstitious, archaic and dogma-ridden system. And the Company's armies would always oblige.

Spear was not alone when he exulted: 'But Christian (and with it general

Western) influence was significant in two ways. The schools and colleges imparted both Christian ethics and Western ideas which perceptibly influenced the mind of the new middle class. The medical work with its circle of hospitals deeply appealed to the conscience of India. The toll of converts was not large from either of these methods but the effect on the mind and the heart of India was very great. Here, said the thoughtful, was true religion at work. Hindu reform movements came to imitate their methods. The whole episode prepared the way for the breakthrough in Hinduism itself from passive realization to the active philanthropy associated with the name of Mahatama Gandhi.¹⁴ His sentiments are not too different from those of Nehru who, in complimenting Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a Bengali ascetic and philanthropist of the nineteenth century, attributes to him 'the *Christian* qualities' of the self-abnegating Franciscans and the Quakers.

The community that first came forth and volunteered to be exposed to missionary education was Hindu. The influence upon it was the most marked and obvious. Yet in this very process lay the early seeds of a vital contradiction.

All through the nineteenth century, missionary institutions churned out young Hindu lads for employment as clerks or accountants in the imperial railways, in the imperial banks, in the imperial cotton trade, and in the entire spectrum of other businesses, and in commercial and administrative

concerns. Missionary education was, perhaps, the one most important factor that brought about the growth of that particular class that enabled Britain to rule India. The prize that was India now amply justified the official patronage of the Church in India. These very institutions, however, produced the men who, without converting to Christianity, began to add to the Hindu middle class, the bourgeoisie. They soon began to resent the monopolistic restraints and controls prohibiting Indian industry and protecting British manufactures. They also began to resent the racist features of the Raj.

While the Hindus, thus, were the first to facilitate the Company's conquest of India, they also took the lead, later, in initiating a nationalistic movement to bring the Raj to an end.

Finally, Spear's implication that the Western influence was readily 'accepted' by the Indians is highly contentious. To imply that the bourgeoisie, which was mainly Hindu, had accepted it is one thing. To expand the observations to imply that there was general acceptance is quite another. Yes, the community of Indian merchants, as we have seen, did take to British trade as they had done to Arab and East Indian coastal trade. They had also adapted to the overland trade through the north-western passes with Central Asia and Iran. But there was a crucial difference between the previous ventures and the present, between the period of the advent of Islam in Indus and India and the

coming of the British. For the first time now the frontline trader class was backed by the resources and productivity of an industrialized nation with the more efficient capitalist mode of production.

There was no general acceptance of British ideas and system in the first place except by the trading minority. The majority were brutally subjugated. The small, though influential, Indian bourgeoisie was in partnership with the British. By and large, the pre-1857 feudal and rural India remained in conflict with them.

V. THE BRITISH SWITCH PARTNERS

Yet upon the conclusion of the 1857 uprising, the British were to switch partners and loyalties. They now began to strengthen and to lean upon the feudals. This option was expedient. The uprising had centred mainly around the agro-feudal areas of the Yamuna valley. But if Indus and India were to be held as captive and passive 'agrarian appendages' to the Lancashire cotton mills and to the Dundee jute giants, then the surplus produce of the native peasant had to be farmed out of the country. There was no better system for extracting the peasant's surplus from him than the feudal organization of agrarian expropriation.

Moreover, the imperial bourgeoisie feared competition from the nascent Indian bourgeoisie. The British government, therefore, began to patronize and strengthen feudal relations in the subcontinent after 1857. British administrators and policemen in India began to employ their powers to restore and re-establish feudal authority and privilege. Having successfully subdued a predominantly feudal uprising, the British government of India undertook now to rejuvenate a dying order, all to its own ends. Even the taluqdars of Awadh, many of whom had joined the uprising, were reinstated. There were, of course, exceptions, but most of these were also placated in some way or the other upon preferring appeals to 'the benevolence' of Queen Victoria.

We have already referred to the two primary objectives of the Raj: collection of revenue and maintenance of public order. The latter was required only to facilitate the former. It had officially been declared that 'The main work of the Indian Administration is the assessment of the land tax,' the main source of revenue.¹⁵ Export of the primary produce of the subcontinent was indeed a part of that revenue, even though it was euphemistically described as 'trade.'

This new partnership seemed to work to the benefit of all parties to the new compact. The feudal found himself propped securely by the support of a strong and stable central authority, competent to punish 'rebels and anarchists' in the remotest corners of the realm. The Raj discovered in the

feudal order a workable machine for expropriating the peasant's surplus produce, while also helping to maintain peace and order.

The Indian bourgeoisie was now left out in the cold. 'All tariff duties were abolished in 1879 with a view to benefit Lancashire. In 1895, an excise duty of 5 per cent was imposed on Indian cotton goods with a view to countervail similar tariff on Lancashire goods imposed in the interests of revenue. The value of the Indian rupee in terms of the English pound was fixed in such a way as to help imports from England and discourage exports from India.'¹⁶ The vice-like grip of the central authority also ended all internecine struggles for supremacy which, in the last 150 years, had created fearsome deserts in central and northern India. For the next fifty years, the peasant had his peace, the feudal lord his prestige, while the imperial bureaucratic network was free to expropriate the produce of Indus and India.

Even in areas in which the limits of agriculture were expanding because of irrigation, the British preferred to introduce a system of surplus-collecting 'landlords' called *lambardars*. Thus, from 1880 onwards, peasants were settled in various parts of the Punjab as new lands opened up in the distribution areas of the newly constructed irrigation barrages. The sizes of the holdings varied. Initially, the largest were between 100 and 150 acres. But with the effect and operation of the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 (which disqualified

non-agricultural tribes from acquiring the holdings of their agricultural debtors), and the pre-emption laws, the gentry with larger holdings began to acquire more and more adjoining pieces. Soon they became large landowners and absentee feudals. Land prices began to rise steadily. The price of land rose between 1866 and 1922 from a mere Rs 10 to Rs 238 per acre.¹⁷ An increase in the size and value of the landholdings of these landowners led to an increase in their political influence (political power again following economic power). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, these agro-feudal areas, including the Indus region, became steadfast bastions of the Raj.

The British had thus gradually changed allies. The bourgeoisie had helped the initial success of their conquests. But the feudals aided the consolidation of the Raj. While the bourgeois classes retained the potential of competing with the imperial merchant and had in fact already begun to flex their muscles, the feudals were to always remain, by their inherent station, servile and complementary subordinates with a commonality, rather than a contradiction, of interests with the British government.

VI. BOURGEOIS AWAKENING AND HINDU REVIVALISM

At the same time as the predominantly Hindu bourgeoisie seemed to have been abandoned, it had begun to reinvest its accumulated surpluses in its own

private trades, businesses and small industries. Business families had moved into those areas of industry and business that were not monopolized by the British. Later, through their skills and their high sense of savings and profits, they began to compete with British industry even in sectors which were prohibitively taxed. The indigenous textile industry had redeveloped, despite heavy excise duties designed to prevent it from competing with the produce of Lancashire.

The competition in economic interests went hand in hand with the emergence of the political consciousness of the Indian bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie required both a trade organization to advance its substantial economic interests and a political party to win for it necessary political privileges. It is, therefore, no mere coincidence that the Indian Chamber of Commerce and the Indian National Congress were established in the same year: 1885. The bourgeois awakening, coupled with Hindu revivalism, needed a common economic agenda and a metaphysical umbrella to justify the community's independent existence. And it needed to rid all domestic markets of foreign manufactures. With the Indian defeat in the uprising of 1857, a new economic battle began.

In 1857, a Gujrati Brahmin, Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj. This was a Hindu nationalist movement, beckoning its followers to

adhere strictly to the ancient teachings of the Vedas and to denounce everything that was modern. It was, in the words of Nehru, 'a reaction to the influence of Islam and Christianity'. It spread quickly in the Hindu middle classes of the Punjab and the United Provinces. In fact, so rapid was the growth of this zealous movement that many a sober Hindu was to be charmed by it. Even the modernist Motilal Nehru wrote to his son, Jawaharlal, in April 1909: 'The position is getting worse every day. Out of evil, however, comes the good. The Arya Samaj has given the best answer to Muhammadan pretensions by quietly converting the followers of Islam to Hinduism. Reports arrive every day of their conversion. Sometimes whole villages are converted in a single day.'¹⁸ Economically, the bourgeois Hindu class was on the rise while the Muslim feudal system stood static. The attraction of economic betterment frequently determines the choice of belief and religion.

In practical politics, the Arya Samaj thinking was best represented in the energetic but highly provocative personality of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920). Seeking to arouse Hindu sentiment, Tilak revived the Shivaji cult and the worship of the heroes of ancient Hindu scriptures.

The British government reacted to this revivalism by promulgating a series of laws to suppress the bourgeois unrest. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the application of several strict laws. The Official Secrets Act

of 1904 widened the scope of 's edition' and restricted press criticism of the government. The Public Meetings Act, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, and the Seditious Meetings Act were adopted in 1907. 1908 brought the Explosive Substances Act and the Newspaper (Incitement to Offences) Act. The Indian Press Act was applied in 1910.

However, at this time it was not in the interest of the mainstream Indian bourgeoisie to confront either the British or the feudals. As an ever-expanding class of merchants and industrialists, it naturally aspired to replace the British and hold rural India as its captive market. It also wished to reduce Indus to a permanent agrarian appendix to the industry of Calcutta and Ahmedabad. But it was aware that this had to be done gently and gradually. Tilak and the Arya Samaj were too militant for such deft handling. Any militant posturing at this stage would at once arouse the wolves of communalism and drive the flock away. A milder, gentler, and all-embracing policy had to be adopted. This is how the philosophy and strategy of the Arya Samaj was completely dwarfed by the political pragmatism of the Congress of those early years. This is also why the energetic and fiery Tilak lost the field first to Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), the moderate, and then to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

VII. THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Meanwhile, the First World War (1914-19) broke out. Again the princes of India were foremost in support of the British war effort. The charge that took away Haifa from the Turks was led by the Maharaja of Jodhpur's Lancers in September 1917. Most of the ranks were Muslims. Bikaner's Camel Corps went to fight in such distant places as China, Egypt, and Palestine. Three battalions and a hospital ship were contributed by the Scindia of Gwalior.

The War also jeopardized all the known means of communication and all maritime trade routes to India. It thus obliged the British to develop India as an alternative industrial base of the empire. Britain began to encourage indigenous Indian industry. The Parsee house of Jamshedji Tata had already been allowed to set up a textile mill at Nagpur and a steel mill at Jamshedpur. The capacity of these mills was enhanced. Tata also began to produce India's own locomotives, although production and price were strictly controlled. Since the British Indian Railways was the only customer for this prestige product, Tata had his hands tied.

While the British relaxed the restrictions on economic activities they did not pursue the same liberal spirit in other fields. The First World War therefore brought in its wake greater political controls, more stringent restrictions of political activity and the total loss of what little civil liberties there were. But we shall revert to these after we have again seen where the Muslims stood at this

point of the subcontinent's history.

We may only note that Raja Ram Mohan Roy's reform movement to induce the Hindus to join the service of the British, to bring them out of their shells and to coax them to actively support the Raj, was born almost half a century before its Muslim counterpart in the efforts and teachings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

1. The reason given by Spear.
2. The Brahmo-Samaj is not to be confused with the Arya Samaj founded in 1857 by Swami Dayananda, the orthodox, fundamentalist Hindu movement which became quite prominent in the twentieth century, its militant streaks provoking substantial communal hostility.
3. Historically, the feudal precedes the bourgeois, and, with the arrival of industrial modes of production, gives way to it.
4. This injury to Islam is reflected in an entire spectrum of customs and practices which persist to the present day. Even though it is conducive to

greater integration, to this day caste predominates in the selection of marriage partners, and even spans urban societies: all manner of official pro formas and forms, including the prescribed form of the marriage contract, the *nikahnama*, contain queries about the caste of the parties to the marriage.

5. It is in these two vital respects that the Indian agrarian system was feudal, though as we have seen, in the absence of heredity and the liability to transfer from one fief to another, it differed from European feudalism. The pattern differed also in the organization of the village and the community of the village property, as well the semi-autonomous nature of a great proportion of the villages.

6. See chapter 21, section V, above.

7. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 349-50 (Emphasis added.)

8. *A History of India*, vol. II, 160 (Emphasis added.)

9. In the raging campaign that followed the rejection of the Ilbert Bill, the by

now mature Hindu bourgeoisie got the message. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885.

10. In Amritsar where, in April 1919, by the official count, no less than 379 innocent persons lost their lives, and another 1200 were grievously hurt when a crowd was fired upon indiscriminately by the Punjab Police.
11. Spear, *A History of India*, vol. II, 95.
12. Even Winston Churchill was no exception. He could not disguise his revulsion for the way Gandhi dressed. He was revolted, he said in a famous Parliamentary anathema, by the 'nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now turned seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's palace . . . to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.' James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat*, 293. Even when he was urged by the the Viceroy, Lord Irwin himself to bring his views on India up to date by talking to some Indians, he remained immovable. 'I am quite satisfied with my views on India', he said, 'and I don't want them disturbed by any bloody Indians' *Ibid.*, 298.

13. *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. II, 738. One is compelled to think: how little things have changed! The past and the present role of these institutions, however, will be discussed in a subsequent part of this analysis.
14. Spear, *A History of India*, vol. II, 163-4.
15. Morris, *Pax Britannica*, 268.
16. Mahajan, Part II, 379-80.
17. M. L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, 208. See also Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement*, vol. II, 300; Mahajan, Part II, 615.
18. In B. N. Panday (ed.) *The Indian Nationalist Movement 1885-1947, Select Documents*, 18.

Whither the Muslims?

I. THE PARTITION OF BENGAL

While the Hindu had marched on towards the twentieth century with a confidence bordering upon militancy, the Muslim stood by passive, dwelling upon the old glories of Delhi and Lucknow. He resented the new system, the values of which seemed so alien to him. He was the fallen hero unable to rise, spending his energies in nostalgia for his past. This fixation immobilized him completely.

At the turn of the century the Muslims found themselves a confused community. Syed Ahmed Khan had spent his life pleading with the Muslims to acquire education in the same vein as Raja Ram Mohan Roy had exhorted the Hindus half a century before him. Syed Ahmed Khan, who had been knighted in the service of the Crown, was the moving force behind the founding of the Anglo-Muhammadan College at Aligarh.¹ He exhorted the Muslims to come out of their shells and to seek modern education so as to join the race for economic advancement. Aligarh's sons would respond enthusiastically.

The Muslim elite had also begun to realize the futility of their withdrawal

from the mainstream of events and developments. They could not continue indefinitely to sit on the sidelines and fret. They became conscious of the need for social advancement. They also felt the need to collect on a unified platform and to raise their defences against the growing communal hostility generated by Tilak and the Arya Samajis. The Hindu extremists appeared to be on the warpath and the only salvation for the Muslim ruling classes seemed the sanctuary of the British government.

The British were themselves fully cognizant of the importance of the Muslim community. It was a most important element in the consolidation and security of the empire east of the Suez. It was to assuage Muslims, therefore, that the government partitioned Bengal in 1905. The Muslim majority areas of Bengal, which were an agrarian hinterland, were separated from the Hindu-dominated industrial vortex of Calcutta. The Hindu community reacted sharply to the partition of Bengal. It denounced the administrative measure and initiated a popular movement against it.

The Muslims were on the defensive. The compulsion for one single platform was imperative. Yet nothing could be obtained, it seemed, without the patronage of the imperial government.

II. THE SPIRIT OF LOYALTY

The Muslim League was founded in December 1906 after a delegation of Muslims, led by the Aga Khan, had waited upon the Viceroy in October and sought the support of the British government with the following argument: 'We venture, indeed with Your Excellency's permission, to go a step further and urge that the position accorded to the Muhammadan community in any kind of representation, direct or indirect and in all other ways affecting their status and influence, should be commensurate not merely with their numerical strength but also with their political importance and the value of the contribution which they make to the defence of the Empire.'²

The conscious need for this patronage of the imperial administration was reflected in the inaugural address that Nawab Viqarul Mulk, Nawab Mushtaq Hussain of the United Provinces, Chairman of the Founding Session of the Muslim League delivered at Dhaka on 30 December 1906, wherein he concluded:

In short, gentlemen, we are today prepared to enter on a political career as a community which the spirit of the times impels us to do... But nothing of the spirit of loyalty is lost thereby, and no amount of candour shall rob us of our traditional courtesy... The object of our League is, frankly, the protection and advancement of our political rights and interests, *but without prejudice to the traditional loyalty of the Musaalman to the*

Government...

And despite the annulment, in 1911, of the Partition of Bengal (a clear indication of the British Government's concessions to Congress pressure), the Muslim League Council laid down its rather servile aims on 31 December 1912 as, *inter alia*: 'to promote and maintain among Indians a feeling of loyalty towards the British Crown.'

The first objective spelt out for the founding of the All India Muslim League in the main resolution of the 30 December 1906 session was 'to promote among the Mussalmans of India, *feelings of loyalty to the British Government* and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intentions of Government with regard to any of its measures.'³ (Emphasis added.) A year later, in the first anniversary session at Karachi, this objective was reiterated when the resolution containing the objectives of the Muslim League as defined in its Constitution was adopted (30 December 1907).⁴

The predominantly landowning Muslims had been compelled by the fear of the Hindu bourgeoisie's early militant revivalism to seek the protection of the British and to that effect to manifest their loyalty to the Crown on every possible occasion. But at this time Hindu moderates began to marginalize the influence of Hindu extremists within the Congress. Moderates like Gokhale

(who was President of Congress in 1905) and reformists like Annie Besant (President in 1917) succeeded in isolating the extremists and in weaning a substantial following of the Indian Muslims away from the British.

III. AMITY, THE FUNDAMENTALISTS AND A BARRISTER

The imperial government had kept the Muslims on its side by providing for separate electorates in the Act of 1909. These ensured the representation of the minority in all circumstances. The Indian bourgeoisie also wanted to win them over. The predominantly Muslim areas would form a passive agrarian appendix to an ultimately independent India. At this juncture the Indian bourgeoisie was also prepared to accommodate Muslim demands.

The Lucknow Pact (1916) between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League recognized the Muslims' right to separate electorates. Hindu-Muslim amity continued through the agitation against the massacre in the Punjab at Amritsar (1919). In the meantime, India had been 'bled white' by the First World War,⁵ in the words of Lord Curzon himself, and the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919 had been adopted, but had had no effect on anti-government sentiments.

These years saw Hindu-Muslim amity at its zenith. Hindus and Muslims

died together at Jallianwala Bagh (1919) in Amritsar and they participated side by side in the Khilafat Movement. The latter was the reaction of a Muslim community, shocked by the unjust terms imposed upon Turkey by the Treaty of Surges. The movement sought the reinstatement of Turkey's 'Khalifa'. The Hindus, led by Gandhi, adopted these demands and supported the Muslims in the movement. Gandhi, in fact, presided over the 1919 Khilafat Conference. The Congress took advantage of this unrest. It synchronized its Non-Cooperation Movement with it. Some prominent Muslim ulema repaid Gandhi for his support. A fatwa⁶ endorsed the Congress Non-Cooperation Movement.⁷

As Abdul Hamid points out, some of the fundamentalist leaders of the Muslim community got carried away to a point where they were able to forge an absolutely novel variety of Hindu-Muslim amity. From a latter-day Muslim, and indeed, contemporary Pakistani perspective, it seems more expedient than real.

In the Khilafat crisis, the leadership of the Muslim community was grasped by the ulema and their allies. Before 1918 the divines considered politics outside their domain and were generally indifferent to all that happened in the country. In some respects, the new orientation was unfortunate. As a class the divines were sadly behind the times. They were ill-educated and ill-equipped for the business of politics. Their mutual bickerings were well

known and their angularities proverbial. With a sizeable section of them religion did not necessarily come into politics as an idealistic or constructive force. Sometimes its influence bordered on the vulgar. Quite a few zealots among them ransacked the whole of Muslim law and tradition and disinterred some texts which could be stretched to justify the use of Gandhian techniques of non-cooperation and passive resistance for political ends. By some ingenuity they read into the Meccan life of the Prophet a titanic example of *satyagraha*. But their grotesque attempts to effect a cohesion between Islam and Hinduism led them to make oblations in the sacred Ganges in the orthodox Hindu fashion, They discovered in the Krishna of Hindu mythology the Moses of the Christians and Muslims and identified Gandhi with the promised one in Islam called the Mehdi.⁸

Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah was, at this time, just an emerging leader of the Muslim community. He too stood for communal harmony. After the Lucknow Pact (1916), he had, in fact, been described as the 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim amity' by a prominent Hindu leader and activist, Sarojini Naidu. Jinnah, however, stood aloof from the pact between the Congress and the Muslim divines calling themselves the ulema (or the learned). He was never comfortable with the fundamentalists and did not approve of the religious approach to politics. Reacting, for instance, to a question by an

enthusiastic youth about Mr Gandhi's non-cooperation call, Mr Jinnah had said in 1920:

Well, young man, I will have nothing to do with this pseudo-religious approach to politics. I part company with the Congress and Gandhi, I do not believe in working up mob hysteria. Politics is a gentleman's game.⁹

From events of the 1920s the Muslim clergy had obtained a taste of politics. Abdul Hamid however gives the contemporary Pakistani perspective thus: 'The concord between the divines and the Congress proved lasting . The ulema had arrived in the field of politics to stay and did not retire even when the ashes of the Khilafat movement had cooled down. Thus they became the nucleus of various "nationalist" Muslim organizations which basked in the Congress sunshine in the thirties and early forties. On the one hand they stood for a resurgent Islam and on the other they owed allegiance to the Congress whose ideals were, in almost every respect, antithetical to theirs.'¹⁰

Although many of these divines would take their 'allegiance to the Congress' at least up to August 1947,¹¹ Hindu-Muslim amity was not to last. On both sides there had been significant developments and a substantial increase in self-confidence. In any case the orthodox clergy could hardly provide leadership and direction to the mainstream community.

IV. THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT AND THE EMERGING MUSLIM BOURGEOISIE

In terms of the achievement of its avowed object, the Khilafat Movement was a fiasco. The Khilafat itself was dissolved in 1924 by Kamal Ataturk, a Muslim modernist and a hero for the Islamic world, and the leaders of the movement in India were highly embarrassed. They appeared to have been propounding and agitating for the wrong issue. In utter confusion the Muslim clergy called upon all Muslims to migrate out of India and Indus. Fatwas declared these lands '*dar-ul-harb*' (a place of strife and war) as distinct from '*dar-ul-Islam*.' But the mass frenzy, the desperate call for *Hijrat* (migration) and the popular mobilization, all petered out in widespread and comprehensive confusion.

Yet the Khilafat Movement was not entirely without consequence. It had made some substantial contributions, not least being the aura of romance that had been added to mass political mobilization as a means of political resistance. The movement had established the Muslim potential to generate mass rallies. Arrest for a political cause began to be looked upon with respect and admiration. Political causes began to find adherents who had dreams in their eyes. Political detainees gained respect and social recognition among all the sections of the populace not serving in the civil and police bureaucracy. The Ali brothers (Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali),¹² became the gallant

forebears of an unending line of brave detenus, suffering imprisonment for their espousal of human rights.

No less significant was the impetus imparted by the Khilafat Movement to Muslim political journalism and activist poetry. A tradition of a vibrant and live press, undeterred in the face of frequent penalties, closures, and forfeitures was established in this period and was to become the guiding force in the days of the Independence movement. Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956), whose periodical, *Zamindar*, was frequently banned, was himself often interned in his village near Wazirabad in the Punjab or imprisoned. He wrote:

DUNYA MAIN THIKANAY DO HI TO HAIN
AZAZ MANASH INSANON KAY
YA TAKHT JAGAH AZADI KEE
YA TAKHTA MAQAAM AZADI KA.

There are only two places in this world
Where freedom can be experienced,
You are free if you sit on the throne,
And you are free upon the gallows.

Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1878-1951) was another intellectual activist who

inspired the Muslims against the imperial yoke. He was truly a man of many parts. The Chairman of the first Indian Communist Party Conference in Kanpur, a founder member of the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind, he was later elected to the Indian Legislative Assembly as a Muslim League candidate. In 1928, Mohani founded the daily *Mustaqil*. A writer, a poet and an activist, Mohani spent several years in jail. During one such period of rigorous imprisonment he expressed his feelings in verse thus:

HAI MASHQ-E-SUKHAN JAREE, CHAKEE KI MUSHAQAT BHEE
IK TURFA TAMAASHA HAI, HASRAT KEE TABEE-AT BHEE

He composes verse as he performs forced labour.

Hasrat is a man of contradictory virtues.

Of even greater significance was the self-confidence which the Khilafat Movement instilled in the Muslims of the subcontinent. For once, they felt neither the need for the protective patronage of the British government, which they had confronted, nor a compulsion to pursue Congress dictates. They felt, in fact, that Gandhi had been forced by the vast sweep of the movement to have his own strength counted on the side of the agitators. The Khilafat Movement was thus a vital factor in resurrecting the confidence of the minority Muslim community.

It was this rising tide of mass politics in the Muslim populace which Jinnah was to eventually lead to Pakistan. The pattern set in the Khilafat Movement, the inhibitions destroyed, the chains broken, the energies released, would all become the political assets of the demand for Pakistan almost two decades later at Lahore in March 1940.

Moreover, an embryonic Muslim bourgeoisie had also emerged and was keen to make its own compacts with the feudals of the Muslim majority areas. It was not prepared to let its Hindu counterparts make further inroads into these provinces. Both the Hindu and the Muslim bourgeoisie were hoping eventually to take over from the British commercial, banking and industrial interests. In this atmosphere of contention, it was natural for the weaker Muslim bourgeoisie to begin to seek its own enclave and exclusive market. This was reflected in the Delhi Proposals of 20 March 1927 and subsequently in the Fourteen Points of 1929, wherein the Muslims specifically demanded the separation of Sindh from Bombay, and the extension of all administrative reforms to the provinces of NWFP and Balochistan, all Muslim majority areas, even at the price of accepting a modified form of joint electorates. By this time, the Muslim bourgeoisie, therefore, had also begun to take the initiative.

V. IN ANOTHER DIRECTION

The Muslims seemed, however, always to be taking one step forward and two steps back. By and large, they were as yet confused about their objectives. Should they move ahead, obtain modern education, equip themselves with scientific knowledge? Or should they shun all that was Western and modern? The orthodoxy had led the Khilafat and Hijrat Movements. It also resisted Western influence. The desperation of the Hijrat Movement indicated the confusion that impelled the orthodoxy.

In April 1920, a fatwa was issued that in case someone felt that he could not discharge his religious duties freely under a non-Muslim government, he should migrate to a Muslim country.¹³ Some twenty thousand persons sold all their belongings, houses, lands, at throw-away prices and began migrating to the closest Muslim state: Afghanistan. The Afghan government made no provision for these self-propelled refugees. Many died of exhaustion, fatigue, cold or hunger. Those who survived returned broken-hearted and penniless.

On 6 September 1920, a conference of the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind passed a resolution in its conference in Calcutta, seeking complete non-cooperation with the 'enemies of Islam' who had 'shown religious animosity towards Islam in uprooting the Caliph of the Muslims by depriving the Caliphate of its power'. People were thereafter asked to surrender all titles and honorary offices, to refuse to attend official functions and to withdraw students from

educational institutions run or aided by the government.

Although the otherwise witty poet Akbar Allahbadi had died in 1921, many of his verses ridiculing the West and modernism became the tools of the orthodoxy, and served to underscore the depths of alienation and confusion:

BAQOUL-E-DARWIN HAZRAT-E-INSAN THAY BOOZNA
HAM KO BAVAR AA GYA EUROPE KEE INSAN DEKH KAR

According to Darwin, Man is descended from the ape.
We believed him only when we saw the Europeans.

BAY PARDA MUJH KO NAZAR AA-EEN CHAND BEEBIAN
AKBAR ZAMEEN MAIN GHAI RAT-E-QAOMI SAY GARR GAYA
POOCHHA JO UNN SAY AAP KAR PARDA WOH KYA HU-A
KEHNAY LAGEEN KEH AQL PAY MARDON KAY PARR GYA

When I saw some women going about without veils
I was affixed to the ground with shame.
When I asked them what happened to the veil,
They replied that it had blinded the commonsense of menfolk.

Although this series of progressive and retrogressive events was creating, in

the Muslim community, a sense of distinctness (later to be called nationhood) compounding this confusion was the fact that the Muslims in the subcontinent were still without a single inspiring and undisputed leader. And Indus (Pakistan) was as yet itself a region divided within as much as without.

The only economic vitality and enterprise that any section of the Muslims of the Indus had shown in this period was the growth of trading communities such as the Khojas, Bohras and Memons of the coastal areas of Karachi and Bombay into businessmen, lawyers, merchants and industrialists, along with their Hindu compatriots. They would become the catalysts of the 'Pakistan movement.'

At the same time in the upper reaches of the Indus, a rich new Muslim feudal aristocracy rose with the opening of new lands to irrigation and the plough. Vast landed estates (*jagirs*) were allotted in the Punjab districts of Campbellpur, Mianwali, Shahpur, Jhang, Multan and Muzaffargarh. The colonization of new lands in the districts of Montgomery (Sahiwal) and Lyallpur (Faisalabad) was based on the allotment of smaller holdings.

Characteristically, the two Indus regions, the south coast and the Punjab, were to bring forth Muslim leaders of two different types. The Punjab threw up Fazle Hussain. The southern coast of Indus produced Jinnah.

VI. A COSTLY MISJUDGMENT

The Congress, on its part, with leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru, had been able by the 1920s to reach out and capture the imagination of the predominantly Hindu bourgeoisie. It had thus become a mass party. The Muslim League had, as yet, no such mass following. Gandhi's ascetic mode of living and his manifestly humble bearing (that would later earn him the derisive Churchillian title of the 'naked faqir' at London's Round Table Conference) had also won for him and the Congress the widespread support of predominantly Hindu rural India. A few well-timed but determined satyagrahas and prison terms had focused upon Gandhi the attention of a vast following. A further opening was provided to the Congress by the appointment of the Simon Commission in 1928. The Congress organized a boycott of the Simon Commission. It took this opportunity to mobilize people on the ground that the Commission contained no Indian member.

There was a popular and widespread response to the Congress call. Upon the apparent success of this endeavour, many elements in the Congress began to consider the Muslim League as an insignificant and tiresome pest which would, in due course, realize what was best for it and fall in line with the Congress in the wake of the latter's undisputed strength. The Nehru Report of 1928 was a clear manifestation of its Congress orientation. It had already been

written in the minds of these Congress leaders before the Motilal Committee put it on paper. It provided no accommodation for the Muslim League or the Muslim community. The Congress considered both leaderless and rudderless. The Congress itself, on the other hand, seemed to have found a stable anchor in the now internationally renowned Gandhi. At this time the Muslim League was also rent asunder by fractious infighting.¹⁴ The Congress leaders thought nothing of it.

The Congress had miscalculated. To the Congress leadership, Mohammad Ali Jinnah seemed to have no prospects of becoming a leader of the masses. In bearing, in his mode of living and in a hundred other ways, he was the very opposite of Gandhi. He dressed in immaculately tailored Savile Row suits. His command of the English language, spoken in his impressive and authoritarian voice, was the envy of Englishmen. He seemed overawed neither by the Viceroy nor the King. A successful and lucrative practice at the bar of the Privy Council in London had won him the respect of most of his British counterparts. And all this ostensibly spelt an exclusive arrogance which, the Congress believed, could never endear him to the Muslim masses. One Congress leader had gone to the extent of calling him a 'spoilt child.'¹⁵

The Congress leadership expected that the Gandhi *chaddar* and the Nehru cap would, inevitably, snatch the advantage from Savile Row and Bond Street

Suits. This was to be a costly misjudgment.

1. 'Aligarh would be the Muslim answer to modernity; a universal Muslim response to the changing times (although not all its students were Muslims). It gave the Muslims a sense of direction and confidence. To say that you had been to Aligarh was to declare your credentials. It also provided a focus for Muslims all over the subcontinent. From Quetta at one end of India to Dacca at the other, Muslims came to study here; this forged a sense of brotherhood, of nationhood.' Akbar S. Ahmed, *Living Islam*, 118.
2. *Historic Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement*, compiled by Jamiluddin Ahmed, 19.
3. *Historic Documents*, 27-8.
4. *Ibid.*, 28.
5. According to James Morris, India provided an army of one and a half

million men to the killing fields of the War. Compared to this only, 857,000 youth from the 'white' colonies of the empire participated in the hostilities. Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 199. Spear points out that India gave a hundred million pounds outright to Britain and contributed between twenty to thirty million pounds annually towards war expenses. India undertook its own defence so that for a time there were only 15,000 British troops in the country. Spear, *A History of India*, 183. Only 15,000 holding more than 300 million under their yoke!

6. A religious edict pronounced by a person learned in Islamic doctrines.

7. Mujeeb, 435.

8. Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India*, 151-2.

9. Akbar S. Ahmed, 'Jinnah and the Quest for Muslim Identity' in *History Today* (vol. 44 [9] September 1994) 34-5.

10. Hamid, 152.

11. Opposing thereby the Muslim demand for Pakistan. To this day, many of the religious parties have not been able to live down their role in the past.
12. The latter was interned without trial for two terms totalling five years.
13. See Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics* (2nd ed.) (1974), 265.
14. On the question of separate electorates for the Muslims, the All India Muslim League had split into two factions: the Jinnah League and the Shafi League, the latter led by Mian Muhammad Shafi and supported by the great poet, Iqbal.
15. Sir Tej Bahadar Sapru. See *Historic Documents*, 96.

The Sons of the Indus Fight

I. CONCESSIONS AND LOSS OF NERVE

On their part, the British were pursuing a twin but divergent policy. They had sensed the growing frustration of the Indian bourgeoisie at an early stage and had begun to counter it at the turn of the century. They sought to pacify the Indian bourgeoisie by concessions but were preparing to suppress its unrest by force.

On the one hand, the government had already taken the first steps to 'Indianize' the civil services, a class the British had found to have been exceptionally loyal to the foreign masters during the uprising of 1857. The Indian Councils Acts of 1892 and 1909 (the latter also called the Minto-Morley Reforms) had been the first concessions to the more educated natives.

On the other hand, the colonial power had begun to succumb to the pressure of the bourgeoisie movements for more economic freedom. The Partition of Bengal (1905) was done to appease the Muslims. (The Bengal Lancers had remained an important and largely Muslim regiment, though now drawn from all over the old Awadh state and even the Punjab.) It was undone

under the pressure of the Hindu agitation hitting, through the call for swadeshi,¹ where it hurt most.

Then there were the terrorist movements. The Poona Society for Hindu Religion became active. The shooting of the magistrate who had committed one of them for trial was attributed, somehow, to the Savarkar brothers. The British had lost their nerve when the Partition of Bengal was annulled (1911). They lost their nerve again at Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919. The coercion and official violence proved far more traumatic than their insubstantial concessions, held out by such measures as the Government of India Act (the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms) of 1919.

II. THE INDEBTED PEASANT AND 'PUNJABIZATION'

There were substantial reasons for the growth of the underground resistance movements in the Indus region. Although little is written about them by official historians, those sub-surface movements played a major role in breaking the will of the imperialists to continue their direct rule in the subcontinent.

Large parts of Indus were at once the most prosperous in the subcontinent and under the greatest burden of debt. In the Punjab, for instance, moneylending was the most important business after agriculture. According to

one estimate of the early 1920s, there was an average burden of Rs 463 per indebted proprietor.² This was a very substantial sum of money, considering the value of the rupee in those days. The burden was to multiply manifold during the ensuing economic depression.

The Raj had, however, opened up at least one other source of income to the impoverished Punjab peasant: recruitment in the subordinate ranks of the Royal Indian Army. This had begun in the preceding century. Michael O'Dwyer, who was the governor of Punjab at the time of the fateful Jallianwala Bagh massacre, had recounted that the argument 'of those great military authorities, Lord Robert and Lord Kitchener was, however, irrefutable that if India could only afford a small army of seventy-five thousand British (now reduced to under 60,000) and one hundred and sixty thousand Indian troops for the protection of a subcontinent of over 300 millions of people, it would be unwise to take any but the best Indian material and this was to be found mainly in the Punjab.'³

There was thus a Punjabization of the Indian Army. Punjab began to be referred to as the 'sword arm of India'. By 1862, the Punjab alone was contributing twenty-eight out of the 131 units of infantry in the Indian Army. The proportion of Punjabi troops went up greatly by the turn of the century. The British had to try to rescue the Punjab peasant-soldier from the grave

consequences of debt. In 1900, the Land Alienation Act was passed, impeding the acquisition of lands of debtors by the non-agricultural caste of moneylenders. The purpose was also to slow down the process of disintegration of landholdings. More relief measures were contrived, but they were not enough. Other revenue-oriented measures nullified the effect of these social reforms and also aroused instant reactions. When the water rate (*abiana*) was increased in 1907, there was an uprising in the Punjab. The Bill was withdrawn.

Before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 the number of Punjabi units in the Indian Army had risen to 57 out of 121. That meant almost half of the Indian Army was recruited in one area. This reliance upon the Punjabi soldiers compelled the government to take steps to ameliorate their lot at home.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the imperial government undertook a widespread recruitment drive in the Punjab and adjoining regions. The indebted peasants enlisted in the army in greater numbers. This would be a crucial turning-point in their outlook. During the First World War, the Punjabi peasant-soldier travelled to several parts of the world. He saw lands and technological advances that he had never conceived of. He thus came out of his shell. His vision was broadened as he was also exposed to the outside

world beyond his cloistered village, to the winds blowing in a new social order in Tsarist Russia. He was completely immersed in new thoughts and concepts when he returned to his bullock-cart, plough, and indebtedness after the War was over. His income was secured somewhat by his regular pension. The much-travelled 'cosmopolitan' rose to a new social status, and acquired a new influence in society with the stories and tales he had to tell. Folk songs of the time reflected his growing social status and importance: *Vasna fauji de naal, paanway boot sanaylatmaaray* (I will live with a soldier even if he kicks me with his boot on).

III. THE SEDITION TRIALS AND JALLIANWALA BAGH

Many who had gone to fight did not, however, come back. Some were so overcome with the romance of the Communist Revolution in Russia that they deserted their military units and took to active opposition of imperialism in distant lands. Other émigré too were exposed to these new ideas. In the United States, some such groups had already joined to form the Ghadar Party in 1913.⁴ Almost all the members of the party were émigrés from the Punjab, and most of them were Sikhs.

Upon the initiation of hostilities during the First World War, the Ghadarites issued a call to all émigré to return home to fight the British. According to one

estimate,⁵ 8,000 responded to the call. 400 were arrested. 2,500 were interned in their villages. The purported uprising was squashed, resulting in what is known as the first Lahore Conspiracy Case. Out of the 400 arrested, 291 were put on trial. Forty-two were sentenced to death and sent to the gallows. 114 were transported to remote islands in the Indian Ocean for life. Ninety-three were sentenced to lesser terms of imprisonment. Forty-two were acquitted.⁶ At the same time, the British government coaxed the Americans to take action in the United States against the Ghadarites who had remained there. The San Francisco Conspiracy Trial resulted in several more convictions.

Despite these tough measures, the nerve of the imperial government broke towards the end of the War. Although the Defence of India Act, drastically curtailing civic rights, had been passed exclusively as a wartime measure in 1915, its scope and area of operation were extended beyond the War on the recommendation of a committee headed by Mr Justice Rowlatt, a judge of the High Court of Judicature in England. The 'Rowlatt Acts' were speeded through the Imperial Legislative Council in March 1919. There was widespread dismay and reaction in the subcontinent. One of the men who resigned his seat in the Council in protest against these unconscionable laws was Barrister Mohammad Ali Jinnah.⁷ There was also unrest in the streets of the Punjab where public gatherings had been banned.

On 13 April 1919, a crowd of 'some ten thousand men, women and children, mostly peasants from neighboring villages'⁸ were trapped by General Dyer in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. The General blocked the only narrow entrance to the garden with his Gurkha and Baloch troops. Without any warning, shots were pumped straight into the gathering. Four hundred were shot dead. Twelve hundred were wounded. To prevent further reaction, martial law was imposed throughout the Punjab by decree of the Punjab governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer.

Despite such repressive measures, anti-imperialist sentiment continued to spread further in the subcontinent. Indus remained a focal area for this aversion to all that was British. While a section of the Muslim masses was attracted towards the Khilafat and Hijrat movements, other sections began to hit where the imperialist power was most vulnerable: commerce.

In September 1921, a bonfire of imported garments was lighted at a large public gathering in Lahore. The number of items of clothing estimated to have been burnt was 50,000.⁹ Many members of the groups that had initially migrated to Communist Russia were arrested and tried on their return in four successive Peshawar Conspiracy Trials held between 1921 and 1924. All were convicted to varying terms of imprisonment.

This crucial decade saw the formation of several groups and cadres who were influenced by the October Revolution in Russia. Ghulam Hussain, a teacher at the Mission College, Peshawar, moved to Lahore and established a communist newspaper, *Inquilab*.¹⁰ Soon the Inquilab Group was formed. It was in touch with all the communist groups in India. But their correspondence and letters were intercepted and all of them were tried in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case. Ghulam Hussain, who was suspected of having become state witness, was himself interned under Regulation III of 1818.

While the Ghadar Party had been suppressed, its journal, the *Kirti*,¹¹ gave inspiration to the Kirti-Kissan Party. It was instrumental in organizing conferences at Lyallpur and Rohtak in 1928. The conferences called upon the peasants and labour to get organized to seek reduction in the rates of imperial taxes and land revenue. The Congress gave these socialist and communist trends such importance that the latter conference was attended by no less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru himself.

IV. SIMON COMMISSION AND BHAGAT SINGH

The Naujawan Bharat Sabha was founded by the young Indus activist Bhagat Singh in 1926¹² and attracted students from the various colleges in Lahore. The objectives of the Sabha included the establishment of a completely

independent Republic of the labourers and peasants of the whole of India, and the inculcation of the spirit of patriotism in the hearts of the youth of the country. Many prominent members of the Congress and the Khilafat Movement became members of the Sabha.

But Bhagat Singh and his friends were tiring of the politics of the mainstream Indian parties and political organizations. They were infused with dreams of revolution. They wanted high-profile action. The Khilafat Movement had, embarrassingly, died down upon the abolition of the Khilafat by the Turks themselves. The Congress had given up mass mobilization, at least for the time being. Britain seemed to be deliberately exploring slow-acting constitutional changes and, perhaps, compromises with the Indian leadership, although the Simon Commission had been thwarted by country-wide reaction and strikes. The young lads met often and feverishly planned dramatic action. The government looked for an opportunity to curb their activities.

The Simon Commission came to Lahore on 30 October 1928. There was a demonstration. The protesters, shouting 'Simon, go home', moved towards the railway station from the Delhi Gate through the Landa Bazaar. A few hundred yards from the station, the police confronted the crowd. In a brutal baton-charge, Lala Lajpat Rai (then styled as *Sher-e-Punjab*, the lion of the Punjab)¹³ was fatally injured. He died the following month. There was extreme

reaction against the police. Some more militant activists of the Sabha vowed revenge. On 17 December 1928, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, Saunders, was shot dead. The murder of a police officer provided the government the required pretext. Nineteen Sabha activists were arrested and tried for the murder. Bhagat Singh was one of them. He, was, however, acquitted because the only police officer, an Englishman who was present on the spot at the time of the killing, could not identify him before the court.¹⁴

On 10 April 1929, the Central Legislative Assembly was debating the Public Safety Bill in Delhi. Sir John Simon sat in the distinguished visitors' gallery. Suddenly, first one and then a second bomb fell on the floor of the House. Both exploded. Then there were two ineffective pistol shots. Some pamphlets were also dropped from the galleries in which the 'Indian Socialist Republican Army' directed the British to quit India. There was smoke all around, followed by a stampede. Some members received minor injuries, but no one was seriously hurt.

Bhagat Singh and his associate, Dutt, gave themselves up to the police. They were indicted for attempted murder and the possession of bombs and explosive material. Both pleaded not guilty. They had no doubt intended to create a sensation, but that was about all, they claimed. Had they so desired, they could have killed many of those present, but they only wanted the voice of

India to be heard. They warned of the makings of a revolution. Both were sentenced to life imprisonment. Neither, however, was to live long thereafter.

V. HEROISM CANNOT STRADDLE THE DIVIDE

The unnerved imperial government threw the net wide and indiscriminately. Hundreds of activists were arrested and tried; correspondence was intercepted. A conspiracy trial at Meerut was already proceeding. Another began at Lahore. And yet the Viceroy's own special train was bombed at Nizamabad railway station near Delhi in December 1929. Chandra Shekhar Azad, an activist colleague of Bhagat Singh, was suspected. Both were tried, along with others, in the Lahore Conspiracy Case under a special ordinance promulgated for the purpose. Both were sentenced to death in October 1930. Bhagat Singh at once became a national figure and his cause was espoused by a wide cross-section of people all across the subcontinent. In April 1931, Bhagat Singh and Azad were hanged.

It was during this period of resistance that one of Bhagat Singh's co-prisoners, Jateen Das, created and shaped history in his own way. Protesting jail conditions, he starved himself to death in a prolonged hunger-strike that stretched over several excruciating days. His sacrifice was to change the attitude of the establishment towards successive generations of

political prisoners, forcing a revision of the Prison Rules.

Even though young men from the three communities, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, were all united in militant action against the imperial government, they could not reach out to the masses and convert them to their own way of thinking. The two great communities were already drifting apart when a Hindu publisher in Lahore printed an offensive book, *Rangeela Rasul*, extremely derogatory of the Prophet of Islam. On 9 April 1929, a devout Muslim youth, Ilam Din, stabbed the publisher to death. The trial led to the pronouncement of the death sentence. Ilam Din was proclaimed a hero and a martyr by the Muslims upon his execution.

Such were the activities of these small groups and dedicated individuals who exerted an immense influence upon the psyche of the government and the direction of the mainstream politics of the subcontinent.

1. Consumption of only local manufactures and the boycott of imperial goods.

2. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, 9.

3. M. O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew It: 1885-1922* (1926) 213. Quoted in Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movements in the Punjab*.
4. The name of the Party was obviously influenced by the Uprising of 1857 that the British called 'The Mutiny' and the patriots called 'Ghadr' (the Great Tragedy), on account of its failure.
5. Josh, 53.
6. Ibid., 54.
7. The resignation was addressed to the Viceroy and stated: 'The fundamental principles of justice have been uprooted and the constitutional rights of the people have been violated at a time when there is no real danger to the State by an overfretful and incompetent bureaucracy which is neither responsible to the people nor in touch with real public opinion.' Jinnah to Viceroy Chelmsford, 28 March 1919; reprinted in M. H. Saiyid, *Mohammad Ali Jinnah* (1945) 238-9.
8. Wolpert, *New History*, 298.

9. *The Tribune*, 16 September 1921, quoted by Josh.

10. Revolution.

11. The tiller of the soil.

12. Josh, 82.

13. Syed Nur Ahmed in Craig Baxter (ed.), *From Martial Law to Martial Law: Politics in the Punjab, 1919-1958* (1985) 75.

14. Sibte Hassan (ed.), *Bhagat Singh Aur Us Ke Sathi* (Bhagat Singh and His Companions) 1985, 32.

Parting of the Ways

I. IQBAL: A MUSLIM STATE OR AN ISLAMIC STATE?

As the two 'movements', the Muslim and the Hindu, began to gain mass recognition by the 1930s, the two communities having displayed their respective sparks and potential in the Khilafat Movement and the mobilization against the Simon Commission, the divergence between them also began to increase.

It was at this crucial juncture that the poet Muhammad Iqbal, who was by now the most prominent political ideologue of the Muslim community, came forth with his proposal for separate autonomous federating units of the Muslim majority areas of the subcontinent.¹ Addressing an All India Muslim League session at Allahabad in 1930, the poet-philosopher formulated his proposals.

Iqbal repudiated the idea of a united subcontinent. 'To base a constitution on the concept of homogeneous India or to apply to India principles dictated by British democratic sentiments is unwittingly to prepare her for a civil war,' he asserted. His ultimate objective was the uniting of 'the Punjab,

North-Western Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan into a single state'. Iqbal could, at this time, only speculate about a status beyond the British Empire as he continued: 'Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of the consolidated North-Western Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.'

Controversy continues to rage regarding whether Iqbal wanted Pakistan to be ruled by a democratic regime or solely by religious parties, regardless of their electoral standing. Iqbal's thoughts have come to us through substantial written material. But since much of it is in the form of poetic expression, there is always room for varied interpretations.

Iqbal's 'Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam', and his presidential address at the Allahabad Session of the All India Muslim League in 1930, however, provide ample, abiding and unambiguous guidelines to his thinking. The presidential address is the more significant. It was the first articulate expression of the concept of a state, or states, for the Muslims of the subcontinent. But was Iqbal talking of a *Muslim State*, or an *Islamic state*? That is the question that arises. This distinction ought, perhaps, to be drawn as many of the present-day conundrums may find some possible solutions if addressed with objectivity and with reference to Iqbal's own words.

II. IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF THE STATE

Iqbal's Allahabad address has been variedly interpreted, and often as recommending a state based on the application of religion as expounded in the Islamic Sharia. The proponents of such interpretations usually skip over some of the significant passages in the address. If these portions are also read, it would appear that Iqbal did not envisage a state ruled by religion, and *a fortiori*, by religious parties.

The issue before Iqbal in 1930 was to protect the interests of the minority Muslim community in India. The fear in Iqbal's mind was of the majority community's hegemony and dominance. If, according to Iqbal, Muslims could be guaranteed protection within India, the issue could, perhaps, be resolved. He said:

And as far as I have been able to read the Muslim mind, I have no hesitation in declaring that if the principle that the Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian homelands is recognized as the basis of a *permament communal settlement*, he will be ready to stake his all for the freedom of India. This became impossible. (Emphasis added.)

Now what did this significant observation imply? It implied, it seems, that if the government of a United India could guarantee the component communities their specific rights, there would be no need for a separate state. Subsequent events have established that a compromise did in fact evade the leaders at a later point of time. But the point is that Iqbal did envisage, as a permanent constitutional arrangement, a government that was not composed exclusively of Muslims, nor was strictly Islamic.

With respect to the prospective state itself, Iqbal had also reassured the other communities (as Jinnah would do later):

Nor should the Hindus fear that the creation of autonomous Muslim States will mean the introduction of a kind of religious rule in such States.

These are Iqbal's own words. The object seems to have been the establishment of a Muslim state (and Iqbal refers to it always as a 'Muslim' state, not an Islamic state), in order to protect the economic, cultural, religious and social interests of the Muslims of the subcontinent. While elucidating the concept of the Muslim state he said:

The character of a Muslim State can be judged from what the *Times of India* pointed out some time ago in a leader on the Indian Banking Inquiry

Committee: In ancient India, the paper points out, 'the state framed laws regulating the rates of interest; but in Muslim times, *although Islam clearly forbids the realization of interest on money loaned, Indian Muslim States imposed no restriction on such rates.*' (Emphasis added.)

It was on this premise, therefore, that Iqbal proceeded to 'demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim State.'

Iqbal spelt out another vital attribute of the state which he had in mind. He spoke thus of 'purely territorial electorates':

The Muslims of India can have no objection to the purely territorial electorates if provinces are demarcated so as to secure comparatively homogeneous communities possessing *linguistic, racial, cultural and religious unity.* (Emphasis added.)

Religion, it would seem, was *one* of the composite package of four attributes. It is mentioned as a separate item, distinct from the others. And, as we have noticed, Iqbal had clearly ensured that the proposed *Muslim* state would not be ruled by religion.

III. AN IMPASSE TO BE BROKEN

In the early 1930s, such talk of a separate state, or states, for the Muslims of the subcontinent seemed a far-fetched idea. But the vision was prophetic. However, while the visionary was looking ahead, the Muslim community itself was not. It was not yet prepared for a parting of the ways. That stage may not, in fact, have been reached at all had Congress shown greater accommodation to the League's claim of representing the Muslims. All that this would have entailed for Congress was some concessions such as taking Muslim League nominees into the provincial governments formed in 1937.

The Congress displayed unnecessary impatience in its lack of accommodation vis-a-vis the League. At this time, it looked upon the League as an irritating, self-styled, and unrepresentative political organization.

A vast range of ideas and communities were indeed represented in Congress. It seemed to envelope the entire spectrum of Akhand Bharat. From the Khudai Khidmatgars (the Red Shirts) of the NWFP and the Brahmins of Kashmir in the north, down to the Harijans² of the south, a vast cross-section of the peoples were either Congressites or Congress allies. With the neo-feudals supporting the British, the Congress was able to win the allegiance of the peasantry. Gandhi's khadi (coarse cotton apparel) image and his the fairy-tale concept of the self-governing, self-sufficient village, made Congress widely popular in the villages. His spinning-wheel had become the symbol of

India. Gandhi had apparently tied up the Ahmedabad and Calcutta industrial bourgeoisie with the peasantry of central and southern India in a powerful multi-class alliance. The Congress did not appear to be in need of the support of the Muslim League.

The Congress leadership believed that the Muslims who supported the Muslim League would soon be swamped by Congress successes and would come back into its fold. It felt that it was only a question of time, before the Congress policy of ignoring the League, leaving it isolated and out of mainstream politics would break the League's ranks. The Congress did not appear to be in need of the Muslim League.

Even though the Congress assessment of the then leadership of the League may not have been entirely inaccurate, it failed to assess correctly the growth and development of the Muslim community and its consciousness. The Hindu bourgeoisie had, of course, developed fully. It had by now overshadowed the princes and the feudal nobility in its leadership of the Indian peoples. In fact, the Indian National Congress was an almost entirely bourgeois movement, supported by the broad masses of the peasantry. The Hindu feudal was to remain isolated and removed from the nationalist struggle, apprehensive as much of British commerce as of the commerce of its Indian counterpart. Little wonder that he became the first target of Congress reforms after

Independence.

In comparison to the Hindu bourgeoisie, the Muslim bourgeoisie had many weaknesses. First, it had no committed and courageous leadership of the quality available to the Hindu bourgeoisie in the persons of Gandhi and the Nehrus. This it finally obtained in the late 1930s in the person of the Bombay-based lawyer, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. But that final compact between the leader and the community was yet to take effect.

At this time there was also another impediment to the development and progress of the Muslim bourgeoisie. So far, it had remained a predominantly rural and agro-based bourgeoisie, confined to the economy of mandi towns³ and mufassil cities.⁴ Its ranks drew from the middle classes comprising teachers, journalist and advocates, in small towns and markets of northern India. To come into its own, it had to win the support of the feudal gentry commanding the rural hinterland of the Muslim majority areas. The feudals kept the king's peace in these areas and could alone aid the ongoing expropriation of the peasant's surplus produce. The support of the landowners was crucial to the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie. This feudal backing would open up (in the 1940s) large parts of the Punjab, NWFP and Sindh to the vanguard of this bourgeoisie, the crusading and zealous Aligarh students.

But the landowner was not willing to chip in with the Muslim League (and later with the Pakistan Movement), unless the League first established a popular base and demonstrated its strength among the masses. This was a Catch-22 situation.

To acquire mass support in Indus, the League needed the umbrella of the landlords. The landlords would not extend support unless the League first manifested a mass following. It appeared to be an impossible and awkward gridlock. How could it be broken?

This impasse would finally be resolved, not by the landowners, nor by any initiative taken by the Muslim masses themselves. It was resolved by the determined and single-minded pursuit by Mohammad Ali Jinnah of the cause that the League had espoused. He would reach out to the masses directly, over the heads of the feudals, forcing the feudals then to fall in line behind him.

IV. A BOLD AND COURAGEOUS JINNAH

By this time, M.A. Jinnah of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-Law, had acquired a name for himself. He had come into prominence on account of several well-known and principled speeches in the Central Legislative Assembly of India. He had always spoken fearlessly and

with clarity. Despite a lucrative practice in London, he was never wanting in words and actions when it came to issues that affected the people of the subcontinent. His mind and soul were rooted in his native land. Despite his ultimate commitment to the Muslim cause he never allowed himself to become a hostage to fundamentalists. He was what he was. Love him or hate him, there was no pretence about him.

Jinnah made many impressive speeches such as the one, in 1918, on G.S. Khaparde's resolution concerning the role of the press, or the one, again in 1918, on the infamous Rowlatt Act. In 1919, defending B.G. Horniman, the editor of *The Bombay Chronicle*, Jinnah had spelt out the essence of his life:

Sir, I am not one of those men who encourage any crime or any offence, but I do maintain, and I have drunk deep at the fountain of constitutional law, that the liberty of a man is the dearest thing in the law of any Constitution and it should not be taken away in this fashion.

In 1924, he had spoken with passion on Diwan Bahadur T. Rangachariar's resolution demanding self-governing Dominion status for India. In 1926, Jinnah forcefully advocated the extension of the constitutional reforms to the NWFP. In September 1929, when some Punjab prisoners charged of waging war against the king were not produced before the court because they had

gone on hunger strike, Jinnah was outraged by the concept of trial in absentia, even for only a part of the proceedings. In the same year, he held forth on the Sarda Bill, to which we will revert later.

The two speeches that need special attention and which indicate his liberalism and his inflexibility on questions of principle were Jinnah's speeches on the Rowlatt Committee's report (1918) and on political prisoners (1930).

The Home Member had explained the reasons for the appointment of the Seditious Committee of which Justice Rowlatt was the President.

At the time of that appointment, the Government of India were faced with this position. We were aware of the existence of a widespread conspiracy extending over India and beyond the borders which was aimed at the overthrow of the British Government. I do not refer to the open manifestations of which we had instances at Singapore, in the Punjab, and elsewhere, or to the prevalence of revolutionary outrages in Bengal, but I refer also to persistent underground working with ramifications throughout India, by which constant attempts were made to seduce loyal subjects of His Majesty from their allegiance.

The Committee's report had proposed stringent legislation and the delegation

of extensive powers to the executive. Khaparde, another member of the Council, had moved a resolution on the report seeking that the report be kept in abeyance and that another inquiry be initiated into the working of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Jinnah's views on the proposed measures were clear.

My Lord, to any man who believes in law and justice, these measures seem abhorrent and shocking . . . You say these powers can be effective, and so they can be. But what guarantee is there for the innocent? Then you will ask, do you not trust the executive? My answer is that I certainly cannot trust the executive, because I am a firm believer - I do not care how many Rowlatt Committees will decide and recommend - I am a firm believer that no man's liberty should be taken away for a single minute without a proper judicial inquiry. . . It imperils the liberty of the subject and the fundamental right of the citizen and, my Lord, standing here as I do, I say that no man who loves fair play, who loves justice and who believes in the freedom and the liberty of the people can possibly give his consent to a measure of this character.⁵

Jinnah was true to his word. When the Rowlatt proposals were adopted by the Imperial Legislative Council, he resigned from its membership.⁶

The young Bhagat Singh was no follower or supporter of Jinnah. In fact he repudiated the manner and style of politics adopted by men like Jinnah. Accused of several terrorist acts, he was being tried in the Lahore Conspiracy Case when, protesting ill-treatment, he and his comrades decided to go on hungerstrike.⁷ To break their will, the government decided not to present them before the tribunal trying them and moved an amendment in the Code of Criminal Procedure to provide for trial in absentia. Jinnah vociferously opposed the measure.

Jinnah first defended the right of a prisoner to protest against ill-treatment. He then proceeded to state that a government meting out such treatment to prisoners had, in fact, made a declaration of war upon them.

As far as the Punjab government are concerned, they do not merely wish to bring these men to trial and get them convicted by a judicial tribunal, but to go to war against these men. They seem to be in this frame of mind: We will pursue every possible method but we will see that you are sent either to the gallows or transported for life, and in the meantime we will not treat you as decent men.

It was a bold and courageous Jinnah who insisted that these men, even though accused of terrorist activity against the imperial government, were political

prisoners. He asserted this despite the fact that Bhagat Singh had already been convicted of having lobbed a bomb into the Legislative Assembly. Jinnah argued:

So far as the Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners are concerned, they are political prisoners. You ask me, what is a political prisoner? It is very difficult to lay down any particular definition. But if you use your common sense, if you use your intelligence, surely you come to the conclusion with regard to a particular case. Do you wish to prosecute them or persecute them? ... You know perfectly well that these men are prepared to die. It is not a joke. I ask the Hon'ble Law Minister to realize that it is not everybody who can go on starving himself to death. The man who goes on hunger-strike has a soul. He is moved by that soul and he believes in the justice of his cause.

Jinnah was a constitutionalist to the core. He did not approve of terrorism. But he was also committed to human dignity and the rule of law.

Mind you, Sir, I do not approve of the action of Bhagat Singh, and I say on the floor of this House. I regret that, rightly or wrongly, youth today in India is stirred up, and you cannot, when you have three hundred odd millions of people, you cannot prevent such crimes being committed, however

much you may deplore them and however much you may say that they are misguided. It is the system, this damnable system of Government, which is resented by the people. You may be a cold-blooded logician: I am a patient cool-headed man and can calmly go on making speeches here, persuading and influencing the Treasury Bench. But, remember, there are thousands of young men outside. This is not the only country where such actions are resorted to. It has happened in other countries, not youths, but grey-bearded men have committed serious offences, moved by patriotic impulses. What happened to Mr. Congrave, the Prime Minister of Ireland? He was under sentence of death a fortnight before he got an invitation from His Majesty's Government to go and settle terms. Was he a youth? Was he a young man? What about Collins? So what good of your putting forward this argument? You have got a situation which you have got to meet, not by introducing and enacting measures which go to the root of the fundamental principles of criminal jurisprudence, and lightly, saying: 'Oh! but it is common sense!' Law is common sense; it is not common sense of one individual.⁸

This was the Jinnah who stood for the oppressed, regardless of colour, caste, religion, or creed, and irrespective of status in life. This was the Jinnah who determined his position on issues without reference to any benefit or any

opportunistic advantage to be obtained by that position. This was the Jinnah to whose integrity even his adversaries testified. Jawaharlal Nehru, while bitterly criticizing him and what he stood for, was compelled to concede that Jinnah was 'widely but distantly respected', and that about 'his ability as a politician there is no doubt'. Reluctantly, he also admitted that Jinnah 'shines as a lawyer-politician, as a tactician, as one who thinks that he holds the balance between nationalist India and the British power.'⁹ The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, wrote on 5 October 1948, after Jinnah's death, that 'I never liked Jinnah', and yet was compelled to admit that he 'had a certain reluctant admiration for him.'¹⁰

How much history generally, and the creation of Pakistan in particular, owes to Jinnah is noted aptly by Hodson.

Of all the personalities in the last act of the great drama of India's rebirth to independence, Mohammad Ali Jinnah is at once the most enigmatic and the most important. One can imagine any of the other principal actors (not counting Mahatma Gandhi, who makes fitful and inconclusive appearances from the wings) replaced by a substitute in the same role - a different Congress leader, a different Secretary of State, a different representative of this or that interest or community, even a different Viceroy - without thereby implying any radical change in the final

denouement. But it is barely conceivable that events would have taken the same course, that the last struggle would have been a struggle of three, not two, well-balanced adversaries, and that a new nation-state of Pakistan would have been created, but for the personality of one man, Mr. Jinnah . . . *Not even his political enemies ever accused Jinnah of corruption or self-seeking. He could be bought by no one, and for no price.*¹¹ (Emphasis added.)

This was the Jinnah who faced the daunting task of leading the Muslim masses, despite the active hostility of the powerful Muslim feudals and the vocal Muslim fundamentalists.

But how would the tactician succeed in this seemingly impossible task?

Jinnah would, in the first instance, ignore the Muslim feudals; and he would be undeterred by Muslim fundamentalist opinion. He knew his goal, and had his eyes set upon it. He would focus his sights on the agro-based Muslim bourgeoisie of Indus and northern India. He would assuage its fears and give it confidence and self-assurance. When it finally came forward to join ranks with him, and to undertake political activity without reference to, and without being overawed by the feudals, it would create a widespread movement among the Muslim masses. Jinnah would then be able to demonstrate his mass support. And the feudals would then, at the last

moment, fall into Jinnah's lap. The stage for the final act would thus be set just before the elections of 1946.

To get to that final point of the elections of 1946, however, many smaller steps had to be taken. To these we must revert.

V. LANDOWNERS, THE BOURGEOISIE, AND THE 1935 ACT

During the 1930s, the big landowners, having benefited from the Raj, were keen to continue to support it. They were not yet prepared to follow Jinnah. In the Punjab, for instance, they adorned the ranks of the Punjab National Unionist Party, established in 1923 by Sir Fazle Hussain. It was committed to the protection of the class interests of the landowners of all the three communities, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. The Sikandar Hayat ministry (1937-42) passed some far-reaching Acts, protecting the vital interests of the agriculturist in the Punjab. The Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act, 1938, the Registration of Moneylenders Act, 1938, and the Relief of Indebtedness Act of 1940, provided relief to the landowner from the clutches of the moneylender.¹²

The cross-communal character of the forces impelling these reforms, supportive of *Muslim* landowners and directed against *Hindu* moneylenders, is borne out in the person of the prime mover behind these enactments. Sir

Chotoo Ram was a Hindu minister in the Punjab cabinet. This incomparable Jat was the prime mover and main sponsor of these reforms. His name is revered to this day among all landowners, even the Muslim zamindars of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Indian bourgeoisie (mainly Hindu), straining for its own markets and impatient with the concessions allowed to imperial manufactures, had stepped up its pressure against the imperial government. Gandhi launched the Salt satyagraha, and won the concessions embodied in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact from Viceroy Irwin in 1931. The movement made the imperial government a little less confident of itself. Perceiving the growing strength of the Indian bourgeoisie, it called a series of Round Table Conferences in London.

After deliberations in which the entire range of the subcontinent's leadership took part, the Government of India Act was promulgated in 1935. The Act provided for a modicum of self government and a delegation of some lesser powers to native representatives. Belated elections under the Act were held in 1937, but only at the provincial levels.

The 1937 elections became the turning point that would inevitably lead to the so far elusive 'parting of the ways' of the two communities.

1. The first expression of this idea is, however, attributed to the Cambridge-based contemporary of Iqbal, Chaudhry Rehmat Ali.
2. A name made current by Gandhi and applied by him to the untouchables, literally meaning children of the god Hari.
3. Rural market towns.
4. Outlying cities, larger than the mandi towns.
5. For the text of the speech see Mohammad Jafar, I. A. Rahman, and Ghani Jafar, *Jinnah as a Parliamentarian*, 27 ff.
6. For an extract of the resignation letter, see chapter. 30, section II, fn 6.
7. See article by Professor Khwaja Masud entitled: 'When Quaid-e-Azam defended Bhagat Singh' (29 March 1991) *The Muslim*.
8. Jafar, et al. *Jinnah as a Parliamentarian*, 195 ff.

9. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 413.

10. Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, 442.

11. H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide* (1969) 37, 38, 39.

12. Military recruitment among the Punjabi peasants and at the instance of the loyal Punjabi landlords, before and during the Second World War, had once again put the interests of the Punjabi landowners high on the government agenda.

Towards Partition

I. THE ELECTIONS OF 1937

The Act of 1935 was scarcely a complete constitution. Certain debilitating and self-negating processes had been provided in the Act. Though provincial governments were formed under it, the Act was not able to come into operation at the federal level. The princes blocked the establishment of a representative government at the federal plane. The coming into operation of the federal arrangement under the Act depended upon the willing assent of at least one half of the princely states, which pretended to have certain, quite ambiguous, rights under 'treaties' with Britain. It was indeed ingenious how the 'subsidiary treaty' was initially devised by Britain to grasp power from a state in the name of the larger entity, and was now pleaded to prevent its transfer to that larger entity itself! The introduction of weightage given to the arch-conservative princes was a preconceived method of preventing the formation of any representative governments at the federal level, even when the curious principle of 'dyarchy' did not envisage a substantially sovereign authority. On a wink from the government, the princes refused to accept the application of the Act. Federal institutions, barring the Federal Court, were thus

never to come about.

Another significant anomaly in the scheme of the Act was the operation of the principle of 'weightage', resulting in indefensible injustices. Muslim representation in the Muslim majority province of the Punjab was, by this curious device, reduced to a minority. In Bengal, this reduction left the barest majority in Muslim hands, making them dependent upon coalition support. Because of these inbuilt imbalances the Act could not provide a solution to the growing communal divide.

These evident injustices of the British legislation were soon to be compounded by the intransigence of the over-confident Congress. It pushed the Muslim community and its leadership irrevocably in the direction initially visualized by Iqbal in 1930.

Congress won five of the eleven provinces in the 1937 elections. By coalition and manoeuvrings, it was able to form governments in another three, including the NWFP where it had only nineteen out of the fifty seats. In this province, its allies, the Khudai Khidmatgars, were able to displace Sardar Abdul Qayyum's short-lived cabinet and instal Dr Khan Sahib as the chief minister. The Punjab was swept by the Unionist Party of pro-British landowners, who were to continue to govern even after Congress ministers resigned in 1942.

II. CONGRESS' CONFIDENCE AND NEHRU'S MISTAKE

All this transpired while the League had sought conciliation. Neither the Muslim bourgeoisie nor the Muslim feudals as yet felt the need for any protection against any possible discrimination, present or future. The League was prepared to nominate Muslim ministers in Congress cabinets, if its exclusive right to represent the subcontinent's Muslims was recognized. Congress, however, appeared to be in no mood to wait upon what seemed to it to be an irksome pretender to the leadership of a minority community. It had little patience for the uncreditworthy claims of the League, particularly in the face of the League's dismal showing even in Muslim majority provinces in the elections of 1937. A weak, isolated Muslim bourgeoisie, having no inherent power and lacking the support of established pressure groups, was perceived as destined to fail and to be overcome by desertions.

What the Congress leadership did not realize was that it was purporting to judge the strength and potential of the Muslim bourgeois, non-landed leadership at a time when it was yet to obtain the support of the Muslim landowners. The dominant interest that Congress represented, the bourgeoisie, wanted to humble and capture the Muslim majority areas as its market, and then to hold them as a passive agrarian appendix to the industrially developed areas of the subcontinent. The ire of the Congress

leadership was therefore not altogether incomprehensible.

This is how Jawaharlal Nehru assessed the prospects of the League in July 1937, while writing to his predecessor President of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad, in July 1937:

Towards the end of June, a little before the working Committee meeting, the U. P. Muslim League leaders, Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan, made an approach towards the Congress. This had obviously some connection with the possibility of Ministries ... When Maulana Abul Kalam went to Lucknow from Wardha he was met by Khaliq who told him that he was practically prepared to give him a blank cheque provided two of their number were included in the Ministry, himself and Nawab Ismail Khan, the President of the U. P. Board. Maulana looked at all this with some suspicion but he felt attracted by the possibility of the whole Muslim League ceasing to exist as a separate group and being practically absorbed by the Congress... We feared reaction among the Congressmen in general and the Congress Muslims in particular, who would have been irritated at their being excluded in preference for those who had been fighting the Congress . . . What of the Muslims who had stood by the Congress during all these years? What of the Jamiat which was supporting us and opposing the League?

All this, and more we considered and we hesitated . . . After much discussion . . . we came to the conclusion that we should offer stringent conditions to the U. P. Muslim League and if they accepted them in toto, then we would agree to two Ministers from their group. Besides them one Minister would be Rafi Ahmad . . . These were pretty stringent conditions and in effect amounted to more than the Congress pledge. But we did not ask them to sever all connection with the parent Muslim League. The position would have been a peculiar one, involving a dual loyalty to some extent. It could not last *and we expected the U. P. Leaguers to break away from the parent League.*! (Emphasis added.)

Had Nehru gained the impression that even the negotiators were amenable to defection? His perception may have been mistaken but it undoubtedly reflects Congress confidence when he continues in the same letter:

There were talks with Khaliq who agreed to all the conditions except two: the winding up of the Parliamentary Board and not to set up separate candidates at by-elections. These were vital conditions. Khaliq said that he personally would agree but he had no authority to do so. In effect, he pointed out this might happen anyhow...

Today Khaliq made another approach (21st July). He suggested that he

would call an emergency meeting of his executive to consider the question of the by-election if we could postpone the decision for some days. I spoke to him on the telephone. I referred him to Pantji² but did not encourage him at all.³

III. JINNAH THE LIBERAL

If Nehru's assessment indicated the mind of the Congress leadership, it is evident that it had again miscalculated. The League, by then had a confident and charismatic leader in Jinnah; and its objectives were squarely identified with the fast growing Muslim bourgeoisie.

As in Europe, the development of the bourgeoisie had led to a recession of fundamentalism and religious orthodoxy. The bourgeoisie cannot develop and progress on the basis of obscurantist dogma. Its very tools are technology and, to remain in the market, it has constantly to keep up with the latest advances and keep pace with science. If it does not do so, its goods will not be up to the latest standards or, if they are, will be prohibitively expensive. Of necessity, the bourgeoisie weans itself away from religious dogma, without itself being anti-religion or irreligious. The bourgeois state may comprise overwhelmingly of citizens belonging to, and devoutly faithful to one religion. But the state itself does not adopt it. It was surely about a bourgeois Muslim state that Iqbal

expressed confidence, as we have seen, that it would not be ruled by religion.

Jinnah represented the very best of the Muslim bourgeois culture of the subcontinent. And he was definitively against orthodoxy, obscurantism and the rule of religious parties. He did not want a theocracy. That is why almost every member of the Muslim bourgeoisie - the trader, the shopkeeper, the Aligarh students - followed him. That is why the orthodoxy opposed him and was so roundly defeated by him.

Jinnah had established his credentials more than once with his liberal and anti-fundamentalist articulations. There are many instances that establish that he posited politics and religion, and by extension, the state and religion, in two separate compartments. He was quite clear in his mind about the issue and never missed an opportunity to make his views known. We have seen how he had reacted to Gandhi's attempt, in 1920, to adopt what he described as a 'pseudo-religious approach to politics'. On another occasion, when some ardent admirers addressed him as Maulana Jinnah, he put them down curtly saying: 'I am not a Maulana; just Mr Jinnah.'⁴

Such small though significant instances apart, two other very important speeches he made say the most about his thinking on the subject. The first, in 1929, was made on the Child Marriages Restraint Bill, and the other, on the eve

of Independence on 11 August 1947 in the Constituent Assembly. All Pakistanis must reflect upon these. Both the speeches were well-considered deliveries. In the most explicit terms, they bring out Jinnah's views on the relationship between the state and religion.⁵

The Child Marriages Restraint Bill (later an Act by the same name) was moved in 1927 in the Legislative Assembly by Rai Haridas Sarda. As such, it was also known as the Sarda Bill. Because of the controversy it generated, it remained pending in the House for two long years. It proposed the adoption of a minimum age for contracting of marriage and provided penalties for guardians giving away their minor wards in marriage.

The Bill invoked the ire of fundamentalists throughout the land. The House Petitions' Committee received as many as 707 petitions against the Bill, signed by no less than 72,725 persons! A fatwa had also been pronounced by seventy-four leading ulema condemning the Bill. Only four petitions, signed by a mere ten persons, were received in support of the Bill. Inside the House, the opposition came from other Muslim members including Nawab Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum from the NWFP, A.H. Ghaznavi from Dhaka, Muhammad Yamin Khan from UP and Maulvi Muhammad Shafi Daoodi from Tirhut. The Maulana was the most vocal: he believed that if the Bill was adopted, it would be the most cruel encroachment on the rights of the Mussalmans. Those

opposed to the Bill cried that 'religion was in danger' on account of the proposed law.

Jinnah was undeterred by the opposition. His words were clear and unambiguous, and it is essential to quote some portions of his speech verbatim:

I cannot believe that there can be a divine sanction for such evil practices as are prevailing, and that we should, for a single minute, give our sanction to the continuance of these evil practices any longer. How can there be such a divine sanction to this cruel, horrible, disgraceful, inhuman practice that is prevailing in India?

Jinnah was not unaware of whom he was opposing. Nor was he insensitive towards that fundamentalist opposition; Voltaire-like, he was prepared to let them retain their sentiments and convictions. But he was not prepared to buckle under on a matter of principle. He was firm when he observed that:

Always the social reformer is face to face with this orthodox opinion having behind it this conviction, this sentiment, this feeling which is perfectly understandable and to some extent legitimate. But are we to be dragged down by this section for whom we have respect, whose feelings we

appreciate, whose sentiments we regard; are we to be dragged down and are we to be prevented in the march of progress? In the name of humanity, I ask you.

And if we are going to allow ourselves to be influenced by the public opinion that can be created in the name of religion, *when we know that religion has nothing whatsoever to do with the matter* - I think we must have the courage to say: 'No, we are not going to be frightened by that'.
(Emphasis added.)

It may be difficult for a Pakistani today, exposed as he is to a selective rendering of Jinnah's statements, to believe that these are indeed Jinnah's own words.⁶ The theme that there were *some matters of state that had nothing to do with religion* would continue in the other speech alluded to above. More strongly and emphatically, Jinnah would spell out the *grundnorm* of Pakistan in his speech of 11 August 1947.

IV. CONGRESS ITSELF PROVIDES THE OPENING

Although Nehru had predicted defections from the ranks of the Muslim League and even though the latter as yet lacked a mass following and an electoral vote-bank, it would not suffer any defections. Jinnah was gradually tightening

his political grip on the minds and souls of the Muslim masses and the Indus persons.

The Muslim League had, no doubt, been routed in the 1937 elections, which showed that it needed to broaden its base among the masses and to expand its electoral vote-bank. Even the support of the feudals and landowners in the Muslim majority areas was contingent upon the League first acquiring and demonstrating support among the broad masses. But how was it to wean away all the Muslims from the nationalistic and secular embrace of the Congress?

Congress itself provided the Muslim League the opportunity. The Congress policy of attempting to break or discredit Muslim ministries in Muslim majority provinces (such as the NWFP) was the League's opportunity, and Jinnah did not let it go by. The Congress had provided the League with a crucial issue. The League leadership reacted at once. The perception that Congress was intolerantly anti-Muslim could now be disseminated without much difficulty. The issue was so formulated as to set up the League's 'Muslim' image in contradistinction to the 'Hindu' orientation of Congress.

This perception, once generated by Congress intrusions in the provinces which had Muslim ministries, worked in two ways. First, it won for the League

a wider and less qualified support in the Muslim community. Second, the vigour of the campaign built for the League its first foundation as a mass organization. It reached out to the Muslim populace. Rajendra Prasad was to complain to Vallabhbhai Patel, the right-wing representative of the Hindu bourgeoisie:

The Mussalmans as a body have been alienated and in spite of all that the Congress ministries have been doing to be just and even generous to them, there is not only no recognition but positive opposition . . . I think if we had not been engaged in breaking, or at least discrediting, Muslim ministries in non-Congress provinces, the position would have been different. The Muslim League propaganda has gained much strength on account of this attitude of the Congress in Muslim provinces . . .
(Emphasis added.)

It was not merely the League ministries that were under threat. Within its own ranks, the Congress leadership began to display a certain narrow-mindedness that was to cost it dearly.

V. AZAD'S CRITICISM

Abul Kalam Azad, one-time President of the All-India Congress Committee,

and India's first minister for education, published his memoirs, entitled *India Wins Freedom*, in 1958. Some portions were, however, held back for publication for thirty years after his death in 1958. The book was published again, in 1988, with these additional portions. These portions tell, in Azad's own words, of the misguided and costly mistakes made by Congress. In one of these withheld pieces, he bitterly criticized the Congress leadership for deciding to form provincial governments after the elections of 1937, and for the policy it pursued thereafter:

As a result of these discussions, the Congress ultimately decided to accept office. At first, it did so in the provinces where it had a parliamentary majority, then in the provinces where it was the single largest party in the Legislature, and finally wherever it could ... Two things happened at the time which left a bad impression about the attitude of the Provincial Congress Committees. *I have to admit with regret that both in Bihar and Bombay, the Congress did not come out fully successful in its test of nationalism.* The Congress had grown as a national organization and given the opportunity of leadership to men of different communities. Thus in Bombay Mr Nariman was the acknowledged leader of the local Congress. When the question of forming the provincial Government arose, there was general expectation that Mr Nariman would be asked to lead it in view of

his status and record. This would have however meant that a Parsee would be the Chief Minister *while the majority of members in the Congress Assembly Party were Hindus*. Sardar Patel and his colleagues could not reconcile themselves to such a position and felt that it would be unfair to the Hindu supporters of the Congress to deprive them of the honour. Accordingly Mr B. G. Kher was brought into the picture and elected leader of the Congress Assembly Party in Bombay.

A similar development took place in Bihar. Dr Syed Mahmud was the top leader of the province when the elections were held. He was also a General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee and as such he had a position both inside and outside the province. When the Congress secured an absolute majority, it was taken for granted that Dr Syed Mahmud would be elected the leader and become the first Chief Minister of Bihar under Provincial Autonomy. Instead, Sri Krishna Sinha and Anugraha Narayan Sinha who were members of the Central Assembly, were called back to Bihar and groomed for the Chief Ministership. Dr Rajendra Prasad played the same role in Bihar as Sardar Patel did in Bombay. The only difference between Bihar and Bombay was that when Sri Krishna Sinha formed the Government, Dr Syed Mahmud was given a place in the Cabinet.

These two instances left a bad taste at the time. Looking back, I cannot help feeling that the Congress did not live up to its professed ideals. *One has to admit with regret that the nationalism of the Congress had not then reached a stage where it could ignore communal considerations and select leaders on the basis of merit without regard to majority or minority.*⁸ (Emphasis added.)

Azad could have added one other factor that gave impetus to Hindu-Muslim friction. The Hindu majorities in some of the provincial legislatures began to insist that the proceedings commence with the recital of the *Banday Matram*, a nineteenth century Hindu revivalist anthem. Muslim members resented this move and resisted it. The *Banday Matram* controversy singed its scar upon Muslim minds.⁹ By these measures the Congress itself chose to vitiate the long-standing communal harmony and to deepen the divide that the Muslim leadership may have been willing to live with.

Compare this with the liberal approach inherent in Jinnah's principles. He would choose his first foreign minister, on merit, from what has since been 'constitutionally' decreed as a non-Muslim minority community.¹⁰ His first law minister was a Hindu.¹¹ Would the present-day fundamentalist lobbies that have applied intense pressure upon successive governments endorse any such induction today?

To his dying day, Jinnah would endlessly exhort his supporters to safeguard the rights of the minorities. The principle would, indeed, be the *grundnorm* of the state he was now struggling to create. It was reflected in his speech on the eve of the establishment of Pakistan. He was possessed by this one passion.

VI. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PLAYER

Disillusionment with the divergence inherent in Congress policy and practice spread fast among the minorities. The Muslim masses now began to rally around the Muslim League flag. Congress' seeming opportunism contrasted sharply with Jinnah's inflexible commitment to principles. Muslim League ranks began to swell. To consolidate its widespread support, the League had now to mobilize its followers in a show of strength which would also make it a credible organization.

Congress provided a second crucial opening at the time of the commencement of the Second World War. In October 1939, Congress asked all its ministries to resign over the issue of the British war aims. The adept Jinnah did not miss his chance. He immediately called for the observance of a 'Day of Deliverance' from Congress rule.

The widespread observance of 22 December 1939 by the Muslim community as Deliverance Day established at once the credentials of the League as well as of its new support in all the Muslim majority areas. Congress had itself scared the minorities by its actions in Bihar and Bombay. Even though tentative in demand and vague in parameters, the Pakistan Resolution of the League, adopted in its Lahore Session on 23 March 1940, was a logical development. The League demanded that 'geographically contiguous units [be] demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute "Independent States" in which the constituent units should be autonomous and sovereign.'¹² Even though the initial resolution seeking a separate political identity may have been tentative, the mood of the Muslim League was no longer hesitant. It was now prepared to exploit any opportunity provided to it. It did not take long for the opportunity to present itself.

As the Second World War (1939-45) progressed, Indus and Indian contribution to the war effort again became the decisive factor. Britain had no intention of being deprived of either. But Indian leaders were aware of the significance of this contribution. The subcontinent had provided an enormous

resource base of men, manufactures, food and provisions, to the Allied forces around the world. And Britain seemed to be giving nothing in return. In 1942 the Congress passed the 'Quit India' Resolution. Britain was not prepared to publicly countenance this eventuality. Congress leaders went to the Ahmedabad Fort prison.

The League leadership also asked for independence from the Raj, but upon different terms. It, therefore, responded at once with the call to 'Divide and Quit'. A confident and vigorous Muslim League demanded the partition of India and the establishment of separate homelands for the Muslims of India. The Muslim League of M. A. Jinnah had thus brought 'Pakistan' on to the political horizon of the subcontinent. The League leaders now went to the Muslim masses.

The landed gentry of the Indus region was now paying heed to the League. The Sindh Assembly, composed almost entirely of feudal lords, fully endorsed the Pakistan Resolution of 1940. In the Punjab the feudal class was led by Prime Minister Sardar Sikandar Hayat of the Unionist Party. Even though the League had won only one out of the eighty-six seats in the Punjab in the 1937 elections, the Unionists now felt its extra-parliamentary presence and were under pressure. The Jinnah-Sikandar Pact (October 1937) established the Unionist Party's realization that it needed the support and blessings of an

extra-parliamentary party, the Muslim League. Jinnah and the League had become inevitable for the Indus (Pakistani) feudals. Events had come full circle. The ailing and frail Jinnah's convictions and resolute determination were forging ahead as a political force.

VII. TOWARDS 3 JUNE

Thereafter events moved fast. Sikandar's successor, Khizar Hayat, attempted, on assumption of the office of Prime Minister of the Punjab, to assert his independence from the League's policies, adherence to which had been guaranteed by the Jinnah-Sikandar Pact. This was the wrong time for any such move. By this time Jinnah had the Indus Muslim masses and the middle classes already in line behind him. He also felt strong enough to dictate to the feudals. Jinnah snubbed Khizar by vetoing his inclusion in the reconstituted Viceroy's Council during the Simla Talks. This was cue enough for the feudals whose protection and support the Muslim middle classes and masses required.

In the elections to the central and provincial legislatures (the results of which were declared early in 1946), the Muslim League swept the overwhelming majority of seats reserved for Muslims. In the Punjab the Muslim League captured seventy-five out of the total of eighty-six Muslim

seats, though it was not, as yet, able to form the government. In Sindh it did form the government, securing twenty-seven seats against the Congress' twenty-one. In the North-West Frontier Province, however, the Congress cut into some Muslim seats and formed its government under Dr Khan Sahib, a pro-Congress Pashtun nationalist. In the central assembly, the Muslim League won every Muslim seat. The Muslim bourgeoisie had forged a crucial compact between itself, the Muslim masses and the Muslim landowners.¹³

In the meantime in the elections held in Great Britain after the end of the Second World War, the Conservatives suffered a defeat. Clement Attlee, the new Prime Minister, began work on the Labour government's policy of decolonization. Then in February 1946 there was a mutiny in some units of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay. Would this mutinous virus spread to the other forces? Britain was on the edge. It was now ready for some crucial decisions.

In March 1946, the Labour government sent a Cabinet Mission comprising of British ministers, to the subcontinent. During exhaustive discussions with the Congress and Muslim League leaderships, no agreement could be arrived at. The Mission then announced its formula for resolving the constitutional impasse. *Even though the Cabinet Mission Plan did not envisage Pakistan*, the Muslim League accepted the plan, as it contained the principles of a three-tier federation and the formation of an interim government, with certain safeguards

for the Muslims in the shape of two groups of semi-autonomous Muslim provinces. This was the best that seemed to be possible at the time. Congress, intriguingly enough, withheld its acceptance. In view of the Congress attitude, the Mission decided to ignore the Muslim League's acceptance. Jinnah was annoyed. This to him and to his followers displayed the British bias in favour of Congress.

By its failure to clinch the issue, Congress missed another chance of obstructing the re-emergence of the 'Indus state'. And by this time an emboldened League was not prepared to wait indefinitely upon Congress' pleasure.

On 29 July 1946, the League withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. It called for 'Direct Action'. 16 August was fixed as Direct Action Day. On that day, fierce Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Calcutta. Out of the estimated 3,000 dead, 'appreciably more Muslims than Hindus were killed.'¹⁴ Jinnah became firm in his 'opinion that there is no alternative except the outright establishment of Pakistan ... We guarantee to look after non-Muslim and Hindu caste-minorities in Pakistan, which will be about 25 million, and protect and safeguard their interests in every way. That is the quickest way to India's real freedom and to the welfare and happiness of all the peoples inhabiting this subcontinent.'¹⁵ Jinnah had now indeed become the most

important of all the players in the field.

Against the backdrop of rising social unrest and mutinous conditions, early in 1947, Attlee, the British Prime Minister, announced that Britain would leave India before June 1948, even if the Muslim League and Congress could not agree between themselves on the constitutional framework of an independent subcontinent.

In March 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed the Viceroy and Governor-General of India. Mountbatten soon announced what came to be known as the 'June 3rd Plan'. It proposed the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The Congress and Muslim League both accepted it.

It was because the impulse of Indus towards separatism was natural and primordial, and because it was itself based on foundations that lay in remote antiquity that history was turning full circle. Indus was reverting to its primordial status.

VIII. JINNAH PROCLAIMED THE QUAID-I-AZAM

Jinnah, starting with a weak and limited following among the Muslim bourgeoisie, had, by the time of the elections of 1946, won the support of the landed gentry of the Indus region. An effective alliance had been forged. The

newly converted feudals, with traditional economic power in the Muslim majority areas of the Indus region, began to exert an even greater influence on policymaking than the bourgeoisie. Together, under the charismatic leadership of Jinnah, they were able to arouse a vigorous mass following in both the urban and rural areas. Pakistan had become inevitable. Jinnah had been proclaimed the Quaid-i-Azam, the Great Leader. Independence day, 14 August 1947 was an irresistible step away.

On the eve of Independence, the Quaid-i-Azam addressed the First Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. His speech of 11 August 1947 embodies the fundamental principles which had impelled the creation of the country. It was a speech made in the forum enjoined to draw up that fundamental document, the Constitution of the newly-created state, and appropriately made on the very eve of its creation. It was thus a contemporaneous rendering of the essential moorings of the new state by the most competent authority, on the most apt and solemn of all occasions. It embodied the essence of the struggle and defined the objectives which lay within grasp. What other testimony could have a greater cogency on the rationale of the new state than the Quaid-i-Azam's speech of 11 August 1947?

In the opening words of his speech, Jinnah asserted: 'You will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a Government is to maintain law and order,

so that the life and property *and religious beliefs of its subjects* are fully protected.' (Emphasis added.) He then proceeded to denounce bribery, corruption, nepotism and jobbery that had afflicted the previous administrations in the subcontinent and stated that a break would have to be made from this legacy. And he pleaded for tolerance:

Now, if we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and specially of the masses and the poor. If you will work in co-operation, *forgetting the past*, burying the hatchet, you are bound to succeed. If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, *no matter what is his colour, caste or creed*, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make.

I cannot emphasize it too much. We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community, because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vaishnavas, Khattris, also Bengalis, Madrasis and so on, will vanish. Indeed if you ask me this has

been the biggest hindrance in the way of India to attain its freedom and independence and but for this we would have been free peoples long long ago. No power can hold another nation, and specially a nation of 400 million souls in subjection; nobody could have continued its hold on you for any length of time but for this.

Therefore, we must learn a lesson from this. You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. *You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State.*

As you know, history shows that in England conditions some time ago were much worse than those prevailing in India today. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants persecuted each other. Even now there are some States in existence where there are discriminations made, and bars imposed, against a particular class. Thank God we are not starting in those days. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State. The people of England, in course of time, had to face the realities of the situation and had to discharge the responsibilities and burdens placed

upon them by the Government of their country and they went through that fire, step by step. Today you might say with justice that Roman Catholics and Protestants do not exist: What exists now is that every man is a citizen of Great Britain and they are all members of the nation.

Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State. (Emphasis added throughout.)

Consider the salient points of what Jinnah, Pakistan's Great Leader, was saying on the eve of Independence: 'You may belong to any religion or caste or *creed* that has nothing to do with the business of the State.' And: 'Today you might say with justice that Roman Catholics and Protestants do not exist: What exists now is that every man is a citizen of Great Britain and they are all members of the nation. Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal.' In the present-day environment of obscurantism, these words would be dismissed as the thoughts of an anglicized lawyer. But it was the Founder himself discussing the 'ideal'. And notice also the words: 'not in the religious sense, because *that is the personal faith of each individual*, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.'

It was because of thoughts that were so fine-tuned to, and in harmony with the essential and tolerant spirit of Indus, and because of his consistent adherence to his principles that Jinnah had been proclaimed the *Quaid-i-Azam*. In his ideas and actions, he had become the major catalyst in the re-establishing of the Indus identity and state. He had thus facilitated the Indus person in rediscovering his inheritance and identity in the material shape of the new Indus state of Pakistan. His memory, therefore, continues to evoke a vast and emotive following, although adherence to his essential philosophy has, alas, been gradually replaced in Pakistan by an adherence to certain state-sponsored dogmatic and fundamentalist precepts.

For Pakistanis, it is time to revert to the thoughts, practices, and principles of plain 'Mr Jinnah'. He was, in many ways, the Indus person incarnate: a liberal, progressive and modern Muslim; a far cry from the fundamentalist obscurantist and intolerant parties that claim his mantle but would drag the country to the Stone Age.

1. Panday, *Nationalist Movement*.

2. G. B. Pant, Chief Minister of the UP from 1937 to 1939 and from 1946 to

1954.

3. Panday, *Nationalist Movement*.

4. *Ibid.*, 39.

5. Yet, somehow, even senior and competent biographers like Ayesha Jalal and Wolpert, do little justice to many of Jinnah's speeches. The one on the rights of political detenus and the one on the relationship between the state and religion (being the one on the Child Marriages Restraint Bill) are not even noticed by them.

6. Today people in the country created by Jinnah entirely through the democratic process have been overtaken by the so-called 'constitutional' amendments, expediently adopted by a military dictator, that invest the Shariat Courts with the power to review every law and precept on the touchstone that Jinnah himself refused to resort to. Of course, expediency also guided Ziaul Haq from withholding some matters, considered crucial by his theocratic allies, from review by the Shariat Courts. The passages quoted above prompt one to question whether Jinnah could have even

envisaged the establishment of such forums in the country he created.

7. Panday, *Nationalist Movement*.

8. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (1988) 15, 19.

9. See Hamid, *Muslim Separatism*, 221.

10. Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan.

11. Mr J.N. Mandal.

12. See *Historic Documents*, 382.

13. The impact of Jinnah's policies and over-powering personality was so great that another somewhat different compact was forged in Bengal. That, however, is not within the pale of this study.

14. See Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, vol. VIII, 274, Wavell to Pethic-Lawrence,

21 August 1946.

15. Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, 287, from Jamil-ud-Din Ahmed, *Some Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr Jinnah* (1952) vol. II, 433.

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