MOHINI LECTURES, 1961

LESSONS OF INDIAN HISTORY

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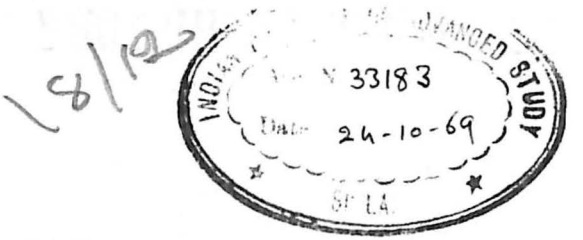

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Shri Harihar Choudhury of Doomdooma, in Upper Assam, made over to the University of Gauhati a sum of Rs. 20,000 for the purpose of creating an endowment for a series of lectures in memory of his mother, the deceased Mohini Choudhurani, a pious and large-hearted lady, on the following conditions:

> The lectures are to be called Mohini Lectures. The lectures will be delivered biennially by a scholar or an educationist on such subjects as the University may decide.

The Executive Council of the University gratefully accepted the sum and invited as the first lecturer Professor Humayun Kabir, Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, Indian Union. Professor Kabir very kindly made time to come over to Gauhati and give two thought-provoking discourses on the trends of Indian history.

The lectures (to which Professor Kabir has added a third section, on the events of 1857) are gathered now into this book, entitled LESSONS OF INDIAN HISTORY, on the expectation that the interpretations of history given here would "draw the attention of students of Indian history and politics to some of the basic principles of our many-sided and composite culture".

GAUHATI,
15th August 1961

BIRINCHI KUMAR BARUA
Department of Publication,
Gauhati University.

PREFACE

I am grateful to the authorities of the Gauhati University for the honour they have done me in asking me to deliver the inaugural series of Mohini Lectures. Founded to commemorate the services of a philanthropic lady of Assam, I felt that I could choose no better subject for these lectures than the lessons which we can learn from our own history. Women have always been the repositories of national culture and have from immemorial times preserved the historical traditions of a people. They have also been forces for understanding and reconciliation and today, the world needs nothing more than their healing touch for allaying intra-national and international jealousies and conflicts.

The first two chapters in this book represent the lectures I delivered at the Gauhati University. I have added a third chapter based on some studies I undertook on the occasion of the centenary of the Revolt of 1857. I shall consider my labour fully repaid if these lectures draw the attention of students of Indian history and politics to some of the basic principles of our many-sided and composite culture.

NEW DELHI,
15th August 1961

HUMAYUN KABIR

TO

INDIRA GANDHI

CONTENS

TOLERATION AND COEXISTENCE

History has often in the past been regarded as a mere chronicle of kings and their exploits. It has not always been recognised that kings may strut upon the stage but without the patient labour of their nameless subjects, the stage could not have been built at all. Today there are increasing attempts to understand history as a repository of the experience of man in his quest for a better life. Kings and wars have their place in such an account, but its chief endeavour is to indicate the forces which have moulded human society. Such a study of man and society not only helps us to understand better the way things have happened in the past but also serves as a pointer towards the future course of events.

It is said of Aurangzeb that when one of his teachers asked for special favours on the ground of having taught him, the emperor replied :

"If you had taught me that philosopy which adapts the mind to reason and will not suffer it to rest satisfied with anything short of the most solid arguments, if you had made me acquainted with the nature of man, accustomed me always to refer to first principles, and given me a sublime and adequate conception of the universe and of the order and regular motion of its parts, I would have been more indebted to you than Alexander was to Aristotle." Aurangzeb

also declared that for a ruler, it was necessary to be "acquainted with the distinguishing features of every nation of the earth; its resources and strength; its mode of warfare; its manners, religion, form of government." He recognised that it was part of the training of a king to become, through a regular course of historical reading, "familiar with the origin of States, their progress and decline; the events, accidents or errors owing to which great changes and mighty revolutions have been effected."

One may disapprove of many things that Aurangzeb did, but one must accept his contention that those who are charged with the administration of human affairs must have knowledge of the basic principles that govern the growth and decline of States and the ways in which human beings respond to different types of treatment. The only modification we need to make in his views is that what Aurangzeb thought to be necessary for only rulers is today required by every citizen. This is partly due to the fact that every citizen under modern conditions shares in the sovereignty of the State. Even in countries which have not accepted the democratic form of government, the ordinary citizen has a greater say in public affairs today than at any time in the past. In addition, advances in science and technology have today interlinked the fate of peoples. Events in any one country have an immediate effect on the fortunes of peoples in other lands. The individual citizen today has thus a greater concern with the future of mankind than even kings or princes in earlier times. This makes it necessary that he should take a more intelligent interest in human affairs and such interest is best fostered by the study of the history of one's own country.

I

Indian history in particular has many lessons of importance not only for the citizens of India but for men and women everywhere. Among these, perhaps the most important is the way in which Indian society has throughout the ages sought to find a way of reconciling the diversities in her life. Students of public affairs recognise that one of the major contributions of India in the modern world is her emphasis on the co-existence of different economic anl political systems and philosophical outlooks. The demand for understanding and good-will among different nations is not new and it would be wrong to suggest that India is the only or even the first nation to support such a demand. Nevertheless, she has in recent times put this demand before the world with an emphasis and insistence that has at times baffled friends and opponents alike. Unfriendly critics have attributed India's attempt to hold a balance between different points of view and her refusal to identify herself with the supporters of any one outlook sometimes to her fear of powerful neighbours and at others to a lack of intellectual clarity. Such critics forget that if fear had been the prime consideration India would have sought the alliance of powerful friends and India's policy of non-alignment refuses precisely this. In fact, some Indian critics of India's attitude argue, though in my opinion wrongly, that India's attempt to be friends with everybody has led to her being nobody's friend.

India's policy of non-alignment cannot therefore be attributed to fear. Nor is it due to lack of intellectual clarity. Her long history has taught India that

no point of view is wholly correct and very few wholly wrong. India has never accepted the Hegelian division of the real into a set of contradictories and still less Marx's attempt to equate the course of history with Hegel's conceptual analysis. India has recognised that truth has many facets and further there is always a difference between concept and reality. Concepts can be sharp and clear-cut but reality is always marked by gradual transitions. India's plea for the toleration and co-existence of different points of view is thus born not out of confusion or fear but out of her age-long experience and wisdom.

Some critics of India's past have at times suggested that such toleration of differences has been a source of weakness for India. History, however, does not bear this out. Indians are the inheritors of a civilisation with a vitality and duration of which there is perhaps no parallel elsewhere in the world. The ancient civilisations of Western Asia, Iran and Egypt live today only in the memory of historians. The glory that was Greece and the splendour that was Rome have also faded into the mists of the past. New civilisations have no doubt blossomed in these lands, but they are largely new and cannot be regarded as continuations of the earlier culture. China was till recently the only other country which had an unbroken tradition of culture stretching back some four or five thousand years. Recent developments in that ancient land indicate a tendency to repudiate its own ancestral heritage and build a new world outlook unrelated to the past. We cannot yet say whether it will lead to the emergence of a new civilisation or a relapse into a new barbarism, but whatever happens, the bonds with the past will have been sundered. India

is perhaps the only country in the world today with a continuous and unbroken tradition of culture, that goes back at least six, if not ten thousand years.

Not only is Indian culture the oldest living culture of the world, it is also perhaps the most composite and complex culture that man has till now evolved. It is trite but true to say that India is an epitome of the world. Here have met people from different races and with different historical and cultural backgrounds. All have merged in one common melting pot. Anthropologists tell us that there is no such thing as a pure race. We may add that neither is any culture pure. All culture is the result of admixture, assimilation and fusion. Indian culture, which is one of the richest and oldest in the world, is also one which exhibits perhaps the widest variety of such admixture and fusion. And one may add that it is the variety and diversity of her culture which has enabled India to survive when so many other peoples and cultures have been submerged by the rushing tide of events. Whether we apply the test of survival value or of richness and complexity of culture, India's toleration and acceptance of differences have been not sources of weakness but factors of strength.

Even before the days of recorded history, Indians had established and indeed welcomed contacts with people outside the sub-continent. The relics of the ancient civilisation of Mohenjodaro and Harappa give unmistakable evidence of contacts with parallel civilisations in the Middle East and beyond. We also know today that this early civilisation spread far beyond the Indus Valley and covered almost the whole of North India and may have spread even wider. Who

these people of Mohenjodaro were we do not know, but it is a safe assumption that they had built on the basis of a still earlier civilisation. We have also evidence that before the Aryans came to India, certain indigenous peoples had attained a high stage of development in the arts of war and peace. References in the Ramayana to the grandeur of Ravana's capital, and in the Mahabharata to the assistance that Yudhishthira sought from Maya Danava to build Indraprashtha suggest that these pre-Aryans had reached a higher stage of civilisation than the nomadic Aryans. Indian culture in the epic age was already marked by the fusion of three distinct strains contributed by the Harappan people, the Dravidians and other pre-Aryans and the Aryans.

We have also to remember that the Aryan infiltration into India was itself part of a larger movement of peoples throughout the inhabited world. The broad flood of Aryan invasion divided into three streams at a fairly early stage, and moved into India, Iran and Greece, and founded the civilisations associated with their names. Those were days of difficult communications, and yet distance did not entirely prevent man from establishing relations with far-flung regions. Even today, we cannot explain how men from the Asian mainland sailed across the Pacific to establish settlements in the Melanesian islands. Nor can we explain easily the many affinities between the civilisations that developed in Central and South America and some of the Asian countries. The legends of Phoenician and Greek sailors lend added interest to recent discoveries in South America of an Arabian script that is older than the Phoenician. These as well as stories of voyages enshrined in Indian and Arabic literature

suggest that long before the beginnings of recorded history, man was moving over the entire surface of the globe.

When we come nearer our own age, we read of Indian missions of religion and culture going out to distant regions of East and West in one of the most glorious periods of Indian history. Asoka's emissaries took with them not only the message of the Buddha, but also the culture of India. We read that some of the earliest of Greek philosophers had travelled in the East and derived inspiration and knowledge from that region. Though there is no positive proof, there are reasons to think that even if Pythagoras did not himself travel to India, he had in some way access to Indian thought. Plato had also travelled in the East and it is fascinating to speculate that he may have visited India. Exchanges between India and Greece became more vivid in the wake of Alexander's conquest and especially in the great metropolis of Alexandria. There can be little doubt that such contacts were occasions of exchange of not only worldly goods but also of ideas and ways of life. If India sent the message of the Buddha to distant lands, there can be little doubt that she in her turn imbibed many elements from the thought and culture of those regions.

Ancient Indian culture was thus composite in a multiple sense. It was intrinsically composite because its fabric was woven out of the warp of Aryan and the woof of Dravidian and other elements. The pattern which emerged out of the mingling of the pre-Aryan and the Aryan was itself sufficiently complex, but to this were added the elements which came from contacts with the West and the East. The Kharosthi

script was a gift of Iran while the development of geometry and astronomy was stimulated, if not fostered by contacts with Egypt and Greece. It is surely significant that words like *pustak, kali* and *kalam* were taken over from the Greeks. We thus have some knowledge of the contribution to Indian culture from Greek, Persian and Egyptian sources, but we have no definite idea of the contribution made by regions in the east. One may perhaps trace the influence of China on some of the crafts of southern India. Equally, the suggestion of Mongolian origin for some of the customs and traditions in eastern India is unmistakable.

Though our knowledge of the influence of eastern countries on Indian culture is not definite, there can be little doubt that there were such contributions. The contacts with Indonesia, Indo-China, Malaya and Burma were close and intimate for many centuries. The traces of Indian culture and civilisation in these areas are even today vivid. Cultural exchange is however always a two-way traffic. Even when one of the participants is convinced of his superiority and the other accepts a position of inferiority — as was the case, for many decades, of men and women of European and African origin in the United States of America — the weaker affects his stronger partner in subtle and sometimes insidious ways. Where the parties are more or less equal, their influence upon one another is both deeper and more lasting. We know that South India had established commercial, political and cultural relations with the regions of South-East Asia for centuries. Even if we cannot indicate what exact influence these contacts had on the evolution of Indian culture, they must be responsible for some of the differences we find in the customs, habits, social

institutions and architectural patterns between North and South India and within South India itself.

Even before the advent of the Moslems, Indian culture was thus a rich and complex pattern with a wide range and variety that defies easy generalisation. There was room in this culture for the secular and the other-worldly, for the theist and the atheist, with all intermediate variations of faith. The Buddha who refused to answer questions about the existence of God was as much a creator of Indian culture as the God-intoxicated sages whose verses are contained in the Upanishads. The merchant and the priest, the soldier and the sailor, the saint and the sinner had each his place on the Indian scene. People are at times surprised by the juxtaposition of the religious and the profane in the temple architecture of India. The answer may be sought partly in the manifold origin and expression of Indian culture and civilisation and partly in India's early recognition that variety and diversity are essential characteristics of the Real.

So long as India accepted the diversity of her peoples and yet unified them in a larger whole, she remained one of the major centres of culture and civilisation in the ancient world. The flowering of the Indian genius in what may be called the Age of the Buddha, from five hundred years before to five hundred years after Christ, is one of the marvels of human history. During this period, there was the greatest liberty in social experience and experiment. Even at the time of the Emperor Harshavardhana, we find the greatest latitude in religious and social thought and the widest toleration for Buddhism, Jainism and various forms of the Hindu faith. Soon after, there was a

narrowing of interests and a growing rigidity in intellectual attitudes and social forms. The rise of neo-Brahmanism saw also a growing intolerance of social differences and a more rigid insistence on conformity in belief and thought as well as conduct. One cannot help feeling that the repudiation of the values of toleration and co-existence also brought about a weakening of the intellectual and moral energy of the Indian of the day. It is perhaps not accidental that the decay of ancient India began with the decay of the broad toleration and liberality that had characterised Indian life and thought throughout the age of the Buddha.

II

The first appearance of Islam on the Indian scene added to the variety and complexity of Indian life, but did not involve any break with the Indian attitude to the world. For one thing, Islam did not come as a simple or unilinear force. Nor was it completely alien, for Islamic culture was itself the result of action and counteraction among many forces. Among them one has to count the impact of Buddhism on the Essenes who in turn had influenced Christian thought. Also, Indian philosophy had at least a thousand years ago reached as far west as Greece and Egypt. There can be little doubt that some of these influences had reached the Arab mind either directly or through Greek, Jewish and Christian intermediaries even before the advent of Islam. Nor must we forget how the simple teaching of the Quran was soon overlaid with elements derived from Greek, Roman and

Persian sources. By the time Moslem influence became dominant in India, Arab mathematics and science and possibly Arab philosophy had established more direct contacts with Indian achievements in these fields.

It is also often forgotten that the first advent of the Moslems in India was not as conquerors or rulers, but as traders and navigators. More than half a century before Mohammed bin Qasim appeared on the borders of Sind, Arab traders had established trading outposts in South India which served as ports of call in their voyages to Indo-China and China. The existence of contemporary graves proves that there were already Arab settlements in these areas in the first half of the seventh century. Some idea of Arab influence on this region can be gathered from the legend of the last king of Calicut. He is reported to have accepted Islam and gone to Mecca on Haj, leaving behind the Zamorin as his Viceroy. Even the word *Mopla* applied to the descendants of Arab sailors is, it is said, derived from the Indian word *Mopilla,* which means a bridegroom. The custom of a Mopla anointing the Zamorin on his accession also continued for many centuries. All these facts indicate that exchange on the commercial and the cultural planes had started long before there was any indication of military and political impact. In fact, it is generally held that Mohammed bin Qasim's attack on Sind was the result of the failure of the Sind king to give protection to Arab traders in his territories.

In one of my books, *The Indian Heritage,* I have indicated in some detail some of the results of the impact of Islam on India. It is hardly necessary to

repeat here all that I have said, but I may sum up the situation by saying that there is hardly any aspect of Indian life that has not been affected in some way or the other as a result of this impact. Over a thousand years of contact and a largely common life profoundly affected the form and content of Moslem and Hindu society. An Indian Moslem is in some ways different from a Moslem anywhere else. Similarly, a Hindu of post-mediaeval India has something which distinguishes him from Hindus of earlier days. Every Indian of today, whether Moslem or Hindu, is therefore in a sense the inheritor of a common heritage.

So long as these two major ingredients of Indian life in the middle ages lived at peace, everything was well with India. Agriculture and industry prospered and the arts of war and peace flourished in a way that attracted the admiration and envy of people from the farthest lands. For many Europeans, India was in this age El Dorado or the promised land where all religions were respected and men lived a life of ease and culture. Akbar who has become the symbol of Indian civilisation in the middle ages was able to establish a magnificent empire because he worked in conformity with the genius of India and sought to combine in one system her diverse religious and linguistic groups. He held the balance even among the Hindu, the Indian-born Muslim and the Muslim immigrant from outside and strove to use the special gifts of each in serving the interests of India. Aurangzeb who was a man of great individual ability still failed to preserve that empire and in fact led to its downfall because he denied the Indian tradition of toleration for differences and sought to exalt the Indian-born Muslim above both the Hindu and the Muslim immigrant.

If one analyses the causes which led Aurangzeb to disrupt the national system which Akbar had so strenuously built up, one is forced to the conclusion that the synthesis and fusion of culture in India had been more on the emotional plane than on the intellectual. Simple people living in rural areas had found a common way of life. They made mutual adjustments in order to live and let live. Persons of deep religious and mystic insight penetrated behind the trappings of doctrinal and ritual differences and saw the fundamental unity of spiritual life. Indian saints and seers who were the finest blossom of this synthesis of cultures bear testimony to the unity of the human spirit, but there was unfortunately no corresponding synthesis on the planes of philosophy and speculation. Intellectuals with rare exceptions lived in a world of limited perspective. No sustained attempt was made to fuse the intellectual content of the two great religious systems. The fusion achieved by the mystics and saints was intuitive, not intellectual, and failed to produce among the educated minority that integration of outlook which could have withstood the challenge of change and circumstances. This lack of intellectual integration is not only a major cause for the comparative sterility of Indian philosophy in recent centuries but has also encouraged fissiparous tendencies which ultimately led to the partition of the country into separate States.

III

The process of enrichment and diversification of Indian culture has however continued in spite of lack of intellectual fusion. The advent of the West has since the beginnings of the sixteenth century profoundly affected our national history. Contacts which began on the commercial plane led to political domination because of failings in our national character some of which I propose to discuss tomorrow. Today I would only point out that political domination by the West has been responsible for many ills in our social and economic life, but the enforced association has also compelled a reassessment of our own institutions and ways of life. European political ideas and institutions have modified our earlier conceptions and made us pay greater attention to the rights of the individual. Western technology is bringing about a revolution in our industry and agriculture, but the most important contribution of the West is a new scientific outlook which even if not unknown to India had never before become pervasive in Indian society.

Western man came to India when he was undergoing a profound revolution—perhaps the most far-reaching mankind has known till now—in the substitution of a scientific, in place of an authoritarian, outlook. Mediaeval India and mediaeval Europe followed more or less the same patterns of production and distribution in agriculture and industry and held similar views about man and his relation to society and the world. Not only had they many things in common but they also shared common inheritances from the past. Europe has since then travelled far

while the rest of the world is yet resting largely in the same stage of civilisation. In consequence, the differences between modern and mediaeval Europe are far greater than those between mediaeval and ancient Europe, or between mediaeval Europe and any other part of the world in the middle age. These developments in Europe in the last three hundred years have brought about changes that make modern Europe a completely new human phenomenon.

The major factor which brought about this change is the growth of the scientific attitude. Since the seventeenth century, there has been an astonishing advance in scientific knowledge but even more important is the spread of the scientific spirit. Europe brought to India something of this new awakening. The scientific temper may not yet have become ingrained in our minds, but the impact of the scientific attitude has for ever shattered the old moulds of our thought and initiated far-reaching changes in methods of production and distribution, in social relations and religious attitudes. The hierarchical structure of society is being steadily replaced by a more democratic form. Vested interests based on birth are being gradually liquidated. Ideas of equality have transformed relations among groups and individuals. In a word, the principles of Indian society are being reconstituted and a new meaning given to India's age-old search for achieving unity and harmony in the midst of diversity.

Increasing unification of the world through scientific and technological advances has given a special point to the ancient Indian exaltation of the virtues of toleration and co-existence. The process of intellectual

renaissance which began in Europe in the seventeenth century led to astonishing advances in theoretical knowledge. This in turn has led to a control over the forces of nature which was beyond the dream of man in earlier ages. In consequence, the world has been unified as never before. Communications between continents are swifter and easier today than among provinces of the same country only a hundred years ago. The whole world has thus become a neighbourhood and demands the development of neighbourly feelings among all men. In the past, man has survived and even triumphed by adapting himself to his environment. Today he is increasingly moulding the environment to his own purposes and working towards a situation where natural forces will be instruments for the fulfilment of his desires. We cannot say that man has yet mastered nature but he has gone far enough in that direction to warrant the hope that one day nature will be a malleable instrument in his hands.

This astonishing transformation of the human situation has however brought with it certain attendant dangers that threaten the very survival of man. In the past when man had not achieved his present control over the forces of nature, impediments like mountains and oceans partly protected him from his own mistakes and follies. Even if disaster overtook a particular human society or culture, there was always a possibility that the human species and its achievements would be preserved in some other part of the world. Man's increasing control over the forces of nature has obliterated these natural barriers. In the modern world, human culture and civilisation can be preserved or destroyed only on a global scale. The manufacture of atomic and hydrogen bombs and the threat of the

manufacture of still more dreadful instruments of destruction have created a situation where different peoples with different outlooks must learn to tolerate if not also to respect one another. The only alternative is the threat of a common annihilation for all. In the context of technological unification of the world, the principle of co-existence of different outlooks and systems has thus assumed a new urgency and importance.

India's tradition and history have given a special meaning to her championship of the principle of co-existence among different peoples and outlooks of the modern world. India has learnt from her history that individuals cannot be reduced to standardised units. She has also learnt that groups and communities always seek to maintain their special character. Any attempt at standardisation or regimentation only leads to conflict and dismemberment. Indian history has also taught that diversity need not be an enemy to unity. Provided differences are reconciled within a flexible system, such diversity may become a source of strength and richness to human life. Her insistence on the acceptance of co-existence in international affairs is an attempt to project her experience to the outside world. To be universal has always been the quest of India. Today, in her acceptance of all values received till now and in her readiness to welcome still newer values, she offers a promise for the fulfilment of her quest within her own frontiers and in the wider world outside.

Gauhati,
20th February 1961

AUTHORITARIANISM AND RESTRICTION OF KNOWLEDGE

In my first lecture I referred to one of the greatest lessons which Indian History has not only for the Indian people but for the world at large. When Buddhism and Hinduism flourished side by side, as in the days of Asoka or of Harsha, India also flourished. When one sought to curb the other, both in the end suffered. Similarly, when Akbar found a formula for the co-existence of Hinduism and Islam, India attained the greatest heights of mediaeval culture. When in Aurangzeb's regime their co-operation was disrupted, India again fell on evil days. The experience of India has shown time and again that the acceptance of diversity and co-existence of differences can alone ensure the survival of man. They explain the astonishing continuity of Indian culture and offer the hope that man can survive in spite of the ideological differences which today divide the world. I propose to discuss today another lesson of Indian history which is of special singificance to the Indian people.

I

There can be no denying that throughout our long history, Indian society has been basically authoritarian in structure and attitude. Society was hierarchical and each individual had his specified place in the hierarchy. Whatever may have been the case in very early times, this hierarchical structure soon

became rigid. In consequence, society became stratified and movement from one strata to another became at first difficult and later almost impossible. Not only so, the hierarchical structure was reflected within each strata and within the members of the same family. Early Indian literature recognised only four *varnas* or castes. Even these were initially functional rather than hereditary. Soon however caste lost its functional character and became a matter of birth. At the same time castes proliferated. Instead of four *varnas*, we already find in Indian society in the early historic period hundreds of castes and sub-castes which were sharply differentiated from one another. Intercourse among the sub-castes became as difficult as movement among the castes. Before the end of the first millennium of the Christian era, the Brahmins in Eastern India had become sharply differentiated into Kulins and non-Kulins, and it was almost an offence for a non-Kulin to claim equality with a Kulin. Even the Muslims were affected by this pervasive influence of caste and Indian Muslims show sharp differences between Ashraf and Atraf and among Syeds, Mughals, Pathans and Sheikhs in spite of the clear injunction of the Quran against such social stratification.

The same authoritarian structure is seen within the Indian family. Agricultural communities all over the world tend to be patriarchal, but the principle was carried farther in India than perhaps anywhere else. There are cases on record where a son killed his mother at the behest of the father. Parasuram has been accepted as one of the incarnations of Vishnu and yet by modern standards, he would have been condemned as a matricide. We find in the Ramayana that Rama left his throne and went into the forest at the bidding

of his father even though his mother pleaded with him at least to stay at Ayodhya. In the Mahabharata, Gandhari's warnings and exhortations had hardly any influence on Duryodhana or Dusshasana even though they were her sons. There is a Sanskrit proverb that the father is an emblem of religion and symbol of divinity and all gods are satisfied if he is pleased. It shows the extent to which the father's authority was supreme in the Indian family in early days.

It was however not only the authority of the father that was supreme. Age has been honoured in all earlier societies but again this was carried further in India than perhaps in any other civilised community of the world. We find that within the family, an elder brother held a position of exceptional prestige and honour. According to the Ramayana, all the four sons of Dasaratha were emanations of Vishnu and they were all born on the same day. Rama could have been at most a few hours older than Bharata or Lakshmana and yet these brothers, younger only by a few hours, treated Rama with a reverence that divided them almost by a generation.

The members of the Indian family were tied by relations of esteem and protection rather than affection and equality. The wife was not her husband's equal but his subordinate and remained so all her life. In the words of Chanakya, a woman was dependent on her father in childhood, on her husband during her maturity and on her son in her old age. Children even when they grew up continued to remain subservient to their elders. There is of course another famous saying of Chanakya that a child is to be nurtured for five years, disciplined till he is sixteen and thereafter

treated as an equal and a friend. This advice was however hardly ever observed and a son was treated as almost a minor even if he himself was a father or grandfather.

The hierarchical structure of Indian society based on its authoritarian character had many unfortunate results. I shall refer later to the way in which it sapped the moral stamina of the people, but may here bring out two harmful consequences that followed immediately. On the one hand, opportunity was unequally distributed among the members of society and on the other, knowledge was restricted to select groups and never became widespread throughout the community. The far-reaching and unfortunate effects of the denial of opportunity and the restriction of knowledge have shown themselves again and again in Indian history and yet we have not learnt the lesson fully to this day.

Let us take up the denial of opportunity first. It is universal experience that ability is individual rather than communal. In any strata of society, there are able persons and men of inferior quality. A hierarchical structure of society denies this almost self-evident truth and thus deprives society of the services of some of its ablest members. We find one of the most telling examples of this in the story of Ekalavya in the Mahabharata. He was born in a class which under the existing social set-up was not entitled to the knowledge of archery. Nevertheless, he had both the desire and the capacity to acquire such knowledge. He sought instruction from the famous teacher Dronacharyya but was refused. Nevertheless, he persisted and through his own efforts became one of the greatest

masters of the art. Arjuna who was the favourite pupil of Drona was astonished by the evidence of his skill and became jealous of him. Arjuna complained to Drona that the master had taught Ekalavya secrets that Arjuna did not know. Drona at first denied that he had taught Ekalavya any skills but when Ekalavya still declared that Drona was his teacher, Drona demanded from Ekalavya fees for the instruction that he had never given. He asked Ekalavya to cut off his thumb and thus make all his skill and knowledge useless.

There is perhaps no more cruel story of social snobbery and denial of opportunity to the able. Ekalavya had been denied what he could claim by virtue of his ability and overcame all difficulties through his own efforts. Even then, the cruel customs of the day made all his ability and perseverance futile. Drona and Arjuna perhaps thought that they had removed a potential rival, but in fact they lost an ally who may have made all the difference to their fortunes. It was not only Ekalavya who suffered. He was denied the opportunity of developing and exercising his innate gifts but society also suffered, for it was denied the services of an exceptionally gifted member who could have contributed greatly to the general welfare.

Ekalavya is only one example of the way in which authoritarian society suffers because of its refusal to utilise its resources in the most effective way. One may generalise and say that whenever opportunities are denied to all members of the community, it means that some with the quality of leadership can never reach the top. Every community must have leaders at every level and if the able do not provide the leadership, it is provided by those who are favoured by birth

but may not possess the necessary qualities. Nothing is more harmful for the community than weak and inept leadership and we have in Indian history many examples of the suffering which people had to undergo because of ineffectual rulers. It is fascinating to speculate what would have been the history of India if Asoka had been succeeded by a king of equal ability or if Akbar's successor had been another Akbar. Society has always had to suffer under inept leaders, but the dangers of unsatisfactory leadership are far greater today because of the interlinking of the fortunes of peoples. In the past, a weak or vicious king meant suffering for his own people, but other countries remained largely unaffected. Today, ineffective leadership in one country has immediate repercussions on the fate of others, and may even lead to world conflagration and the destruction of man.

It is not only at the top that a community suffers if opportunity is denied to all its members. Leadership at the top is certainly decisive both for weal and woe, but its effects are felt at almost every level of the community. If a person who has an aptitude for medicine is denied the opportunity of medical training, the community loses a potentially first-rate physician or surgeon and has to satisfy itself with a substitute who is mediocre or worse. The man may become an inefficient lawyer so that the community has to suffer a bad lawyer and lose a good doctor. The same thing applies to agriculturists, businessmen, industrialists and administrators. Failure to use available ability at any level leads to social impoverishment by denying the community goods and services to which it is entitled and which it could have enjoyed by more effective use of its members.

II.

The authoritarian structure of society also leads to the restriction of knowledge to special sections of the people. This is a direct corollary to the denial of equal opportunity to all. It is obvious that where opportunity is not equal, knowledge and special skill become the prerogative of a privileged coterie. Those in authority realise much sooner than the masses that knowledge is power and consequently, they seek to guard such knowledge as their exclusive preserve. The gap between the privileged minority and the rest of the people increases continually. We have had in India the example of highly intellectual minorities exercising almost dictatorial control over a vast illiterate mass. In the end, even the minority suffers under such a dispensation, for when the gap between the privileged few and the exploited many becomes too great, the community is overtaken by disaster either through foreign attack which it cannot resist because of loss of social cohesion or through the decay of knowledge which makes it incapable of facing the challenge of changing times and circumstances.

Man can attain and maintain knowledge only through strenuous endeavour. Eternal vigilance is the price of not only liberty but also intellectual achievement. Where knowledge is spread throughout the community, the chances are that such knowledge will not only be preserved for posterity but also continually enhanced. There is a competitive element in human nature which drives the individual to try to excel. If knowledge is confined to a small coterie, its members

are already assured of pre-eminence and thus have no incentive to further effort. If knowledge is widespread in the community, there is the possibility of furthering knowledge in two ways. A specially gifted individual makes a special effort to surpass his fellows and at the same time the number of persons who are likely to make such effort is much larger.

Where knowledge is restricted to small groups, there is also the constant danger of its being altogether lost. Indian history provides a number of interesting examples of this. It is generally agreed that India was one of the first countries to discover the use of iron and also probably steel. There are references in Arab literature to steel as Indian iron, and it is well known that Europe learnt to make steel from the Arabs. In fact even today, *toledo* and *damascus* are bywords for steel of quality.

While India was a pioneer in iron and steel making, she was soon surpassed first by the Arab countries and later by Europe. The only reason can be that in India making iron and steel became the preserve of a select group. They guarded the knowledge as a trade secret and even fathers did not pass the secrets to their sons easily. In fact, in many cases, teachers or fathers would not part with their secret knowledge till they felt the approach of death. Since however death does not always give advance notice, many secrets died with their exclusive possessors. This holds not only of special techniques of iron and steel making but also of many medicines and crafts in which early Indian advances were wiped out through the loss of secret techniques not shared freely with the whole community.

In sharp contrast to the Indian practice of restricting knowledge to selected groups, the Arabs and later the Europeans aimed at the general dissemination of knowledge. In fact, one of the greatest contributions of Islam to world civilisation and culture is the emphasis on making knowledge universal. The very first verse of the Quran started with an admonition to the Prophet Mohammed that he must read. When he declared that he was illiterate and could not read, the exhortation was repeated thrice. Later, the Prophet himself taught his people that every member of the community, man, woman and child, must be given the opportunity of education. He urged students that they must go to the farthest regions of the world in the search for learning. Sayings of the Prophet also exalt the virtues of knowledge by declaring that the ink of the scholar is more precious than the blood of the martyr. The astonishing progress of the Arab peoples in the first century of the Islamic era and the even more remarkable progress of the Europeans since the Renaissance can be traced directly to the spread of knowledge through the entire community.

The Arab decline began with the restriction of knowledge to privileged groups. Europe on the other hand marched steadily forward by expanding the facilities of education till opportunity has today become coterminus with society. The U.S.A. was perhaps the first State to write into its laws the obligation to provide elementary education on a free and compulsory basis for the entire people. Since then, one western State after another has sought to provide similar facilities to all its members. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in both ancient and mediaeval India, the State did not accept the responsibility of providing

elementary education to the people. Whatever patronage the State offered was for specially selected groups—Rishis in ancient and Pandits and Ulemas in mediaeval India—but in neither case did the State recognise its duty to provide general education for the people at large. Elementary education was thus left entirely in the charge of the community or of philanthropic individuals, while the State made occasional grants for only higher education or specialised research. It certainly seems surprising to us today that the State should offer some assistance for higher education but none at all for elementary education.

Most of the ills from which India has suffered throughout the ages may be attributed to the restriction of knowledge to favoured individuals or groups. A microscopic minority was highly intellectual and on them depended the present prosperity and the future progress of the community. The majority who were denied knowledge were inevitably denied privileges The minority became, as it were, the guardians of social morality, prestige and welfare, and the majority felt no special urge in defending any of these social values. This created an essentially unstable society which I have sometimes described as an inverted pyramid resting on its apex. Was it surprising that attacks from outside or disturbances from within should again and again upset the precarious balance of such society ?

It is not only the exploited majority but also the privileged minority who have ultimately suffered from such restriction of knowledge. To take an example each from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In the Ramayana, Indrajeet or Meghnad had acquired special skills which he kept as his own secret. The

result was that when Lakshmana came to kill him in his own temple, there was no one to come to his aid. Nor could Ravana find after Indrajeet's death another general who had his skill or knowledge. Even more telling is the example from the Mahabharata. Arjuna had taught his son Abhimanyu how to penetrate into the Chakravyuha. Even Abhimanyu however did not know how to get out of it. The result was that when Arjuna was away and the Kauravas made a Chakravyuha to attack the Pandavas, Abhimanyu was able to get into the Vyuha but none else of his army could follow him. He himself did not know how to get out and the Kauravas were able to kill him after isolating him. If the secret of the Chakravyuha — both entry into it and egress out of it — had been known to other Pandavas, Abhimanyu would not have lost his life. If at least Abhimanyu himself had known the technique of getting out, he might have saved himself. Restriction of knowledge however proved fatal in his case. One may add that such restriction of knowledge has proved dangerous, if not fatal to India time and again in her history.

III

The authoritarian restriction of knowledge carries with it, as I have already briefly indicated in the examples of iron and steel and various kinds of medicine, the possibility of total loss of knowledge. Perhaps even more dangerous is the certainty of fostering fissiparous tendencies within the community. A rigid hierarchy and unequal distribution of privileges — and the right to knowledge is the greatest of all

human privileges — inevitably make for loss of social cohesion among members of the community. Because the people are divided into groups with separate loyalities to separate ideas based on the stage of their knowledge and development, India has in spite of her ideal of unity suffered through the ages from an absence of national integration and integrity. This has in the past led to misfortunes and may, unless checked in time, lead to disaster in the modern age.

Historians have pointed out that one major reason why Indian armies were often unable to withstand the attack of invading forces was the lack of cohesion among the Indian troops. Indian armies fought not as one unit but as a combination of groups or jathas. There was no sense of common nationhood and little fellow-feeling or solidarity among all the members of the army. Nor was there any sense of solidarity between the army and the people at large. Where an entire people are involved, no invader however powerful can make an easy conquest. In Indian history, on the other hand, we find that the majority of the people showed little interest or concern for the fate of their armies. There are accounts that the cultivator went on tilling the land while invading armies fought nearby. Because fighting was the prerogative of a special caste, other sections of the people felt little or no responsibility in defending the country. The result was that even a single defeat of the army led to a total collapse of resistance to the aggressor.

The insidious effects of the authoritarian structure of society are seen in our national and social life in another way. Throughout our history, people have depended exclusively on the leadership of single

individuals. This is a universal characteristic in all early societies, but in many societies outside India, pre-eminence of the individual came to mean in course of time that the leader was recognised as 'first among equals,' while in India, throughout the historic period and to this day, the leader has been exalted as almost a demi-god. In consequence, throughout our history — and the tendency persists — loyalty has been directed not to the country or the State but to a person. In the army, the general as an individual commanded personal allegiance but paid little attention to system or organisation. The loss of a great leader shakes all communities in the world, but in India, such loss has very often led to the entire breakdown of a system.

India has had her share of able rulers. In fact, the proportion of able rulers has if anything been on the high side. Nevertheless, the Indian State has almost always lacked in stability and duration. In Western countries, the loyalty is to the State and not to the individual. In their armies, greater reliance is paid on training and discipline than on the bravery or skill of individual generals. We therefore find that in a Western army, when the general is killed, the soldiers fight with even greater vehemence and very often achieve victory. In the Indian army on the other hand, the defeat or capture of the general means immediate rout of the entire army. At the battle of Shamugarh, Dara Shikhoh's army was winning. Some of his advisers who were secretly on Aurangzeb's side advised him to come down from his elephant and lead a cavalry charge to complete the victory. As soon as Dara Shikhoh did so, they spread the rumour that Dara Shikhoh had been killed. When the soldiers did not see Dara Shikhoh, they immediately started to run

away even though till that time they had been winning. Victory was thus turned into defeat because the soldiers missed the immediate and visual leadership of their general. It is interesting to speculate what might have been the history of India if Dara Shikhoh and not Aurangzeb had succeeded to the Mughal throne.

The tendency to acquiesce with evil has been one of our national failings through the ages and may be attributed directly to this personality cult. Because we depended exclusively on our leaders, we left to them to think and act and were content only to follow. Even when we saw evil and disapproved of it, we waited for those in authority to take the first step to check it. Again, because our loyalty was to a person rather than to a principle, we felt baffled when the person in authority was himself the wrong-doer. In the Mahabharata, Bhishma and Drona disapprove of the action of the Kauravas, but even in the court scene where Dusshasana seeks to dishonour Draupadi, neither intervenes to stop the outrage. Their attachment to Duryodhana the king proves stronger than their loyalty to the principle of justice.

This supine inactivity before evil—which is a blot on our national character—continues to this day. It is a matter of almost everyday experience that when we see evil, we sometimes shut our eyes or even if we condemn it, we are not generally prepared to take action to check or remove the evil. In the unfortunate disturbances which have occurred in different parts of India in the last twenty years—and the incidents in Assam last year or at Jabalpur only recently are a cruel reminder of the continuance of the evil—the miscreants have hardly ever been more than a small fraction,

perhaps at most five per cent of the population. The vast majority of the people have disliked their action and disapproved of it but rarely taken action to stop them.

There is another evil which follows from the undue exaltation of the individual. We tend to exaggerate his virtues and so long as he is in power, we overlook or ignore his faults. Should he however fall from power, he also falls from grace. We then tend to condemn him even more than he deserves and magnify his smallest faults into major crimes. In a sense, we compensate for our earlier servility by later insolence. In either case, our relations are not the normal human relations where we accept men and women with their qualities and their faults and seek to build up social progress through co-operative effort. Instead, there is complete dependence on the leader or leaders during the period of their ascendancy and a total loss of initiative and incentive among the followers. When the leader is no longer there, nobody with the requisite ability and experience can immediately come forward to take his place, as our social outlook has not provided the conditions for the development of secondary and tertiary leadership.

IV

The restriction of knowledge to selected groups not only led to the loss of intellectual incentives to the able but has perhaps been even more harmful for the community as a whole. It has encouraged the growth of intellectual snobbery and close-mindedness among the privileged and rank passivity among the masses. In the earlier phases of Indian history, the Indian people were not afraid of learning from others. They borrowed freely the Kharoshthi script from the Persians. They took up the geometry and the astronomy of the Greeks without any mental reservation. Not only did they borrow but they improved upon what they borrowed. Before the end of the first millennium of the Christian era, this attitude of open-mindedness had however come to an end.

It is interesting to note that the age of the Buddha when restrictions on knowledge were relaxed was also the period of the greatest glory of India in almost every sphere of life. As the impulse of the Buddhist revolution gradually weakened and the rigidity of caste exclusiveness increased, there was an inevitable loss of intellectual resilience. There are records of Chinese translations of Indian classics throughout this period, but we have hardly any evidence of Indian translations of Chinese classics. In fact, from this period onwards, Indians seemed averse to drawing upon the accumulated knowledge of the outside world. Not only so but Indians who in the past had been among the most intrepid sailors of the world and had travelled to the farthest corners of the then known world slowly became

confined to their own homeland. Very soon, a voyage across the sea was declared a social crime and those who dared to go abroad were condemned to be social outcastes.

The failure to draw upon the increasing knowledge of people outside India has had serious effects on Indian life. As she fell behind in technology, not only her economy weakened but her defences could no longer stand attacks from outside. In individual strength or bravery, the Indian is not inferior to any other people. Nevertheless, smaller bands of soldiers from outside were again and again able to defeat Indian armies. This happened mainly for two reasons. One was inferior arms and strategy due to inferior technology and military craft and the other was undue dependence on individual leadership. Mohammed Ghori was able to defeat the huge army of Prithviraj partly because of superior weapons and partly because Prithviraj was not able to master his strategy which skilfully combined advance and retreat to break the solidarity of the Rajput soldiery. Babar has left on record that he was able to overcome the mighty army of Ibrahim Lodi because of superior use of cannonade. It is noteworthy that in spite of the lesson of these victories, Indian rulers did not develop strategy or technology on any large scale. Cannons had given Babar his victory over the Pathans, but even the Mughal emperors did not develop proper ordnance factories where cannons could be made by improved techniques. Even the few cannons that were made in India were cast by Turkish or European craftsmen who were brought from outside. Neither did the Mughals develop their navy, even though the advent of the Europeans on the Indian shores had brought clear and

unmistakable evidence of the danger which seapower posed.

Indians complain of the way in which Indian industries and trade were ruined after the establishment of British authority in India. There is no denying that the British used political power to curb Indian and foster British industry and commerce. Some of the laws prohibiting the import of Indian textiles into the United Kingdom and giving British traders unfair advantages over their Indian competitors are too well known to require detailed comment. Nevertheless, it seems certain that even without these political measures, British industry and commerce would have prevailed over the Indian because of the technological advances taking place in Europe. The invention of the steam engine combined with the introduction of spinning and weaving mills made it certain that British production of textiles would improve in quality and increase enormously in volume. Superior means of transport ensured that cheaper and better goods would gradually flood the Indian market. As Indian industry and commerce dwindled, pressure on the land grew and poverty became widespread. Growing poverty was due to lack of technological initiative and in turn led to greater technological backwardness. A vicious circle was thus set up where poverty led to primitive modes of production and in turn led to greater poverty.

Authoritarianism, denial of opportunity to all and the restriction of knowledge to selected groups have been three of the major factors for India's misfortunes in the past. It is therefore not surprising that with the attainment of Independence, it became a major objective of the Indian people to build up

democratic institutions where equality of opportunity and universality of knowledge would guard against the repetition of the past tragedies of Indian history. One may say that the Indian renaissance began when the doors of knowledge were thrown open to all. The British connection has led to untold individual and national suffering of the Indian people, but equally it was this connection which for the first time sought to replace authoritarianism and personal rule by system and the rule of law. It had little regard for Indian traditions or prejudices and brushed aside unceremoniously the existing vested interests. Its reasons for doing so may have been the furtherance of its own imperial interests, but it did offer opportunities of education and advancement to all who were willing and able. The spread of Western education with its emphasis on rationality and scientific enquiry created a new intellectual curiosity among the Indian people and taught them to question institutions and values that till then had been accepted as dispensations of Providence. They also learnt to protest against evil and not acquiesce in it. India stood up against the mightiest empire in history and refused to compromise, and the result was the achievement of Indian independence and the establishment of the Indian Republic. Rightly that Republic has declared that all her citizens shall be equal in the eye of law, enjoy equal opportuinities in education, wealth and welfare and work for freedom and prosperity of the world through peaceful and democratic methods.

Gauhati,
21st February 1961

THE LESSON OF 1857

1957 marked the centenary of two events of far-reaching importance in Indian history. The firsrt was the great struggle of 1857 which many people regard as the first War of Indian Independence. The other was the foundation of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. A contrast between these two historic events and an inquiry into the causes of the immediate failure of the former and the lasting success of the latter are interesting and instructive. Congressmen who have worked for the political liberation and are working for the social and economic uplift of the Indian people would find a special interest in such a study, both in order to avoid the mistakes of the past and shape the policies of the future.

The upheaval of 1857 failed in its immediate objective. It did however succeed in bringing to an end the rule of the East India Company and its replacement by rule by the British Crown. It also paved the way for the ultimate political freedom of India. India was not subjugated by the British in one day and the process of revolt and liberation also stretched over a number of years. In fact one may say that the struggle for Indian liberation began from the day on which the British appeared as potential rulers of the country and did not end till the last vestiges of British rule had disappeared.

The violent struggle of 1857 failed, but the quiet beginning of a new age symbolised by the foundation of the universities has led to the most far-reaching changes. It is sometimes said that Western education was imposed upon an unwilling subject nation by its foreign masters. No serious student of history can subscribe to such a view. In fact, the East India Company had initially reserved its attention and funds for oriental education alone. It was the combination of a group of far-sighted Indian and some foreigners of vision that compelled the Company to reverse its policy and introduce Western education into India. Thus began a process of co-operation between East and West which may well hold the key to the future prosperity, and indeed the survival of man.

I

The British established their rule in India gradually and almost imperceptibly. There was at first no overt act which could be regarded as conquest or subjugation. Some of the actions of the Portuguese suggest that they had thought of conquest, conversion and empire from the days of their first appearance here, but the British did not seem to have any such objective in the beginning. It was the action of the French which provoked counteraction from the British. Initially, both the French and the British came as traders and were more concerned with security and profit than conquest. They soon discovered that a friendly ruler meant not only protection but in certain cases favours in their competition with rival traders.

It however took a long time to spell out the full implications of this discovery. At first they interfered in the affairs of local rulers and step by step they came to exercise sovereignty themselves. Even when they had become virtual rulers, the East India Company remained for several decades more interested in trading profits than in good administration.

The British did not establish their position without a long and in some cases a bitter struggle. Their first important foothold was in Bengal, whose last independent ruler Siraj-ud-Daula may have had many faults, but he realised from the beginning that the British represented a menace to Indian independence. His political insight was not however matched by administrative efficiency or military prowess. He failed and so did Mir Qasim who attempted to check the depredations of the East India Company's servants. In other parts of India we have the same evidence of opposition to the British, but it was often sporadic and disjointed. The British played their cards cleverly and used one Indian power against another. But for the Nizam and the Marathas, Hyder Ali might have crushed the British in the South. Similarly but for the help which the Nizam gave, the British might have found it difficult to cope with the Marathas. At one stage, the Marathas seemed poised to establish their ascendancy over the whole country, but they did not succeed as they proved better soldiers than administrators. They dissipated their energies in fighting one another and other Indian communities, and in any case, their military power was shaken after the third battle of Panipat.

By 1800, the British had become the greatest

power in India, but they still maintained the pretence of owing allegience to the Mughal empire. Uncontrolled exercise of power was however slowly bringing about a change in the attitude of the Company and its agents. The Company's servants began to behave as if they were themselves the rulers of the land. This caused dissatisfaction among the better placed Indians. The Indian soldiers employed by the British also began to feel that they were becoming tools of a foreign power. There was as yet no concept of Indian nationhood but the soldiers vaguely felt that a foreign power was becoming the sovereign of the country. There were sporadic revolts early in the 19th century as seen in the records of local military uprisings in places so separate as Bengal and Madras. Because they were local the British were able to suppress them without much difficulty. By 1857 the discontent became sufficiently widespread to merit the name of a national uprising but even at this stage, some important sections of the Indian people sided with the British and helped them to overcome the challenge to British power.

There can be no simple or single explanation of any phenomenon which concerns large number of men. Different commentators will give differing weight to the various factors. It is therefore not surprising that there is and will be difference of opinion about the causes of the revolt of 1857. British historians have generally treated it as a purely military revolt. They point out that it was local, in as much as of the three Armies in India — the Bengal Army, the Madras Army and the Bombay Army — only the Bengal Army rebelled. They also point out that even in Northern India, the middle classes did not generally support the rebellion. On this, I will have to say something later. The Punjab was

generally with the British and in Bengal and Bihar, large sections of the people favoured the British. It was only in some parts of Oudh and Rohillakhand that the rebels had general popular support and the movement became almost a national uprising. Even in Oudh and Rohillakhand there were groups and areas which supported or acquiesced in British rule.

There is no doubt that the religious factor played an important role in the uprising, but some historians, Indian and British, have gone too far in saying that the revolt was due mainly to religious causes. Both among Hindus and Muslims there was a widespread belief that the East India Company was trying to tamper with their religion and turn them into Christians. Even enlightened measures for the spread of Western education or for the abolition of customs like the *sati* were cited as examples of insidious propaganda in favour of Christianity. The introduction of the greased cartridge was one of the immediate causes of the uprising and offers sure evidence of how religious passions contributed to the outburst. The fact that Hindus and Muslims fought side by side against the British, while at the same time both communities were found in the armies of the British, offers equally convincing evidence that the main issue in the conflict was not religious.

No one can deny that the growing impoverishment of the country was a major factor for the revolt. Strictly speaking, there have been no foreign rulers of India till the East India Company appeared on the scene. The Aryans may have come to India as invaders but they settled here. The same thing is true of the succeeding waves of conquerors and rulers.

Mohammed Ghori may have been a foreigner but he did not rule India. Kutub-ud-Din, the first Muslim Ruler of India, became completely Indian without any interest outside the country. His successors were mostly born Indians and had all their interests confined to this country. Similarly, Babar, when he conquered India, transferred his domicile from Kabul to Delhi. The later Mughals carried this identification so far that they have become the symbols of Indian rulers for the outside world. The British were the first rulers of India who retained their base outside the country and even after a hundred and fifty years' rule, remained aliens without any roots in the land.

Earlier rulers of India may have extorted money from their subjects but the money was spent within the country. It was during the British regime that for the first time in Indian history, wealth flowed out of the country as the result of deliberate governmental policy. The fact that the East India Company was primarily a trading concern made the situation worse. Its officers looked at everything from the angle of corporate and individual profit. They wanted high dividends for the company and large private fortunes for themselves. Their acts of omission and commission led to the destruction of indigenous industries and increased the already intolerable burden on the land. The British occupation of India thus led to the exploitation of the country in a sense and on a scale which have never been experienced before.

Some Indian historians hold that the uprising was the result of concerted action by a group of leaders who thought in terms of national freedom. They point out that regardless of religion or race, all the

participants in the rebellion hailed Bahadur Shah as their leader. They also argue that the whole course of the struggle proves that religious considerations could not have been the governing factor in the uprising. Both Hindus and Muslims fought against the British. Among the supporters of the British were found men of both communities. Besides, the slogans that were raised were in the main political or economic. This was perhaps inevitable, when the main participants on either side belonged to so many religions and communities.

The only conclusion we can draw is that like other major upheavals in human history, the struggle of 1857 was the result of many forces. Religious passion, patriotism, economic motives, personal pique, and feudal loyalty—all played their part in causing the outburst. Even superstition had an important role in determining the timing of the uprising. It was widely believed that the British power would last for only a hundred years, and would therefore come to an end before June 1857. If we are honest, we have to admit that the movement was not a unified one nor were the motives of their leaders unmixed. Different considerations weighed with different individuals and groups. Many tiny streams together make up a mighty river. Many elements of individual, communal, racial, class and national discontent combined to give to the outburst of 1857 its unprecedented intensity and volume. The reasons for its failure are also to be found in this complexity of its composition.

II

The struggle of 1857 did not lead to the achievement of Indian independence but it brought to an end the Company's rule. It also brought the British and the Indian people into a direct political relationship. There is a section of Indian opinion which blames this relationship for all our national ills. It attributes our poverty to British exploitation. It holds the British responsible for our lack of education and economic backwardness. It blames the British even for our moral failings. While there is no doubt that domination by a foreign power impoverished India, kept the people ignorant and uneducated and also weakened our national character, it is obvious that no foreign power could have conquered or held us in subjection unless there had been some major flaw in our own makeup.

Of the various factors which helped the British occupation of India, perhaps the most important was the existence of internal divisions within the country. These divisions were based not only on religion and language but also on limited territorial loyalities. Till very recent years, the majority of our people have thought themselves not as Indians but as belonging to a particular Province. In fact, in most of the Indian languages, there is no word which corresponds to a province or region. Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nad, Orissa or Oudh were thought of and described as countries. Their inhabitants regarded themselves—and perhaps to some extent still do so—as primarily Bengalees, Marathas, Punjabis, Tamilians, Oryans or Hindustanis and only secondarily as Indians.

In a country so vast as India and inhabited by people following different religions, some religious and provincial differences were and are perhaps unavoidable. What was and is unfortunate is the exaltation of smaller loyalties over larger ones. The worst example of this is seen in the division into castes, sects and communities. This has prevented the growth of national feeling and hindered common action on economic, political or social issues. It has also led to a sense of grievance in some and a feeling of snobbishness in others. Claims of caste or community have at time interfered even with the administration of justice. There may have been some merit in caste in a prehistoric past. I have tried to evaluate them in my book, *The Indian Heritage*. Caste has however no function in the India of today and has proved an unmitigated curse for the Indian people. Its evil effects have not remained confined to Hindus alone, but have affected Muslims and Christians as well. Never were the evils of caste more clearly seen than in 1857 when the Indian people tried to rise against their British rulers. On one side was a unified body of men accustomed to disciplined action and moved by common loyalty to their Queen and country. On the other were undisciplined bands of discontented men divided from one another on every issue except their hatred for the common enemy. The surprising thing is not that the Indians lost but that they could maintain the struggle for almost two years.

The British were gradually spreading their domination over the country but even then the Indians could not unite. Indian rulers were defeated one by one and generally with the help of other Indians. It is literally true to say that the British conquered India with Indian armies. This process continued over decades and is

clear evidence of the sorry state of Indian affairs. Even during 1857, the situation was not materially different. Pockets of resistance were overcome one by one with the help of predominantly Indian arms. But for the support of Punjab, Delhi could not have been occupied so easily. There was a general uprising in Oudh and Rohillakhand, but even in these areas, the British were able to secure help from local people. The armies in Madras and Bombay remained with the British throughout the struggle. In all areas, there were sections which supported the British and assured their final victory.

The upheaval of 1857 began with the revolt of the army. Even after they revolted, the soldiers could not offer a united front. Selfish considerations and personal jealousies weakened the units which rebelled. The commanders were at loggerheads with one another in almost every area. The leaders also intrigued against one another. Individualism was so rampant that rather than give credit to a rival, a captain could acquiesce in the defeat of his cause. There was no concerted move at any stage. In spite of the general unity of feelings, action was throughout disjointed and weak.

The clash of group and sectarian interests handicapped military action. These divisions proved even mere harmful in other ways. Small groups generally evoke narrow but intense loyalties. When the Indian people were divided into sections on a linguistic, religious or racial basis, the result was an attempt to glorify the peculiar customs, habits and beliefs of each. The parochial spirit cannot be strong when many groups meet on terms of equality. When rival customs and traditions are confronted with one another, the result is a relaxation in orthodoxy and a growth of the liberal

spirit. Sea-faring people have generally been quick in accepting new ideas. One main reason for this is that they meet new creeds and new institutions and begin to compare their traditional beliefs with those of other peoples. In contrast, land-locked people tend to cling to their own prejudices and superstitions. India lost her tradition of sea-faring many centuries ago. By the time the British came, the different sections of the Indian people were each entrenched in the narrow citadel of their own conservation.

Historians have observed that in military clashes between the Indian people and foreign invaders in recent centuries, the Indians have often been overpowered in spite of superior numbers. This was not due to any lack of personal bravery. We have hundreds of examples of supreme courage and reckless daring by individuals. The defeat of large Indian armies at the hand of small foreign forces was almost invariably due to inferiority in arms, strategy and discipline. Inferiority in these respects can be directly attributed to conservatism and lack of intellectual resilience. The Indian weapons were inferior because the people clung to traditional weapons even when better ones had been discovered and used elsewhere. Inferior strategy also grew out of the inability or unwillingness to learn the hard lessons of history. Inferior discipline arose out of unintelligent adherence to outmoded customs and divided loyalties. There was no third alternative between the two extremes of total repudiation of and unquestioning submission to a superior authority.

III

The establishment of British rule was due mainly to the loss of the qualities which in earlier ages had made India one of the pioneers of world civilisation. The spirit of adventure and experiment had declined. It had been replaced by conservatism and rigidity of outlook. 1857 in one sense marks the nadir of this process. 1857 also marks the foundation of the three modern universities which created the conditions for the restoration of that spirit.

It is on record that in ancient India, philosophers and thinkers questioned even the ultimate assumptions of thought. Students asked fearless and searching questions which often baffled the teachers. Islam also began as an intellectual rebellion which sought to replace revelation and authority by rationalism and intellectual judgment. Unfortunately for India, this spirit of enquiry and experiment had disappeared by the beginning of Muslim rule. Even Muslims who came from outside soon lost their scientific and questioning spirit under the pressure of local inertia. It is instructive to note that though the Mughals used cannons extensively in their warfare, they did little to improve them. In fact, even the traditional guns were generally cast by engineers from abroad. Thus by the time the British appeared on the scene, Indians had become essentially a conservative people. Individuals still occasionally showed extraordinary intellectual acumen, but by and large the people were sunk in intellectual apathy and inertia.

India had not lost her quality suddenly. The decay of intellectual freedom and growth of conser-

vatism was spread over many centuries. One aspect of the process was the tendency to resist new ideas. The other was an unintelligent adherence to old beliefs and customs even when they had outlived their utility. Since each group or individual conformed to what was customary, intelligent and co-ordinated action by individuals and groups became more difficult. They could react in a traditional way to a traditional situation but if the situation changed they were often at a loss. The slightest change in military tactics therefore led to defeat. What is worse, it encouraged the growth of a spirit which accepted the setback as ordained by providence and decreased the people's self-reliance and power of resistance.

The loss of the spirit of questioning and rebellion dulled the edge of the Indian intellect. The result was intellectual, moral and spiritual stagnation. The loss of intellectual resilience led to a weakening of the moral fibre. Once a people give up the pursuit of truth for its own sake, they become worldly-wise in a narrow sense. In such a context, selfish considerations tend to overpower national interest. Throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth century and even more markedly during the Indian struggle of 1857, individuals failed at crucial moments as they were more concerned with their personal interest than the interest of the nation, the state or religion. Loss of the scientific spirit thus meant loss of the spirit for service and sacrifice.

The establishment of the three universities may be regarded as the beginning of Western education in India. Old values and traditions were challenged. A new respect for scientific enquiry and personal liberty grew out of this new mode of education and shook the

Indian mind out of its torpor. When rival systems of thought confront one another, it is inevitable that the attitude of unquestioning faith should disappear. The fact that the British had triumphed over the Indians made it difficult to dismiss their way of life and attitude of thought. In fact, Indian beliefs were now under fire. In the beginning, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. Many Indians repudiated their own heritage and some questioned the very possibility of faith in values. Agnosticism and atheism were for a number of years rampant, but the human mind cannot maintain a question mark indefinitely. Slowly belief in values returned, but this was a faith tempered by reason. The old unquestioning acceptance was gone and was replaced by a more critical attitude which recognised the elements of value in the West as well as in our own heritage. One may say that the discovery of the West led to a rediscovery of the East.

British political domination has been responsible for many of the shortcomings in our social, economic and political life. It has however made one contribution which to some extent compensates for all these ills. By bringing the riches of the Western tradition within the reach of a large number of Indians, it created a situation in India which has few parallels in the history of the world. In fact, one may venture to say that the introduction of Western education in India was an event of great significance not only in the history of our country but also in the history of the human race. It made Indians the inheritor of the traditions of East and West. By the wide diffusion of Western science and Western values in a country with a rich tradition of its own, it has made India a bridge between the orient and the occident.

I have said earlier that the middle classes had as a class kept away from the upheaval of 1857. The rulers, noblemen and feudal interests led the struggle against the British. The masses of peasants and workers were also generally in favour of the uprising. The new intelligentsia and the middle classes on the other hand very often sided with the British. This was not due to any lack of patriotism among them. In fact, they alone had perhaps some vague feeling of nationalism while the other classes were moved mainly by feudal loyalties. The support of the middle classes and the new intelligentsia for the British arose out of their admiration for the new values of the West. The intellectual classes admired Western advances in science and political thought and were willing to acquiesce in British rule for the sake of Western ideals. They did not formulate the thought consciously, but some of them found a greater affinity with the Western progressive outlook than the conservative spirit prevalent in feudal India. They also thought that contact with the West would revive the Indian spirit and lead to social, economic and political emancipation of the entire people.

Never has the need of a bridge between different cultures been so great as today. In the past, civilizations have been regional if not parochial. The contributions which one country made remained generally confined within its own territories. In those days it was possible for different civilisations and cultures to exist as self-contained and closed systems. With the advance of science and technology and the improvement in the means of communication, such exclusiveness can no longer be maintained. Physically, the whole world has drawn nearer but psychologically, human beings are still living in different self-contained

worlds. This is one of the greatest problems which faces contemporary man. Whatever is unfamiliar and alien seems to be inimical. Much of the suspicion and distrust among men of different civilisations and cultures is due to this lack of contact and knowledge. With the enormous increase in man's power of destroying his fellows, the prevalence of such suspicion and fear threatens the very survival of mankind.

In this critical situation for man, India may be able to play the role of an interpreter and mediator. The diffusion of Western education has made India a meeting place of East and West. Before the British came, she had attempted a synthesis of culture enriched by strains from the Dravidian, Aryan and Saracenic sources. Some traces of Greek and Sumerian influence could also perhaps be traced. With the coming of Western education, she began to draw upon the resources of classical, mediaeval and modern Europe. Hellenic humanism and Renaissance science became as much her heritage as the values she had imbibed from prehistoric times.

This multiple source of her civilisation gives India a peculiar advantage in the modern world. Almost all Asian nations have derived the inspiration for their development from their own past tradition. Europe has similarly confined itself to the Western tradition alone. The two roots of Western culture are Hebraic and Hellenic. The vast contribution which Egypt, India and China made to the culture of man has largely remained outside the purview of the Western man. Similarly, the Eastern man has generally remained impervious to the influence of Western philosophical ideas, political institutions and economic organisation.

India has sought to combine these traditions for achieving a truly human civilisation.

The last hundred years in India has thus been a period of mutual influence of East and West. Western education brought the challenge of a different outlook and different ideology to India. With Western science has come Western technological developments. British rule brought in its wake Western political ideas. More important still has been the fact that growing recognition of Western values led to a re-discovery of Eastern values. Indians regained their ancient heritage through their acquisition of the heritage of the West. Indians have thus become the inheritors of the culture of East and West. They have therefore the opportunity to blend Eastern and Western culture and act as a cultural mediator between the two. As such, India may well serve as the meeting ground where clashes in political ideologies and institutions and social and economic organizations may be peacefully resolved for the benefit of the whole world.

This can however happen only if India remains responsive to the challenge of East and West alike. The attainment of independence has released new energies in the country, but along with the tremendous advance has come the risk of revivalism and chauvinism. Some people have confused the liberation from the political bondage of the West with the repudiation of Western values. It may be an extreme case, but people in fairly important position have been heard to say that now that British rule is gone, we need no longer study the English classics ! Such people have evidently forgotten the lessons of Indian history. The Indian people have prospered when their doors were open to influences

from outside and their minds responsive to new ideas and challenges. Whenever India has tried to draw within her shell, she has invited defeat and disaster on herself and her children.

If narrowness and conservatism have been India's greatest enemies in the past, they are an even greater danger to her in the context of the modern world. With the advance of science and technology, the whole world has been unified for good or evil. Manned aeroplanes can circle the world in less than twentyfour hours while the artificial satellite has traversed the globe in only ninety minutes. Unless India can keep abreast with the rest of the world in science and technology, even her independence may be threatened. Everything must therefore be done to maintain and indeed strengthen our contacts with the outside world. The three universities established in 1857 brought India into the fellowship of modern knowledge in the fields of humanity, science and technology. The thirty-five or more universities functioning in 1957 ought to ensure that this fellowship is maintained, extended and deepened. This is the real lesson of 1857 which we can ignore only at our peril.

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