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STUDIES IN THE PURE THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE
THE PURE THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNDER UNCERTAINTY

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The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism

A New Study of History

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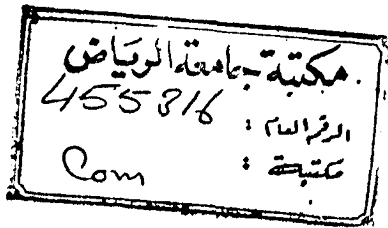

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Preface

Few questions have fascinated the modern historian more than the mystique of the rise and fall of civilisations. Within a span of one hundred years three path-breaking studies – by Marx, Spengler and Toynbee – have appeared, made their mark on the academic profession, but are now considered incomplete or seriously deficient. Their dogmas, which once caused much intellectual ferment, have undergone careful scrutiny by critics, and have now fallen into disfavour. It is not that they have been forgotten, for in their thought there is much that will endure for ever, only that few today concede their claims of universal validity. Their method of analysis, namely the method of historical determinism wherein the scholar attempts to detect a pattern in the quagmire of historical events, is now regarded by some as an idea buried so deep in the grave that it can never come to life again.

It is this dead idea that I am trying to revive. What converts me from a student of economics to one of history is a fascinating new theory by an Indian scholar, P. R. Sarkar, who synthesises many of the available theories of civilisations into one ecumenical law of social cycle. His analysis not only expounds the dynamics of past history, but also abounds in predictive content. Unfortunately, this prodigious work, written in Bengali a little after Toynbee completed his monumental *Study of History* in 1954, has not yet been transmitted to the world at large. Sarkar's philosophy of history, to my mind, is more general than any the world has yet seen; it is an answer to all the pointed darts that the critics, for good reasons, have hurled at popular dogmas of historical determinism.

The purpose of this book is threefold: first, to introduce Sarkar's doctrine to the world; second, to subject it to the empirical testing from past human experience embodied in four variegated civilisations – Egyptian, Western, Russian, and Hindu – which are selected for their diversity and uniqueness of expression; third, to draw inferences for the future of India, Russia, and the Western world. Despite the fact that these civilisations have evolved along very different tracks, I find that Sarkar's theory fully explains their evolution. That is what lends credence to my predictions concerning capitalism, communism, and democracy. I raise

and answer the following questions that matter today:

1. What is the future of capitalism and communism?
2. Are they going to dissolve – if so, when and why?
3. What will be the philosophy of life guiding the world in the next generation?

The questions I raise have been raised by others before, but the answers I give are completely different, somewhat unsettling, but also reassuring. In the world we inhabit today, in the tensions in which we live and breathe, in the complex international problems which we must solve to survive, it is important that such epochal questions be raised and answered. The world today is polarised into a loose tripartite alliance of capitalist, communist, and under-developed nations. All systems are facing internal fissures and external traumas. There is brutal inequity in the distribution of wealth within and among all nations, while millions of people go undernourished and even starve to death year after year. The world today suffers from a potentially crippling energy crisis, environmental pollution, population explosion and a host of other tumours. The basic cause of all these ills, I find, is the ultra-selfish materialism of the ruling cliques in all, not just a few, countries: the philosophy of life guiding the world today is rooted in pure self-interest. This is a malaise that cannot last long, and Sarkar's thesis tells us why. It tells us where we are headed. It tells us that if the present ruling classes fail to curb their egocentricity and materialism, soon many countries will be caught in the throes of revolutionary and violent turmoil. This is the submission of this book to the world, and I sincerely hope that it will not go unheeded.

The organisation of the book is as follows: the first three chapters deal with Sarkar's law of social cycle and where it stands in relation to the views of Marx and Toynbee. The next four chapters are devoted to testing Sarkar's theory in terms of the four societies mentioned above. The final three chapters take up the question of the future of capitalism, communism and democracy. Whenever a source is cited in any chapter, it is first indicated by a numeral in a square-bracket in the main text, and then listed at the end of the chapter.

A work of the kind I have attempted has creditors of many hues and disciplines, and the present volume is no exception. I owe my greatest intellectual debt to P. R. Sarkar whose monumental work lies at the heart of my investigation. It is my good fortune that I have been among the first to come across his contribution of which there are numerous tributaries. For Sarkar has ventured not just into the mysteries of history but also into the arena of psychology, sociology, criminology, economics, and social philosophy, among many others. The present book only makes use of his contribution to the philosophy of history, for it is beyond my ability to do justice to his genius in one volume.

Among others who have been contributory to this work, I am grateful

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I am also indebted to Southern Methodist University for providing me a tranquil work-place and a University Fellowship that enabled me to devote many working hours to my writing. Speedy and accurate typing by Gloria Jones, Carolyn Simmons, Elaine Brack and Jessie Smith must get credit for easing my burden in checking various chapters.

Last, but not least, I should thank my wife, Diane, whose patience and understanding are phenomenal; she acquiesced and even provided words of encouragement after I made an unthinkable switch from Theoretical Economics to World History.

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Dallas, Texas
July 1977

1 Sarkar's Theory of Social Cycle

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar is a man of profound learning, and a leading Indian philosopher. Since 1955 he has written numerous books and articles providing penetrating insights into spiritual philosophy, historical change and pressing economic and social issues which have engaged prominent minds of all ages.[1] The bulk of his prodigious work has been in Bengali, and although it has recently been translated into English, outside India it is largely unknown. This chapter examines his theory of social cycle, which expounds a civilisation in terms of a sequence of certain eras. In generality and breadth, Sarkar's theory surpasses all others espoused before, including the contributions by such celebrities as Marx, Toynbee and Spengler. In a short, simple and yet decisive discourse, it sets to rest, once and for all, the paroxysm of heated criticism that has previously greeted the dogmas of historical determinism.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HUMAN MIND

Every author with a new and deep message to convey introduces his own terms, concepts and definitions. In this respect, Sarkar is no exception. Even where he borrows a bit from the stock of already known ideas, especially those of Marx and Toynbee, his exposition is novel and original.

Sarkar's thought is based on a simple and yet deep perception. It begins with the fact that society is basically composed of four types of people, each with a different frame of mind. Some by nature are warriors, some intellectuals; some are capitalists and some labourers. This way there are four broad groups or classes in a community. Thus Sarkar differs sharply from Marx and other socialists who define classes on economic grounds – on the basis of income and wealth. Sarkar, of course, does not neglect the economic aspect, but to him it is only one of the four aspects that describe the totality of society. Class divisions, in his view, exist, and have existed ever since the genesis of Civilisation,

because of inherent differences in human nature.

The four types of people mentioned above do not, of course, cover the full range of society. There are many gradations among the stated groups. Among labourers, for instance, some are highly skilled and some unskilled. Similarly, capitalists did not exist in the past in several societies. In order to provide class definitions independent of time and space, Sarkar goes deep into human behaviour and commences with the fundamentals – with characteristics of the mind which he classifies into four distinct categories. That is why every society basically comprises only four types of people, whom he groups into *Shudras, Khatris, Vipras* and *Vashyas*.[2] To a scholar of Hindu civilisation, these groups relate either to the caste system still lingering in India or, as in ancient times, to one's occupation. But to Sarkar they convey an altogether different meaning and significance: they simply reflect four types of mind, each manifesting itself in nothing else but one's deeds, thinking, and outlook towards life. Of course, given the freedom of choice, the mental make-up is also reflected in one's occupation. Therefore in the case of society's privileged classes, which are usually free to make such choice, the profession is a true gauge of their mentality.

A Shudra-mind is one that is completely dominated by the environment surrounding it. It is passive, and unintelligent relative to the other types, and those whose actions and behaviour exude such mentality are the ones called Shudras. The Shudra-mind fails to do anything subtle or intellectual, for it is ruled by materialistic thoughts which run parallel to the crude waves of matter. Sarkar believes that every entity in this universe emits certain waves and vibrations which the naked eye cannot perceive. The waves of the Shudran[3] mind are similar to those of inert matter, and therefore a Shudra cannot subjugate material forces or the physical environment in which he or she resides. Unskilled workers, peasants, serfs generally belong, or have in the past belonged, to the Shudran class. Exceptions, of course, may be discerned in all these occupations. Some peasants or farm-workers may be persons of keen intelligence, or there may be other physical workers who perform hard labour not by choice but under social oppression. Such persons are not, of course, Shudras. Similarly, in virtually all societies in the past slavery was a common institution and slaves were forced to do the servile, physical work. But in no way does it mean that the slaves were Shudras. A Shudra is simply one who performs physical labour either by choice, or because he or she is unable to acquire technical skills. Even though imbued with physical strength, Shudras lack the initiative, ambition and drive to subdue matter or to succeed in the world: seldom do they shine in society.

The mind that is moved by the spirit of subduing matter is the Khatrian mind. 'To make a slave of matter,' says Sarkar, 'is the wont of a Khatri' [1, p. 14]. Thus, a Khatri is one who loves adventure, is full of

courage and high-spiritedness, has natural curiosity to learn new ways, and applies his physical strength and skills to solve his problems. Since the Khatrian intellect is subtler (more intelligent) than the Shudran intellect, the Khatri makes the Shudra do a considerable amount of his work. Of the three divisions of time – past, present and future – a Shudra abides only in the present, whereas the Khatrian mind abides in the past as well as the present. A Khatri does not just live; he lives with dignity and self-esteem. Those endowed with superlative Khatrian qualities want to leave their mark on history, to seek eternity through their exploits. The Khatrian class is usually composed of army officers, skilled workers, adventurers, professional athletes, etc. – anyone who struggles to solve the problems through a direct fight or through physical prowess.

A Vipran mind is one that is more prone to intellectual pursuits than the Khatrian mind. Like the Khatri, the Vipra too wants to subjugate matter, he too strives to make the environment conducive to his living, but, unlike the Khatri who wrestles material forces with his heroism and physical skills, the Vipra uses his intellectual forte to attain the comforts of life. The Vipran mind is subtler than the Khatrian mind; hence in social interactions as well as in politics, the Vipra eventually comes to sway the Khatri. Thus the ambitious Vipras, lacking in the Khatrian endowments of virility and fearlessness, endeavour to dominate society by controlling the Khatrian mind and through it the Shudra. In Sarkar's words, 'The Khatri wants to bring matter under his subjection by a direct fight and the Vipra wants to keep the Khatri, the conqueror of matter, under his own subjection through the battle of wits' [1, p. 36]. Thus, a Khatri's behaviour is straight and simple, not difficult to read, but Vipras usually approach a problem in a roundabout way. They devise theories, cults and dogmas to confuse the Khatri and take advantage of his straightforwardness.

Priests, scribes, poets, scientists, lawyers, physicians, teachers and the like constitute this group. Most intellectuals keep aloof from politics and earn a living by dint of their intellectual calibre; but those seeking high social status and political power attain them by prevailing upon the Khatrian mind. Thus, whenever Vipras rule, they rule by winning over the Khatris, who alone are physically and mentally equipped to maintain order in society.

Finally, we come to the Vashyan mind. Most people want enjoyment from material things, but the Vashyan mind also has a penchant for their accumulation. In fact, Vashyas, according to Sarkar, 'are more partial to possession than to the enjoyment from material objects – want to feel peace in the mind thinking of them or feasting upon them with their eyes' [1, p. 101]. Of the three intervals of time, the Vashyan mind frets constantly about the future and seeks to amass wealth for a rainy day. At some point in time, the affluent Vashya comes to dominate the

other three groups by purchasing their services with his opulence. In other words, accumulation of wealth is the lever through which the Vashya seeks not only the comforts of life and the security of future, but also prestige and dominion in society. Money-lenders, merchants, feudal lords and capitalists belong to this class. Not all Vashyas, of course, engage in politics, but those interested in it usually rise in society by hiring the Vipras. However, before this, Khatris were working for Vipras, and Shudras for the Khatris. So at some point in time all non-Vashyan sections readily submit to men of fortune – to those abounding in acquisitive mentality.

Let me illustrate the difference in the four mental types through a simple example. If a problem crops up, a Shudra simply ignores it or tries to postpone the solution as long as possible. A Khatri, by contrast, faces it head on, uses his physical prowess, and does not rest until the resolution is in sight. A Vipra applies his intellect, but, if that does not work, either requests help from a Khatri, or attempts to win him over through persuasive arguments. Finally, a Vashya tackles the problem by pouring down his money to hire Vipras, Khatris and Shudras. This illustration does not cover all cases, but gives a pretty good idea of the different attitudes with which men and women in general lead their lives.[4]

Wherever civilisation developed, in Africa, Asia, Europe or anywhere else, a careful examination of history reveals this four-pronged division of society. Sarkar calls it the 'quadri-divisional social system'. His categories of mind are broad enough to cover the full range of a mature society. Thus every civilisation, which is what we call a mature society, is composed of four sections, each comprising people reflecting the predominance of a certain type of mind. Ordinarily, individual behaviour displays two, or even all, of the four attitudes, but, for the most part and especially under duress, only one mentality betrays its true colours. There is a bit of Vashya or acquisitive instinct in each and every one of us, but only a few constantly long for money and make it the *summum bonum* of life. We are all after a comfortable living standard and social prestige, but some of us attempt to attain them through physical strength and skills, some through intellectual pursuits and excellence, and some by ceaselessly saving money or making more money with money already at hand. In this order, we are Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas. Those of us imbued with little ambition or drive, wanting in basic education and skills of the time are the Shudras.

It is worth noting that Sarkar's division of society into four different groups is very flexible. Social mobility among the groups may occur if an individual's mental characteristics change over time. Through concerted effort or through prolonged contact with others, a person may move into the realm of the other class. For example, a Shudra, under the command of a warrior, may become a genuine Khatri, or through

vigorous education he or she may become a Vipra, and so on. Similarly the Vipran intellect, through contact with money, may turn into the acquisitive intellect of a Vashya, or a Vashya may turn into a Shudra. Thus even though class distinctions in society, according to Sarkar, derive from differences in human nature, they may or may not be hereditary.

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL CYCLE

Having described the four types of people in society, I am now in a position to state Sarkar's theory of social cycle. In accordance with his quadri-divisional social system, he argues that a society evolves over time in terms of four distinct eras. Sometimes Khatris, sometimes Vipras and sometimes Vashyas dominate the social and political system. Shudras never hold the reins, but at times the ruling class becomes so self-centred and decadent that for a while society may have to languish through disorder which, as he contends, marks the Shudran times. Thus no single group can exercise social supremacy and power for ever. What is more interesting, as well as intriguing, is that the movement of society from one epoch to another follows a clear-cut pattern. Specifically, in the development of every civilisation, ancient or modern, oriental or occidental,

> *the Shudran era is to be followed by the Khatrian era, the Khatrian era by the Vipran era and the Vipran era by the Vashyan era, culminating in a social revolution – such a social evolution is the infallible Law of Nature.* [1, p. 40]

This is Sarkar's law of social cycle. Note the word 'evolution'. This law of nature is 'infallible' because it is based on evolutionary principle. Just as human evolution from animal life is indisputable, just as the onward march of humanity up the evolutionary ladder cannot be arrested, so is this movement of social cycle an inevitable natural phenomenon, whereby social hegemony shifts from one section of society to another, from the collectivity of one type of mind to another. Thus underneath the seemingly haphazard change in society lies the invisible but unmistakable imprint of certain laws of nature: social evolution goes hand in hand with human evolution. It is in such apocalyptic terms that Sarkar conveys his message. To him society is a dynamic entity, and perpetual change is its essence. A civilisation emerges with the advent of the Khatrian era, and, after considerable ups and downs through Vipran, Vashyan and Shudran eras, it goes back to the Khatrian age, only to resume its evolutionary march in step with the same old rhythm. This, in short, is Sarkar's social cycle.

Why must society go through these changes? Why must it move in cycles and not in a straight line? Sarkar argues that the dynamics of every mundane entity – singular, or collective such as society – is systaltic; that is to say, just like the heart-motion its movement is characterised by alternate flow of systole and diastole – ups and downs. The systolic aspect of every movement is simply an expression of its progressive state, at the culmination of which it reverts to its retrogressive or diastolic phase. The reason why every relative movement is systaltic is that its source of inspiration is the state of motionlessness, which to Sarkar defines not a static state but a state of equilibrium and poise: it is from motionlessness that every activity springs, and it is back towards motionlessness that every activity proceeds. For instance, suppose that the equilibrium of an entity is disturbed by some extraneous force. Then this deviation from equilibrium and the corresponding agitation of that entity constitutes its diastolic phase. If during that phase it still has some vitality left, there begins its systolic phase marked by a reverse movement. The entity, which may have been transfigured in the process, then goes back towards equilibrium or towards what may be called a steady state. Depending on its momentum, it may evolve during the systolic phase with a far greater inspiration than ever before. However, if during the disequilibrium or diastolic phase, no reverse movement occurs, the entity meets its death. Thus all relative movements are pulsatory. They may perish before or after the completion of a full cycle or, depending upon the innate strength, may indefinitely move along a cyclical path marked by alternate currents of diastoles and systoles. Uninterrupted, unidirectional flow of any entity is impossible.

A civilisation also is a relative movement. It also like every action has a certain velocity along which society evolves at a much faster rate than a primitive community – one that according to Toynbee [2] fails to offer adequate response to the challenges of life. Being relative movements, civilisations are also systaltic; they too are subject to the phenomenon of cyclical variations that Sarkar's social eras represent.

What then is the Shudran era? The society of Shudras is one that suffers from complete lack of guidance, leadership and authority; one where the so-called leaders become so egocentric that the majority of people, following in their footsteps, display Shudran mentality, a mentality ruled by instinctive behaviour and pure self-concern. The Shudran era is then characterised by anarchy, by a lack of social order. There the family ties are not binding; people scoff at higher values and finer things of life; religious behaviour, if any, is born out of fear of the unknown; morals are extremely loose, crime is rampant, and materialism permeates society to the core. People of Shudra-like propensities exist at all places and in all civilisations, but it is only when society lacks all purpose and the ruling class oppresses the masses to the maximum that

the Shudran era begins. The state or government may exist in the Shudran era, but its dominion is not respected. And in any case the Shudras, despite their majority, do not control the government. The important point is that the Shudran era arises because of the self-conceit of the dominant groups who care nothing for how their actions affect others.

The Khatrian era, in terms of the political and social structure, is diametrically opposite to the Shudran era where, as stated above, Shudras are in the majority but the government, if any, is controlled by a different group of people. In the Khatrian age, the Khatri-minded persons, though not necessarily in the majority, dominate society as well as the government. There the political authority is extremely centralised, people are highly disciplined, family ties are morally binding, social prestige through physical prowess and feats is earnestly sought, the religious behaviour of people reflects the common Khatrian desire for victory over crude matter, and so on. Vipras and Vashyas enjoy some respect in the Khatrian era, although they have little say in governance. But Shudras perform physical labour for the Khatri, and in the closing stage of this period, as in that of every other era, they are mercilessly exploited. However, at the dawn of the Khatrian era, the ruler respects their contribution and treats them with care and compassion.

The Vipran era is marked by the rise of priests and intellectuals, though here again the ruling class does not have to have a numerical superiority. Many new theories dealing with various aspects of life are then born. Although most Vipras are interested mainly in pursuing their worldly careers, a few, through earnest yearning, come to attain a beatific experience transcending the mind. It is through them that the ideal of prayer to God for love alone was born. Whereas in the beginning of the Khatrian era strong, benign leadership comes from persons of physical might, in the Vipran era it comes from selfless intellectuals and a few rare, enlightened beings. Unscrupulous Vipras, however, exploit Khatris and Shudras in the name of these sages who themselves had tamed all infirmities. Near the end of the Vipran age this exploitation becomes oppressive.

The Vashyan era bears close resemblance with the final stages of the Vipran era where, as mentioned above, Khatris and Shudras are heavily exploited. The Vipras, however, are no longer at the helm of the polity; rather they work for the affluent class which foists a highly decentralised regime on the community. It is in the Vashyan era that the inherent or practical value of things is reduced literally to zero. Everything is valued in terms of dollars and pennies. Human values begin to recede. Art, music, religion, sports, everything is commercialised. Crime flourishes, family ties again become loose, and gradually the Vashyan age heads toward the lawlessness of the Shudran age. At the end of the Vashyan era, all non-Vashyan groups are remorselessly exploited by the limitless

rapacity of the Vashyas. Society then passes through a period, which may be very brief, of the Shudran age, only to be engulfed in a social revolution, following which it resumes its march in terms of another Khatrian era, and so on.

THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Sarkar's law of social cycle states that power and influence shift from one group to the other in accordance with the phenomenon of systaltic motion. Several questions naturally come to mind. First, is the transition from one era to the other smooth and peaceful or is it violent and marked by convulsions? Second, how do stages of progress and decline behave within each era? Is the rise or fall during an era unimpeded, or is it subject to cyclical oscillations as well?

Let me consider the second question first, for my response to it will determine the answer to the broader question of transition from one age to the other. If the movement of every entity is pulsatory, then within each era also the steady ascent or descent of a group's fortune is impossible. Each action or each movement has a certain wavelength that some may call life. For instance, the social cycle has a vastly greater wavelength or life than the social dynamics within a certain age, but all relative movements, whether short or long, even the tiniest ones, are systaltic. That is why one discovers so often that all activities, social, political, cultural, economic, are subject to cycles. Therefore even within a particular era of civilisation, both the rise and fall of a group are marked by cyclical variations. It is for this reason that some historical events appear to be repetitive. Even each person's life, with a far shorter wavelength than a social era, is subject to ups and downs.

In order to explain the vicissitudes in any era, Sarkar introduces his concepts of social evolution and revolution. He defines them in terms of the rate of change or the momentum that ushers in a new epoch in society.

Social evolution occurs when, through gradual changes over a long period of time, society moves from one era to the succeeding era; that is, from the Khatrian era to the Vipran era and so on. Here the social system evolves sluggishly and the change from one system to the other does not deeply touch the masses; it benefits a privileged few who come to dominate the new government, while, in comparison, the common people benefit only slightly.

The reverse of social evolution is 'counter-evolution' which takes place when, in contradiction to the law of social cycle, one era reverts to the preceding era; that is, the Vashyan era recedes to the Vipran era, and the Vipran era to the Khatrian era. Being in violation of the

evolutionary principle of the social cycle, 'counter-evolution' has a relatively short span of life.[5]

Sometimes the transference of power between sections is abrupt, swift and tumultuous. If it conforms with the social cycle, there occurs a social revolution; if it conflicts with it, the event is called 'counter-revolution'. Social revolution is usually accompanied by a totally new way of life for those in power as well as for the masses. It may or may not be beneficial to everyone in society, and need not be productive of violence and bloodshed; but it culminates in the replacement of old ideas by ideas that meet the imperatives of the time.

In fact, Sarkar's social revolution is synonymous with a sudden introduction of new ideas even if no parallel change occurs in the governing body. Thus any event, violent or not, that shocks the polity into some drastic surgery of age-old traditions and institutions may be called revolutionary. For example, the diminution of the King's powers and prerogatives by the British parliament in 1688, even though peaceful, was a momentous event that can be easily hailed as a social revolution. On the other hand, countless revolts and uprisings that occurred in the past but left no visible imprints on the future cannot be called social revolutions even though they were violent, and, at times, accompanied by changes in government.

The converse of social revolution is 'counter-revolution' which usually involves a violent reversal of the social cycle and has a shorter life than even 'counter-revolution'. Both counter-evolution and counter-revolution usually occur as an era nears its end.

The transformations in society through partial episodes of social and counter-evolutions (or revolutions) may occur numerous times before a particular era gives way to the succeeding era. Society grows at a faster pace when a benevolent ruler leads the masses, who usually emulate their leaders. A careful study of the rise and fall of civilisations reveals that this is what generally happens at the outset of each era, especially the Khatrian era. The rate of evolution in society is accelerated by what Toynbee [2] calls 'social mimesis' of creative personalities, whereby the great bulk of uncreative people follow in the footsteps of the creative few. But the prerequisite for what we may call positive social mimesis is that the ruler either patronises the creative minority or is a creative person himself. Whatever the reason, the first half of every social era, except the Shudran age, is usually distinguished by impressive social, economic, artistic, and humanitarian achievements.

In time, however, the reigning class loses its benevolence and degenerates into what Toynbee calls a 'dominating minority' which no longer commands the natural allegiance of its people, culminating in a social reaction against the official oppression. Why this degradation occurs, why the once effulgent flower of humanity withers into decay need not bother us at this point. What matters here is the universally

observed phenomenon that such is the fate of all mundane entities, of all relative movements, of all facets of a civilisation.

The oppression of the domineering class – which fails to abdicate the supremacy it once merited but has now ceased to deserve – creates a powerful clash in the minds of the oppressed, the victims of the dominant minority. As a result, those enduring persecution evolve at a faster rate than the ruling clique. Their children, living with memories of the tyranny which their fathers had to suffer, turn into inveterate foes of the ruling class. As tyranny grows, so does their resolve to fight, until one day, equipped with superior character and mind, they wrest power from their rulers. If such transformation occurs abruptly, and gets firmly established, then the event in Sarkar's terms is a social revolution. If it occurs gradually and after a long time of oppression, then it is social evolution.

Those who proclaim the new era, the new leaders, having been raised in suffering and deprivation, are once again magnanimous of heart. Under their guidance, society resumes its forward march of evolution at accelerated speed. This is the systolic phase that springs from the benevolence of leaders, from the creativeness of the creative minority. On the other hand, the diastolic phase of society arises from the depravity of the ruling faction.

This is the process that manifests itself time and again in the course of societal evolution from the Khatrian era to the Vipran era and then to the Vashyan era. Whereas in all phases of civilisation society consists of four broad sections, at the end of the Vashyan era only two remain: Vashyas and Shudras – Khatris and Vipras having been reduced to Shudrahood by Vashyan rapacity. In the initial stages of the Vashyan era, Khatris and Vipras fail to see through the Vashyan exploitation, and willingly provide services to make a living. For a while, the entire social order works to prop the Vashyan dominance. The Vashyas, however, return this loyalty not with gratitude but with a crescendo of exploitation. Under their acquisitive impulse, they keep on amassing wealth. But material resources available to society are limited, with the result that the Vashyas grow richer and richer only at the expense of other classes.

The Vashyan mind is averse to sharing wealth with others unless, of course, that sharing appears profitable. As more and more wealth ends up in the Vashyan coffers, the living standard of the other three classes progressively declines, and there comes a time when society degenerates into two classes – the haves and the have-nots. So strong is the power of want and hunger that the distinctive features of the Khatrian and Vipran mind succumb to the compulsions of survival. It is during such dark days of high exploitation that the Shudran era is born. The boundless Vashyan greed eventually invites the revolt of the masses who are led by the very Khatris and Vipras – now diminished to the Shudran ways of thinking – who had once received the Vashyan system with open arms.

Sarkar calls this revolution the Shudran revolution, one that occurs in the terminal phase of the Vashyan era, contributes towards its demise and is brought about by disgruntled Khatris and Vipras.[6] The label Shudran revolution reflects not the fact that it is engineered by Shudras, who are generally unable to lead, but the fact that it is masterminded by those reduced, under the incubus of Vashyan avarice, to the Shudran level of living. The terminal phase of the Vashyan age may be called the Shudran age or the Vashya-cum-Shudran age, because Shudras are then in stark majority with Vashyas still at the helm. Few Khatris and Vipras then remain, for, forced by the Vashyan rapacity to devote all their time to make a living, they are unable to pursue activities of adventure and art, activities that interest Khatrian and Vipran minds. It is at such times that the Shudran revolution occurs, and Vashyas are swept aside: the limitless Vashyan greed ultimately becomes its own nemesis. In the ensuing polity, which may arise immediately or after a brief interlude of adjustment, power reverts to the Khatris and social evolution starts all over again. In this manner, one era will always be followed by another.

Note that in every age other than the Vashyan era, the transfer of power may occur through social evolution or revolution, but the Vashyan era positively ends up in a social revolution of the Shudras. This rotation of societal dominance round the hub of Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas culminating in the Shudran revolution is Sarkar's law of social cycle. In his view most countries today are in the moribund phase of the Khatrian age; at places the Vipran era is about to be established, whereas in many democratic countries the Vashyan period is in vogue.[7]

There remains the question of whether a civilisation can perish before going through the full range of the social cycle. The answer is yes. If during the diastolic phase of any era, no new leaders emerge, no dynamic personalities appear, that societal era may die under the weight of the dominant minority. Civilisation may then revert to the Shudran anarchy perpetuated either by dominant natives or by the emergence of what Toynbee calls *Völkerwanderung*, which is a German word for 'barbarian invasions'. Thus the period of transition fron one era to another is perilous for the fate of civilisation. It can mean the difference between prolonged life or death, between civilised or primitive existence. Once having reverted to Shudrahood – which can last for several centuries – if that decadent society wakes up again, temporarily or permanently, it will start anew its course of evolution through the Khatrian era to the Vipran era, and so on.

NOTES

1. All the English translations of Sarkar's work are available from Ananda Marga Press, 854 Pearl Street, Denver, Colorado, U.S.A.

2. I have been unable to come up with English equivalents of these Sanskrit terms, for Sarkar ascribes a wide variety of attributes to each category of mind,

so that equivalents of these words are not available in any other language. For what it is worth, I have introduced one simplification. Sarkar's book has been translated into English by Manohar Gupta, and for the latter's spelling of Kśattriya and Vaeshya, I write Khatri and Vashya, respectively. This is how these words are pronounced and spelt in the Indian province of Punjab, and they are not as tongue-twisting as in the corresponding Sanskrit lexicon. In addition, while using direct quotes from the English version of Sarkar's book, I have taken the liberty of using my own spelling structure, rather than utilising Gupta's structure and then confusing the reader by inserting my own usage in brackets.

3. The word Shudran is here used as an adjective for the noun Shudra. Similar expressions will frequently be utilised in connection with other mental categories as well.

4. The categories of the mind presented above have been defined for men, but they apply equally to women. Unfortunately, the English grammar as well as most other languages have so evolved that no author can write anything doing justice to both men and women. The neutral pronouns describing man are automatically taken to hold for woman as well. This attitude, this male superiority complex is not a part of the natural order as most believe, but a relic of the past Vipran dominion over disparate societies. As the present work slowly unfolds to the reader, the truth of this statement will become manifestly clear.

5. In Chapter 5, which deals with Western civilisation, some events of counter-evolution are pointed out.

6. On this definition, few of the well-known revolutions – such as the Glorious Revolution in England, the French Revolution of 1789, and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia – qualify as the Shudran revolution, for, as argued in subsequent chapters, they did not occur at the end of Vashyan eras. On the other hand, the rise of Henry VII in England, Chandragupta Maury's revolt against the Greeks and Dhana Nanda in India, Amenemhet's revolution in ancient Egypt, etc., turn out to be those events that helped terminate various Vashyan periods.

7. In terms of the theory of social cycle, Russia and China today are prime examples of the Khatrian age, whereas Western and Indian (Hindo-Muslim) societies are passing through their Vashyan phase. Even though India and the West have little cultural and economic affinity, both are under the sway of the acquisitive mentality.

REFERENCES

[1] Sarkar, P. R., *The Human Society, Part II* (Denver: Ananda Marga Press, 1967).
[2] Toynbee, A. J., *A Study of History, Vol. I* (London: Oxford Economic Press, 1948).

2 Class Attitudes and Human Exploitation

In the preceding chapter I have introduced the reader to Sarkar's theory of social cycle and the four social classes upon which it is based. The theory simply states that of the four groups – Khatris, Vipras, Vashyas and Shudras – the first three take turns in exercising political power and social supremacy in any civilisation, the fourth being uninterested in attaining prominence. I have also examined some features distinguishing the rule of one class from that of the other. The present chapter examines some intriguing corollaries that follow from Sarkar's main hypothesis explaining the change in society. It deals with questions ranging from women's rights and human exploitation to the evolution of institutions. For instance, Sarkar explains how social attitudes towards feminism vary from one era to another, how the Vipras play their tricks in all eras, how they connive with the Vashyas to perpetrate an unprecedented social exploitation during the Vashyan age, how they have been responsible for women's plight all over the world, and so on. What is interesting about these corollaries is that one way or another they all relate to the mental frame of the ruling class. This chapter is devoted mainly to questions such as these, but in the process many other characteristics of various eras also come to light.

THE SHUDRAN ERA

We already know that a person of Shudran mentality lacks initiative and is unintelligent relative to persons belonging to other groups. Shudras are incapable of taking the lead in society. For these reasons, all Shudran societies in ancient times were primitive, and remained primitive until some Khatris emerged and wrested the leadership into their own hands.

What distinguishes a civilisation from a primitive community has for some time been a matter of controversy among historians. Sarkar's division of society into four classes in accordance with their mental characteristics, however, suggests a straightforward definition. Using his

concepts, a primitive society is one where all its members display Shudran characteristics, so that it has little chance of growing out of the chasm of illiterate, ignorant and savage existence. The rise of civilisations may then be ascribed to the rise of persons with non-Shudran disposition, especially those endowed with Khatrian qualities.

One way to differentiate between Shudras and other groups is to look at their levels of literacy. In general, literary attainment is highest among Vipras and lowest among Shudras, with Khatris and Vashyas standing somewhere in the middle. In many societies in the past, only churchmen, who were Vipras, had the ability to read and write. The access to education was then considered a privilege of which the Shudran peasants, serfs and unskilled workers were totally deprived. Today educational facilities are available to all, yet the physical labourers are relatively the least educated. The schooling of Khatris and Vashyas is difficult to compare, but the intellectuals, the Vipras, clearly excel other groups in this regard.

Of one issue there is little doubt. The early history of humankind, the prehistoric or the Palaeolithic period – covering the times of *Homo habilis* to the Java man, to the Neanderthall man and finally to our immediate ancestor, the Cro-Magnon man – belongs to the Shudran era. Sarkar describes this epoch with great acumen:

> At the embryonic stage of the human race, when human bearing or Man-ness had first moulded itself out of animality, the then people also, like the people of today, had found only two paths open to them – the path of Shudrahood, and the path of triumphing over matter and mind through the thought of subtlety, i.e., the path of Khatrihood. In those days they had to be so preoccupied with material thoughts due to their being in the midst of hostile environments of nature that they all had to remain involved with the Shudra-like thoughts. [3, p. 10]

The genesis of the Shudran era may be traced back to 1,750,000 B.C. when the Palaeolithic men are supposed to have evolved enough from apes to perform what archaeologists and historians call astonishing feats. There is some evidence that the Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon men, who lived in caves, had begun to cook their food and bury their dead. Group life, which is traceable to the lower Palaeolithic culture, had become more regular and organised with the advent of Cro-Magnon men. Their supreme achievement, however, is in art (especially painting), which throws ample light on what is known as the upper Palaeolithic culture.

Although group life had been established during the Palaeolithic age, the essentials of an organised society were still absent. The institution of

marriage and family life was yet to evolve. Men and women lived together not in a morally and legally binding relationship, but purely because of biological attraction to each other. They felt little love for their own children, much less for their fellow-beings. Each powerful man had several concubines: being feebler than men, women had to accept an inferior status. Since there was no government, there was no law and order; there was anarchy, with everyone preoccupied with self-preservation.

Today, over the aeons, we have all evolved to an extent that our relapse to the prehistoric culture, to that savage existence, is inconceivable. Can we then say that humanity cannot now degenerate into the Shudran era? The answer is no.

Everything in this world is relative, changing with respect to time and place. A Shudran society today would be similar in some respects to its counterpart in ancient times, but it cannot be exactly the same; that would be negating the fruits of millions of years of natural evolution. The Shudran mind is now much more intelligent than it was at the birth of human consciousness; no longer need it be passive in the absolute sense. A Shudra today is one with low initiative and drive relative to the other types of people. And for this reason, in all countries the Shudran class is exploited as much today as in the past. Its toil is still indispensable to the survival of any society, but ruling classes are taking advantage of it everywhere in the world.

The distinctive feature of a Shudran society today would be the flagrant disregard of governmental authority and law by its dominant members. Thus, unlike the Palaeolithic age, government may exist in contemporary Shudran society, but its command would not be respected; violent crime would become rampant, with people living in fear. In ancient times there were no family ties worth the name. Today, by the same token, the lack of family bonds would be reflected in the indiscipline of children or their disrespect for parental authority, in frequent divorces and other intra-family feuds, in the heartless abandonment of the elderly. Women had a lowly status in the distant past; in today's Shudran society, such inferiority would be manifested in ubiquitous prostitution as well as in the general subservience of women to men.

In short, if all, or most, of these characteristics permeate a society, it is unmistakably languishing through the Shudran age. A close scrutiny of history reveals that all civilisations, including those now alive, occasionally had to pass through the pangs of Shudran periods. There were times when they were shaken by internal fissures or external assaults. Actually the difference between the extinct and existing civilisations is simply that some societies were crushed by the Shudran times, whereas others came out of them to resume their forward march of evolution. In subsequent chapters that examine some extant

civilisations, I will point to those tumultuous years when the Shudran era briefly prevailed, but was overcome by the spirited people.

THE KHATRIAN ERA

In most respects the Khatrian age, where persons of Khatrian disposition rule, stands out in sharp contrast to the Shudran age; and for this the acute difference between the Shudran and Khatrian mentality is chiefly responsible. Shudras, though physically strong, lack the enterprising and adventurous spirit of the Khatris, who use their physical prowess to advance in life, to excel within their circle. It is the Khatrian spirit that enabled Columbus to discover America, Robert Peary to reach the North Pole, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing to climb Mount Everest. Propelled by the same spirit, the Russians launched a Sputnik and the Americans set their footprints on the moon.

A Khatri believes in physical discipline, in firm authority over his family. However, when a Khatri comes to power, his family extends to the entire people living in his domain. Therefore a Khatrian ruler believes in authoritarian government, in absolutism. That is why Khatrian eras have always been characterised by political centralisation, by the unimpeachable divine right of kings, monarchs and dictators.

Going back to ancient times, it may be seen that the Khatrian era began with the Neolithic period or the New Stone Age, which seems to have been established by 3000 B.C., although in Egypt it had arrived by as early as 5000 B.C. The Neolithic age is marked by the beginning of agriculture and by the domestication of animals. This is the period when men and women began to live out of caves to attain a better mastery over environment than their forefathers. What else but a Khatrian spirit could have inspired them to go out without fear and look for dependable sources of food? In the words of Burns and Ralph, 'whereas all the men who had lived heretofore were mere food-gatherers, Neolithic man was a *food-producer*' [1, p. 13].

Another distinct feature of this period is the rise of institutions, for which a highly organised group and social life is essential. The origin of state may also be ascribed to this period, in which the discovery of agriculture and the subsequent population explosion made social organisation indispensable to survival.

Political scientists commonly cite various reasons to account for statehood. It could have derived from war activities undertaken for conquest or defence against foreign invasion; from the natural expansion and clash of group life; or from early religion, involving witchcraft whereby the magicians and witch doctors, though lacking in physical force, came to rule their people.

According to Sarkar, however, the sovereign state can be traced mainly to the rise of some powerful men, endowed with Khatrian disposition and superior physical force, who chose not to be cowed by nature. Those who fought their environment with some success must have inspired Shudras with awe and admiration. In the Shudran epoch of yore, there were no institutions of family, state and property. Khatris emerged from what Sarkar calls 'the socio-psychic transmutation' of Shudras under the stress of physical and mental clash generated by the hostility of natural surroundings. When the Shudras organised under the emblem of a Khatri, social evolution, in Sarkar's view, occurred in human history for the first time. In this way, several groups and tribes, each led and commanded by a Khatri, came into being. A few clans might have been established under the suzerainty of the Vipra-minded magicians and medicine men, but they were soon engulfed by the tribes led by the high-spirited Khatris.

Although traces of Neolithic culture can be observed in places even today, it is supposed to have ended when metal was discovered. In Egypt it terminated as early as 4000 B.C., and in Europe by 2000 B.C. [1]. In most other parts of the world, where primitive societies were replaced by ancient civilisations, the Neolithic epoch came to an end around 3000 B.C. However, the Khatrian era seems to have continued with few interruptions, although, in accordance with the general human evolution, its anatomy underwent drastic surgery. In order to distinguish the earliest Khatrian epoch of a society from the later ones, a distinction important to ancient civilisations, the Neolithic period may be called the rudimentary Khatrian age.

In the immediate post-Neolithic age, the Khatrian era is represented by the supremacy of royalties – kings, emperors, monarchs, dictators. The ancient Egypt, the Rig-Vedic age in India, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, the centralised national monarchies, and many communist and under-developed countries today are prime examples of societies belonging to the Khatrian era.

In the Khatrian age, the sense of discipline, first in the family and then in society, is extremely strong and for this reason women enjoy a high social status, at least relative to the way they are treated by society in other eras. In the Neolithic period, many different tribes were led by warlike Khatris. Being constantly at war with each other, they soon discovered the importance of numerical strength. Fast growth of population thus became their common objective, an objective in which women were at least equal partners. On this account, and to maintain the purity of blood, brave and daring women were honoured as Group Mothers in Neolithic times. Thus early Khatrian society was governed by a matriarch who provided lineal identity to every man and woman belonging to a particular clan.

The institution of marriage first emerged in the rudimentary Khatrian age. In the Shudran era there was hardly any marital life. Once the

Shudras united under the banner of the Khatris, and woman's contribution towards procreation received recognition, men and women began to feel a certain sense of bond in their conjugal relations. At the same time, the father came to have a sense of duty and responsibility towards his offspring. Consequently, woman's burden in raising children declined to an extent, and with this began the decline in her social status as well. Gradually families began to be dominated by men who were also the bread-winners. In time, Matriarchy gave way to Patriarchy wherein the tribal head was a man, and in which descent was reckoned in his name. How long the Group Mothers dominated society cannot be easily ascertained, but it appears that the patriarchy had emerged before the end of the Neolithic times. As women's influence declined, men began to have many wives towards the close of the rudimentary Khatrian age.

The Khatrian art also reflected a certain type of mind. A Khatri by nature is courageous and fearless. This mentality found expression in the deification of lions and elephants, animals that are masters of jungles, and embody fearlessness and might. The lion and elephant heads that one finds on human torsos of stone belonging to ancient Egypt and India are simply manifestations of Khatrian manliness and valour. Phallus-worship that prevailed in many Khatrain societies of yore also reflects their need for growth of population, a need arising from incessant tribal warfare.

In the Khatri-dominated societies, the contribution of Shudras was by no means insignificant. Shudras themselves were incapable of subjugating matter; but once inspired by the Khatris, they too plunged into the task of subjecting the natural environment. In return, the Khatris provided them with patronage and protection. The early Khatrian societies thus benefited a great deal from the ruler's benevolence. In fact, we will later find that in every civilisation the benevolent phase of the Khatrian age exceeded all that society had achieved during the preceding Vipran and Vashyan eras: most, if not all, Golden Ages in the past occurred during Khatrian periods.

During Palaeolithic times also, there were frequent fights among the Shudras, but they were actuated solely by self-preservation. In the Khatrian era, however, Khatris, and their soldiers recruited from the ranks of the Shudras, warred for their own survival as well as that of others. Whereas Shudras had fought for food and shelter, the Khatris fought for dignity and self-esteem as well. In due time, however, the Khatrian rulers became more authoritarian; they lost much of their early benevolence, and as a result the Shudran soldiers and labourers were mercilessly exploited. The Khatrian domains also expanded manifold; many tribes were unified after protracted warfare into vast kingdoms headed by monarchs and emperors. In the holocausts that the Khatris unleashed on each other, Shudras were the helpless participants.

And for what? For the momentary ego-gratification of the megalomaniac warrior who craved supremacy over the entire world. In most Khatrian societies, the sanguinary wars of conquests portended the end of Khatrian domination and the birth of Vipran influence. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, at the end of the Khatrian era, Vipras in the guise of the priest or the prime minister came to power in every civilisation.

THE VIPRAN ERA

The despotic governments of the Khatris were fundamentally unstable, for nothing based on fire and sword can command obedience from the people for ever.The absolute rulers had felt the need for theories that could pander to the higher sensibilities of their subjects; they had needed dogmas that could minister to the passions and prejudices of their people. In this they were ably assisted by those endowed with superior intellect – the Vipras.[1] To pursue their own careers, the intellectuals volunteered theories that justified the ruler's absolute authority over his people. Thus were born such concepts as the infallibility of monarchs and the divine right of kings. Poets and playwrights came forward to sing panegyrics about the ruler's performance in battles and wars – even in romance.

That is why, in the heyday of the Khatrian age Vipras enjoyed a social status second only to Khatris. Therefore when the Khatrian influence waned as a result of their myriad wars, the power and leadership vacuum could be filled only by the Vipras who alone commanded enough esteem and authority at the time. Everywhere do we find that Vipras came to power in the aftermath of the carnage that the Khatrian warfare had so copiously handed down to posterity. In the West, for instance, the Catholic Church rose to primacy after the fall of the Khatrian Roman empire.

The Vipran mind has been defined as one that lacks the gallantry of the Khatris but abounds in foresight and keenness of intellect. In general a Vipra is cautious and pragmatic; he or she relishes comfort but not the physical labour that it requires. Actually his (her) constitution is not built for this purpose. Consequently, the Vipras attain dominion only by vanquishing the Khatris in the intellectual arena. They rule indirectly – through their control over the apparent Khatrian ruler who alone has the physical and mental prowess to keep order in society. Whenever, and wherever, the Vipras perceived that the time for their rule had come, they devised new cults and dogmas rationalising their hold on the people. First they managed to convince the Khatri of the possibility of his perdition after death, and then concocted rituals so complex that the bewildered Khatri earnestly sought their religious

service. This the Vipras were more than glad to provide in exchange, of course, for political sway and all the creature comforts.

After outwitting the Khatris, the Vipras set out to inject baseless fears and prejudices in other sections as well. Once the apparent Khatrian ruler was won over, it was just a matter of time before the rest of society yielded to their self-serving doctrines. Thus we find that in every civilisation all non-Vipran groups were once caught in the stranglehold of religious tenets and practices.

One of the most remarkable features of the Vipran age, as mentioned earlier, is the indirect rule of the Vipran ruler. The apparent or direct ruler is a mere puppet in the hands of Vipras who pull all the strings. For this reason, the Vipran groups enjoy the best of all worlds: in case of victory, the glory is theirs; in case of defeat, the blemish falls on the Khatris. The structure of government and administrative machinery in the Vipran era changes little from that prevailing in the Khatrian age, except that now, because of the weakness of the apparent ruler, the real authority is exercised by someone behind the scenes. Yet Vipras need the Khatris to maintain their dominion over the general public, and, therefore, the Vipran polity is somewhat decentralised in comparison to the Khatrian regime: the apparent ruler is no longer absolute, nor is the indirect ruler.

Digging deep into the pages of history, one discovers that at times Vipras ruled as priests, at others as elected representatives of the people. In any case their rule was indirect, in the name of a figurehead – the King. At times the Vipran primacy can be ascribed to their control over the church, at others to their gifts of oratory and erudition. During the Middle Ages, for instance, many kings and princes were overshadowed by the Pope, heading the Catholic Church. Similarly, in England, following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the King had to play second fiddle to his prime minister. History abounds in such examples. Thus, according to Sarkar, whenever the intellectual assets of a group enable it to dominate society, usually in the name of an apparent ruler, the Vipran era prevails.

Because of their intellectual acumen, Vipras in general contribute greatly to the finer aspects of life. The Vipran epoch, especially that run by the prime minister rather than the priest, is distinguished by its outstanding achievements in music, art, dance, and literature – anything that derives from subtler intellect rather than crude force. Subjecting the despotism of Khatrian rulers, of monarchs and emperors to a sacred and inviolable authority is a singular contribution of the Vipran age. In the final days of the Khatrian eras, the once benevolent Khatris had turned into ruthless rulers, preying, in tune with passing fancy, upon their hapless denizens. It is the Vipran intellect that tamed their caprice and despotism. In order to consolidate their hold on government, the Vipras had to invent theories that paved the way for their indirect rule;

in so doing they contributed unwittingly to the birth of the rule of law and constitutional forms of government. The political apparatus was, therefore, not as totalitarian as before; it was characterised by some degree of decentralisation. Of course, the Khatrian kings resented their loss of real power; they did not give in so easily. That is why during the Vipran age, as well as during the subsequent Vashyan age when Vipras ran the government in the interest of Vashyas, one comes across frequent episodes pitting the king against the priest. The history of medieval Europe abounds in events of confrontation between the Vipran Pope and the Khatrian king, between ecclesiastical and secular authorities. At times the kings were even successful in overthrowing the Vipran yoke, in ushering counter-evolutionary events, but they were of short duration – merely last-ditch efforts of Khatris to cast off the Vipran noose.

While the above-mentioned legacy of the Vipras to humanity, despite their motives, is commendable, their real and eternal contribution lies elsewhere – in what they did to spread the lofty ideals of universalism. Vipras have the calibre for abstract contemplation which other groups do not. Human thirst for happiness is unquenchable. We all want more and more from life; seldom are we satisfied with what we have. The reason is that our hunger for pleasure and beatitude is boundless – is infinite. However, this unlimited thirst for enjoyment cannot be quenched by material objects, which themselves are limited. Something which is limited cannot be the source of limitless joy. Thus there is a fundamental contradiction between what we really want and what we run after. We seek infinite happiness, but are obsessed with earthly objects, which, being all finite, yield only momentary pleasure.

This fundamental anomaly can be appreciated only by a superior intellect, which the Vipras alone are fortunate to possess. That penetrating faculty which can perceive reality behind the false veneer of limited existence belongs only to the Vipran mind. Therefore some Vipras, through intense longing and search for truth, come to attain illumination in their hearts. To be sure, very few persons have ever attained these dizzying heights, but such sages have emerged in the past and will emerge in the future. Indeed, without them the cosmic ideas of universalism and brotherly love would never have been born.

The most important bequest of Vipran eras to humanity then lies in spreading the cosmopolitan ideas of these sages who proclaimed spiritual ideals without compromising with narrowness and bigotry. However, some of their followers subsequently contrived useless rituals merely to perpetuate their own dominion over society. The sages had donated invaluable pearls, the charlatans reduced these pearls to fanatic religion; the sages had preached the sermon of God's love and mercy, the imposters proceeded to spread it by unleashing carnage on the unfaithful. And this happened not just at one place, not just in one coun-

try, but in all civilisations. The history of Khatris was written by the pen of blood. There were chivalry and valour in it, but no wisdom and sagacity. The Vipran age, on the other hand, was marked by appalling perfidy as well as gruesome warfare which – unlike the Khatrian period where wars gave vent to personal ambition – was rooted mainly in rabid religious fanaticism. Sarkar describes all this with a vivacity so characteristic of his work:

> Going through the pages of history we find that all the crusades or jehads of the Medieval Age were engineered by these Vipra Satans. Entrapped in these Vipran intrigues, the Shudras took the beatings as helpless victims and the Khatris fought as the crusading heroes. [1, p. 42]

The reign of Vipras emitted nothing but rank hypocrisy. Knowing that logical reasoning was no gateway to luxury, they concocted rigid social rules which nobody could escape. Of course, all this was done in the name of some enlightened sage who, even after corporeal death, commanded esteem and reverence from the common man. On paper, and in congregations, they proclaimed lofty ideals, but in reality their lives smacked of debauchery and corruption.

Acknowledging the priest as a messenger of some sage, the common people held him in high regard. They readily handed over their labour, daughters and wealth to the religious quacks who were always the 'reluctant' beneficiaries. And in case any greedy heretic had the temerity to withhold his donations or question their conduct, the priests were ever ready to put a curse on the gullible man. In order to mask their intentions, they even declared their scriptures to be of divine origin. The irony of it all is that the masses trusted them, and in places continue to trust them today.

The early Khatrian period, as noted before, was marked by Matriarchy, a social order in which Group Mothers had dominated; this was followed by Partiarchy in which the male head of the tribe became supreme; and finally came the absolute monarchs and emperors. Due to Khatris' innate magnanimity, woman continued to enjoy a respectable social status. Throughout the rudimentary Khatrian era she was regarded as man's co-helper, commanding sufficient, if not equal, social prestige.

In the Vipran era, however, woman came to be regarded as inherently inferior to man. In the Khatrian era, at least in its first half, the Khatri's manliness enabled him to treat woman, despite her physical weakness, on a more or less equal footing with man. A Vipra, however, lacks the Khatrian courage, and consequently is always wary of insubordination by other groups. He has to be, lest the muscular Khatris and Shudras see through the ruse of his shaky dogmas and cast him aside. Thus a Vipra,

in order to rule, will always endeavour to subjugate other groups, much less allow them equal rights. It is therefore ironical, and pitiable, that, with his probing intellect, a Vipra can either soar to dizzying heights of enlightenment, or stoop low enough to keep his fellow-beings choked in the noose of superstitions and servility.

After besting the Khatris in the intellectual arena, the Vipran men proceeded to bind women as well in the web of theories; and in this case, the web was even tighter than that binding non-Vipran males. Women were denied access to scriptures as well as education in many countries. At some places their subservience to men came close to slavery, whereas at others they were diminished to the status of housewives: the husband was, and in places is, God Almighty to his wife. Today, we find it hard to believe that even in the West which had supposedly shaken off religious irrationalism after the Middle Ages, women were deprived of suffrage as late as the twentieth century.

True, women have now come a long way in their emancipation from servility to men, but the idea of woman as inherently inferior, as a property, as a plaything of men persists in many parts of the world. Woman's humiliation, however, began only with the Vipran era, and if it has endured so long the blame rests squarely with agents of religion. In line with the general double-talk of Vipras, in theory woman was accorded a status equal to man. She was called 'better half' or 'fair sex', but in practice the essence of such labels was ruthlessly flouted.

Prostitution as a profession came into being in the Vipran era for the first time. In the Shudran as well as Khatrian times, especially towards the end of the Khatrian age when men had many wives, some amount of lechery did exist in society. Khatris even went to war over women, but prostitution as an institution had not yet been born. The credit for its genesis goes solely to Vipran men, to the priests who made women totally dependent on men. Without a husband, woman economically became a cripple; prostitution presumably began when widows or some other women could not find husbands, and there was no other recourse. More important, however, were the priestly coaxing and pressures on virgins to dedicate themselves in the service of temple-gods. This is how the so-called temple-prostitution developed in the ancient communities of Egypt, Greece and India among others. In Lacroix's vivid words:

> As soon as religions had been born, from the fear inspired in the heart of man by sight of the great commotions of nature, as soon as the volcano, the tempest, the thunderbolt, the earthquake and the angry sea had led him to invent gods, prostitution offered herself to those same terrible and implacable deities, and the priest took for himself an offering from which the gods represented would have been unable to profit. . . . Prostitution became, from then on, the essence of certain cults of gods and goddesses who ordained, tolerated or en-

couraged it. Hence sprang the mysteries of Lampsacus, of Babylon, of Paphos and of Memphis; hence the infamous traffic which was carried on at the gates of temples; hence those monstrous idols with which the virgins of India prostituted themselves; hence the obscene dictatorship which the priests arrogated to themselves under the auspices of their impure divinities. [2, pp. 6–7]

THE VASHYAN ERA

Nothing irrational or illogical can endure for ever. The strait jacket in which the Vipras had cramped the rest of society began to loosen as other sections slowly saw through the facade of their theories. Quite fittingly, and perhaps ironically, some elements within the intellectual class itself began to question the priest's intentions. Not only the elaborate rituals but also the luxury and life-style of the priestly class came under fire. Among Vipras themselves there had occurred a good deal of argumentation and doctrinal battles, and those who were thus defeated started accumulating wealth to compensate for their intellectual debility. Similarly, some Khatris also followed that route. In this way, another mentality evolved in human beings; another intellect, one obsessed with money – the Vashyan mind.

In the meanwhile, all forms of authoritarianism – monarchic as well as ecclesiastic – had been challenged by certain intellectual reformers. New philosophies of individualism, as opposed to state collectivism, were gradually sinking into public consciousness. The philosophical pillars of the doctrine of divine right of kings as well as of churchmen had been fatally undermined. As a result of all these developments, the power base slowly drifted towards the opulent class – the Vashyas: thus began the Vashyan age.

In all civilisations, the Vashyan class during this period consisted of rich magnates constituting, at different points in time, such diverse groups as landlords, capitalists and merchants. No longer was it enough to have a keen intellect to attain comforts and political power. Instead, social hegemony passed into the hands of the affluent.

A Vashya differs from a Vipra mainly in the way he uses his intellect. The Vipran mind, while interested in comfortable living and some material acquisition, is inclined to intellectual pursuits for their own sake; it likes theorising about any phenomenon. However, the Vashyan mind would have none of this; its intellect is obsessed with amassing, not just enjoying, wealth. It is this acquisitive mentality that reigns during the Vashyan age. Yet the intellectuality of Vipras does not go wasted. They now help the Vashyas stay in power by doing what they do best – devising theories that, in return for some compensation, prop the Vashyan rule. This they accomplish, as always, in a way that lures the

gullible – by cloaking their support for Vashyan primacy in the unimpeachable garb of individual rights, liberty, and justice. In reality, however, such lofty principles are flagrantly violated: they are usually observed when it serves the Vashyan interests. Once Vipras are sold out, Khatris and Shudras also perform services for the rich. Thus at the birth of the Vashyan age, all non-Vashyan sections willingly submit to the Vashyas who then control the means of production, be they land, factories, or financial capital. Feudalism and capitalism, for instance, are two pointed examples of the Vashyan eras of Western civilisation.

Of all forms of government, the one loved by Vashyas is that where the central authority is the weakest. In the Khatrian era this is impossible. In the Vipran era the central imperium is not so strong, but the rigid social codes that Vipras contrive to perpetuate their dominion keep a tight rein on acquisitive minds. That is why one finds that the Vashyan era in every civilisation was accompanied by a high degree of decentralised political authority. A centralised system can, if it suits its purpose, force the rich to share their wealth with the poor, and no other class is more aware of this hazard than the Vashyas. Therefore, whenever the affluent hold the reins, the system of government as well as the administrative apparatus are decentralised in the extreme.[2]

One distressing feature of the Vashyan epoch is that the virus of acquisitive mentality eventually infects all sections of society. The attitudes of the ruling class do not spread so much, do not become so pervasive in other eras; but in the age dominated by the affluent, the distinct marks of non-Vashyan groups ultimately succumb to the glitter of pelf. Everything is commercialised as a result – music, art, literature.

Crime also increases drastically. We will find later that a general disregard for the rule of law developed in the Vashyan periods: under the coercion of ultra-selfish acquisitive mentality, all sorts of crimes – murders, thefts, muggings, rape – came into vogue in every civilisation. Family ties too become loose. At some places, this was reflected in repugnant harems of the noblemen, at others in increased frequency and social tolerance of divorce.

The Khatrian and Vipran warfare was rooted in ambition or religion. In the Vashyan era, however, warfare stems from the Vashyan lust for opulence, for land, or for commercial markets. Here economic rivalries, more than anything else, are to blame for sanguinary wars. The struggle to acquire commercial markets for domestic industries, to control raw materials in several under-developed countries during colonial times, and similar events all point to the malady of the Vashyan mind, namely the craze to accumulate wealth at all costs – at the cost of compatriots, at the cost of other countries, at the cost of every virtue in life.

The Vashyan exploitation of society is the most difficult to see through, for in their avaricious designs they are actively assisted by the Vipras, who continue to excel in government and administration. Some

intellectuals, of course, see through the shaky dogmas justifying Vashyan control over the means of production; but their feeble protests are drowned in the noble maxims offered by the bulk of Vipras. In early stages of the Vashyan epoch, the rich have some humanity left in them, and the common mass inhales a fresh breath as the Vipran rigid hold becomes loose. But at later stages, the semblance of benevolence evaporates like misty vapour.

Prostitution, which was born in the Vipran era, undergoes a remarkable growth in the Vashyan age. Those who have money to burn are able to corrupt many poverty-stricken women. And once the ruling class casts off its moral scruples, other sections are quick to follow suit. As a consequence, moral degeneration comes to pervade the entire society. This results not only from the lewdness of the rich, but also from the looseness of family ties, excessive stress on individualism, and a general lack of social discipline that springs inevitably from a decentralised political structure.

I have already noted that the Vashyan mentality eventually comes to infect their subjects. The first to catch this infection are the Vipras, who learn the art of acquisition quickly from their mentors. Such people may be called fake Vashyas. Specifically, a fake Vashya is a Vipra whose acquisitive intellect has been aroused through long contact with 'genuine' Vashyas – those born with great wealth and excessive acquisitive instinct. Thus a fake Vashya is a Vipra who, though born poor, becomes wealthy through the use of high intellect in the acquisition of wealth, whereas a genuine Vashya is one inheriting huge wealth as well as acquisitive intellect from his parents. Both types of Vashyas earn large incomes from their control over the means of production, but fake Vashyas also make money from their occupations, relying on superior intellect. For instance, during the days of European feudalism, the secular landlords were genuine Vashyas and the religious landlords fake Vashyas. Similarly, today the capitalists are genuine Vashyas, whereas those whose affluence derives from their brains as well as the accumulation of wealth are fake Vashyas.

This distinction, though minor, is quite significant for determining whether the Vashyan era is in its rising or declining phase. For towards its end, the political apparatus, and hence the entire society, come under the sway of fake Vashyas. And it is then that the engine of Vashyan exploitation runs at full speed. Fake Vashyas blend the Vipran penchant for hypocrisy with the excessive greed of the Vashyan mind. It is under their dominion and deception that the Vashyan era gradually drifts towards the scourge of the Shudran age. Eventually, as described in the previous chapter, things become so wretched that some disaffected Khatris and Vipras rise in rebellion and help bring an end to the Vashyan, or more properly the Vashya-cum-Shudran, age. Soon afterwards, the rebellious Khatris take over and civilisation moves afresh

on the track of social cycle.

In every era, shadows are commonly cast for the advent of subsequent eras. Many prophets, for instance, were born during Khatrian periods, but their sublime message later fell into the hands of charlatans, whose new interpretations gave birth to the Vipran eras. Similarly, during the Vashyan epoch a Khatrian class begins to ascend long before the actual eclipse of this age, but the Vashyas unmistakably remain entrenched at the top of the social hierarchy. In addition, and especially towards the end of this era, women begin to reassert themselves, something that foreshadows the improved feminine status in the forthcoming Khatrian age.

NOTES

1. Those Khatris who had been defeated by other Khatris in the struggle for supremacy sought ways to compensate for their inadequate strength and valor. Under the mental anguish and churning they set their brains to work, and there developed in them the Vipran mentality which some of them transmitted to their progeny. This is how the Khatrian mind evolved to become a more intelligent Vipran mind.

2. In terms of political structure, the Vashyan state may resemble the rudimentary Khatrian age where small groups of Shudras are organised under the command of individual Khatris but where no central government exists. Therefore, relative to the rudimentary Khatrian era, the Vashyan polity may appear to be centralized. But this is not the proper comparison. In Sarkar's theory, each era is to be compared with the era immediately preceding it. For further details on this point, see Chapter 7 on Hindu civilisation.

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3 Sarkar, Toynbee and Marx

In attempting to unravel the mysteries of history, in imputing order to the seemingly disorderly currents in the human past, in reaching out to the future, Sarkar has joined the august company of Toynbee, Marx, Hegel, Spengler, Wells, among many others; and in erudition and breadth of vision, he is not excelled by any. Quite a few scholars have endeavoured to detect in the chaos of history a certain rhythm, an imperceptible harmony that complies with certain natural laws, but their peers, suspicious of anything conferring rigour on past trends, have criticised and scoffed at them. Sarkar's contribution, however, belongs to a different genus. It is immune at least to those strictures to which other dogmas of historical determinism have been subjected.

This chapter attempts to see where the law of social cycle stands in relation to well-known explanations of history. For the sake of comparison with Sarkar's thought, I briefly appraise the views of Marx and Toynbee – two intellectual giants who, in terms of learning and catholicity of thinking, stand in a luminous class of their own. Both men attempted to solve the riddle of history – Marx through deductive reasoning, Toynbee through 'scientific' empiricism. Their contributions, it turns out, are two separate pieces that fit, somewhat loosely, into Sarkar's conception of history.

THE MARXIAN VISION OF HISTORY

Karl Marx is regarded as one of the most influential historians and economists of all times. Today, through his materialistic conception of humanity, he commands from his followers a reverence that human beings usually reserve for sages – those who transcend all matter. Marx himself was contemptuous of religion; today his following adores him with a devotion that smacks ironically of fanatic religious ardour.

In order to grasp the Marxian dynamics of society, it is necessary to proceed in steps, which, though seemingly disjointed, are all interwoven in a masterly work of economics and history. Marx sought to explain the historical process through logical argumentation, through dialectic, a method of inquiry that he borrowed from Hegel. However, unlike

Hegel, who regarded humans as sensuous beings, Marx believed in the materialistic existence of men and women. To Hegel sense-perception was the basis of all social activity, whereas to Marx the social change was rooted in material forces, in the essentials of survival which must pre-empt every other human concern. 'Men,' said Marx, 'must be able to live in order to "make history"' [3, p. 419]. Therefore, the way individuals make a living, the means and techniques of production must be the main catalyst of social dynamics; productive and hence economic activity, more than anything else, must be the prime mover of society.

Material forces, however, affix their stamp on history in a certain rhythm. Change occurs in society because of contradictions in prevailing ideology, in its social, economic and political order; the contradictions arise inevitably from antagonism among social classes which themselves are determined by material elements – property relations. Specifically, class divisions in society are based on who holds the property and who does not, who is the proprietor and who must be the servitor.

The ideology acceptable to the dominant class is called 'thesis', that of the humbler and opposing class 'antithesis'. The inexorable clash between these two gives rise to another system called 'synthesis'. This is the so-called doctrine of 'dialectical materialism' – 'dialectical' because it rests on logical deduction, 'materialism' because the change is alleged to stem from material forces.

Thus to Marx, economic activity or 'mode of production' forms the social 'structure', upon which rests the 'superstructure' representing the non-economic elements such as religion, law, political institutions and so on. Not that the economic element is the only factor that propels the engine of society; nor that the edifice resting on an economic footing cannot initiate any movement of its own. But the structure exerts a vastly greater influence than the superstructure. And indeed any momentous event in society, a major overhaul of its institutions, can spring only from a crack in its underlying foundation. Such, to Marx, is the potency of the mode of production which comprises 'forces' as well as 'social relations' of production. Among forces of production are included technical knowledge concerned with the advancement of capital resources – such as machinery – as well as other productive factors, such as land and labour. Social relations, by comparison, involve the institutions of property, exchange, income distribution and the consumption of goods. The superstructure includes the rest – art, religion, ethics, ideology, family, government.

Marx also details the process that initiates, feeds and regulates social dynamics. First, some powerful change occurs in the forces of production, which, as a result of changes in population, inventions and education among others, are subject to a state of perpetual motion. Second, this change gives rise to fissures in the social relations of production.

Finally, the slipping foundations of the economic structure eventually shake up the superstructure, and then the whole legal, philosophical and political environment gets a new face. A new social order, with a structure and superstructure of its own, is thus born.

Social change, however, will never occur if society were not divided between hostile groups with irreconcilable interests and aspirations; but the conflicting social divisions are themselves the product of economic conditions, namely property relations among human beings. As mentioned before, Marx defines social classes in terms of those who own property and those who do not. Therefore as long as groups can be identified on the basis of their possessions, class conflict, sometimes smouldering and covert but more often overt and violent, is inevitable; and so is the transformation in society. Thus the eternal clash between socio-economic groups occasionally leads to convulsions in the economic structure and superstructure, and in this way a new society, a synthesis, comes into being.

It is only after the institution of private property is annihilated, and society becomes classless, that humanity can enjoy a reprieve from incessant social strife. Such a society can evolve only under Communism where all property is jointly owned by workers. There the community reaches its pinnacle from which there is no demeaning fall.

This, from start to finish, is the Marxian theory of historical change. It is ingrained, as stated before, in the exigencies of physical survival, which to human beings must take precedence over every other affair. It seeks to expound the entire historical process in terms of this simple, and perhaps naïve, materialistic notion.

This vision of social dynamics was utilised by Marx to explain historical change in pre-capitalist as well as capitalist societies. Prior to capitalism, the economic environment had the characteristics, in Marx's words, of 'free petty landownership and of communal landed property' [2. p. 67]. In this system, which perhaps first evolved as the Oriental Commune in Asia, land was privately as well as communally owned. The people toiled on earth mainly for subsistence, for bare existence of the self and the family. Evidently Marx is here referring to Sarkar's early Khatrian society of the Neolithic age (as described in the preceding chapter) where human beings, after abandoning cave and nomadic life, had taken up agriculture as well as tribal living under the stewardship of Khatris.

In the Asian tribal organisation, land was owned by the whole community, and for all practical purposes there was no private property. Part of individual labour or the surplus product was retained for family survival, whereas the other part was set apart for rites and various communal activities. This very surplus, according to Marx, gave rise to the power of landlords; and thus was born the institution of serfdom as well as the two hostile camps in the community.

The second form of pre-capitalist society, the state ownership system, was organised on lines similar to the first except that the central authority now exercised more power. This system, which at times was somewhat more democratic and at others more autocratic than the first, was founded on kinship as well as conquest. It displayed greater unity and discipline. As population increased and political authority became centralised, various cities emerged as nuclei of political power. The economic basis also then shifted from the land to the city, especially when external trade came into being. At the same time, private property came into vogue, as was the case with the Romans and Greeks; no longer was the individual a co-owner of land. However, since the state rested on the foundation of conquest, those who were defeated had to accept slavery. Therefore the impetus to maintain a communal order remained, and it sprang from the need to obtain allegiance from the slaves who were made to toil on the state-owned lands. Thus in the state ownership system communal property coexisted with private property, and there emerged internal schisms and class conflicts of all sorts – between towns and villages, between landlords and merchants, between citizens and slaves.

The third type of pre-capitalistic community was the feudal estate ownership wherein vast tracts of property were owned chiefly, as in medieval Europe, by private landlords. Here land was the principal source or 'force' of production, the 'social relation' of significance was naturally one that existed between owners of land (the feudal lords and barons) and farm-workers (serfs). The social superstructure corresponding to such economic structure was the feudal state. Production was carried on by the serfs, but the fruit of their labour was enjoyed by their masters. Here again communal and private ownership coexisted, but the communal landholding had lost much of its earlier importance. No longer did it form the basis of state power.

These then are the main economic systems that preceded capitalism. Though arising at different points in time, the pre-capitalist societies had some features in common. First, their economic base rested on land and agricultural production which was carried out mainly for subsistence and not for exchange in a market; second, labour was not a commodity, as the worker did not sell it in any market for money. However, capitalism, the analysis of which engaged the bulk of Marx's copious intellect, is distinguished precisely by institutions that were non-existent before. But even though the institutions are new, the class conflict is not. In fact, to Marx the same class warfare that tore the earlier systems apart will one day destroy capitalism as well. 'The history of all hitherto existing society', proclaimed Marx in an oft-quoted line, 'is the history of class struggles' [4, p. 13].

How do class divisions arise under capitalism even though it has little in common with earlier systems? Put another way, what are the con-

tradictions of capitalism? Marx went to great length to answer these questions which had not yet been raised by his peers, the so-called classical economists. But Marx, with his vast mental horizon, foresaw what his contemporaries were unable, or unwilling, to comprehend. Despite all contradictions of its own, the Marxian contribution to the understanding of how capitalism works is phenomenal. His critique of the capitalist system is pungent and at times misleading, but he generated many provocative ideas which Keynes later used, quite ironically, to rescue the very system that according to Marx would one day end up in smoke. Keynes today, despite contradictions of his own, is regarded by many as the most prominent economist of the present century, but it is to Marx's credit that he anticipated Keynes in many ways.

There are various strands in the Marxian prognosis of capitalism, all intertwined with each other. Its basic ingredients are the two hostile classes: capitalists or bourgeoisie who own the means of production and financial capital, and workers who in exchange for money wages sell their labour to capital-owners. Both groups are interested in maximising their incomes, but in this endless pursuit the property-owners have a decided advantage over the labourers or the proletariat, for the latter are totally dependent on the former for employment. Labour is worth nothing if it is not in demand by the capitalist, who, of course, hires a worker only if some profit can be made. Furthermore, it is in the interest of the manufacturer to set as low a wage as possible, approximating to subsistence level, enough to ensure a steady supply of labour, and no more. Thus the working class has a precarious existence on two counts. First, the livelihood of each worker depends not only on individual labour but also on the unreliable capitalist who can sacrifice him like a pawn in the game of chess, provided the profit conditions so dictate. Second, the level of the wage rate is also at the mercy of the manufacturer whose interest, by nature, is inimical to that of the worker. Herein lies the inexorable source of social conflict.

During the days of Marx, capitalism was still in its infancy. It was characterised by what economists commonly call perfect competition, wherein so many manufacturers compete with each other for the sales of a product that none can control its price. Under such conditions not much profit can be made – provided capital is regarded as a contributor to production – and the entrepreneur's own behaviour leads to maximum productive efficiency as well as the highest possible wage rate. This is the consensus among economists today. Marx perhaps had some inkling of this argument, but he wanted to show that the working class is exploited under all forms of capitalism – competitive or otherwise. He maintained that the contribution of capital as a factor of production is zero. In justification he provided an elaborate argument, but in so doing was trapped in his own labyrinth.

Marx, a champion of the labour theory of value, asserted that labour is the only source of production. Not that he was the first to make this claim; before him such eminent economists as Adam Smith and David Ricardo had argued in the same vein. Marx believed that the value of a commodity is determined by the labour time needed in its production. To value he assigned many concepts. 'Use Value' denotes the quality or capacity of a commodity satisfying human wants; 'exchange value' is the rate at which the commodity, possessing use value, exchanges for money, and so on. However, the relationship between the abstract Marxian value (or values) and the more visible concept of market prices is at best unclear, and at worse inconsistent.

Marx ruled out all other factors in the creation of value. Although natural resources could be brushed aside easily, for after all without the helping human hand they can make no contribution to production, capital, being a produced good, proved to be more troublesome. Marx argued that a machine incorporates past or 'dead' labour, so that its value is determined by the past labour time embodied in it. In other words, capital itself contributes nothing, for the only source of all production is labour – past and present.

One major difficulty with this view is that capital goods may command prices that, being dependent on demand and supply conditions in capital markets, will generally differ from the past labour time going into their production. Moreover, current machines were produced not only from labour but also from past capital goods, which themselves embodied some labour time. How can one be sure that the value of the current capital stock corresponds to a whole series of past labour time that once entered into its production?

Actually the labour theory of value is not crucial in the demonstration of capitalistic exploitation of labour, provided goods are produced under conditions of pure monopoly, oligopoly or imperfect competition. And the irony of it all is that Marx had correctly predicted the transformation of capitalism from a purely competitive system of his day to its present form of a constrained, monopolistic system. This by itself is no mean accomplishment. Under monopoly conditions, part of labour's contribution to the total product is expropriated by the entrepreneur in terms of monopoly profit, and there is exploitation in this sense. Thus Marx really did not have to tread the circuitous route of labour theory of value to establish that capitalism engenders exploitation of the working class.

None the less, if the labour theory of value is accepted, then it follows that capitalism can be nothing but exploitative. Any profit or 'surplus value', as Marx called it, can exist only if labour is denied its full share. But how can capitalism endure without surplus value?

What then is the value of labour or its wage rate? Marx treated labour under capitalism as a commodity, and its value too could not deviate far from the labour time necessary to produce it, i.e., from the level of con-

sumption on which a worker can barely survive. Thus under capitalism a worker labours partly to earn a bare subsistence wage, and partly for the manufacturer's surplus value.

Under competitive conditions where the wage rate is governed by forces of demand and supply for labour, how is the subsistence wage to prevail? In order to ensure this, Marx introduced his concept of a reserve army of unemployed labour. Without unemployment the competition among entrepreneurs for scarce labour would raise the wage rate to a level where surplus value could all but disappear. However, well before this point is reached capitalists resort to labour-saving inventions that result in a decline in demand for labour, in unemployment, and hence in the move back towards the subsistence wage.

After all this is said, where is the element of contradiction in capitalism? Evidently the clash between the two camps has to become progressively bitter, until the workers, sick of their wretched conditions, rise in revolt and seize power in their own hands. Indeed, this is precisely the scenario laid out by Marx.

The capitalist is interested not only in maximising surplus value from his investments, but also in exalting his socio-political status, which to him depends only on his affluence. Moreover, he must be frugal, must save money to grow, to stay in competition with others, to invest in new inventions, lest other capitalists devour him and take over his enterprise. Thus the system itself goads him to accumulate capital rather than spend all or most of his income for the consumption of goods.

Such economic behaviour can backfire. Excessive frugality of capitalists can lead to a shortfall in the aggregate demand for commodities which must be sold if the surplus value is to be realised. If all savings find outlets in investment, then there is no problem: the demand for investment goods, when added to that of consumption goods, will then match the aggregate supply. But the rate of investment depends crucially on the rate of profit, defined as a ratio between the surplus value and the value of the capital stock. Marx argued that the rate of profit declines with increased capital accumulation, thereby choking the inducement for investment. It is this declining tendency of the rate of profit that turns out to be the Marxian lever generating contradictions in capitalism, adding to internal strife and collisions.

Eventually, therefore, the seeds of strife are sown by the very process of capital accumulation which gives rise to two forces tending to sever the roots of capitalism. First, the rate of profit tends to decline and so does investment. Second, the labour-saving inventions resulting from accumulation tend to cancel out any positive effect that the growth-induced rise in wage rates has on consumption demand. The end-result of this process is that at some point the aggregate demand falls short of total production, thereby further stifling the rate of investment. Once this starts, a chain-reaction sets in. Falling investment increases unemployment in the capital-goods sector; this, along with the resulting diminution in wages, causes a decline in the demand for consumption goods, creating unemployment in that sector as well; manufacturers in turn are left with more unsold goods and the rate of profit slides again, and so on. Thus an initial spark in the capitalistic economy, through its linkage effects, may flare into a conflagration; a booming economy may move into a recession and then a depression. This malaise of capitalism Marx foresaw more than a century ago. He was the first to proclaim that violent economic oscillations bedevil nothing but the market-dominated system, not because of recurring external traumas, but because of self-generated contradictions.

Once the economy is caught in the throes of depression, all groups suffer – workers much more than capitalists. Among the latter, smaller firms fall first and are in turn gobbled up by the larger firms. It is this process – occurring many times over long periods – which ultimately diminishes the number of manufacturers to such a level that monopolies and oligopolies are born. The smaller capitalists, overwhelmed by bigger ones, also join the ranks of the unemployed, thereby exerting further downward pressure on the already abysmal wage rates. The misery of the working class then beggars description; for a while the wage rate may be pushed even below the subsistence level.

Marx, however, did not believe that a depression would endure for ever. Output tumbles faster than the wage rate, so that eventually aggregate supply falls below aggregate demand and the rate of profit is restored at some respectable level. Once this happens, investment and employment rise anew, and so does national income. To Marx, then, economy under capitalism does not grow in a straight line, but rather in cycles, in boom and bust where unemployment among workers soars to high levels.

The progressive concentration of capital in the hands of the few spells misery for the working class, at least relatively, if not absolutely. Marx argued that economic cycles, after capitalism reached a certain stage, would become more frequent and wider in amplitude. The lot of the labourers, at least during depressions, would progressively get worse; even during happier times, working conditions would be anything but comfortable, while capitalists wallowed in ever increasing affluence. This is Marx's celebrated 'doctrine of increasing misery' for labourers. It prophesies progressive poverty for workers relative to capitalists.

While the number of capitalists declines, the working class swells. As communications improve with advancement in technology, the proletariat frequently come in touch with each other, become aware of their pitiful conditions, organise into unions, and turn into a formidable force. A time would come, argued Marx, when the workers would stay calm no more; they would rise in rebellion against the capitalist order, and then usher in a new era where the means of produc-

tion would be collectively owned. Private property would cease and society become classless: no private ownership, no classes.

The post-capitalistic socio-economic organisation, according to Marx, is socialism, which is to be followed by Communism. Under socialism some relics of capitalism remain, because private property and its creed can be only gradually abolished; Communism is simply unadulterated socialism where all vestiges of capitalism have been buried in the grave. All people then become free. No more are there any social divisions or any antagonisms. Hence there is no impetus to change, and everyone lives happily everafter, enjoying a high standard of living, which to Marx is the one wholesome bequest of capitalism to humanity.

This furnishes the Marxian circle of socio-economic evolution. The society began with the communal land ownership of pre-capitalistic times, unmolested by any divisions caused by private property; it will end up with Communism, where again all property – land, money, buildings, machinery – is jointly owned, thereby completing the full circle of evolution.

SARKARIAN AND MARXIAN THOUGHT: A COMPARISON

Despite some contradictions of its own, there is much imperishable truth and resilience in Marxian prognosis of social change. Marx's philosophy has been subjected by critics to careful and minute dissection, but its beauty lies in the fact that, after all its weak links are severed, its fundamental point is undeniable, namely that capitalism suffers from severe contradictions, that the profit-seeking, wealth-accumulating propensities of the bourgeoisie must shoulder the blame for the recurrence of business cycles, which, quite often in the last two centuries, have shaken the very foundations of Western civilisation. Even today the threat of recessions looms like a Sword of Damocles over the shaky capitalistic economies.

In comparing Marx's system with Sarkar's, one is immediately struck by their divergence as well as their similarity. However, the similarities are not many and can be disposed of quite quickly.

Both Marx and Sarkar use a historical method of analysis, both believe in the inevitability of historical patterns of societal evolution, though not in the repetition of events themselves, and both agree that capitalism will be brought to an end by some sort of revolution, although to Sarkar this revolution may be bloody or peaceful, whereas to Marx it will be bloody and violent. Marx calls it the revolution of the proletariat, whereas to Sarkar it is the social revolution of the Shudras; but the Shudras and the proletariat have much in common. They are both victims of the capitalist's unbridled rapacity, of his penchant for more and more wealth, although Sarkar's Shudras are vulnerable to

exploitation in every facet of civilisation. One might say that, as far as the description of capitalism is concerned, Sarkar draws on Marx in some respects. In a rare reference to Marx, Sarkar looks at him in an unconventional light:

> Centering round a remark about religion by the great Karl Marx, a class of exploiters goes hysteric and raises quite a storm. It should be borne in mind that Karl Marx was never antagonistic to spiritualism, moralism and good conduct. Whatever he said was against the then religion, for he had visualized, understood and felt that the then religion had paralyzed man mentally, made him impotent and despirited by instigating him to submit to the vicious circle. [7, p. 122]

Sarkar himself, while driving a wedge between spirituality and blind faith in religious dogmas, believes that emissaries of religion have in the past exploited humanity in every civilisation, and continue to do so even today.

With this, the similarities between Marxian and Sarkarian thought end. Even a cursory reading of the two previous chapters suggests that Sarkar's theory is immensely more general and realistic than Marxism. The latter is simply a special case of the former, one link in Sarkar's chain of social cycle.

In the first place, the Marxian message is intensely materialistic, relegating humans to the inertness of matter, whereas Sarkar's message is intensely spiritual, relying totally on the human spirit and mental characteristics. In this respect the latter is closer to Hegel and, as we shall see subsequently, to Toynbee than to Marx. The material aspect, however, is not ignored by Sarkar; it reflects itself in the Shudran and Vashyan mind, and to some degree in all human beings. But here also one discerns the human element in his philosophy. Even in the Vashyan age, economic forces, to Sarkar, shape social destiny through the medium of acquisitive human intellect, as opposed to the Marxian contention that material forces determine human consciousness and institutions at all times. There is an element of tautology in the Marxian assertion that human beings have to survive before historical change can occur, because if survival were the only relevant factor then society would never have changed. If survival is all that counts, then why have so many men and women in the past died for a cause, for an ideal? Why would people of gallantry prefer death in war to a comfortable life at home? Why did some spend all their life in the search for truth and enlightenment, enduring at times unbelievable sufferings?

Another difference between the two systems lies in their perception of the labouring class. To Sarkar no society can even survive without the sweat and toil of Shudras, but they seldom, if ever, come to power, a

view that contradicts the Marxian prophecy that under socialism the proletariat will rule. Even in Russia and China, where Marxism has now been adopted as the way of life, not the worker, but an elitist group with Khatrian attitudes towards military and social discipline reigns supreme. It is perhaps unfair to admonish Marx for this, because we are the beneficiary of hindsight and he was not. By contrast, Sarkar's Shudran revolution is not led by the proletariat, but by a coalition of intellectuals, military officers and skilled workers, i.e., by the cooperative efforts of disgruntled Khatris and Vipras diminished, by the Vashyan (or capitalistic) rapacity, to the Shudran standard of living.

Sarkar's main concern with the human element is what imparts universality to his thesis. Thus while social evolution according to Marx is governed chiefly by economic conditions, to Sarkar this dynamics is propelled by forces varying with time and space: sometimes physical prowess and high-spiritedness, sometimes intellect applied to dogmas, and sometimes intellect applied to the accumulation of wealth determine the movement of society. Quite clearly, Marxian view of history is myopic in comparison with the Sarkarian vision. In terms of Sarkar's terminology, the Marxian analysis implies that Vashyas, and hence the economic factor, have always ruled society, whereas Sarkar maintains that their turn to rule comes only after warriors and intellectuals have had their turns. Marx calls upon one single element to illuminate the entire past as well as future, whereas Sarkar does this by relying on four fundamental elements rooted in human mind: Sarkarism, therefore, derives from human evolution, Marxism from material existence.

Another fundamental difference between the two viewpoints is that according to Marx Communism is the pinnacle of society after which there is no social evolution, but in the Sarkarian view every phase of society is a passing phenomenon. Sarkar is very explicit and emphatic on this point. To him social evolution signifies a relative movement of society, one among so many other relative movements which are all interconnected. Therefore if social evolution stops, then all relative movements, interwoven as they are, must cease, and this in effect is the death of the universe. In other words, societal evolution will endure as long as the universe does: there is no final synthesis; there cannot be one.

Furthermore, Sarkar's theory tosses Communism out of the realm of possibility. To him, since there are four basic types of mental attitude in human beings, there are four types of era through which every civilisation has to pass. Thus one mental tendency will always be preponderant in society; not that one class will always exploit the others, only that its mores, preferences and idiosyncracies will fashion the behaviour of the other three. Hence the classless society that Marx envisioned simply cannot exist. It is a utopia, and not a desirable one either, for its attainment amounts to society's dissolution.

It is not my intention to be over-critical and chastise Marx – as others have done – for minor points such as the failure of some of his prophecies. That his foresight could not completely pierce through the obscurity of the future does not diminish his analysis one bit. Some of his predictions have in fact been affirmed. What matters is the acumen with which he knitted together the discordant pieces from history, sociology and economics into a cohesion that disinguishes him as one of the most gifted writers of all time. My contention that the law of social cycle is more general is not meant to disparage Marxian contributions to humanity, but merely to underline the merits of Sarkar's thought.

TOYNBEE'S VIEW OF HISTORY

Among the current hypotheses concerning the rise and fall of civilisations, among those with which the world is well familiar, Toynbee's views appear to be the most general and cosmopolitan in scope [9]. He stands before us as perhaps the most awe-inspiring figure among historians; his work commands universal respect, his erudition a world-wide esteem. However, Sarkar's contribution, though drawing upon Toynbee's thought in some ways, turns out to be even more general. As with Marxism, Toynbee's system will also be shown to be a special case of Sarkar's.

Toynbee is among the first historians to escape the narrow confines of parochialism, and venture into universalism. He is contemptuous of nationalism in any form; civilisations to him are the only acceptable units of study, not states, nor nations.

In Toynbee's view there have been twenty-one civilisations, including the present-day survivors.[1] Of these, fifteen are affiliated to certain predecessors in the sense that the new civilisation is born out of the ruins of its parent, which towards its end is established as a 'Universal State'. The Universal State, specifically, is an immense empire into which the previous civilisation near its end had been organised; from this empire, the succeeding society inherits a 'Universal Church' which represents a new religion with roots in the 'internal proletariat', a body of people exploited by the dominant minority mentioned in Chapter 1. By the internal proletariat Toynbee means not the Marxian labouring class but the common masses who are on the fringes of society, and who feel left out of the inner core of civilisation. The fall of the Universal State is brought about by assaults from the neighbouring barbarians (Toynbee's *Völkerwanderung*) who had been living on the borders of its territory.

Thus the relationship between the new and the old civilisation resembles the parent-child affinity, because through this child's veins runs the ideology of the Universal Church, which later is going to nourish it into adolescence and maturity. Of the twenty-one

civilisations, fifteen are affiliated to the original six, which had no parents and which generated themselves by vigorously meeting the obstacles created by the natural environment. Of the six pristine or unaffiliated civilisations, two – the Egyptian and the Andean – left few traces, whereas the other four – Sinic, Minoan, Sumerian, Mayan – are still pulsating through their progeny. Four more, Hittite, Syriac, Indic, Hellenic, had remote familial ties – not characterised by the presence of Universal Churches – while three, Babylonian, Yucatec, Mexican, had much closer (or 'supra-affiliated') ties with their parents. There are six more which are simply affiliates – Western, Orthodox Christian, Far Eastern, Iranic, Arabic, Hindu – while another two are distinct offshoots, the Russian belonging to the Orthodox Christian society and the Japanese-Korean to the Far Eastern society. This completes the list of twenty-one civilisations.

How were the parent civilisations born? According to Toynbee, when primitive societies successfully respond to challenges posed by adversity and hardship, civilisations come into being. It is not the salubrious soil, nor the benign climate, nor the racial element, but the spirited and triumphant battle with mighty obstacles that ought to get the accolade.

The salutary environment to Toynbee may have some influence, but it cannot be the important factor. The important factor is the 'Challenge' which, however, should not be too severe, otherwise any 'Response' from the struggling people will be relatively weak and inadequate to overcome the formidable obstacles. Therefore Toynbee speaks in terms of a balance, a golden mean, wherein the Challenge is harsh but not too harsh to smother the Response.

The challenge itself has been different from place to place. It may be an abrupt climatic change, or a soil turning into a barren land, or the menace of alien nations. The important point is that it is not the bountiful environment but its severity that has been the cradle of civilisations.

While a civilisation springs from the increasing mastery of society over the environment, its growth depends on the rise of some creative persons or a 'creative minority', which is emulated by the uncreative majority. Growth occurs when the challenge increases in severity and is met successfully by an even more resolute response from some gifted beings. Thus if the adversity grows strong, but the resolve to overcome it grows stronger, victory and hence the rapid development of society are assured. In other words, a civilisation once born need not continue to exist on a high pedestal; if it fails to meet new challenges, it will fail to blossom. This to Toynbee explains why some societies – such as the Eskimos, the Nomads, the Polynesians – were born but were prematurely 'arrested'. In other words, there is nothing automatic in the growth of an infant civilisation. It needs nourishment, fresh stimuli and the helping genius of creative personalities.

Unfortunately, the creative persons are always in limited supply, and

their continued emergence over long periods is rare. This is the basic cause of a civilisation's breakdown of which so many have been the victims. Not that all civilisations have to meet this fate. Toynbee is quite emphatic on this matter. Seeking to differentiate himself from Spengler (that champion of an iron-clad law assuring the demise of every system) he makes it clear that civilisations are not like physical organisms, that if they decline then some internal 'schism' is to blame, not any inexorable law of senescence.

The schisms appear in the form of social 'mimesis' whereby the majority follows the minority in a blind, mechanical way; in the form of parasitic institutions embodying everything that is narrow and parochial – religious rites, rituals, caste systems; and in the form of excessive militarism that eventually succeeds in transforming the polity into a behemoth – the Universal State. All these fissures are internal. Occasionally external traumas may add fuel to the fire, but the initial disruptive spark flares from within.

The initial breakdown gradually turns into a rout. The creative minority degenerates into a dominant minority, which becomes increasingly oppressive of the masses, who in turn come into conflict with the powers-that-be and welcome any new redeeming philosophy. This is how a Universal Church comes into being. It meets open hostility from the ruling minority but a warm reception from the internal proletariat. In due course the church rises to primacy, order is restored, but the society now emerges with a new visage, bearing little resemblance to the old. Thus nations may be old, the past territorial limits may remain unchanged, but the civilisation of which the nations are part is now different. This is how an offspring becomes 'affiliated' to its parent civilisation.

Here then is a bare skeleton of Toynbee's voluminous work which encompasses the entire history of humankind – all those millennia, beginning with the Neolithic period, of which we have knowledge.

COMPARISON BETWEEN TOYNBEE AND SARKAR

Toynbee and Sarkar seem to have an affinity in many of their views, but differences of a real and subtle character also exist. To both the historical process is rooted in the human spirit; material forces do count, but only in being the adversary over which human fortitude must prevail if a primitive society is ever to evolve into a civilisation. However, in this respect Sarkar goes further by pinpointing the type of mentality which can overcome the challenges posed by the environment. To him only the Khatrian mind, with the active assistance of the Shudras, can vanquish the mighty and hostile forces of nature. Perhaps

the difference is only semantic; Sarkar is nevertheless more specific on this point.

A difference of deeper significance lies in the fact that Sarkar's prognosis does not rule out the salutary effects of favourable soil and climatic conditions that may lend a helping hand in the development of civilisations. For his total disregard of these factors, Toynbee has been severely taken to task by his critics. But in Sarkar's system, the growth of civilisations depends not so much on the severity of the environment and the mettlesome response that it invokes, but on the rise of the high-spirited Khatrian mind. Even if no challenge appears, a civilisation may emerge if the primitive society is led by a Khatrian mind, for this type of mind does not rest until total mastery over matter is achieved; and I do not have to labour the point that human mastery over nature even today is far from complete. Thus regardless of whether the environment is friendly or hostile, the vivacity of the Khatrian mind creates challenges of its own, and endeavours to meet them fearlessly and with dignity. This would explain the genesis of some civilisations which in their infancy encountered comparatively few misfortunes.

The difference here is more real than apparent. While Toynbee's accent is on both the harshness of material surroundings and the human spirit, Sarkar emphasises only the human element and ultimately the natural human evolution. The Challenge, in the Sarkarian view, has its place, but it may spring from the hostile environment or be self-created by the Khatrian mind.

In Toynbee's view there is little affinity between civilisations – which are dynamic societies – and primitive communities, which he regards as entities flowing at a rate of evolution so low that to all intents and purposes they can be considered as static societies. The crucial distinction, therefore, lies in the rate of growth in a society's evolution.

Sarkar would perhaps be uncomfortable with Toynbee's definition of a primitive society, for to him nothing is static in this universe, 'thronged as it is with a plethora of relativities'. He therefore defines a primitive society also in terms of mental characteristics, i.e. in terms of the early Shudran community. Again this difference is perhaps semantic. However, Toynbee's taste for total differentiation between primitive and civilised societies finds full expression in his somewhat arbitrary distinction between civilisations – between parent and 'affiliated' societies. True, his Universal States and Universal Churches are reminiscent of some of Sarkar's Khatrian and Vipran eras; but to Sarkar they both belong to the same society, as two arms of the same social cycle, whereas for Toynbee the Universal Church provides the line of demarcation between the old and the new civilisation.

Sarkar regards civilisations as entities that have evolved from primitive societies just as civilised humanity evolved from the primitive human being. To him the intimate anthropological kinship between the primitive and the civilised also extends to civilisations, a view that sharply contrasts with Toynbee's. Furthermore, Toynbee does not adequately explain why the Universal Church emerges toward the end of the parent civilisation. Why religion, why not any mundane philosophy? Why not any other military power? To Sarkar the transition from the Khatrian to the Vipran era, or from Toynbee's Universal State to the Universal Church, is just an integral part of the evolutionary social cycle, something ingrained in the process of human evolution. For the subtler intellect of the Vipras evolved on our planet much later than the high-spiritedness of the Khatris. But upon its arrival, it had little difficulty in winning over the Khatrian mind.

It is hard to concur with Toynbee and pretend that civilisations have emerged abruptly out of primitive societies, especially when many historians believe that perhaps agriculture, more than anything else, procreated and nurtured all civilisations. In this view, the prerequisite for the dynamic movement of every society is the availability of an economic surplus, something that frees some people from toiling just for subsistence; consequently a part of society's energies can be devoted to subtle and creative avocations – architecture, music, art, literature. If the presence of economic surplus is the precondition for social progress, then civilisations must have sprouted from the primitive, Neolithic culture of which the most distinctive features are agriculture and the domestication of animals.

Sarkar believes in the unity and continuity of civilisations, whereas Toynbee, as stated before, first divides them into parents and their affiliates, and then distinguishes them by the presence of Universal States and Universal Churches.[2] These two institutions are implicit in Sarkar's Khatrian and Vipran eras. For example, the period of the Universal State into which the Roman Empire had been organised at the dawn of the first century would be identical to Sarkar's Khatrian era of Western civilisation. Similarly, the primacy of the Catholic Church following the collapse of the Roman State would coincide with Sarkar's Vipran era of the same civilisation, but to Toynbee, of course, it is now a new society. Moreover, Sarkar, unlike Toynbee, does not stop with these two institutions but goes on to introduce his Vashyan era that follows upon the decline of the Vipras, who were ruling through the Church. All these eras are identified with the mentality of the dominant social class, whereas in Toynbee's system particular periods of history are associated with the institutions that for a long time endured in various civilisations. Therefore if these institutions vanish from the face of the earth or lose their vitality, which they all do at one time or another, then to Toynbee a civilisation is either dissolved or affiliated to its offspring. But since Sarkar speaks in terms of the lasting features of the human mind, his theory is flexible, is capable of assimilating the novel organisations, mores and customs. That is why his eras may appear time and again

during the course of history, of the past and of the future, even though human institutions, rules and laws, because of natural evolution, must go through numerous alterations.

Toynbee's admission of only two long-lasting and world-wide organisations – the Universal States and Churches – in a way compels him to be unusually gloomy about the prospects of Western civilisation, which he thinks has been declining ever since the sixteenth century when the Universal Church in Europe was weakened by the rise of autocratic monarchs and by the Wars of Religion. He is particularly emphatic about the paralytic consequences of the religious wars of Germany, France and Spain – especially the loss of faith. There is plenty of arbitrariness here, a point noted by other historians, especially by Geyl [1], but it need not be our concern. For some reasons, real or imagined, Toynbee views the declining influence of religion as disastrous for Western society, whose breakdown to him actually began, believe it or not, four centuries ago. And he insists that once the breakdown begins, it is irretrievable; euthanasia cannot then be averted, no matter how solid the subsequent achievements of some of its individual members may be. Thus in his view, the West is now lingering through the period of disintegration, with no known timetable.

To my mind it is the paucity of 'universal' institutions in his system that makes Toynbee so pessimistic about the prospects of the Western world; once the Universal Church collapses, what is left? Dissolution of course, or merger into a new civilisation! However, Sarkar's framework is more sanguine; his hypothesis is resilient enough to accommodate all changes. It suggests that the West is now in the decadent phase of the Vashyan era, which, since no age can endure for ever, should eventually be replaced by a new Khatrian era. Thus one arm of the organic social cycle will be replaced by another, but Western civilisation will survive, and perhaps emerge with greater effulgence. Of course, the new Khatrian era will not be dominated by monarchs and tyrannical dictators. This is simply unthinkable. But a group that displays Khatrian qualities will be supreme. He does not say all this in so many words, but it is implicit in his discourse.

All the critics who have taken Toynbee to task for numerous errors of omission and commission are single-minded in acclaiming his work for its singular contribution not, ironically, to history but to literature – even to fiction. Some have characterised Toynbee's system as a figment of his bountiful imagination, while others have called it an outright fraud. His critics stand in awe before his monumental and voluminous work, but they do not concede its veracity. Volumes have been written as critiques of Toynbee's thought and it is not my intention to add much to them (see Stromberg [8] for a summation). Nor am I among his critics, who certainly have some valid points of their own. I think Toynbee went a bit too far. If only he had scaled down his claims,

if only he had not attempted to expound almost every historical episode in terms of a perceptible cause, his following today would be much larger than it is. In any case, there is much in Toynbee's message that will endure for ever.

It is upon these enduring pillars that Sarkar constructs his thesis. Toynbee's work is a start, and Sarkar adds the finishing touch, plus much more. But in so doing he avoids many of Toynbee's errors. Thus Sarkar simply outlines a broad pattern of historical evolution, but is not so specific about a society's laws of growth and decay, because he realises that such laws cannot be explained in terms of a single cause.[3] In his own way he recognises Toynbee's Universal States and Churches, but, in concurrence with the latter's critics, he does not believe that the Universal Church provides a dividing line between the old and the new civilisation. Thus a civilisation may endure for ever, although its distinctive institutions may come and go. It is in this way that Sarkar builds where Toynbee, and also Marx, have left off.

THE TESTING PROCEDURE

Before concluding this chapter, let me say a few words concerning the way I intend to test the theory of social cycle. To illustrate his hypothesis Sarkar sifts a number of pointed events from the immense landscape of the human past, but does not provide a continuum of history in terms of his four eras. Some may object to this method and suggest that it merely clothes the well-known episodes of world history with the garb of new concepts, terminology and labels. Perhaps the proper procedure is to explore the annals of various societies and see if they can be explained by the four eras in exactly the succession that the law of social cycle determines. Of course, this methodology requires a wealth of information that may not be readily available. For detecting the mentality of the ruling class at various moments of history requires not only data about political events but also about society, the economy, literature, and so on. Nevertheless, this is a procedure which few can question, and, wherever possible, this is how the hypothesis of social cycle will be subsequently tested in terms of four old or modern civilisations. In the next chapter, I begin with ancient Egyptian society, which sets a rhythmic pattern for the other three.

NOTES

1. In a later revision, Toynbee's civilisations swelled to as many as thirty.
2. Sarkar's conception of the unity of history is, of course, totally different from the obsolete European version, which exalted the West to the exclusion of every other social organism. To Sarkar, the unity of history is rooted in the fact that all civilisations have to evolve along the tracks of the law of social cycle.

3. In another volume [6], Sarkar does delineate in some detail the basic elements that propel the engine of social change, but there again he speaks in terms of broad generalisation, rather than slip into the pitfall of specificity. Also see Raghunath [5] in this connection.

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4 The Ancient Egyptian Civilisation

The Egyptian civilisation, though not necessarily the oldest, is regarded by many historians as a splendid archetype of most other civilisations. Its variegated attainments in art, religion, literature, and many other crafts and skills that distinguish a society seem to have been unexcelled by other ancient peoples, and in some respects even by any people to this day. Incredibly enough, the Egyptians had discovered a calendar of 365 days more than six thousand years ago, and the only other improvement that has since been added to this discovery is the leap year, of which they were not yet aware. They had also early discovered a smooth yellow sheet, called papyrus, on which they could legibly write with an ink produced from vegetable gum and soot: indeed the word paper itself derives from papyrus. Some of the monuments to their glory have survived the onslaughts of man and Time, and in them we can catch a phantom glimpse of their radiance.

There are several reasons why, among the ancient and now defunct societies, I have selected the Egyptian as the first test case for the validity of Sarkar's theory of social cycle. For one thing, it endured longer than any other known to have flourished on our planet, including those that are still extant, so that if time is any factor in complete rotation of the social cycle, then the Egyptian civilisation, more than any other, meets this criterion. Second, it seems to have been one of those few that in early days enjoyed a long period of tranquility and stability of political institutions. Third, somewhat more is known of its attainments than of most other bygone peoples. Finally, as just noted above, the Egyptian past stands out as a radiant model for many other dynamic societies.

Egypt has long been recognised as the product of the river Nile, and appropriately so, because even today more than ninety per cent of its population dwells in the river valley, which at any point is rarely wider than thirty miles. The strip of soil on each side of the river is nourished year after year by an overflow, which spreads a thin layer of earthy sediment on the flat surface as far out as ten miles. Over the years, under the unfailing deluge of the Nile, this sediment has built up a rich delta, which together with the valley up to the First Cataract forms an area

comprising ten thousand square miles of verdant black soil, encompassing less than four per cent of what we call Egypt. The Nile valley is divided into two sections, one called Upper Egypt stretching from the southern city of Adindan to Cairo, and the other, called Lower Egypt, covering the Delta between Cairo and the northernmost point – the Mediterranean Sea.

In terms of Sarkar's thesis, the rudimentary Khatrian age of ancient Egypt was born around 5000 B.C. when its Neolithic tradition seems to have begun. It is not clear whether communal living was also established as early as this. The earliest Egyptians once were hunters, but wheat and barley found in their graves suggest that as early as five millennia B.C. they were engaged in agriculture. Egypt was then peopled by a tribe of Badarians, who appear to have excelled in the finesse of pottery even at that stage of human evolution. Our knowledge of these people comes, quite naturally, from their graves whose contents reveal gradually improving skills and workmanship. From these graves we surmise that Badarians were infiltrated by certain warring stocks coming perhaps from Libya and Syria, and that is when were born some Khatrian groups, wherein a band of Shudras is organised under a Khatri or a group of Khatris. James Baikie [2, p. 34] suggests that this system of clans had arisen by 4475 B.C. By 4241 B.C., the Egyptian had devised his calendar to which I have already alluded, and by 4000 B.C. metal as well as the art of writing had also been discovered.

This so-called predynastic period, or the rudimentary Khatrian age, continued until various clans were united first into two separate kingdoms of Lower and Upper Egypt, and later into one. The credit for complete unification goes to Menes (or Narmer), the king of southern Egypt, who conquered the Delta and founded the First Dynasty around 3100 B.C. It is this event which is commonly believed to have opened the floodgates of creativity and rapid advance in ancient Egypt.[1]

The period prior to this unification is appropriately called the predynastic period, which, judging from the testimony of recent excavations, seems to have produced no mean accomplishments of its own. Just the discovery of the calendar, which in some respects excels the present-day Julian calendar, was a marvellous feat that reflects the keenness of the Egyptian mind. The kind of reasoning and probing attitude that this requires are not possessed by many to this day.

THE EARLY PHARAOHS AND THE KHATRIAN ERA

The dynastic annals of ancient Egypt are commonly divided into three periods: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the Empire. As stated above, the seed of the Khatrian age had already been planted in the predynastic epoch, but we know so little about the then political

organisation that it is difficult to say when the Khatrian era really began to advance at a rapid pace. Even the historicity of Menes is open to some question, not to speak of his predecessors, who are described as 'demigods' by Manetho, the first Egyptian historian, who lived around 300 B.C. Manetho called them 'strong men', a trait that attests to the Khatrian qualities of these demigods. The title of these predynastic kings in the Upper Egypt was Insi, which means 'Reed', whereas in the Delta their title was Bya, which means 'Bee', signifying that they had roots in primitive communities.

The semi-historic Menes, who by his conquest of the Delta laid the ground for the Old Kingdom and indeed for several dynasties of monarchs called pharaohs, was a benevolent and judicious ruler. In order to cement the political union of the Egyptian kingdoms into an enduring cultural union, he fused the two royal titles into one – into Insi-Bya [2, p. 58]. To Menes also goes the credit of being the first ruler endeavouring to tame the abandon of the Nile. The Greek historian, Herodotus, records that in order to divert the course of the Nile around the capital city of Memphis, Menes erected a great dam, thereby laying the foundation stone for the impressive system of dykes and inundations which his successors subsequently built to harness the river.

Although this itself must have led to tremendous agricultural development and to the prosperity of a united nation, yet its economic health does not seem to have been the main concern of the pharaohs of the first two dynasties. There were other pressing matters that demanded attention and leadership, something for which the then rulers were well equipped. James Henry Breasted lauds Menes by suggesting that

> it must have been a skillful warrior and a vigorous administrator, who thus gathered the resources of the Southern Kingdom so well in hand that he was able to invade and conquer the Delta, and thus merge the two kingdoms into one nation, completing the long process of *centralization* which had been going on for many centuries. [4, p. 37 (italics mine)]

Note the word 'centralisation', for this is precisely why I say that with the founding of the Old Kingdom the Khatrian era, which is marked by absolutism, had passed its rudimentary phase. Actually centralisation was unavoidable, for the unification of Egypt was an unprecedented event, and before long it must have met opposition from the vanquished party as well as from those fearing the change. John H. Wilson [11, p. 44] advances this argument 'with the positive observation that there are scattered records of fighting and an apparent rebellion within the First and Second Dynasties', which incidentally endured for over four hundred years. During this none-too-short time, the pharaohs consolidated their hold over their subjects through military activities as well

as through proclamations of their divine origin, which also could not initially have gone unquestioned.

In those remote days, when national consciousness was out of the question, the doctrine of the god-king was a deft strategem devised to arouse the loyalty of the common Egyptian towards the person of the king, towards the pharaoh. The people of the southern and northern wings of Egypt, with diverse cultures and gods, might have had trouble accepting the rule of one person, but not of a god claiming to be the nerve-centre of all the elements of the two lands. Such authoritarian rule continued until the first two or three dynasties, as Wilson concludes in these words:

> Thus we assume the process of the first two or three dynasties to have been highly centripetal, with the setting up of a state with the pharaoh as its essential nucleus. He, as a god, was the state. To be sure, it was necessary for him to have officials of a government which had spread and which would become increasingly elaborated, but our evidence indicates that they were his officers, appointed by him, responsible to him alone, and holding office subject to his divine pleasure. [12, p. 50]

Even though the first three dynasties were mostly occupied with reinforcing and legitimising their hold over the unified land, the emergence of a strong, well-organised administration gave rise to immense economic development and a high degree of civilisation. The network of dykes and inundations itself could not have been erected without the concentrated energy of a centralised government. However, it is in the Fourth Dynasty that the Old Kingdom reached the summit of splendour and creativity. This is the age of the pyramid-builders. The first pyramid, and the most magnificent of them all, was built by Khufu, in whose reign Egyptian art and sculpture reached an apotheosis that does not seem to have been reached by humanity again. Its vast size, the precision of its masonry, the imposing height, the finesse and workmanship, the mind-boggling human effort involved in its construction all point to the tenacity of purpose as well as the extent to which the ancient Egyptian mind had developed. Fittingly, the only other work which comes close to the immensity and grandeur of Khufu's Great Pyramid is yet another pyramid that was built by his successor named Khafre. In Toynbee's eloquent words, the Fourth Dynasty stands at

> the zenith in the characteristic achievement of the Egyptian Society: the co-ordination of human labour in great engineering enterprises ranging from the reclamation of the swamps to the construction of the pyramids. It was also the zenith in the spheres of political administration and of art. [11, p. 137]

All this illustrates the fact that in the Khatrian era, usually in its early phase, a civilisation soars to heights unscaled by it before and, perhaps, afterwards, until, of course, another Khatrian age is born. Although the early pharaohs were absolute rulers, with a mandate from God untrammelled by any earthly institution, there is no evidence that their reigns were marked by tyranny, at least not until the advent of the Fourth Dynasty when the royal mania for pyramids, some suggest, could have turned the government into a repressive regime. There are others who argue that these massive activities of construction reflect the king's humanitarian concern for the peasantry, which could work on the public projects just when the yearly Nile overflow forced idleness upon the farm-workers. The truth perhaps lies somewhere between these extreme positions: royal extravagance tempered by humane concern. In any case, the five hundred years of the first three dynasties do not seem to have been blemished by oppressive despotism – centralisation yes, oppression no! Breasted convincingly dispells any remaining doubts in this regard:

> In spite of the luxury evident in the organisation of his court, the Pharaoh did not live the life of a luxurious despot. . . . He was thus an educated and *enlightened monarch*, able to read and write, and not infrequently taking his pen in hand personally to indite a letter of thanks and appreciation to some deserving officer in his government. [4, p. 77 (italics mine)]

HELIOPOLIS – PRIESTHOOD AND THE VIPRAN ERA

From recent excavations, in mortuary inscriptions in the passages of the pyramids, in various papyrus documents, nothing is more manifest than the sway of religion on the ancient Egyptian psyche. However, it is difficult to speak of one Egyptian religion, because it changed with the changing social and political environment as well as with natural evolution. In prehistoric times, Egypt, like other hunting communities, had a plethora of gods associated with certain animals. As various clans evolved first into the domains of Lower and Upper Egypt, and then into the Old Kingdom, the tribal gods were merged with the favourite god of the pharaoh. This is how a state religion, and the concomitant priesthood, came into being. In theory, it was the pharaoh alone who worshipped the gods, but in reality he could not possibly perform this function without the priests who represented him in various temples. Some of these priesthoods, especially those of Heliopolis and Thebes, were destined to play a supreme role in the nation's evolution, a role that, as we shall see, resulted in the primacy of Vipran forces on two different occasions.

The Old Kingdom had reached its pinnacle during the Fourth Dynasty, in the reigns of Khufu and Khafre. Thereafter, decline seems to have set in; it is reflected in the successive pyramids which are dwarfed in size, architecture and craftsmanship by their two preceding counterparts. It appears that a vacuum of power and leadership developed after Khafre's death, a vacuum that was filled by a new tide that swept the weaklings aside and injected new vigour into the moribund state. How this transition from the Fourth Dynasty to the Fifth came about, we do not know. In terms of Sarkar's nomenclature, there seems to have been a 'social revolution' that resulted in the forced, and possibly violent, deposition of the last of the Fourth-Dynasty kings. But we have no glimpse of either the causes or the process of this conflict. What is indisputable is that it culminated in the rise of the priestly citadel of Heliopolis and its sun-god Re (or Ra), for the pharaohs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties were mere figureheads of state.

The transition from the Fourth Dynasty to the Fifth is predicted in scanty details in the celebrated Egyptian tale found in the Westcar Papyrus. In this, a certain wizard named Dedi apprises King Khufu of how three children will be born to the wife of a priest of the sun-god Re, how one by one each will come to the throne, and how the goddesses themselves will give the three children, procreated by none other than the Sun-god himself, the names of Userkaf, Sahure and Kakau. And lo and behold, these are the names of the first three Fifth-Dynasty kings! The tale unfortunately tells us nothing about Khufu's reaction to this adverse prophecy. Evidently it is a concoction of the priesthood to justify in the common mind its usurpation of political power. Speaking of this tale, Baikie observes that

> the story has great historical importance, because it represents the popular tradition of the change which took place on the crumbling of the IVth Dynasty, and which resulted in the triumph of the priestly college of Ra [Re] at Heliopolis, and the establishment upon the throne of a dynasty of kings who owed their position to priestly influence, and were in fact, though perhaps not in name, the nominees and servants of the priesthood of the Sun-god. . . . The priests of Ra had to account to the nation at large for the possibly violent and at least irregular series of changes which displaced the last weak descendents of the great-pyramid building line from the throne of Egypt, and substituted for them the puppets of the priesthood. They did so in the convenient way which priesthoods have always had at hand as a justification for the actions which their policy requires or finds convenient. The first three kings of the Vth Dynasty, whom the Heliopolitan priests knew well enough as very mere men, even as puppets whose strings they pulled, must needs appear before the nation as divine, the actual sons begotten by Ra himself. Probably from the very beginning Pharaoh had claimed a certain divinity for himself; now it was claimed for him as a necessity of priestly policy, and the permanent ascendancy of the Sun-god was assured by the fact that henceforth every Pharaoh, no matter how poor a weakling, is Son of Ra. [2, p. 141]

Thus at the advent of the Fifth Dynasty, the direct Khatrian reign gave way to the indirect reign of the priesthood; the rule of force and might gave way to the rule of intellect and the attending machinations. All this signals the presence of none other than the Vipran age in which, according to Sarkar, the Vipran brain towers over the Khatrian brawn.

Just when the Khatrian era drew to a close is not completely clear even though the end of the Fourth Dynasty furnishes a convenient terminal point. However, it is quite possible that the priests became dominant immediately after Khufu's death. Names of the pharaohs are often instructive in this regard. Up to Khufu no pharaoh had a name ending in Re, but his successors belonging to the Fourth Dynasty are named as Khaf-Re and Men-kau-Re, and these names are suggestive of the sway that the Re-priests must have exercised even during the Fourth Dynasty. By the same token the Fifth Dynasty kings rejoice in such names as Sahu-Re, Neferirke-Re, Nuser-Re, although there are some whose names admittedly do not end with Re; the founder of the Fifth Dynasty, for instance, was Userkaf, but his chief claim to renown is his donation of a large tract of land to the Re-temple. If this line of reasoning is correct, then the Vipran era really began with Khaf-Re's accession in 2560 B.C., otherwise it commenced with the onset of the Fifth Dynasty around 2500 B.C. In any case, by then it is certain that, perhaps for the first time in history, a human society evolved from the Khatrian to the Vipran age.

The names of the kings following Khufu are not the only indicators of the priestly power. Prior to Khaf-Re, the office of vizier (prime minister) and chief judge, which was the most powerful office in the state, belonged to the eldest son of the pharaoh, but now it became the monopoly of the High Priest of Ptah, bearing the name Ptahhotep. As with royalty, the succession to this highest administrative office also became hereditary. In addition, each king of the Fifth Dynasty expressed his gratitude to the Re-priesthood in the concrete form of splendid sun-temples, which were well endowed with land and other forms of wealth. Priests were also exempted from labour services and property taxation.

According to Sarkar, Vipras rule indirectly (in the name of the apparent ruler) by binding him in the web of unintelligible dogmas. Therefore, while the outer shell and form of the political system remain unscathed, the administrative apparatus in the Vipran epoch become somewhat decentralised. In theory nothing changes, but in reality the absolutism of the nominal Khatrian ruler is enjoyed by the Vipran class, whereas in administration his officials come to prominence. There is

evidence that this process, which perhaps started during the closing phase of the Fourth Dynasty, had crystallised by the onset of the Fifth. A quote from Baikie leads the way:

> The pyramids of the [Fifth-Dynasty] kings show very poor workmanship, and their small size suggests that the sovereign had no longer that absolute control over his subjects which would enable him to bend the whole resources of his kingdom to the erection of a magnificent sepulchre for himself. There are indications of that *gradual rise in the importance of the nobles* which we shall see reaching its culmination and ending in a period of anarachy at the close of the Sixth Dynasty. [3, p. 37 (italics mine)]

The fact that by then the nobility had come of age flows from various bits of evidence. First of all, the victory records left by the pharaohs prior to the Fifth Dynasty contain no names of the officials involved in military expeditions. Either the pharaoh restrained his subordinates or they were in such awe of their god-king that they would take no credit for personal excellence. By the end of the Fifth Dynasty, however, the pharaoh's dignity had so much declined that the officer could no longer resist inscribing his name as the campaign-commander. A few centuries ago this was foreign to common consciousness, but now the pharaoh was no longer the sole claimant to glory and fame. At last the Egyptian people were beginning to penetrate the imposing facade of divinity that the Vipran priest had so assiduously created round the person of the pharaoh.

After a reign of approximately 150 years, the Fifth Dynasty came to an end, as its last ruler was overthrown by local governors; a new dynasty, headed by Teti II, then emerged in its place. However, the Vipran era continued although the dominion of Vipras suffered a corresponding decline. True, the local governors had gained more independence than before from the central command, yet there is no evidence that they became quasi-sovereigns in their own right. That development would have to await the fall of the Sixth Dynasty. Such names of the Sixth Dynasty kings as Userker-Re, Merne-Re, and Nefer-ka-Re (or Pepi II) attest to the continued Vipran dominion; and Breasted affirms this in these words:

> Notwithstanding the thorough-going changes, the new [Sixth] Dynasty continued the official cult maintained by their predecessors. Re remained supreme and the old foundations were respected. [4, p. 133]

Yet a subtle change did occur after the Fifth Dynasty. Henceforth the Vipran priests could not feel as secure as before, for the centrifugal storms that were then so visibly in the making are subversive of all kinds of authority, whether ecclesiastical or secular. The rumblings of the impending storms had already been heard, for was not the last of the priestly puppets violently overthrown. But there is nothing that the priesthood could do to counter the advance of evolutionary forces, which for the last seven or eight centuries had been directing the nation towards decentralisation. This process and its evolutionary nature have been detailed by Wilson with an insight that cannot be equalled:

> The sudden and brilliant maturing of Egyptian culture in the first four dynasties called forth the highest abilities of individual Egyptians. . . . As the state became more powerful and effective, it had to have a large number of able and trustworthy servants. . . . Thus the centripetal forces supporting the absolutism of the king were actually building toward a centrifugal counteraction of individualism apart from the king. . . . This process was effective throughout the Old Kingdom, but in a slow and evolutionary way, never with the sharp break of a social and political revolution. It would be the breakdown of the state in the First Intermediate Period following the Old Kingdom that would give recognition to the process of decentralisation, with Egypt reconstructed into a feudal state. [12, p. 87]

THE FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD AND THE VASHYAN ERA

The Vipran era, which perhaps began during the Fourth Dynasty around 2560 B.C., lasted until the end of the Sixth Dynasty, that is, until about 2200 B.C. Thus for over three hundred years, in remote recesses of the Egyptian civilisation, it is Vipras who ruled under the mask of the priesthood of Heliopolis and even Ptah. Their dominion rested on their intellectual superiority over the feeble Khatrian pharaohs, who until the Fifth Dynasty were all in some way related to the semi-legendary warrior Menes. The priests had sown the seeds of relative decentralisation, which, despite the pharaoh's avowed divinity, had been gradually gaining ground during the last three dynasties of the Old Kingdom. And as Pepi II died, the Old Kingdom, under the weight of local elements, died with him. The period immediately following this collapse is usually called the First Intermediate Period, a name we have already come across in the quote from John Wilson. Egypt then passed into what Sarkar calls the Vashyan age, of which extreme decentralisation relative to the preceding Khatrian and Vipran eras is the chief distinguishing feature.

In the Vashyan period, it may be recalled, the rich come to power because of their wealth, while all other sections of society, Khatris,

Vipras and Shudras, serve the interests of those who own or control the means of production; extreme materialism then rules the roost, crime becomes rampant, and society slowly and steadily moves towards the anarchy of the Shudran age. All this fosters conditions for Khatri or Vipra-inspired rebellions that Sarkar lumps together as the Shudran revolution, following which the Khatrian era and hence centralisation surge anew.

These features of a Vashyan era have been enumerated in the first two chapters, but I have presented them again to refresh our memory. Even a cursory reading of the ancient Egyptian chronicle suggests that these traits aptly describe the First Intermediate Period which lasted from the Sixth Dynasty to the Eleventh. There are good reasons why this interlude, of which the records are extremely scanty, is called the 'dark' period.

That extreme disrespect for central authority came over Egypt following the dissolution of the Old Kingdom is beyond any shadow of doubt. This much appears certain, even though it is hard to pierce through the pall of clouds that hangs over historical developments from the Sixth to the Tenth Dynasties. Baikie makes it clear that after the death of Pepi II

> the turbulent barons asserted their strength against the declining power of the royal house; the kingdom split into a number of petty principalities, each ruled by its own princelet; there was no strong central authority, but 'every man did what was right in his own eyes'; and the land was made miserable by a state of anarchy, tempered locally by the rise of some stronger despot, who was able to impose his will upon a few of the petty chiefs around him. [3, p. 41]

In reality Egypt then reverted to the political conditions of the predynastic times as its myriad nomes (or provinces), into which it was divided upon the breakdown of the Old Kingdom, were each ruled by the local nomarchs or nobles. A precise succession of events that culminated in such fissures must still illude us, but the slow process of evolution following the foundation of the Old Kingdom furnishes some clues. Wilson has already given us a preview of the divisive currents that throughout the first six dynasties had been gradually, but imperceptibly, building up to the storms of decentralisation. But running concurrent with the forces of decentralisation were the forces of materialism, which subordinated the afterlife to the present, tainted religion with wealth and power, and emaciated the sceptre of the pharaohs.

At the risk of some repetition, let us see how materialism came to permeate the Egyptian mind. The main concern of the first two dynasties was conquest and consolidation which exalted the militaristic, disciplined and centralised mode of life. It was then that the pharaoh

decreed himself to be a Horus, a Falcon-god of the celestial spaces, and this resulted in the subordination of all divisive forces. Apparently it took some time before the divinity and absolutism of the king became embodied in the Egyptian cultural tradition, and perhaps by the end of the Third Dynasty the king's Divine Rights had gained nation-wide acceptance; the king could now attend to the immense task of immortalising himself, a task which crystallised into the Great Pyramids during the Fourth Dynasty. At that time the nobles, provincial governors and other administrative officers considered it a privilege if the pharaoh deigned to permit their graves near his pyramid. Indeed there is evidence that hundreds of them were slaughtered at the time of a pharaoh's death and were then buried around his own grave, so that they could escort him even in the afterlife. The pharaoh was a god on earth and could be no different in the life beyond, whereas the nobles were his subjects here and could be no different in the celestial world.

The massive activity of construction, however, planted the germs of decentralisation; it led to a dramatic growth of bureaucracy which, while supportive of the king's absolutism, gave rise to what Wilson calls 'individual voluntarism'. These centrifugal forces received a shot in the arm from the priestly lineage of the Fifth Dynasty, thereby further diminishing the pharaoh's stature, even though the priesthood actually exalted his concept of divinity: He was now Re's own begotten son. However, no longer did the nobles crave the privilege of burial near the pharaoh's grave. Dead or alive, they preferred to stay in their nomes – a reflection of either the pharaoh's diminished prestige, or of the nobles' prominence, or of both.

As is the king, so are his subjects. The pharaoh's excessive materialism, which manifested itself first in the Great Pyramids during the Fourth Dynasty and then in the huge, luxurious temples of the priestly line of kings during the Fifth and Sixth, must have ultimately infected the Egyptian mass. It also must have vexed the nobles who had to provide materials and manpower for the colossal projects of construction. It is quite possible that, as the king's influence declined, thanks to the priest's usurpation of power, at least some of the nobles refused to comply with central orders, and later arrogated to themselves even the divine attributes of the pharaoh.

Perhaps this is how the Vashyan era, with its accent on decentralisation and materialism, was born. One may question my characterisation of the pyramids as tokens of the pharaoh's materialism, because after all they merely reflected his concern for a comfortable posthumous life and not for the world of the present. But this only shows that his conception of immortality was also materialistic. It never occurred to him that the gateway to the infinite eternal life is the inner spirit whose mysteries his pyramid could in no way unfold. How can the infinite be attained with anything material, which by nature is finite? Also, the pharaohs did not

have to be so extravagant in their monuments.

To the materialism of the pharaohs must be added the voracity of the priests. Once the latter rose to primacy at the end of the Fourth Dynasty, they strove to consolidate their hold and privileges. First, they won exemption from property taxes as well as forced labour; secondly they urged, and perhaps coerced, the king to set up perpetual endowments – mainly in terms of land – that were meant to finance the care of mushrooming tombs and temples; finally they introduced new cults, charms and rituals, for which they began to charge sacerdotal fees. Their intercession with the gods became indispensable to the ruler and the ruled for success in wars and other matters. Their birth into a priestly family was all they needed to curry favour with the deities. The sequel was a great rise in the riches and corruption of the priestly class, a class that the average Egyptian avidly sought to join. Thus, it is at this time when the Vipran wheels of social exploitation were in full swing that the Vashyan era had been born.

Whatever be their cause, materialism and decentralisation reigned supreme in the First Intermediate Period, which is also called the Feudal Age. The nobles now arrogated to themselves the royal status and divinity of the pharaoh himself. How can we be so sure about this in view of the thick mist that veils this age? Wilson answers it in this way:

> the decentralisation of the Old Kingdom had leveled down the king and raised up the nobles, so that a concept of equality was theoretically possible. The First Intermediate Period was the only time in Egyptian history in which the divine king was presented as humanly fallible and errant or in which an ordinary commoner pointed a denunciatory finger at his sovereign. With a thoroughly exceptional humility, a Herakleopolitan king confessed to his son Meri-ka-Re that he had done wrong and deserved punishment from the gods. [12, p. 117]

How did Vipras fare in the new alignment of power? Were they still on top of the social pyramid or some notches below any other class, particularly the Vashyan nomarchs? With the shift of power from the pharaoh to a multitude of nobles, the influence of the priest must have declined somewhat, for now he was divested of the unflinching protection that he and his property had so far received from the king. Some incidents of the Feudal Age have been documented by Maspero, who concludes that, despite all the anathemas which the priest threatened to unleash, the kings and the nobles at times confiscated his ill-gotten wealth:

> Such menaces did not always prevent the king or the lords from laying hands on the temple revenues: had this not been the case, Egypt would soon have become a sacerdotal country from one end to the other. [10, p. 86]

A few decades ago this was inconceivable, but now it became a matter of necessity. In the heyday of the priestly power during the Fifth Dynasty, temples were completely unmolested and their revenues went nowhere but up. However, now they were not as sacrosanct as before. This is not to suggest that the priest had become a nonentity, only that his standing in the social hierarchy had descended one notch. Instead of being the arbiter of destinies, his own and those of others, he was now resigned to a position dependent on the nobility. Otherwise his *modus operandi* had changed little; he still relied on his intellectual forte to make a comfortable living, except that now he was pitted against Time which, following the Sixth Dynasty, favoured those blessed with acquisitive mentality and economic power. The priest's influence, as before, derived from his impregnable monopoly over intimacy with the gods, and this he still used to his maximum advantage. The career of the gods themselves depended upon the fortunes of those mortals on whom they showered their grace. If the gods picked a winner, their priests were so much the richer; if a loser, they and their agents faced economic ruin – slavery. Thus religion, like the rest of society, had become thoroughly worldly, and, as a result, the affluent kept it and its emissaries under their thumb. The priesthood itself was divided into splinter groups, and that killed any chance it might have had of holding on to its once supreme status. About Egyptian religion in the Feudal Age, Maspero asserts that

> its administration was not vested in a single body of Priests. . . . There were as many bodies of priests as there were temples, and every temple preserved its independent constitution with which the clergy of the neighbouring temples had nothing to do: the only *master* they acknowledged was *the lord of the territory* on which the temple was built, either Pharaoh or one of his nobles. [10, p. 87 (italics mine)]

The upshot of this discussion is that Vipran priests in the First Intermediate Period had to play second fiddle to the nobles who, by virtue of their hereditary offices, veritably owned their principalities. Yet all was not lost, because the Vipras were still chummy with the gods, and this placed them above the Khatrian group of warriors and skilled workers, as well as the Shudran group of physical labourers. The priests were still exempt from ordinary taxes, military service and forced labour obligations; their main duty was to keep the nobles in good graces of the gods.

Who were these nobles? What were their mental characteristics? Did they excel in economic muscle and display an acquisitive mentality? In other words, were they by temperament Sarkar's Vashyas?

During almost a thousand years of the Old Kingdom, many men of humble means had risen to high offices of the land either as the pharaoh's provincial governors or as his ministers. The army of their descendants must have been very large. Many of them came to own hereditary fiefs either through royal favours or through marriages of convenience. It is this class of people that mostly constituted the nobility, and within it also there were many gradations. On top were the nomarchs of the nomes as well as great lords owning huge tracts of land; but there were others whose fiefs were rather small and they, of course, had little sway. Throughout the dark age one pharaoh or another was accepted by the landed magnates as their king, but his sovereignty was more fictitious than real. Each lord exercised supreme authority in his own realm, and everything within that sanctuary belonged to him. Of his estate he had a part farmed by his serfs, and the rest he leased out to his vassals who in return cultivated the fief and provided military service. The lord also enjoyed judicial and administrative powers, and the incomes that went with them. In short, his life was a replica of the life-style of the pharaoh himself, only on a somewhat miniature scale.

From this account, it is clear that the dominion of great lords stemmed from their control over vast estates of land which was then the main source of production. Thus it is their economic muscle that placed them at the top of the social hierarchy. Consequently, their interest lay in enhancing their fiefs either through warfare or through strategic marriages, which not only helped enlarge their estates but also their harems.

The pharaoh, who could not ignore the great lords, endeavoured to win their fealty through generous gifts of land and sinecure positions. Possessed as they were of Vashyan disposition though, their rapacity seldom knew any bounds. For all this, Maspero provides affirmation in crystal-clear words:

> Pharaoh himself was obliged to treat them [the nobles] with deference, and he purchased their allegiance by renewed and ever-increasing concessions. Their ambition was never satisfied; when they were loaded with favours, and did not venture to ask for more for themselves, they impudently demanded them for such of their children as they thought were poorly provided for. . . . He [pharaoh] proceeded to lavish appointments, titles, and estates on the son in question; if necessity required it, he would even seek out a wife for him, who might give him, together with her hand, a property equal to that of his father. [10, p. 83]

It is now clear that, in the guise of the great lords, it was the Vashyan mind that prevailed over Egypt during the First Intermediate Period. As is to be expected from a Vashyan period, the life of the masses became more and more miserable under the grinding oppression of so many chiefs acting like the pharaoh. Living under the domain of one oppressor is intolerable, but imagine what life would be in the reign of so many voracious nobles, all vying for personal power, remorselessly usurping the fruits of their vassals' sweat and toil. From all available accounts the masses – the craftsman, the peasant, the artisan, the vassal, the serf – were all heavily taxed; forced labour was as common as ever before. Crime also steadily increased. Homicide and pilferage reigned rampant. Even the sacred property of the dead, of the pharaoh himself, was not spared; to build their tombs, some even broke into the tombs of their own ancestors. And to cap it all, this internal decadence invited periodic assaults by the Asiatics living on Egypt's peripheral areas.

Some Egyptians contemplated suicide, while others sought refuge in hedonistic abandon. We can find confirmation for this general Egyptian malaise in Wilson:

> The First Intermediate Period has left us a respectable body of literature voicing bewilderment and despair with which Egyptians faced the overturn of their once stable world. . . . These texts agree in their sense of shock and grief at the sorry state of land, but they propose different activities to escape the troubles of the day; suicide, forgetful indulgence, or the return of good rule. [12, pp. 106–7]

All these developments suggest that the Feudal Age steadily but surely moved from a state of decentralised polity to one of anarchy pure and simple – indicating a gradual degeneration of Egypt's first Vashyan era into the Shudran age, of which open disrespect for law and order is the surest sign. Nowhere else was this turmoil more apparent than on the political front. The dark age had been born amidst shrieks of confusion and horror. Following the collapse of the Old Kingdom, the nobles, according to Manetho, endeavoured to set up a joint rule, but that venture ended in a fiasco as the feeble rule of the Seventh and Eighth Dynasties, over which the nomarchs held sway, lasted but a short time, maybe twenty-five years. Next to nothing is known of these phantom kings, except that there were seventy of them in seventy days. This statement taxes our credulity, but even though tinged with exaggeration, it serves to underline the vortex of disorder in which Egypt was then caught. No pyramid, nor any other monument of any of these pharaohs has ever been found, indicating that either they were too weak to command any resources for such construction works, or their works were of too poor a quality to withstand the ravages of time. None of these interpretations puts these kings in a favourable light.

While the records of these pharaohs are conspicuous by their absence, those of some nobles, such as the lords of the Hare-nome, are con-

spicuous by their presence, dispelling any doubt about the power of nomarchs, who evidently ignored the authority of the king, and documented in glowing terms their own petty accomplishments. This silence of history over the early pharaohs of the Feudal Age is somewhat broken by the advent of the Ninth Dynasty, which seems to have been founded, with a little use of force, by nomarchs of Herakleopolis; and with them a semblance of order appears to have been restored in the Delta and a goodly part of Upper Egypt. Actually the Herakleopolitan family ruled through the Ninth as well as the Tenth Dynasty, and this period of roughly one hundred years was 'the formative time of the classical Egyptian literature, with a productive literary movement of considerable vigor' [Wilson, 12, p. 105].

Meanwhile a powerful family was emerging at Thebes in the South to catch the attention of the Herakleopolitan ruler, and soon they were at war in which the Theban prince triumphed enough to become a 'keeper of the Door of the South' [5, p. 420]. This development brings to mind the situation immediately preceding the First Dynasty. Then also Egypt was divided into two royal domains: the circle is now complete.

There cannot remain two swords in one sheath. With Egypt divided into the rule by two powerful families, the chances for continued peace were not particularly bright; one of them had to give way, but only after its energies were all spent. Not surprisingly, there was a full century of intermittent warfare between the northern and the southern kings. Despite heavy odds against them, the Theban princes, endowed with Khatrian qualities, continued fighting, and, after an internecine struggle, they defeated a coalition of Herakleopolitan kings and some powerful nomarchs. Egypt was reunited in 2050 B.C. under a single sovereign, the founder of the Eleventh Dynasty, who brought the centrifugal forces representing the nobility under some degree of control. Whatever little knowledge we have of these times suggests that the Theban conquest trimmed but did not efface the influence of the nobles. Wilson argues that the Theban dynasts were acknowledged by the provincial chiefs as '*primus inter pares*', and accorded the stature of the sun-gods – something that heralds the move of the Egyptian society back towards authoritarian rule [12, p. 126]. Peace had now been restored and it continued to bless the formerly bedevilled land for another half-century. During this time Egypt endeavoured to recuperate from its long illness which had brought all its achievements to the verge of extinction.

So far at least the ancient Egyptian civilisation has followed the track of Sarkar's law of social cycle. Its rotation would be complete if now the Vashyan era is first terminated by a revolution which, though peaceful or bloody, has the blessings of the Egyptian masses, and then succeeded by the government of the class displaying Khatrian mentality and benevolence. Is it possible to impart such an interpretation to the events

that eventually eclipsed the Feudal Age? Is it possible to argue that relative centralisation of government occurred soon after? I believe it is.

AMENEMHET I AND THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

It is safe to state at the outset that living conditions in the terminal phase of the First Intermediate Period were so miserable that any movement, even violent revolution, aimed at displacing the system, must have been received well by the Egyptian mass. It is then that, as mentioned earlier, some persons openly advocated suicide. Referring to such times, Baikie points out that

> the wonderful civilisation of the Old Kingdom seemed to be on the verge of total destruction. The savagery with which the struggle was carried on is evidenced by the ruthless manner in which the great works of the former dynasties were violated and destroyed. There seems to have been a systematic attempt to obliterate the relics of the ancient rulers of the land; and the very portrait-statues of the kings were smashed or buried. [3, p. 63]

It is hard to picture this sacrilege of the once revered mementos of pharaohs, who during the Old Kingdom were gods on our planet as well as in the celestial world? Can one conceive of ancient Egyptians striving to disown their once proud heritage? But it happened; so awry had life become! The Egyptian had been simply driven to it.

Thus the soil for the seed of revolution was quite fertile, and to it the century of sporadic warfare between Herakleopolitan and Theban kings must have added nourishment. True, this warfare expedited the decline of the Feudal Age, but it was no revolution. The Theban triumph, though a harbinger of the ensuing centralisation, did not erase the nobility's influence. The venomous snake of the feudal society had been defanged, but it was still very much alive and ready to strike its blow at the first opportunity.

The credit for revolution must go to Amenemhet I, the vizier of the last of the Eleventh-Dynasty kings, who seems to have emerged as the pharaoh after a civil war that lasted nearly seven years. About the lineage of this Amenemhet there is some dispute among Egyptologists. Some believe that he belonged to a princely family from Thebes, whereas others suggest that he was of common descent. An extract from the *Egyptian Collection* [8], also quoted by Lester Brooks [6, p. 43], describes him as 'a commoner who had become governor of the South, seized the throne for himself and founded the XII Dynasty'.

Whether or not Amenemhet belonged to a noble or common family, he certainly disliked the political climate in which he lived. By tempera-

ment he was a benevolent Khatri, a trait that manifested itself in the vigour and prudence with which he finally brought order to the scourged land. We have already seen how, with the rise of Theban princes, Khatris were on the rise again, and how their Herakleopolitan adversary eventually had to yield to their indomitable will. The first Theban ruler of the united Egypt was Monthuhotep, who was powerfully built with a giant figure. Although he had brought about Egypt's unification, thereby founding the Middle Kingdom, he still had a long way to go in smashing the power-base of the nobles. In this task, his successors met with ever greater failure, and the feudal chieftains had surged again. 'Such a state of affairs', observes Maspero, 'could only be reformed by revolution' [10, p. 319], a task for which Amenemhet certainly had the resources and the clout. Earlier he had been involved in a royal expedition to a place called Wady Hammamat. He was powerful enough to take with him no fewer than 10,000 men, an unprecedentedly large number for those times. Such an influential subject could not for long remain in the shade, but to achieve his goal he had to remove the reigning king. According to Breasted:

> It was not without hostilities that Amenemhet gained his exalted station. We hear of a campaign on the Nile with a fleet of twenty ships of cedar, followed by the expulsion of some unknown enemy from Egypt. [4, p. 154]

Several points deserve further elucidation. First, Amenemhet was a Khatri, endowed with high-spiritedness, vigour and benevolence; second, he seized the throne presumably after some fighting. The exact process by which Amenemhet came to the throne must still evade us. It is not known, for instance, whether in his struggle against the last pharaoh of the Eleventh Dynasty or against other claimants to the crown he had any support from the Egyptian masses who, having gone through centuries of intermittent repression by the nobility, would have been willing participants in his revolt. But from the facts that he was a non-Vashya, and that his rebellion put an end to the Vashyan era, I conclude that Amenemhet's triumph was the first Shudran revolution in history. Those 10,000 men who joined him in the Hammamat expedition, most of whom must have come from the masses, could have very well provided him with the muscle needed for a successful revolt. It is quite possible, nay very likely, that he enjoyed support from serfs, vassals, peasants, artisans and other common people, who all had to live with crime and heavy taxes, while the privileged Vashyan nobility basked in affluence.

Not that all the underprivileged masses belonged to the Shudran class. Towards the end of the Vashyan period even the Khatrian vassals, artisans and other skilled workers were so heavily exploited that in that materialistic age they must all have been reduced to the Shudran standard of living and thinking. Note that Shudras themselves lack the courage to rebel against the persecution under which they subsist; the initiative for the revolution must come from those Khatris or Vipras who are appalled by the Vashyan voracity. Amenemhet seems to have been one such Khatri who detested what he saw around him. This much speaks out from his subsequent actions through which he deftly, and systematically, cut the nobles down to size. According to Maspero:

> ... he [Amenemhet] showed himself worthy of the rank to which fortune had raised him, and the nobility saw in him a new incarnation of that type of kingship long known to them by tradition only, namely, that of a pharaoh convinced of his own divinity and determined to assert it. He inspected the valley from one end to another, principality by principality, nome by nome, 'crushing crime ... restoring that which he found in ruins'. [10, p. 319]

From these words it is clear that following his seizure of the throne Amenemhet set out to subdue all that scourged the commoners. To what extent he was successful, we will study in the next section. For now let me reiterate that, because of his subsequent success in taming the Vashyan nobility to a proper degree, his revolt may be hailed as the first Shudran revolution. The Eleventh Dynasty, according to Burns and Ralph was 'assailed by the masses, with the result that ... the pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty were able to regain a measure of their former power' [7, p. 30]. The First Intermediate Period, that covers the Vashyan era as well as its terminal Shudran phase of civil wars and revolution, lasted for at least two hundred years – from 2200 to around 2000 B.C.

THE TWELFTH DYNASTY AND THE NEW KHATRIAN ERA

Amenemhet I, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty in 1991 B.C., made a fresh start for Egypt. Not only did he restore order and health to the Egyptian body social, not only did he tame the nobles, but he also gave prominence to a new god, Amon, whose rise broke the back of the Heliopolitan priesthood which had hitherto exercised considerable power. In fact, as argued above, the priestly influence during the First Intermediate Period had been second only to that of the nobles. To be sure, during Amenemhet's reign the nobility was not effected, but from the day he ascended the throne, it had to pay him homage. For the new pharaoh replaced the uncooperative nobles with his protégés. Thus even though the Vashyan aristocracy retained some influence, the apparent ruler was now without doubt the real ruler. According to Maspero:

> Hostile nobles, or those whose allegiance was doubtful, lost the whole or part of their fiefs; those who welcomed the new order of things received accessions of territory as the reward of their zeal and devotion. [10, p. 320]

With the rise of the Twelfth Dynasty, therefore, the Feudal Age began to pant for breath; it was not then buried in the grave, but centripetal forces had gained the upper hand although the early absolutism of the Old Kingdom was still far away. Its full-blooded revival would have to wait till the Eighteenth Dynasty with which the period of the Empire began. Wilson points out that the magnates of individual principalities had supported the Middle Kingdom in the hope – not initially unfounded – that its rule would continue to be nominal; but 'in practice it turned out to be so effective that separatist tendencies lasted only a generation or two into the Twelfth Dynasty and then a *centripetal trend* set in for the greater power of the throne' [12, p. 126 (italics mine)]. Breasted is even less circumscribed in affirming that

> under the vigorous and skillful leadership of Amenemhet I the rights and privileges attained by the powerful nobles were for *the first time* properly adjusted and subjected to the *centralized* authority of the kingship. [4, p. 177 (italics mine)]

I have already mentioned in passing the emergence of the Theban god – Amon. In order to give him the national exposure and prominence, Amenemhet blended him on to the sun-god Re as Amon-Re, or 'King of the gods'. Why did he do this? In answer to this question, one may get a glimpse of that Vipran complicity which, according to Sarkar, furnishes the facade of legitimacy to Vashyan rule in the age of Vashyas. Why would a pragmatic ruler, such as Amenemhet was, attempt to introduce a wholesale, and potentially divisive, change in the realm of religion? His pragmatism had already made him change his capital from Thebes to Lisht, a place strategically located near Memphis in the North, which was then the citadel of the powerful nomarchs. It is easy to see why he moved to live right in their centre and thus be able to keep a watch over them. Why would such a wise ruler then exalt a new deity, and risk disaffection among the masses, unless he felt that the nobility and the Heliopolitan priesthood stood and fell together? Unless he felt that in order to erase the base of great lords he also had to erase the entrenched priesthood, which had every reason to resent the change; unless he felt that the Vipran priest had turned into the fake Vashya (as defined in Chapter 2) and thus become an accomplice of the great lord – the genuine Vashya. The conclusive evidence for complicity between Vipras and Vashyas in the First Intermediate Period will perhaps never be unearthed, but Amenemhet's support for Amon-Re, immediately after his revolution, lends partial credence to this hypothesis.

Let us now examine whether the dynasty which Amenemhet founded displays Khatrian attributes as well as concern for society's well-being. The fact that a new Khatrian era started with the Twelfth Dynasty must by now be clear. A new trend towards centralisation had set in, and the apparent ruler was also now the direct and real ruler. No longer were Vashyan nobles and priests on the summit of the social pyramid; this summit was now held by Khatris. The Khatrian qualities of the Twelfth-Dynasty pharaohs were reflected in their conquest of Nubia and Lower Sudan, and their humanitarianism in the irrigation projects they erected near Faiyum. Wilson notes that, as a result, twenty-seven thousand acres were added to the irrigated area for cultivation. Baikie acclaims Amenemhet I by observing that

> competency is the distinguishing note of the royal line which he founded, and it is rare to see a line which presents . . . so even a keel of efficient administration as does the XIIth Dynasty. [2, p. 270]

In fact the government during this regime as so virtuous and humane that he goes on to call it the golden age of Egypt, whereas according to Burns and Ralph:

> The whole population, regardless of birth or rank, appears to have been accorded privileges hitherto reserved for the few. For this reason the government of the Twelfth Dynasty is referred to as the first democratic kingdom in history. The period of its rule was a golden age of social justice and intellectual achievement. [7, pp. 30–31]

Thus Sarkar has good reason to claim that every Khatrian era, usually in its early phase, is marked by progress, justice and the ruler's benevolence.

THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD AND THE SHUDRAN ERA

Unfortunately every radiant age in the past has been followed by degeneracy. The emergence of the Twelfth Dynasty and with it of another Khatrian era signify one completion of Sarkar's social cycle in the ancient Egyptian society. The social evolution, of course, need not stop here, but it must continue to tread through cyclical variations. If Sarkar's hypothesis is valid, then the benign Khatrian era, the golden age of the Twelfth Dynasty, must be followed by a baser phase, then by the Vipran era, and so on, unless, of course, society in the diastolic

phase decays so much that its revival becomes impossible, or is delayed. Actually the diastolic phase of an era is the most perilous for a civilised community, because any era – Khatrian, Vipran, or Vashyan – in its declining phase is vulnerable to unexpected shocks which may arise internally or externally, from within the body social or without. Under the impact of such shocks, the society, already emaciated by internal fissures, may, for a long time, stay in Shudran age, of which confusion and anarchy are the main features; and when – and if – it renews its forward march, it has to embark on its evolutionary course in the very same order of the Khatrian era to the Vipran era, and so on.

Through such a catastrophic course, unfortunately, Egypt had to pass after the dissolution of the Middle Kingdom, which covered the reigns of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties. Historians are at a loss to explain the causes of this sudden illness, for the Twelfth-Dynasty chronicles of two glorious centuries give no hint of the impending plague that was to afflict Egyptian culture and life for the next two hundred years. Within a few years following the death of Amenemhet IV, the last of the great line of the Twelfth-Dynasty kings, Egypt seems to have reverted to the kind of turbulence and anarchy with which it had had a close brush just after the collapse of the Sixth Dynasty, a collapse that had ushered in its first Vashyan age. However, at that time this anarchy, reflected in the rapid turnover of the so-called kings of the Seventh and Eighth Dynasties, had lasted but twenty-five years; then it signified no more than the short-lived confusion which usually occurs in the transition from one era to another. But now it was to beset Egypt for almost two hundred years.

It is on such grounds that, following the Twelfth Dynasty, Egypt may be said to have passed through a Shudran era which has been described by Wilson as 'The Great Humiliation' [12, ch. VII], or by Baikie as the 'Second Intermediate Dark Period' [2, p. 383]. Let me hasten to add, however, that this age was strikingly different from the First Intermediate Period. For earlier, following the disorder of a quarter-century, order had been restored by Herakleopolitan as well as Theban kings; but now, as we shall presently see, the confusion created by a swift succession of underlings merely invited assaults from an alien colossus – the Hyksos – that in the initial stages of conquest all but obliterated the Egyptian society. True, even during the First Intermediate Period Egypt was penetrated by Bedouin invaders – who quickly lost their separate identity – but that was a mere raindrop in comparison to the avalanche that now struck it with barbaric vehemence.

However, the Hyksos, as those conquerors of Egypt around 1730 B.C. are called, did not ride roughshod over a strong, united, and resisting country. Egypt was overrun without a single battle, so dispirited, so complacent about its own security had it become ever since the fall of the Twelfth Dynasty around 1800 B.C. What ensued after 1800, what

caused the sudden emaciation of the vigorous state that Amenemhet I had founded are among Egyptologists matters of unending contention. As usual, the fragmentary nature of evidence, if any, is the culprit. There is some agreement on the point that the feudal forces during the Twelfth-Dynasty reign had merely gone underground, from where they waited for the right time to come out and rise in rebellion. As long as the pharaohs themselves displayed Khatrian qualities of valour and strength, the feudal nobles were denied that right time; but as soon as a weakling appeared on the throne, the divisive streams of the nobility rushed out of their hideouts and engulfed the once tranquil land. The confusion of the second dark age has been well described by Baikie:

> The period which lies between the close of the Twelfth Dynasty and the rise of the Eighteenth is the most confused and obscure in the long history of Egypt. Even its duration is not settled. . . .
>
> Nor is the confusion of kings less than that of dates. For the Thirteenth Dynasty, Manetho's History gives no fewer than sixty kings, and for the Fourteenth seventy-six; while the Turin Papyrus gives the names, or spaces for the names, of at least fifty-five kings of the Thirteenth. It is manifestly impossible that all, or anything like all, of this enormous multitude can have really been kings of Egypt in the full sense of the term. Probably what we must picture to ourselves is a long period of miserable strife, in which pretender after pretender rises for a little while to lordship over a section of the country, only to be thrust down from his position by another with no truer title than his own. [3, p. 86]

No more words need to be added to this description of the chaotic Egyptian state which invited the assault of the Hyksos, who seemed to have descended on the verdant Delta from Asia. The slumbering Egyptian, busy in his own petty squabbles, was then rudely awakened. It had never occurred to him that an invading horde from Asia could march in force and cross the scorching Sinai desert that separates his land from the Asian. But then he had not as yet been exposed to the speed and power of the horse-driven chariots which the Hyksos used to catch him by surprise.

Of these new rulers, little is known; whatever contemporary documents that are available variously describe them as 'Asiatics' or 'barbarians'. They seem to have left few written records, and this probably means that they were unable to read and write. In the beginning they seem to have effected nothing but destruction of cities and temples; economically too they must have produced nothing but drought as the irrigation system came under gross neglect. However, in the course of time they seem to have been Egyptianised; apparently the superior culture of the vanquished land eventually prevailed over their

barbarity. In the Delta area they established their own dynasties, the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth, while from Upper Egypt, where the house of Thebes seems to have ruled throughout the second dark period, they obtained tribute.

Under the foreign domination, the Egyptian civilisation appears to have reached a new low. Most of its creative faculties then seem to have been destroyed. The Hyksos' illiteracy and innate cruelty, the Egyptian's hatred for the fearsome foe, and the economic decline all seem to have produced a society of nonentities, with few achievements worth the name. True, Egypt was for the first time exposed to a sense of humility, to new ideas and inventions such as improved techniques of spinning and weaving, to new weaponry that ushered in the Bronze Age, to a new patriotism that finally transformed it into a power of unprecedented vigour; but for now, during the Second Intermediate Period, the centrifugal forces of nobility conspired, as it were, with the invading barbarians to spawn a long period of Shudran age.

THE EMPIRE AND THE THIRD KHATRIAN ERA

The Hyksos had added new dimensions to the Egyptian's mental horizon. Before the enemy could be expelled, his techniques of war had to be mastered, improved and then turned back against him in the same way as he had unleashed them at his victims one-and-a-half centuries before. The burden of leadership fell once again on the shoulders of the Theban princes whose dynasty, also called the Seventeenth, had been permitted by the Hyksos under a tributary relationship. The Thebans started the war of independence around 1600 B.C., suffered many defeats in the process, but, in the tradition of their Eleventh-Dynasty ancestors, they persevered, and their fortitude was eventually crowned with success: in 1570 the enemy was expelled and Ahmose I came to the throne, thus founding the Eighteenth Dynasty. Egypt was at last free; free to form its own destiny, free to resume its forward evolutionary march along the tracks of Sarkar's social cycle.

For over two centuries, Egypt had been languishing in the Shudran era, and when finally it woke up from deep sleep, it did so under the leadership of the Theban warriors – the Khatris. In terms of the theory of social cycle, this was not a coincidence, but an arrangement of the principle of societal evolution. Vipran intellectuals or Vashyan landlords could not, for instance, guide the nation out of its calamity; only the high-spirited Khatris could. Therefore when Egypt surged anew to escape the Shudran age, it is not at all surprising that it evolved into an extremely centralised society, with the army and military men dominating every aspect of life. For one thing, numerous nobles had perished in the sanguinary conflict with the Hyksos; for another, the

whole nation was a shambles, ready to accept despotism, march across its frontiers and give the neighbouring lands the same medicine that it had been given. But, first things first! Before all this could be done, the nation, its economy, its social fibre all had to be revived. It took Egypt about a century before its recuperation was complete. From 1570 B.C., when the Eighteenth Dynasty was founded, to 1490, when Thutmose III ascended the throne, even though some military incursions were made into Asia, they were mainly in the nature of punitive expeditions rather than systematic attempts at conquest and colonisation. On the southern borders, in Nubia and Sudan, the military campaigns indeed were more frequent and organised, perhaps because they merely reflected a policy that the Twelfth-Dynasty kings had followed.

The main thrust of the new dynasty was therefore aimed initially at social and political institutions. Egypt had to be united and the pharaoh's hold over the body social consolidated; above all, the favour of the gods, who had been neglected under the Hyksos, had to be won again. In the realm of goverment, the new pharaoh had no difficulty in establishing an absolute monarchy. Ahmose I had led the country out of bondage, and he was then without question the supreme ruler. 'The new Egyptian State' observes Baikie, 'was a despotism pure and simple, in which the will of the divine Pharaoh, "the good god", was law' [3, p. 97].

More than ever before, a career in the army attracted the common man. Thus Khatris were back on top again. The period that began with the rise of the Eighteenth Dynasty in 1570 and lasted up to 1090 B.C. is called the period of the Empire, or the New Kingdom during which at least three dynasties ruled not only over Egypt but also over many adjoining lands. Many warrior-kings then wore the crown, but perhaps the greatest of them all was Thutmose III who, in seventeen-odd campaigns fought over twenty years, conquered Syria and Palestine, thereby laying the ground for Egypt's Asiatic empire. Subsequent pharaohs could only add a little to these vast areas, but just holding on to them in the wake of intermittent revolts from the colonies was, by itself, no mean task. At its pinnacle, the Egyptian empire extended from the Euphrates in the North to as far as the Fourth Cataract along the Nile in the South.

With the Khatrian mentality dominating society, the economic, cultural and artistic advance could not lag far behind. Some Egyptologists acclaim the Empire by calling it Egypt's golden age. For instance, according to Cyril Aldred:

> The civilization of the New Kingdom seems the most golden of all the epochs of Egyptian history, and the nearest to us, probably because of the wealth of its remains. [1, p. 139]

Aldred thus differs from Baikie, who confers this distinction on the reign

of the Twelfth Dynasty; but then others have resolved this difference of opinion by calling the latter Egypt's first golden age and the Empire its second golden age. What is of greater interest is that whenever Egypt made real progress, whether in architecture, economy, or in humanistic achievements of virtue and justice, it did so in the course of Khatrian eras. Every one of them, to say the least, excels the preceding era in terms of attainments for which Egypt is remembered to this day.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF AMON AND THE NEW VIPRAN ERA

Most Khatrian eras, for the sake, so to say, of the evolution of society, plant the germs of the forthcoming Vipran era where those with intellect reign, usually in the name of the apparent ruler. To this general rule, the Khatrian epoch inaugurated by Ahmose I was no exception. As a matter of fact, the seeds of the coming Vipran dominion were sown almost at the time the third Khatrian age was born. To the ancient Egyptian, the propitiation of gods was indispensable for success and happiness in the present life as well as in the life beyond. Therefore, when the nation turned to the task of rebuilding itself, simultaneously there began the construction of new temples, especially those of the god Amon, who, it may be recalled, was the personal god of the Theban rulers, and of whom we first heard in the context of the Twelfth Dynasty. After sifting through the evidence, Wilson suggests that

> from the Eighteenth Dynasty on, the gods directed the affairs of Egypt more actively. . . . The temples of the gods became larger and more important under the Empire, and this increased size began before the full tide of empire under Thut-mose III. [12, p. 170]

With new temples, as should be expected, emerged again the class of priests, of those acknowledged as darlings of the gods. Thus the same old drama that was first staged during the Old Kingdom was now restaged by different characters, wearing different garments but humming familiar tunes. Replace the priesthood of Heliopolis by the priesthood of Thebes, and we are back to the same old patterns.

We have already seen how Thutmose III had laid the foundation of a vast Egyptian empire. However, as a token of his gratitude to the gods, he also planted the germ of a new Vipran era which emerged following the collapse of the Eighteenth Dynasty. It was he who began sharing with the gods, with few murmurs from the priesthood, whatever his victorious armies might bring from alien lands; as the gods, represented by their priests, had a hand in victories, so would they have their hands in the immense loot. This is how the wealth, and with it the corruption, of the priesthood, especially that of Amon, began to pile up apace.

However, just before the new Vipran era could materialise, the priesthood of Amon had to face its most serious challenge – ironically from none other than a king himself.

In 1369 B.C., when Amenhotep IV came to power, Egypt was at the height of its imperial majesty and might. Amon-priests were making merry in opulence but so had it been with the entire nation, thanks to that constant inflow of tribute from foreign lands. There was a surface calm on the Egyptian horizon, unruffled by any hint of latent dissent or of impending storms of religious conflict. True, the venom of clerical corruption had been steadily getting deadlier ever since Thutmose III had enhanced the priest's sources of income about a century ago. True, under that influence the average Egyptian was about to be stupefied by witchcraft, sorcery, magic charms, and the like, which only the priest could deliver in exchange, of course, for sacerdotal fees. Yet superstitions and ritualism had been infecting the body social so gradually that the rulers had simply winked at priestly indulgence. Egypt, after all, was still winning in battles, although sirens of rebellion were beginning to be heard from distant lands; the gods were still in raptures.

Thus when Amenhotep IV ascended the throne, the priesthood of Amon sat secure in luxurious temples, with no warnings of coming change. The new pharaoh, however, was made of a stuff remarkably different from that of his fathers; he was no warrior, no athlete, no muscleman, but an iconoclast, a revolutionary in the realm of ideas, a visionary thriving in his dream-world of thought and contemplation. This much is apparent from his physique; his statue makes him out a frail, slender man, perhaps with poor health, and certainly not as robust as his forefathers. What he did was to expound a new religion, a new god Aton, not merely to add to the pantheon of already existing gods, each with a unique function to perform and a unique favour to confer, but to replace them all by one all-pervasive and abstract divinity. Thus what Amenhotep introduced was nothing short of monotheism; Aton, representing the vital power and light of the sun, was not just a one-and-only god for Egypt but a universal God, transcending local prejudices and national frontiers.

Amenhotep, however, did not stop at this. Had he done nothing else, the priesthood of Amon and its god would have grudgingly accepted their secondary status, for the pharaoh was still the unquestioned ruler; his word was still supreme. But while Amenhotep designed a new revolutionary religion, he set out to demolish the old with a vehemence unbecoming to the cosmic idea he preached. Actually this conflict was unavoidable, for while Amon and other gods could coexist with one more in the accepted Egyptian tradition, Aton could not, or so its patron thought; and at that time what its patron thought prevailed. Aton was thus a solitary god, unwilling to accept company.

Amenhotep IV ruled only for fifteen years, but in that short spell he all but crushed the Amon-priesthood. He, of course, changed his own name – to Akhenaton; but the king, not just content with setting an individual example, proceeded to erase even the word Amon from the vocabulary of his land. The Amon-temples were all closed, their properties expropriated, their god and his statues demolished, his very name effaced from inscriptions and the walls. In this iconoclasm, nothing of the past pertaining to Amon escaped, not even the royal statues of the illustrious pharaohs, nor of his own father. It is with such fanaticism that Amenhotep sought to erase the memory of Amon from his kingdom.

Now if Akhenaton, whom Breasted calls 'the first prophet of history', had lived long, he could have undone with one stroke what his forefathers over two centuries had done. But Amenhotep IV did not reign long, and soon after his death, the priesthood of Amon was back in the saddle. The heretical pharaoh was far ahead of his time, and his lofty ideas, in spite of the entire state machinery behind them, never really penetrated the national consciousness. But while his religion failed to capture the masses, his neglect of mundane affairs, administrative as well as imperial, invited periodic revolts from conquered territories which began to slip away from the Egyptian hold. Thus, it is after Akhenaton's departure that another Vipran era came into being; the new alignment of power is reminiscent of the government of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties during the Old Kingdom. Again the apparent ruler, the pharaoh, is a puppet whose strings the priesthood, this time of Amon at Thebes, pulls; again the administration is relatively decentralised with bureaucracy coming into its own; again the dominion of the priest rests on his intellect, on his trickery, on the fact that he alone can win the indispensable favour of the gods.

Soon after Akhenaton's departure, Egypt reverted to a state of confusion that usually occurs, though for a short span, at the time of transition from one era to another. Out of this confusion, a military commander named Harmhab emerged to head the government. Whether or not he founded the Nineteenth Dynasty, we do not know; but the Eighteenth, by 1340 B.C., had certainly come to an end. Harmhab's first task was the restoration of Amon and his priesthood, but now the pharaoh was dependent on the gods in a different way. Whereas the Eighteenth Dynasty had been founded by Ahmose I on the ruins of the Hyksos, the rule of a petty commander, who had had no chance to distinguish himself, was blessed by the Theban priesthood, by Amon. Thus Harmhab owed the Amon-priest a great debt of gratitude, to which he gave expression by restoring Amon's temples and their vast sources of income; Aton, of course, was now in disfavour. Thus a new Vipran era was born with the fall of the Eighteenth Dynasty. In describing the reinstatement of Amon following Harmhab's coronation, Wilson furnishes an idea of the duration of the new Vipran age:

> The forces of reaction were in the saddle, and they wiped out every doctrinal trace of Atonism. . . . Furthermore, by their victory, the reactionaries established the domination of the gods, particularly Amon-Re, over the pharaoh for the *next four centuries*. [12, p. 235 (italics mine)]

The new Vipran epoch thus endured for about four hundred years.

Harmhab's successors continued to be overshadowed by the Amon-priesthood. Some of them, such as Seti I and Ramses II, were mighty warriors who returned to the familiar path of foreign conquests; they could have perhaps become strong rulers, independent of the priest's influence. But the Vipran era had now arrived in Egypt, and as Breasted points out,

> the state, always closely connected with religion, was gradually being more and more regarded as chiefly a religious institution, designed to exalt and honour the gods through its head, the Pharaoh. . . . That which had long been the sacerdotal theory and ideal of the state was now beginning to be practically realized: the Empire was to become the domain of the gods and the Pharaoh was to give himself up to the duties of a universal high-priesthood. . . . As the wealth and power of Amon in particular increased, his High Priest at Thebes became a more and more important political factor. [4, p. 456]

With the advent of the second Vipran era, we should now expect, over the next few centuries, a usurpation of all power by the priesthood and a steady decline in the prestige and influence of the apparent ruler, the pharaoh – something similar to what had occurred during the last two dynasties of the Old Kingdom. This is precisely what happened, for following Harmhab's accession we find the pharaoh not only deferring to the increasing demands of the priesthood but also losing influence with his subjects. Wilson infers this from the fact that for the same crime the king now had to enact much harsher penalties than before: no longer was his word as weighty as in earlier days of the Empire.

Except for Seti I and Ramses II, the Nineteenth Dynasty blessed Egypt with feeble rulers, and as a consequence the Asiatic arm of its colonies was amputated by alien armies. No longer did the Egyptian society exude the confidence and vivacity of the earlier days of the Empire; gone for ever was the nationalistic fervour that had transformed a sleeping country into an imperial giant after the expulsion of the Hyksos. Under the sledgehammer blows of the priest, the Egyptian mind had sunk so low that nothing could arrest its decline, not even, as we have seen above, the sublime ideals of universal monotheism that Akhenaton had preached.

As the Nineteenth Dynasty progresses, we find an ever-augmenting

portion of national wealth going into priestly coffers, and as the Twentieth Dynasty rises, such economic concentration begins to ruin the economy. As Baikie explains it:

> Thus to take only a few items, the temples held as part of their endowments 169 towns in Egypt and Syria, 113,433 slaves, 493,386 head of cattle, and . . . more than one-seventh of the whole country. . . . It is manifest at a glance that the religious order of Egypt had become a serious menace to the economic stability of the land, and that the nation was being bled white for the aggrandizement of a body already too powerful and capable of becoming a distinct danger to the State. [3, p. 253]

The Amon-priesthood seems to have reached the peak of power during the reign of Ramses IX, a Twentieth-Dynasty king. John Wilson tells us why:

> The Pharaoh had always been depicted in colossal size in proportion to all other Egyptians, who were only humans and not divine as he was. In a scene in the Temple of Amon at Karnak, we see Ramses IX recognizing the services of the High Priest Amen-hotep with decorations. Pharaoh is shown in his customary heroic size in proportion to the two bustling little officials who carry out his instructions, but Amen-hotep had the arrogance to have his figure carved in the same scale as his king. Furthermore, the composition makes him the focus of attention instead of pharaoh. Nothing could illustrate more clearly that reality . . . that the king was only an instrument of a ruling oligarchy. [12, p. 273]

The new Vipran era continued well into the Twenty-First Dynasty, although after the fall of the Twentieth we begin to hear the sirens of decentralisation, of the multiplicity of city states into which Egypt, without a strong ruler, had a constant tendency to lapse. The enormous ransom that the country had long been paying to escape the priest's curse eventually took its toll on the economy, and on the social and moral fibre. In the ensuing confusion, a military commander, Herihor, won out and assumed control of the priesthood as well as the throne, thus founding the Twenty-First Dynasty. However, it appears that Egypt then was again divided into two kingdoms – one ruled by Herihor with his capital in Thebes, and another by a certain Nesubenebded with his capital in the North at Tanis. For a while the office of the High Priest and the royalty were united in the person of the pharaoh.[2]

After Herihor's death, one of his successors, by marrying a Tanite princess, united the country into one kingdom again. The priesthood of Amon still wielded considerable influence within a weakening nation, as the past practice of invoking the oracle of Amon for legitimising the state actions continued with few signs of abatement. The most creative faculties of the Egyptians were now completely spent. Nowhere could this be seen more clearly than in the army which was so predominantly recruited from the ranks of Libyan mercenaries; the Egyptians themselves, under their magic charms, had become too listless to defend their borders. To be sure, the use of alien soldiers in the army was nothing new. They had participated in Egypt's imperial efforts even during the Eighteenth Dynasty; but at that time, the native Egyptian army had captured many foreigners, who, as slaves, chose to fight for Egypt's honour. The erection of the imposing edifice of the Empire was purely an Egyptian feat. However, it is only during the Twenty-First Dynasty rule that the alien soldiers, especially those from Libya, had come into real prominence. So much so that one of them, Sheshonk I, seized the throne in 945 B.C., and in the process fathered the Twenty-Second Dynasty at a site called Bubastis. And with his accession, the Vipran era seems to have come to a definite end. It started with Harmhab in 1342, and lingered on for about four hundred years until 945 B.C. when Sheshonk usurped the crown.

ALIEN MERCENARIES AND THE NEW VASHYAN ERA

With the accession of Sheshonk, there was some kind of socio-economic revival, but the new ruler, like his predecessor, found it hard to rein the independent-minded Libyan lords who knew him only too well as one of themselves. Breasted puts the matter this way:

> A vigorous and an able ruler, it might have been expected that Sheshonk I . . . would be able to weld Egypt anew into a powerful nation; but those elements with which he was obliged to deal in the building up of a new state were not such as could possibly be wrought into any stable fabric. It was essentially a *feudal organization.* [4, p. 528 (italics mine)]

Thus around the fall of the Twenty-First Dynasty and the rise of the Twenty-Second, the storms of decentralisation, and hence of a new Vashyan era of high materialism, were threatening to overtake the Egyptian land. The fact that a Libyan was on the throne does not mean that Egypt was now under the domination of a foreign power, because the Libyans had by then been thoroughly Egyptianised. The country had now fallen into three main divisions: Upper Egypt was organised into two separate kingdoms – the principality of Herakleopolis where Sheshonk ruled, and the principality of Thebes where the high priest of Amon still retained some independence – whereas in the Delta ruled the

Libyan princes with quasi-sovereign city-states of their own. Thus rudiments of a new Vashyan era are clearly discernible in this set-up. As long as Sheshonk, a capable ruler, lived, the nation stayed together in a tenuous fabric, but following his demise one weakling after another ascended the throne. The priesthood of Amon still commanded some influence, as the king felt obliged to make him large donations, but the real power belonged to no one as the feudal lords had arrogated to themselves many of the king's functions. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the First Intermediate Period, when also the pharaoh had ceded many administrative functions to the feudal nobles.

Not much is known about the exploits of the Twenty-Second Dynasty save its control, or lack of it, over the Theban principality. And whatever is known is not flattering to its record, which is a story of rebellions, bickerings between the two principalities of Herakleopolis and Thebes, and ceaseless conflicts among the mercenary nobles in the Delta. The last of the Bubastite rulers was Sheshonk IV, and by his time the new Vashyan era was in full swing as the local lords had virtually become independent entities. The ceremonial position of the Bubastite rulers is described by Breasted in this way:

> It is evident that during their rule the local lords and dynasts of the Delta were gradually gaining their independence, and probably many of them had thrown off their allegiance to the Bubastite house long before the death of Sheshonk IV, about 745 B.C. [4, p. 535]

And it is not surprising that the Twenty-Second Dynasty succumbed to the intrusion of another Libyan prince. In 745 B.C., a Delta lord named Pedibast overthrew Sheshonk IV and seized the throne, thus starting the short-lived Twenty-Third Dynasty. The new Vashyan era seems to have reached its climax under Pedibast's successor, Osorkon III, for, as Breasted points out, 'there was at last an independent lord or petty king in every city of the Delta and up the river as far as Hermopolis. We are acquainted with the names of eighteen of these dynasts, whose struggles among themselves now led to the total dissolution of the Egyptian state' [4, p. 536]. We are back once again to the predynastic days when the country was splintered into small units, none ruled by a strong hand at the centre.

Such a power vacuum, however, could not long remain unfilled. The Twenty-Third Dynasty, lasting only a quarter of a century, was overthrown by an Ethiopian (or Nubian) prince named Piankhi. He could have forged Egyptian unification then and there, because he conquered both Upper and Lower Egypt, but he withdrew as abruptly as he came, and the throne fell into the hands of a Tefnakhte, an able ruler who, perhaps for two years, restored a semblance of order. He was succeeded around 718 B.C. by his son Bocchoris, whose main claim to

prominence in history seems to be the fact that he was the one and only ruler of the Twenty-Fourth Dynasty. Soon he too was overwhelmed by another Ethiopian tide, but this time the tide had come to stay. This is how, according to Manetho, an Ethiopian or Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, of which Shabaka was the founder, came into being in 712 B.C. Here again it would be wrong to think that a foreign stock now ruled Egypt, for the Ethiopians (or Nubians), over two millennia of contact with Egyptians, had been to a great degree Egyptianised. In any case, the state that Shabaka founded was also in character feudal, for he, and later on his son, were unable to keep a rein on the local lords and thus weld the splintered principalities into a unified nation. This was just unfortunate, because unification is precisely what the country sorely needed at the time, as the mighty armies of neighbouring Assyrians were virtually knocking at the gates of Egypt. To Shabaka, however, goes the credit of destroying the influence of the High Priest of Amon, whose power-base had been shrinking ever since the dawn of Vashyan decentralisation.

In 688 B.C. a prince named Taharka ascended the throne, but the crown he wore turned out to be full of thorns; for soon he was embroiled with the Assyrians in a life-and-death struggle, and, despite his gallant efforts, he was defeated and forced to seek sanctuary in the South. The alien yoke over Egypt did not, however, last long, but the prince who thus became the ruler of independent Egypt was not an Ethiopian but a native Egyptian named Psamtik (later known as Psamtik I), who fathered the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty in 663 B.C.

PSAMTIK I AND THE SECOND SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

Ever since the rise of the Twenty-Second Dynasty, the people of Egypt had been languishing through a state of lawlessness, disorganisation, and disdain for the central authority, which are all symptoms of a Vashyan age. Crime was again rampant, as the once sacred tombs were violated and robbed as frequently as they had been during the First Intermediate Period. The economy had been stagnating under the neglect of irrigation projects, which inevitably suffered from loss of repairs; the international commerce had come to a standstill. To be sure, as happens in every Vashyan era, there were occasional bursts of economic revival and efficient administration. This, for instance, was the case with Egypt under the early reign of the Twenty-Second Dynasty, which had inherited from the Twenty-First social unrest and an incredible concentration of wealth in the priestly treasury. Under Libyan rulers, Sheshonk I and his successors, even though the state was feudal in character, Egypt had progressed with a vigour rare for those times. But ever since the closing phase of the Libyan Dynasty, the economy had been going downhill. There were occasional civil wars, punctuated by

petty feuds among the mercenary lords. It is this kind of anarchy that Psamtik I effaced after founding the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty; he established his capital in the city of Sais, and for this reason his dynasty is known as the Saite Dynasty.

What Psamtik did to control the mercenary lords, reunite the country and eventually gain full independence from the Assyrian yoke is a story of a brilliantly engineered rebellion that may be hailed as another Shudran revolution. A Shudran revolution, it may be recalled, is an event in which a person of Khatrian or Vipran mentality rebels, with implicit support from the masses, against the Vashyan forces of wealth and political decentralisation; the emergence of a new and benevolent government, marked by centralisation, usually follows this event either immediately or after a short time.

Let us now examine the series of events that catapulted Psamtik to the exalted position of a pharaoh. A legend, narrated by Herodotus, the father of history, has it that at Psamtik's times Egypt was divided into twelve kingdoms, of which his at Sais was one. An oracle of gods declared that Psamtik should be the ruler of all Egypt, whereupon the other eleven kings forced him into exile. Herodotus goes on to narrate how the banished king eventually gained the throne with the help of some Greek pirates who were forced to drop anchor in the turbulent weather. As Baikie points out: 'In the main this legend represents actual history and recounts how Psamtik gained dominion over Egypt by means of the Greek mercenaries whom he hired' [3, p. 310]. What this story then tells us is how through violent rebellions Psamtik ousted the centrifugal Vashyan forces from their provincial strongholds. We also know from accounts of his subsequent reign that he was by temperament a Khatri, a man of magnanimity and fortitude, who put an end to three to four hundred years of turmoil through which Egypt intermittently had to pass. What Herodotus' story does not tell us concerns the question of the mass participation in Psamtik's revolution. But it is quite unlikely that Psamtik could have defeated the entrenched Vashyan kings, of as many as eleven provinces, with just the help of a few Greek pirates who happened to run aground in inclement weather. Thus Psamtik's revolt may be hailed as Egypt's second Shudran revolution, which put an immediate end to its second Vashyan age.

THE SAITE DYNASTY AND THE FOURTH KHATRIAN ERA

With Psamtik's accession around 654 B.C., political centralisation as well as respect for central authority staged another of those cyclical comebacks, and thus was born in the Egypt of old a Khatrian era for the fourth time. The High Priest of Amon had already been humbled, so that no other authority could now impede the rise of the Khatris.

Breasted pays Psamtik a lofty tribute in these words:

> In the suppression of the mercenary lords and local dynasts, Psamtik made an end of the intolerable conditions of semi-anarchy which had so long blighted an unhappy land. The nation was at last rescued from the unstable rule of a body of feudal lords and their turbulent military adherents, under whose irresponsible tyranny it had suffered, with but brief respites, for some four hundred years. This remarkable achievement of Psamtik I places him among the ablest rulers who ever sat on the throne of the Pharaohs. Indeed the conditions by which he was confronted were so adverse, and the evils with which he was obliged to cope were so old, persistent and deeply rooted that his success should perhaps rank him higher than either Amenemhet I, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty, or Ahmose I, the conqueror of the Hyksos. [4, p. 567]

In dealing with the feudal lords, Psamtik followed the same pragmatic policies that Amenemhet I, the mind behind the first Shudran revolution, had followed more than a millennium ago. The lords either died in fighting or were replaced by the king's own supporters. No longer were they threats to national unity.

After consolidating his power at home, Psamtik turned towards the Assyrians, not by starting any war of independence but by simply shaking off the vassalage that they had formerly imposed on Egypt. All through the time that Psamtik was gaining ground, the Assyrians had been embroiled with conflicts elsewhere, and by 640 B.C., when the dust finally settled on their troubled empire, it was far too late for them to make a comeback and reconquer the now united Egypt. They simply accepted the change.

Under Psamtik's wise rule, Egypt's economic, and even military, health recovered once again, although its army, perhaps more than ever before, was dependent on aliens – Greeks, Libyans, Carians. In the realm of art, religion, and sculpture also, there occurred another revival, although now the stress was not so much on originality as on rehabilitating the classical heritage of the glorious and abiding past. There was also a vigorous revival of international trade, especially with Greece, because, from the very beginning, Psamtik knew that a strong economic base was needed to sustain a strong military power.

The new Khatrian era lasted until the end of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, i.e., from 654 to 525 B.C., when another foreign power, this time the Persians, not only conquered Egypt but also, for all practical purposes, inaugurated the beginning of the end of its ancient civilisation. It is not that Egypt was then bleeding internally, only that the adversary was so formidable that the contest, for all Egypt's new-found confidence, was by no means between equals. The kind of nationalistic fervour that had

seized the country following the expulsion of the Hyksos never stirred the nation again, not even during the Saite Renaissance; its army, that rested on the assorted pillars of alien mercenaries, was no match for the battle-hardened Persians. Thus came to a rather ignominious end the chequered career of a long and glorious civilisation. Even today, some two-and-half millennia later, its monuments bear mute witness to the antique effulgence in which not only the Egyptian people but humanity at large can take pride.

In retrospect, the relative movement that we call the ancient Egyptian civilisation was extinguished by a series of foreign conquests, beginning with the Persian. From then onwards, no person of truly Egyptian stock ruled Egypt – not until 1952, when Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser rose to power through a militaristic revolution. In Tom Little's poignant words:

> About 2,300 years had elapsed since Egypt was last ruled by one of her own people. Her own antique civilization was submerged in Greece and Rome, its remnants caught in the tide of Islamic expansion and then washed up on a barren shore of the Ottoman Empire. Her bewildered people lived for centuries in the twilight of chaotic oppression by mercenary slave soldiers who fought their private civil wars for loot and power. So it came about that the Egyptians, who were perhaps the first people in history to achieve nationhood, ceased to feel themselves a nation. [9, p. 15]

Traditionally, the Persian conquest is regarded by Egyptologists as one that dug the grave of the ancient Egyptian society. In A. D. 1952, when Farouk, the reigning king, was forced by Nasser to abdicate, a new Egypt, seemingly with no links with its resplendent past, was born. By this time, its face had changed beyond recognition. At present, the extant Egyptian society, along with the rest of the Arab world of which it is now a part, is passing through the Khatrian age, where I expect it to stay for some time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This is the first chapter attempting to test the theory of social cycle, and we have found that in the evolution of ancient Egyptian society, Sarkar's hypothesis finds complete verification. As argued in preceding pages, the seeds of the Khatrian era were sown on Egyptian soil, in the cradle of the Nile valley and delta, some seven thousand years ago. By 3100 B.C., the first Khatrian era in Egyptian civilisation had crystallised in the form of the First Dynasty that started the Old Kingdom. Then came its Vipran era when the priesthood of Heliopolis emerged supreme some time during the Fourth-Dynasty reign; this was followed by a Vashyan era that coincided with its feudalism or the First Intermediate Period, which terminated in a Shudran revolution engineered by Amenemhet I, who founded the Twelfth Dynasty, and ushered in a new Khatrian age. This age ended in a Shudran era that overlapped with the Second Intermediate Period, following which there was a resurgence, with the founding of the Eighteenth Dynasty, of another Khatrian age. This was succeeded by another Vipran era, wherein the priesthood of Amon at Thebes was supreme during the Nineteenth, Twentieth, and Twenty-First Dynasties. Sometime during the Twenty-First Dynasty emerged another Vashyan era wherein the mercenary princelings ruled the roost over semi-anarchical conditions – punctuated by brief spells of order – during four dynasties, ranging from the Twenty-Second to the Twenty-Fifth. At that time, a vigorous Psamtik I masterminded another Shudran revolution against the princelings, and by starting the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty inaugurated another Khatrian age. This era flourished until 525 B.C., when the Persian conquest of Egypt initiated a long chain of events under which the Egyptian face underwent a surgical transformation. It is this momentous event which, to all intents and purposes, crippled the relative movement that we call the ancient Egyptian civilisation. From this debility, the nation was never to recover again, at least not for the next twenty-four centuries until Nasser's star emerged on the Egyptian firmament in 1952. Today Egypt is in the early phase of a Khatrian era under whose aegis it is trying its best to rebound.

We have seen that whenever Egypt, following a long period of Vipran and Vashyan decline, experienced economic prosperity and cultural revival, it did so under the auspices of a Khatrian age. This was true throughout its ancient history; not once could we discover an exception to this rule. Herein then we find full confirmation of Sarkar's contention that in general every Khatrian era, in terms of society's overall attainments, excels at least the preceding Vashyan age, if not all other eras of one particular social cycle.

Throughout ancient Egypt, women played a role that, to say the least, has turned out to be unique to its antique culture. Originally, I had planned to examine the validity of Sarkar's views regarding social attitudes towards women in the present context. It may be recalled that, in his view, of all the eras that come and go over the course of one particular social cycle, women receive the best treatment from society during a Khatrian age, especially during its early facet. Now there have been some studies concerning feminine status in the Egypt of antiquity, but they yield little information for making meaningful comparisons over time. We do know that in general, and especially during one Khatrian era, the Egyptian women enjoyed a position of prominence, but we do not know whether their influence or their role in social and political matters during other eras had suffered any decline. In the

Khatrian era that began with the expulsion of the Hyksos and the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, many queens such as Hatshepsut, Tiy and Nefertiti seem to have distinguished themselves on the Egyptian political scene. The status that womanhood then enjoyed appears to have been unexcelled during other eras, a premise to which Wilson subscribes in these words:

> One feature of the *imperial age* of Egyptian history was the prominence of women. In one sense, this was not new. Egyptian queens had been important factors in the Old Kingdom. . . . The Eighteenth Dynasty, however, surpassed previous ages in the acknowledged influence of women. . . .
>
> This acknowledged importance of women was not restricted to queens. . . . It has been pointed out that the artistic convention of a married couple under the earlier periods gave priority to the husband and made the wife his attaché, whereas the Empire presented the couple as a balanced pair in equal prominence. [12, pp. 202–3 (italics mine)]

This is at best a tenuous thread of evidence which partially supports Sarkar's viewpoint that women enjoy a high status in a Khatrian society. Its full confirmation or confutation must wait till the next chapter that deals with Western civilisation, for which so much has been written for so many of its aspects that the want of information cannot there be my excuse.

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter, I have followed Wilson's dating system [12] for the dynastic annals of Egypt.
2. This event furnishes one example of Sarkar's concept of counter-evolution whereby the movement of the social cycle is reversed. With the pharaoh thus performing secular as well as religious functions, the Vipran era for a short time moved back to the Khatrian era.

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5 Western Civilisation

Of all living societies, Western civilisation is the most pervasive in the world today and has been so for the last two centuries. It used to be said that the sun would never set in the West. Today the sun of the Western empire, which was once so vast and impregnable, shines no more, yet the cultural, linguistic and institutional legacy of the West to its former colonies is alive and vibrant. Therefore, in contrast to the ancient Egyptian culture that has long been dead, the testing of Sarkar's theory in the present chapter calls for exploring the Western narrative from its beginning down to this day. Many scholars begin their study of the West from the Graeco-Roman era, although some go back to the Minoan period and then to the Neolithic age in Europe and the island of Crete. Not all historians agree on this matter, and without judging how far back the Occidental roots can be traced, I take the first century A.D. as a convenient starting-point. Western society could have sprouted from the Cretan soil, but this is a controversy I intend to skirt.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE KHATRIAN ERA

By Western civilisation I mean that social order which has inherited its laws, culture and traditions partly from Roman society, a lot from Judaeo-Christian ethics and religion, a good deal from the body of socio-political philosophy first developed in western Europe and later transplanted to the New World of the North American continent, and more recently from the ideology of capitalism. It excludes Russia, though the latter has long been a European power; it also excludes other continents save Australia, though in these places too the Western influence may have been dominant for several hundred years.

Let us then commence with the Roman Empire, which is distinct from the earlier Roman period called the Republic. At the dawn of the first century A.D., Western society was organised in the Roman state with Augustus, as the *Imperator* (or Emperor), firmly in command of its military machine and of vast European provinces. His word in Europe then swayed the modern nations of Spain, France, Italy and Greece; Britain was not yet within the orbit of the Roman Empire, but before

long the Roman military might forced it to join this impressive assembly of nations. Only Germany and some parts of north-eastern Europe somehow escaped the Roman colossus, which at one time towered not only over Western Europe but also over many parts of West Asia and North Africa. Later on, invading hordes from these same unoccupied European areas pounced like sharks on the decadent Roman state, and eventually brought it down.

At the turn of the first century, a Khatrian era can be easily seen to be prevailing in Western civilisation. This is the age of absolutism, of despotism masquerading in constitutional attire; the tradition of conquests, long established in Rome, continues unabated. The bulk of the territory constituting the Empire had been conquered by Augustus' predecessors, who lived at a time that historians have designated as the Roman Republic. The celebrated Julius Caesar belongs to those early days.

But conquest is one thing, governing is another. The republican government of the Roman city-state had been a failure; it had precipitated disorder, civil war, economic ruin and moral degradation among the people – conditions quite reminiscent of a Shudran revolution following a Vashyan era. It is in this background that the seizure of power by Augustus in 31 B.C. ought to be viewed. The Roman citizens, as well as non-citizens, sick of years of anarchy, then accepted him as the saviour of the ship of state, especially when his authority was bolstered by a triumphant army. On his part, Augustus managed to avert all needless affront to their republican consciousness, of which the memory was still fresh and alive. He did not dismantle the old institutions and laws, and assumed only the military title of *Imperator* and the innocuous civil title of *Princeps* or first citizen. It is after this title that his rule, along with that of his immediate successors, is often called the Principate; it is a subsection of the Empire.

Even though the old republican Senate still convened and passed some laws, Augustus was without doubt the unchallenged ruler. As commander of the army and navy, he exercised absolute control in all affairs, be they social, political or financial. As a result of a long list of powers, which the Senate covertly or overtly delegated to him, the sovereign authority was completely centralised in his person. Here was absolutism masked under the thin veil of the constitutional structure inherited from republican times.

Augustus was an intelligent and benevolent ruler. His reign furnishes another example of how a society in the early Khatrian era, under the stewardship of a benign Khatrian ruler, forges ahead with fresh vigour and reaches to heights unscaled before. One of Augustus' principal bequests to Western society, and indeed to humanity, is Roman law, of which many tributaries have survived to this day. Roman law affirmed, among other things, that all humans are by nature equal; that they are

entitled to certain fundamental rights which no government has the authority to violate; that the accused is innocent until proven guilty. Augustus' reign was not, of course, the sole contributor to this legal conception, which had actually been evolving for more than four hundred years. But it was during the Principate that ideas of humanism and abstract justice enshrined in Roman law acquired wider acceptance than ever before. Priority was given to the law of nature; it was proclaimed as something transcending the ruler, transcending the state itself. True, not every jurist of the time subscribed to this concept of natural law, yet it came to be regarded as an ideal from which the state decrees ought not deviate too far.

Augustus died in A.D. 14, and few successors could match his acumen and his regard for republican institutions. But they continued to be the absolute rulers; their regimes were marked by tyranny and sanguinary violence. As early as the second half of the first century, the army had gained considerable power in determining succession, and many rulers as a consequence were no less than military dictators. Despite this, however, unprecedented peace and prosperity prevailed in the Roman state for more than two hundred years. Never in the history of Europe, and perhaps in that of all other nations, have the people enjoyed so long a reign of absolute tranquillity, which could not but yield dividends. More than ever before, the provinces and the state of which they were parts prospered in terms of culture, architecture, and living comforts. With respect to such achievements, the first two centuries of the Principate are more radiant than any other period of the Roman chronicle. An amazing tribute to the Roman ingenuity of the day has been paid by Rostovtzeff in these words:

> One can say without exaggeration that never in the history of mankind (except during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and America) has a large number of people enjoyed so much comfort; and that never, not even in the nineteenth century, did men live in such a surrounding of beautiful buildings and monuments as in the *first two centuries of the Roman Empire.* [13, p. 291]

Elsewhere, writing in 1926 about Roman cities, Rostovtzeff continued in the same vein.

> We may say that as regards comfort, beauty, and hygiene, the cities of the Roman Empire, worthy successors of their Hellenistic parents, were not inferior to many a modern European and American town. [14, p. 135]

These are two incredible statements, but they have flowed from the pen

of an eminent authority on socio-economic conditions in the history of Rome. They simply confirm the view that usually during the early phase of the Khatrian era the achievements of a civilisation surpass much that has been accomplished by it before. And the innate benevolence of the early Khatrian ruler (or rulers) must be at least partly credited for such excellence.

This is not to say that Roman society during the Principate was without its faults. To labour the obvious, no society has reached perfection – yet. Perhaps the most stinging accusation against the Principate society is its penchant for brutality. Judged by any standard, the then Roman people stand convicted of Philistinic sadism. They patronised bloody games and gladiatoral shows in which armed pugilists, mostly slaves but occasionally free citizens, engaged in life-and-death duels to the cheers of a vituperative crowd. Such spectacles were commonplace and were watched by all people, including the Princeps. The gladiatoral exhibitions had actually been the Roman's heritage from the Republican past, but now their savagery exceeded all bounds. The reason is that the Khatrian era then prevailed: the innate aggressiveness or the adventurous spirit of a Khatri has to seek expression in volatile activities. Since the war activity had considerably declined in the first two centuries, the aggressive spirit had to find an outlet in other ways. And the gladiatoral shows, to which those ruling Khatris were heir, offered a convenient diversion and pastime.

What was the status of women in the Principate society? This question is of more than passing interest, because according to Sarkar woman's position in the Khatri-dominated society, especially in its early phase, is superior to her position in the preceding as well as the succeeding era. If this view is correct, then women must have enjoyed a better status in the days of the Empire than in those of the Republic. Furthermore, as we proceed along the track of Western civilisation, their standing, according to Sarkar's theory, must decline. I will subsequently argue that this is exactly what happened, when Christianity rose to primacy in Western society.

It should be pointed out at the outset that any information pertaining to feminism in the Roman state is fragmentary and should be treated with care. This is especially true of Republican times, for which the evidence, there is reason to believe, has been tinged with the bias and prejudices of the Roman scholars. More is known about womanhood in the days of the Empire simply because its records are more recent and plentiful. After issuing such a caution, most students of womanhood in the Roman society argue that during the pre-Empire times women as a class were subservient to men. Their life was so miserable that at times they even poisoned their husbands to death; and that, partly because of such retribution, Roman men came to appreciate women's plight, so that gradually, over a few hundred years, most, if not all, restrictions on

feminine rights and liberties were lifted. This view, for instance, is embodied in Donaldson's words:

> At the time when Christianity dawned on the world women had attained . . . great freedom, power, and influence in the Roman Empire. Tradition was in favor of restriction, but by a concurrence of circumstances *women had been liberated from the enslaving fetters of the old legal forms*, and they enjoyed freedom of intercourse in society; they walked and drove in the public thoroughfares with veils that did not conceal their faces, they dined in the company of men, they studied literature and philosophy, they took part in political movements, they were allowed to defend their own law cases if they liked, and they helped their husbands in the government of provinces and the writing of books. [5, p. 153 (italics mine)]

These words speak for themselves. It seems that women in the Khatrian Roman Empire matched, if not exceeded in some respects, the status of modern woman in America and European countries. This is a far cry from the Republican days when a Roman man, traditionally given unquestioned authority over his progeny, treated a woman like a child, who would owe obedience first to her father and, after marriage, to her husband. In short, the woman of the Roman Empire was a 'liberated' woman, at least relative to what she had been before. To reinforce this view, let me cite Emily Putnam, whose work in the annals of womanhood has become a classic. Speaking of the lady as 'the female of the favored social class', she describes Roman attitudes towards women in glowing terms.

> At Rome she becomes thoroughly intelligible to us. The society in which she lived there is very similar in essentials to that of our own day. We see the Roman lady helping to evolve a manner of life so familiar now that it is difficult to think it began so relatively late in the history of Europe and is not the way people have always lived. [12, p. viii]

Of course, there are some who dispute such a glowing account of feminism in the Principate society, and Bullough [3, Chapter 4] is one of them. However, what matters here is that women of the Khatrian Roman Empire had won many legal and social liberties, of which they had been deprived before (and of which, as we shall see, they were to be deprived later). This point, at least, seems to have been established beyond question.

It has already been noted that following the death of Augustus in A.D. 14, the republican form of government underwent a gradual but steady decline. Augustus had at least permitted the fictional participation of the Senate in administrative affairs; his successors disallowed even that. However, the Senate was not completely ignored until A.D. 284 when Diocletian ascended the throne. Prior to this, the ruler, at least in theory though not in fact, was the emissary of the people who supposedly were born with some rights, but now even that semblance of 'responsible' government disappeared. No longer was the Senate consulted in any matter of administration; though not abolished, it was treated as a municipal council or a social club. No longer was the ruler subordinate to natural law; he was the Law; he was the State. No longer were there any Roman citizens; only subjects servile to the divine authority of Diocletian.

Diocletian's accession thus marks a watershed in the annals of the Empire, a milestone almost as monumental as the transition from the Republic to the Principate. The main reason for this change lies in the long economic decline that had its beginning in the third century: the people, having lost confidence in themselves, were ready to forfeit for the elusive hope of peace and security all their rights and freedoms. For convenience the period of the rule by Diocletian and his successors is called the late Empire.

Actually as early as the end of the second century, the Roman polity had begun its march towards dissolution. But it was not before the third century that the symptoms of decay first came to light. Between 235 and 284, the army had wrought havoc in society. The monstrosity of gladiatoral shows had now turned backwards and fallen with uncontrolled fury on the heads of the Emperors themselves. Men from subjected classes, once the victims of ghastly spectacles in the Colosseum, had now joined the army and thus lent a hand in steering the destiny of the state – if there remained any destiny. The army looted the cities; it plundered the provinces; it blazed a trail of terror in the heart of society. In short, the rule of brute force bedevilled the then Roman world.

Such was the tumult when Diocletian came to power, and it is hardly surprising that the Romans were ready to forfeit all the cherished liberties for some order in life. The despotism, however, could only temporarily arrest the decline of the Roman Empire, whose economic and social threads had already been weakened by the decline in agriculture, population, commerce and the cities.

The first step that Diocletian took in restoring the health of the state was to usurp all power in his own person; his second step was to introduce centralisation in the administrative machinery and bring it under his own direct hand. In order to make this system work in so vast an empire, he handed the governance of the western half of the state to a trusted general named Maximian. This division, effected for casual ad-

ministrative reasons, was to have far-reaching effects on the further evolution of the Empire. It ratified the gulf that for some time had been separating the thinking of the Latin West and the Greek East. Maximian shared with Diocletian the title of Emperor, and thus was planted the germ that subsequently caused many wars of succession.

Diocletian had ushered in despotism, and his successors continued to reign in the same style. The best known among the latter was Constantine the Great, who is remembered in the pages of history for shifting his capital to the eastern site of Byzantium (later known as Constantinople), as well as for his policy of rapprochement with Christianity, of which I will speak in detail in the next section.

The system of government that Diocletian had established continued with slight changes until the fall of the western side of the Empire. In the year 476, Romulus Augustulus, the last Emperor of the West, was overthrown by a barbarian chief who took over the reins of government. It is this event that is commonly supposed to have ended the dominion of Rome; but it was merely the final tip in the long Roman decline. Even the barbarians had assaulted and plundered Rome before. As early as 378, a Visigoth army had vanquished the once mighty Romans, thereby demolishing the myth of Roman invincibility once and for all.

Few fateful events have invited more obituaries than the fall of Rome; the literature in this respect has been varied as well as voluminous. If there is one culprit to be singled out for the demise of the Roman Empire, then it is militarism. Virtually all its problems sprang from over-aggressive Khatrian tendencies. The military had come to dominate society as early as A.D. 68, and after the second century all it had accomplished was disorder. The same militarism was responsible for generating such a vast empire, which in the end became so unwieldy and hard to administer.

Whatever be the cause, the Roman hegemony over the West came to a definite end in 476, although the eastern half of the Roman empire lingered on well into the Middle Ages. However, as far as Western civilisation is concerned the eastern empire, sometimes called the Byzantine Empire, is not of so much significance. Of greater relevance, and immediate concern, is how individual provinces in the western half evolved in the aftermath of the general Roman decline, which to all intents and purposes had begun by the beginning of the third century.

My story now takes a dramatic turn. Instead of harping on the Roman passion for cruelty and aggressive militarism, we must now speak in terms of their opposites; in terms of brotherly love and selfless sacrifice – two weapons that Christianity used in winning over the hearts of the pagan Romans. It is an amazing story of persecution followed by success, of perseverance rewarded by victory, of glory sinking eventually into degeneration. It is a story of initial martyrdom but ultimate debasement. It is on this that I focus in the next section.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND THE VIPRAN ERA

The long period of a thousand years that bridges the gulf between the fall of Rome in the fifth century and the modern era of scientific discoveries beginning with the fifteenth, is commonly, but scornfully, called the Medieval Era or the Middle Ages. The term medieval itself has come to signify a dark age, an age of superstitions and intellectual blindness, an age where human beings endured squalor, misery and a constant fear of perdition after death. Many historians today regard such a wholesale condemnation of the entire period as erroneous and unfair. Yet there is a grain of truth in the saying that much of the medieval period, especially its first half, was chaotic and backward at least in comparison to its preceding as well as the succeeding age. Throughout the Middle Ages the influence of religion was predominant; the Christian church was the one sacred link that provided a common bond for the disparate strands of European nations. Living as we do in the present, with our thinking shaped by the modern environment, it is hard for us to envisage the role that the church played in day-to-day affairs, whether religious, political, social or economic. In Thompson's words:

> The medieval church differed enormously from modern churches, whether catholic or protestant. It exercised everywhere not only spiritual dominion, but great political, administrative, economic and social sway. Its jurisdiction extended over every kingdom in Christendom; it was not only a state within every state, but a super-state as well. [15, p. 647]

How did it all come about? Why was the church influence during the Middle Ages so pervasive, so potent? To answer these questions, we have to go back in time and examine the religious developments during the Roman Empire.

Roman society is not particularly known for its contribution to religion. It had its pagan gods, inherited from the epics of Homer and Virgil; it had its temples which were places of homage to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; and it had its Emperor who was also its object of worship. But nothing deep did it have; nothing that would quench the thirst of the heart; nothing that would attempt to answer the enigmas of the after-life, enigmas that became all the more captivating during the chaotic times of the third century. Having faced disaster and constant insecurity in the present life, men and women became more interested in knowing if there was any life after death, in questions of hell and heaven.

It is to such fertile soil that many new religions – Christianity and other oriental faiths – got transplanted from the East. The new cults had

one thing in common: they all addressed themselves to issues that for a while had been besetting the Roman mind; they all offered absolution from sin, immortality for the soul, and something to look forward to in the afterlife. But Christianity differed from the new pagan religions in many respects. The first and the foremost difference was that while other cults revolved around imaginary figures and legends, Christianity derived inspiration from a historic personality, Jesus of Nazareth, who had practised what he preached, who had gloried in life as well as death, who had preferred crucifixion to compromise with principles. Secondly, it preached monotheism as opposed to the polytheism of other cults. Finally, during the early Empire Christianity had few rituals to speak of, whereas its rivals harboured a multitude of rites, sacraments and ceremonies.

To the harried denizens of Rome the elaborate rituals of the new paganism were more appealing than the austere religion of Christ. For this reason as well as the fact that Christianity ran into an early collision with the Roman state, the oriental pagan cults were readily accepted by the Romans. Almost from its birth, Christianity was persecuted by the government, which was alarmed at the former's seditious teachings, barring worship of the Emperor. By A.D. 111 the new religion and its church had become strong enough to arouse the Emperor's ire; and that is when it was banned. No longer was it a legal religion, and its adherents risked severe penalties – death. The enforcement of the ban was left to provincial governors whose attitude alternated between tolerance and hostility.

This policy continued for the next hundred and fifty years during which the march of Christianity was slowed but not blocked; it was hindered but not effaced. Its progress was especially aided by the general decline in the social fibre towards the end of the second century. Its challenge to the state, with the emergence of churches and Christian communities in which it had been organised almost from birth, had grown to menacing levels by the year 250 when Emperor Decius made the first serious attempt to stamp it out of his domain. Many Christians then renounced their faith, while others continued it secretly, and some accepted martyrdom. But persecution cannot destroy anything born out of selfless sacrifice; in the ultimate analysis, the former merely reinforces the latter's resolve and facilitates its spread.

Among the last of the emperors attempting to crush the faith of Christians was Diocletian, but, as with his predecessors, his efforts proved abortive. It was not until Constantine the Great came to power, however, that the official repression gave way to reconciliation and even cooperation. But contrary to popular belief, he did not recognise Christianity as the state religion. This distinctive task fell to the lot of Theodosius I. The triumph of Christianity was then complete. Towards the end of the fourth century, Christians were still in a minority, but their religion had ascended the pedestal of imperial power.

Such is the fascinating history of the rise of Christianity. In Sarkar's nomenclature, its relative movement was created, and given powerful inspiration, by Christ's sublime life; it got an infusion of fresh vigour from the Crucifixion. Having been launched from so sturdy a footing, the lofty teachings of Christ could not but spread far and wide. For several years Christianity went nowhere but up; slowly but surely, it expanded until in the year 111, as noted above, it was banned by the government of Rome. Thus the relative movement of Christianity was born when Christ began delivering his sermons; that is when it entered into a systolic phase which, with certain vicissitudes, lasted until it was banned by the Roman Emperor; then began its persecution and hence its diastolic phase which, again with ups and downs, continued for more than two hundred years. Any other movement would have been smothered by the systematic official repression; any lesser cult would have crumbled under the weight of the Roman juggernaut. But not Christianity, whose flame continued to flicker amidst rough storms. In Sarkar's view, if a relative movement refuses to die during its diastolic phase, if its pulse continues to function, then that very movement comes back, and sometimes with vastly greater momentum; it may then climb to peaks never attained before. This is exactly what happened with Christianity which survived over two centuries of state repression. And when it came back, it did with gusto, rising eventually to no less a status than the official religion of the Roman Empire.

The primacy of a religion, however, does not necessarily signify the fact that its Vipran members have begun to rule; it merely suggests that in the sphere of religious policy, a particular faith has come to dominate other faiths. By no means does it imply the beginning of the Vipran era where Vipras, by dint of their superior intellect, have the Khatrian rulers under their control, while, at the same time, the political and administrative system of the apparent ruler becomes relatively decentralised.

When Christianity was recognised by Theodosius as the religion of the state, its triumph over its own heretics, who had been vocal for some time, as well as over other religions, was complete; but it was far from controlling the Emperor. Time, however, was on the side of the Vipras, for the Khatrian era, established in the Roman state, had been declining for a long time. Only a few years before the coronation of Christianity, the Gothic barbarians had humbled the Roman army, and created in the empire an unprecedented situation. Such humiliations were to become a commonplace in the fifth century.

The area of modern Germany, it may be recalled, was never annexed to the empire; the northern frontier had always remained a menace to Roman security, a menace that, until the fourth century, had been kept under reasonable control. Because of the general decay, however, this

task was becoming increasingly difficult, and in A.D. 376 the German tide could not be stemmed any more. In wave after wave, the barbarians from the north crossed the river Danube, settling into the periphery of the empire; and in the year 378 they trounced the Roman army. To make matters worse, at about the same time, a series of revolts against the Romans erupted in the provinces. All this could not but weaken further the social structure and morale of Roman society.

The fifth century of Western civilisation then opens with a chapter that was soon to be written in blood. The Roman retreat in the West had already started, but the rout had not yet begun. The Romans were still fighting, but it was a rearguard action, designed to delay the catastrophe. The fifth century opens with the western half of the Empire more or less intact, but ends with its disappearance; its place has been taken by a constellation of barbarian kingdoms – Italy under the Ostrogoths, North Africa under the Vandals, Britain under the Anglo-Saxons, Spain under the Visigoths, France under the Burgundians and the Franks.

The interlude, however, saw great upheavals. The fifth century is a century of barbarity at its zenith, of duplicity and treason at best, of plunder, pillage and famine. However, the Christian Church came out of the ruins with enhanced influence and glory. It is during these turbulent times that the Christian religion gained a firmer foothold in the European nations. The Church succeeded, because it provided guidance and shelter to the harried denizens at a time when the Roman Empire was crumbling under the weight of imperialism and of invading marauders who preyed on it from all directions. In accordance with the law of social cycle, the Vipran Church in any case would have inherited power from the decadent Khatrian Empire, but such succession was hastened by the onslaught of Toynbee's *Völkerwanderung*. Had it not been for the Christian Church, Western society would have found its grave at that time; under the spate of invading hordes, the relative movement which is called Western civilisation would have perished, were it not for the tiny breath of life vibrating the budding Church. This is how in the West the Vipran era was born.

Perhaps the driving-force behind the survival and eventual triumph of Christianity was its efficient, compact organisation which at first was refreshingly simple. There were churches in various communities, each with a number of elders and bishops whose main function was to preside at congregations and services. However, as Christianity came in touch with oriental paganism, which in the early Empire had fascinated the Roman mind, it felt the need to devise rituals of its own. In time its rituals grew to an extent that full-time priests became all but indispensable to the faithful. This is how the rudiments of ecclesiastical organisation, subsequently nurtured by intermittent official persecution, came into being. By the end of the third century, Christian communities, each

with a bishop as its head, had been organised in almost every city of the Empire.

Still among the bishops themselves there was little gradation. It is mainly after Christianity was elevated to the official religion of Rome that the ecclesiastical hierarchy came into existence. Bishops residing in large cities came to outrank those of the smaller communities; those with strongholds in the capitals emerged with the highest prestige and esteem. All these developments culminated in the primacy of the bishop of Rome who, in the fullness of time, was exclusively given the title of Pope (Latin *papa,* or father), although originally this title was given to all bishops. The Roman Catholic Church came to be regarded as the 'Mother Church', because the Christians venerated the city of Rome as a place hallowed by visits from the Apostles Peter and Paul. The Roman bishop also came to be looked upon as an heir to the imperial authority of Augustus who, it may be recalled, was the founder of the Roman Empire. Peter, regarded as the first bishop of Rome, was believed to be Christ's close disciple, and therefore his successors were held in great reverence.

In the eastern Empire, the bishop of Constantinople, the imperial capital, had triumphed over his rivals, but there the Church remained under the Emperor's control. In the West, on the contrary, successive invasions by the barbarians had gradually emaciated the imperial power, to which the Roman Church emerged as a natural heir. Many times in the fifth century, the Emperor went into hiding in the city of Ravenna, leaving Rome at the mercy of the ruthless invaders. The Roman bishops, with great equanimity and fortitude, would then take the lead, conduct negotiations with the barbarians, and quite often use their influence to save the city from destruction. The same process was repeated verbatim in many other provinces as well. The end-result was that bishops in many areas, under the authority of the Pope, assumed vast duties and powers, powers that at one time had belonged to the Emperor and his administration.

Thus it is clear that a Vipran era in the West was born in the middle of the fifth century. During those turbulent times, not only did Christianity remain the official religion, its leadership also came to acquire immense political power and administrative control; nor was this control to prove a fleeting affair, for, within a few years, the barbarians themselves were converted to Christianity. (Actually the conversion of the Visigoths had been begun by bishop Ulfilas as early as the year 341.) Furthermore, the barbarian kings proved completely inept in the art of governance, in maintaining peace, in restoring law and order. The complex administrative machine and the tax system that the Roman emperors had taken pains to establish were simply allowed to break down; in their place emerged bishops, dukes and counts with varying degrees of administrative and judicial responsibility, as well as privileges. Old regal

cities were allowed to languish in poverty and squalor; in their place emerged small villages and semi-feudal estates.

It has already been mentioned that at the end of the fifth century the western Empire had split into a number of kingdoms, each ruled by a barbarian stock migrating from the north-western frontier. Of these only two – the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons – were to survive and augment their conquests. Others were absorbed by the superior culture of the conquered people. But although the political and racial identity of the Germanic peoples was thus lost, they affixed their stamp on the linguistic, cultural, economic and legal developments that were to take place during the medieval period. Hence medieval society was shaped by the fusion between diverse cultures, between the roughness of the victors and the civility of the vanquished, while the Catholic Church applied the healing balm.

During the course of three centuries following the fall of the western Empire, the barbarian kingdoms, through force of arms, were unified by a line of Frankish kings, while much of Spain was absorbed by the Mohammedan Empire. The first to make a move for this unification was Clovis, who fought many battles to expand his small kingdom, thereby establishing a strong base for the Merovingian dynasty that he founded in 481. The next century was a witness to brutal civil war and anarchy, out of which emerged three separate kingdoms of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy. These kingdoms were united under the reigns, lasting from 613 to 639, of Choltar II and Dagobert. After them followed a century of weaklings who delegated all authority to their chief ministers, called the mayors of the palace; and the king played in the latter's hands like a puppet. In 751, however, the illusory Merovingian rule ceased altogether, because a mayor named Pepin, with blessings from the Pope, installed himself as the king, thereby founding the Carolingian dynasty. In return for his benediction, the Pope received the territory of central Italy, stretching from Rome to Ravenna. This is how were born the 'Papal States', which played a great role in the affairs of western Europe in general and of Italy in particular.

In this brief historical sketch of western Europe over four centuries (fifth to eighth), three facts are crystal-clear. First, in comparison to the Roman Empire, political authority was now decentralised. Some of the Merovingian kings were strong rulers, some were feeble; some enjoyed absolute authority, while some were figureheads. But in most cases, it is the nobility consisting of bishops, counts and dukes that reigned in matters of day-to-day administration. During the sixth and seventh centuries, the government was in the hands of the mayors who ruled in the name of the king. These are instances of decentralised authority and the *indirect rule* by the aristocracy and the Church.

Secondly, in theory the king was still the absolute ruler, with an unchallenged command over his subjects. In some respects, the theoretical

power of the Merovingian king even exceeded the might of the Roman Emperor. Now the kingdom was his because of hereditary rights, not because the people had delegated sovereign authority to him, an idea conflicting with the original conception legitimising the hold of the Roman Emperor. In other words, the form of government was now more or less the same as that of the Khatrian era, but the reality was something else: the absolutism of the king was good in theory but not in practice. This is exactly the hallmark of a Vipran era, where the apparent ruler is under the sway of his officials.

Finally, Vipran influence represented by the Church hierarchy of the Pope, bishops and priests, had by then become a fact of life. Religion was the one common bond that linked diverse cultures of different peoples living in the vast lands of western Europe. About the influence of the Church at the time, Ferguson and Brown have this to say:

> The church played a tremendously important part in the life of the Merovingian age, barbarous and immoral though the sage was in general. The bishops, who governed the church, were among the *most important* administrative officials in the state. [6, p. 166 (italics mine)]

In addition to the extensive authority that the bishops exercised, they also received veneration and wealth from the common man. While the Frankish kings themselves were the biggest donors, donations from affluent laymen also counted. All this the Church encouraged in typically Vipran fashion – through the shrewd use of intellect. In Thompson's explicit words:

> 'Give and it shall be given unto you' was the constant word. The Frankish clergy astutely utilized the zealous veneration of the saints, a remarkable religious phenomenon of the sixth and seventh centuries, for the purpose of increasing the Church's endowments. It was the saint, often a merely locally venerated one, who became the actual proprietor. For the intensely personal and proprietary ideas of the age required that the invisible Church be given some sort of personal expression, even if the patron was an invisible personage. Invocation of the saints, saints as spiritual godfathers and godmothers, became general; for the saints interceded in heaven for their protégés. [15, p. 200]

In other words, the Church utilised its immense moral appeal to gain influence and wealth. Needless to say, this influence would not have been so pervasive if the Merovingian kings had not first been converted to Christianity. The Church could not have enjoyed such primacy in society, if the kings had not paid homage to its emissaries – the Pope and bishops. This is yet another instance of the indirect sway that the

Vipras had over society through their control over the apparent rulers.

It is not that greed in the Church had arisen all at once; but it had arisen with astonishing speed and magnitude. Immediately after the reconciliation between Constantine the Great and Christianity, the Church had begun to grow into a complex organisation, which soon became an embodiment of degeneration as well as leadership, of sloth and simony as well as guidance and fortitude. One side of the story, the side of leadership and courage, has already been told: recall how, in the wake of barbarian attacks on the Roman Empire, the Pope and bishops would negotiate with the invaders and quite often save the cities from annihilation. The other side of the story, though not so refreshing, is no less important.

In the first three centuries, the teachings of Christ were genuinely embodied in Christianity, which continued to inspire early saints and the Church. With the passage of time, however, especially after Christianity was recognised as the imperial religion, the Church succumbed to luxury and comfort. No longer was it a refuge of the poor and the middle class, of slaves and labourers. In order to acquire wealth and social acceptance, it lowered its standards, and subordinated principles to politics and secular affairs. Its bishops and saints were now concerned more with their privileges than with sublime ideals. Instead of society depending on the Church for moral guidance, the Church became a parasite on society.

Thus the moral corruption of the Church and its taste for luxury were already in evidence at the dawn of the Merovingian age. The spiritual-minded Christians had already recognised and deplored these tumours developing in the ecclesiastical body, but to little avail. And the tumours became cancerous when the Frankish kings were baptised, when Germanic peoples got converted to Christianity, when the Merovingian kings were emaciated by lust and lechery, when the mayors took over the palace. It is at these times that Vipras, in the guise of the Pope and bishops, governed the society, directly in religious and social affairs, indirectly in political matters, although in administration they had to share the spoils with the mayors.

Did the Pope and bishops govern owing to their physical prowess? Did they control the social order by dint of their manliness, valour or adventurous spirit? No! They governed because of their intellectual superiority over the Khatrian king, so adept in the profession of war; because they could read and write, explain scriptures, while others could not. They governed by ministering to the fears and prejudices of the illiterate masses; by elevating themselves in the common mind to the pedestal of sainthood. In short, their dominion rested on their intellectual acumen rather than on high-spiritedness and muscular strength.

The best proof of the view that the hegemony of the Church derived from intellect is furnished by the practical monopoly that it then had

over education. In the Roman Empire, schools were the responsibility of the state. As the empire fell, this system gradually broke down and the Church moved in to fill the vacuum. The centres of learning in the early Middle Ages were the monasteries whose gates, as far as education was concerned, were closed to the masses. Most members of the non-Vipran groups were thus illiterate. And even within the monasteries, the courses of study tended to belittle science, history and, above all, a probing attitude. The emphasis was on theology; logic too was taught, but theology deemed it irrelevant. No technical skills worth the name were imparted. No wonder the early Middle Ages suffered from intellectual bankruptcy and economic decline. With little competition from other institutions of learning, with the curriculum carefully, and purposely, designed by the Church to discourage independent thinking and scientific reasoning, intellectual achievements on the whole could not but have been mediocre. No wonder the early Middle Ages were dark.

The later Middle Ages, when this educational monopoly finally ruptured, reveal that apprehensions of the Church were quite well-founded. As other centres of learning emerged, many schisms, as will be seen in the subsequent section, developed in the body of Christianity – schisms that served to weaken the hold of the papacy, though not of religion, over society.

The three centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire then clearly belong to the Vipran era, to the Catholic Church. There is some amount of political decentralisation; the form, if not the substance, of the absolute government of Roman times continues, but this absolutism is indirectly exercised by others – the Pope, the bishops, the mayors.

Let us now see how women fared in the new alignment of power. In Sarkar's view, woman's status in the Vipran era is inferior to that in the preceding Khatrian age. Let us then examine what the rise of the Church had in store for womanhood. Recall that women, by the Principate period, had already shaken off the legal, social and political shackles which had oppressed them over the past few centuries. By the time of Augustus, women had become more outgoing, more extraverted than ever before; no longer were they chained to mere family life; no longer were they, in the modern term, mere housewives. The early Christian views about woman and her status in the subsequent Vipran era must then be examined against this background. The Roman environment at the dawn of Christianity permitted of real respect for women and their legal rights, their participation in civil affairs and their say in family life.

So close is this Roman view of womanhood to the modern Western view that all this seems to have come down to us in an unbroken stream. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Standing between the West of the present and of the Roman Empire are more than fourteen centuries during which woman was at times treated no better than a slave. Not only was she then considered inferior and servile to man in all

respects, but even the existence of her soul, in a world where every man was privileged to have one, was at times open to question. On the one hand, she was denied the right to participate in religious affairs, on the other she was called upon to submit to her husband as she would to God, give the best care to an army of children, and perform all other household chores without a murmur.

Is it a coincidence that such subjection of women occurred during an age of which the first half belongs to the Vipran era and the latter half, as subsequently argued, to the Vashyan era? The bulk of the Middle Ages is said to have been dark; but much of this period was not as dark for men as it was for women. Is it a mere coincidence that the Vipran era, and the Vashyan era, were the darkest as far as feminism in the West is concerned? Not in Sarkar's mind! Not in terms of the theory of social cycle!

Right after the birth of Christianity, its saints reserved a role for woman that was, to say the least, unbecoming and less active than her Roman counterpart. This is certainly not Christ's attitude, for, where there are purity and sublimity transcending the mental plane, there is no room for chauvinistic ideas of any sort. Christ is believed to have uplifted both men and women without discrimination. He did not get married, but this does not mean that he looked down upon women, or that he exalted celibacy over marriage as a social institution. He had many female followers and is also believed to have taken part in matrimonial ceremonies. Actually his compassion for women flouted the mores and customs of the community in which he lived.

But as soon as we come to Saint Paul and the later Church Fathers, there is an abrupt turn in the Christian attitude towards women. In the first blush of the Christian movement, women did much towards its spread. Their contributions did not go unnoticed, and we find St Paul appreciating them with great warmth. Apparently he lauded many outstanding women, imbued with love for Christ, as co-workers. But when it comes to relations between man and woman, between husband and wife, his tone takes a stern turn. He exhorts women to obey their husbands as their Lord, observe silence in churches, and refrain from wearing jewellery or expensive clothing. His words have been quoted time and again in justification of woman's inferiority in society. How is one to reconcile the two apparently contradicting positions that St Paul has taken in his view of womankind? Georgia Harkness has come up with an explanation:

> Of individual women, Paul could speak highly and gratefully and feel with them a fine fellowship in Christ. But of the man-woman relation, he spoke his inherited rather than his Christian conviction when he said that as the head of man is Christ, so the head of woman is her husband, and that man is the image and glory of God while woman is the glory of man. [8, p. 71]

Indeed, to this day Paul's contribution to woman's status in Christianity continues to be debated, with some accusing him of as much as misogyny and some absolving him of any such malevolence. Regardless of Paul's views, what is beyond dispute is that his sermons have been used time and again by churchmen to denounce women. He has been frequently cited to show that the Bible condones, nay, demands the exclusion of women from religious affairs. In the early Christian organisation, there were three tasks, too menial to be performed by men themselves, that were reserved for women. In the New Testament and in subsequent ecclesiastic writings, brief mentions are made of deaconesses, widows and virgins who were assigned some duties that were usually paltry relative to those assigned to men. Later, however, the Church leaders, ignoring Paul's warmth for feminine co-workers, denied women even this bit of respect and responsibility.

The saints who steered Christianity through the storms of the first four centuries are called the Fathers of the Church. Most renowned among them are Clement, Tertullian, Jerome and Augustine. Without slighting what they did for Christianity, I must say that the Church Fathers hummed one and the same tune in their tirade against women. To be sure, the pagan converts, who respected feminine rights, did not take kindly to the exclusion of Christian women from all religious functions. But their murmurs were submerged by the rhetoric and eloquence of the Fathers.

Why? What was the reason? Why did otherwise compassionate, scholarly and unpretentious saints take positions so abhorrent to women and to the rational mind? The reason lies in asceticism, which has been woman's scourge in most, if not all, religions. In every religion which extols communion with God to beatify the soul, there have been some people who renounced everything to taste that rare beatitude, of which every prophet speaks in glowing terms. Asceticism is the name given to such renunciation and self-denial. The ascetic usually feels that to achieve oneness with God, natural instincts and senses have to be brought under control; and of all the instincts, the biological urge of sex is perhaps the most difficult to conquer. Thus when the ascetic fails in this herculean task, which he usually does, he blames it on temptations hurled at him by woman. Quite sweepingly, he holds the charm of Eve responsible for Adam's fall; he detests woman's propensity for make-up as well as rich clothing. Little does he know that self-adornment is an integral part of human nature, inherent in both women and unascetic men; little does he realize that, because of his very effort to suppress the sex instinct, woman appears more seductive to him than to ordinary men; that if there is any moral pollution, it is in his own mind and not in any extraneous object, and that as long as his own mind is not purged of the egoistic feeling of the petty 'I', neither the sex instinct, nor any other sense, can be brought under control.[1]

As soon as Christianity came in contact with oriental cults, it was also infected by the latter's ascetic bent. The sequel was all those anti-feministic sermons by Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, among others. In Donaldson's words:

> Now what the early Christians did was to strike the male out of the definition of man, and human being out of the definition of woman. Man was a human being made for the highest and noblest purposes; woman was a female to serve only one. She was on the earth to inflate the heart of man with every evil passion. [5, p. 182]

As long as Christians themselves were the objects of official repression, as long as they were in the minority, as long as their leaders were out of the saddle of power, the new chauvinistic ideas afflicted only Christian women. But when the Church, its Pope and bishops, gained the upper hand in Western society at the beginning of the Middle Ages, portents for feminism could not have been more ominous. The customary Roman respect for woman's rights and liberties had then as much chance of survival as the gladiators of older days. Steadily and surely, the attitude of the Church Fathers made its way into the common law and custom, as well as the family and private life of Western society. So complete was the subjection of woman during the Middle Ages that relics of these customs and mores have survived to this day. In some ways, they still shape social attitudes towards woman in Western countries.

The first idea to gain currency in society was that celibacy is superior to matrimony. Priests were barred from marriage, something that vented the ascetic impulse of the Church Fathers. But more than that, it created a distinction between the clergy and the common, married people. Automatically it conferred a diploma of sainthood on the celibate priest, a diploma that was the time-honoured gateway to creature comforts.

The ideas that the sexual urge is intrinsically evil and that woman is purely a temptress could not but colour the public view of family life and of adultery, for which woman was held solely at fault. A lewd man, because of his immunity to pregnancy, could deceive the public, could, if exposed, even win forgiveness for his excesses, but not a lewd woman, not a prostitute, who would inevitably end up a social pariah. For a long while, this double standard underlay many of the laws concerning rape as well as prostitution, and only now is the West lukewarmly trying to get itself out of this mockery of justice.

Curiously, as the sex instinct got slighted, the size of the family increased manifold with inevitable consequences for women's health and household chores. The Church Fathers permitted of sexuality within marriage solely for procreation. The weakling layman, the Shudra, the Khatri or the Vashya, who looked up to the Church for guidance in every affair, had to justify in his mind his every carnal act. This he did by begetting as many children as possible; hence the emergence of large families and an aversion to birth control. However, although a layman could thus expiate his sensual sins, woman had to bear the brunt of man's taboos which the Church had foisted on him, and which were not at all of woman's own making. Thus, woman in the Vipran era was not only condemned as a temptress, not only condemned as inherently immoral, she was also, as it were, called upon to help man atone for his indulgence that biologically was unavoidable. Such then was the status of women in the early Middle Ages that belong to the Vipran era.

Does the Church have anything salutary to add to the cause of womanhood in Western society? I believe it does; and I say this because of the positive role that the Church in some respects has played. I have already referred to the absolute authority that the Roman father used to have over his offspring; even the decision whether his children, especially those with handicaps, should be allowed to live or perish was his and his alone. Infanticide was, therefore, quite common, and although, by the time of the Principate, this heinous practice had somewhat abated, its vestiges took many centuries to die. Till the very end of paganism, this prerogative of the Roman father was accepted by the pagans. However, its brunt fell on infant girls, who were considered a liability in those days. The Church Fathers did not take kindly to this practice, and denounced it as plain murder. Therefore when the Church came to prevail over the West, this practice was slowly eliminated; the chief beneficiaries, of course, were women, whose population must have thus risen. In this way the Church ironically promoted increased numbers of the seductive creatures whom the Fathers had dreaded for fear of falling from their self-deluding pedestal of sanctity.

On the political scene, the history of the West has already been traced through the eighth century. We have travelled in time up to a point where Pepin, with the approval of the Pope, had deposed the king in 751, and taken direct control over the reins of government. With Pepin's rise, there was a further increase in collaboration between the state and the papacy. But the Carolingian king was made of a stuff sterner than the Merovingian weakling he had replaced. On Pepin's insistence, many reforms were instituted to eradicate clerical corruption; but unwittingly he helped the papacy by strengthening its hold over the clergy.

For our purposes, Pepin's rule is significant in yet another way. Through his strong and benevolent government, he prepared the ground for his more famous son and successor, Charlemagne, who quickly assembled a vast empire, and in the process took command of the Church as well. Thus the supremacy of the Pope and bishops

remained more or less unchallenged until the accession of Charlemagne, who reigned from 768 to 814. The new king, never the one to let anyone else rule in his name, was a man of superlative Khatrian qualities. He was tall, healthy and stout; had a superabundance of energy and vigour. With his excellent health and stamina he was able to mount innumerable campaigns of conquest, which resulted in a vast empire, covering all central and western Europe save England. At the same time, he assumed control of the Church. He was an absolute ruler who supervised administrative and church activities through an institution called *missi dominici* (emissaries of the king).

Actually the star of the Pope, Leo III, had been going downhill for some time. Leo had been accused of profligacy and tyranny, and in 799 was chased out of the city of Rome. However, Charlemagne promptly came to Leo's aid, and reinstated him as Pope. In return, on Christmas day of the year 800, the beholden Leo took Charlemagne by surprise and, in a melodramatic ceremony, crowned him Roman Emperor. The king was thus elevated to the majesty of Augustus.

Despite this, Charlemagne never acknowledged the papal primacy over himself, although Leo, of course, regarded it as a precedent whereby the king's *imperium* derived directly from God, of whom the Pope was on earth the only representative. True, Charlemagne was now an emperor, but it was the papal action that had sanctified his position; and the Pope could recant what he had bestowed. At the turn of the ninth century, such assertions were empty, for the fact of Charlemagne's primacy over government and the Church had already been established; was not the Pope obliged for his own the survival to the Emperor? But during the next four centuries, this precedent was to become the source of eternal conflict between secular and ecclesiastical authorities.

The shift of power from the Pope to the Khatrian king, this shift from indirect rule and decentralisation to direct rule by a centralised authority, is a striking example of what Sarkar calls counter-evolution, because this entire episode signifies a backward movement of the social cycle from the Vipran to the Khatrian age. However, the fact that this change to autocracy and the corresponding diminution of the papacy were not to endure long suggests that counter-evolutionary events are usually short-lived.

In the long procession of history, one discovers that counter-evolution usually occurs when a particular era of the social cycle is about to run its course. This is not an inexorable law, but it generally holds good with annals of most societies. Charlemagne's dominance over the Church was, therefore, a premonition of things to come. For the ninth century opens with a government as centralised as it can be, but terminates with such dilution of political power as was not seen in the West before: it begins with autocracy, but ends with unprecedented decentralisation. It is towards this new situation that I now turn.

FEUDALISM AND THE VASHYAN ERA

Charlemagne's death in 814 was followed by a century of turbulence, chaos and disorder. None of his successors was to inherit his forceful personality, with the result that within a few decades after his demise the Carolingian empire just disappeared. The central government was so badly weakened that more than ever before the counts, bishops and big landowners usurped the rights and duties of the state – if there remained any state. It is here that we detect the elements of extreme decentralisation, culminating in feudalism that for the next few centuries prevailed all over Europe. The Church also then underwent a vast change in composition and character. It regained a measure of its sway that had been the rule before Charlemagne, but only in a limited area of Europe. In most European nations in which Charlemagne's empire was divided, political and economic dominion was exercised by feudal kings and feudal lords or nobles who exhibited a Vashyan mentality. They ruled because of their control over the means of production – the land or fiefs. They were always on the prowl to increase their wealth through matrimony and petty feuds in which usually their vassals had the honour of participation. And it was during the ninth century that the ground was prepared for the impending Vashyan age, an age not far removed from Egypt's First Intermediate Period.

As defined in the first two chapters, a Vashya is someone whose intellect for the most part runs after wealth, and when some Vashyas gain social primacy by purchasing services of the other three classes, the Vashyan era begins. The intellectuals or the Vipras then zealously serve the Vashyan interests, and devise theories justifying the Vashyan dominance as part of some natural order. Many Vipras themselves now behave like the Vashyas, because the Vashyan acquisitive virus, once dominant in society, quickly infects the intellectuals: for the privileged classes, mammon becomes the sole objective. This is what transpired in Feudal Europe around the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth.

Charlemagne was succeeded by his son, Louis the Pious (814–40), whose chief claim to fame in history is his mediocrity; he could have been as strong a ruler as his illustrious father, had he not been overawed by the Church as well as an indomitable wife. Hardly had Charlemagne been laid to rest than conspiracies and conflicts broke out among his grandsons, who were eventually subdued with some difficulty – a poor augury for coming generations. In 841, immediately after Louis' death, the simmering embers of internal strife erupted into an open war among the three claimants of the throne. The sequel was the Treaty of Verdun in 843 and the empire was divided into three parts – France, Germany, and a 'middle kingdom'. All this simply prepared the soil for emaciated central authority that was to be the hallmark of Europe in the near future.

Just as the assaults of Germanic barbarians had helped Vipran priests into power on the debris of Roman empire, so did the invading marauders called Northmen help Vashyan landlords at the end of the ninth century. From their original base, situated in the three Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, the Northmen, also called Vikings, moved out in droves, and demolished much of the civilised life that was in their way. Having been cut off by the Baltic Sea from the rest of Europe, they had not yet been injected with the serum of Roman and Christian influence. Their incursions into Christian Europe had begun as early as 787 when they first preyed on the British Isles; thereafter their raids continued in a crescendo of destruction, until, towards the end of the ninth century, they were repulsed by the nobles who by then had erected impregnable castles. It is then that Vikings began to settle down in England as well as in the outskirts of the erstwhile Carolingian empire.

The Vikings were as much a barbarian element as had been their Germanic predecessors, and their advent proved calamitous to the parts of Europe they visited. They destroyed many monasteries, and hence the centres of learning, over which the Church had exercised a monopoly. But in the end they were absorbed by the culture of their more civilised victims. Their adventures, of course, helped determine the evolution of Western society for the next five centuries. By their daring assaults, the central authority of the Carolingian kings was emasculated beyond repair. Everywhere power passed into the hands of the nobles – dukes, counts, bishops, big landlords. And the Carolingian empire split further into many kingdoms: one in Italy, two in Burgundy, one in Germany and one in France, while Spain was still under the Mohammedan yoke and England divided into two royal domains. In short, the Europe of the later Middle Ages, commonly called Feudal Europe, followed a course determined partly by the enterprise of the Northmen.

The hallmark of the new kingdoms was their essentially feudal character. The medieval European society from the tenth century onwards was a feudal society that differed radically from its predecessor. The scholars of European feudalism define it as a social order where the political and economic power is exercised by big landlords, and where the rest of society serves them in terms of well-defined contractual obligations. The entire fabric of feudal society is woven together by myriad contracts whereby every person – the serf, the noble, the clergy – is called upon to submit to his immediate superior. Everyone is a vassal to someone else, including the overlord who is a vassal to his king. In the words of Burns and Ralph:

> Feudalism may be defined as a structure of society in which the powers of government are exercised by private barons over *persons economically dependent on them*. It is a system of overlordship and vassalage in which the right to govern is a contractual relationship involving reciprocal obligations. [4, p. 390 (italics mine)]

In other words, the aristocracy under feudalism enjoys the duties and privileges of government simply because its subjects are 'economically dependent' on it. This is precisely what distinguishes a Vashyan age: Vashyas rule not because of superior intellect or muscle power, but because of their command over productive resources which in the tenth-century Europe consisted primarily of land. Thus Western society of the later Middle Ages, or of the period lasting from the tenth century to the fourteenth, belongs to the Vashyan era. Not that feudalism was the same everywhere in the then Europe, for what prevailed at one place might not prevail at another, or what was true of one time might not be true of any other. At one place feudal barons might be kept in check by a centralised authority, while at the same time extreme decentralisation ruled the roost in other parts of Europe. At one time a Khatrian king might be the ruler, in theory as well as in fact, of as much as a quarter of European lands, while at others Vashyan overlords reigned everywhere in the name of a feeble king. At times even the Pope might be at the helm of temporal affairs, and at some places, as in big cities, the wealthy merchants might wield the sceptre. Thus no picture of the later Middle Ages displays a harmony applying to the whole of Europe all through this period. But the differences, for our purposes, are mostly in terms of nuances or shades of colours. This much can be said with little doubt that, looking at Europe or Western society as a whole, disregarding some of its parts that may at times strike an aberrant note, the four to five hundred years of the late Middle Ages were dominated by the Vashyan aristocracy which ruled, usually in the name of the king, solely because of its wealth. Not only that, its rise to power in the first place occurred because of its wealth; because of its vast estates or, as in cities, because of its control over commercial capital. And when the king, for some short intervals, became powerful, he could never lose sight of disgruntled barons ready to strike back at the first opportunity. Whenever the kings ruled, they did so usually by appeasing the aristocracy or by taking momentary advantage of the factional strife among the barons themselves.

How did medieval feudalism come into being? In most respects, it was an embodiment of that fusion among the barbarian, Roman, and Christian elements of which I have spoken in the preceding section. Roughly speaking, the germ of feudalism was planted in the eighth and ninth centuries; it attained adolescence during the twelfth and thirteenth, withered into senility during the fourteenth, and gave way grudgingly to a system of centralised monarchies, reminiscent of a Khatrian epoch, beginning with the fifteenth. In England it met an early death, but in many parts of Europe its vestiges lingered on well into the

nineteenth century.

To find the roots of feudalism, we must retreat in the dimension of time to as far back as the late Roman Empire. There, to thwart the decline in agricultural population and production, imperial decrees had bound many labourers and tenants to the soil as serfs during the third and fourth centuries. In time these serfs became completely dependent on the big landlords. Eventually, as the central government weakened, the landowners usurped all powers of governing their estates and their serfs.

Then there were the Merovingian and Carolingian kings who contributed much to feudalism by rewarding the loyalty of their warriors and governors with vast tracts of land. Later, these nobles grew very powerful and arrogated to themselves the sovereign authority of the king himself. However, without the unexpected assistance from the Vikings, feudalism perhaps would never have developed into the kind of pervasive system that emerged at the turn of the tenth century. The Frankish central government, which seldom rose to the efficiency and authority of the Roman Emperors, simply collapsed under the steady onslaught of invaders from the North. Emasculated by years of internal strife and civil wars, Charlemagne's successors were simply unable to defend their citizens from the northern *Völkerwanderung*. The people, in desperation, then turned to the nobles for protection behind their fortified castles. Once the nobles assumed responsibility for the main function of the state, namely the provision of defence, other rights and privileges of government naturally passed into their hands. In those days of skimpy communications, the emaciation of monarchy automatically meant a rise in the powers of local magnates who were more accessible to the people than the remote king. The vacuum of power could then be filled only by the Carolingian counts, dukes and other nobles, who also managed to make their offices hereditary. Still they paid homage to their king, but it was merely ceremonial, designed to perpetuate the *status quo* and avoid unnecessary affront to an institution that in the popular mind had been hallowed by centuries of presence.

What was the theory of government under feudalism? This issue is of much relevance here, at least for purposes of comparison, because it may be recalled that all through the first eight centuries, the king was entitled to an absolute authority over his subjects. Regardless of whether this absolutism was directly exercised by the ruler, as in the Roman Empire, or indirectly by the Church and the mayors, as during the Frankish reign, the king's absolute sovereignty was in theory never questioned. However, during the later Middle Ages, this theory underwent drastic surgery at the hands of the Vipras, who by now had become the Vashyan hirelings. In so doing, they were simply singing the tunes of the times, capturing in their writings the new realities, the new

spectrum of power which, to their chagrin, had slipped out of their hold.

Many medieval theologists and philosophers seriously examined the complex questions regarding the origin of state and of political power. And in these matters, if in nothing else, they generally agreed with each other. Though deriving from different reasoning, their thought converged on one essential point: man should not yield to the tyranny of any sovereign – an idea sharply conflicting with that of the Church Fathers, who had preached that the state was created by God to help man atone for his sin, so that the ruler, however ruthless, had to be obeyed. No longer was the state regarded as inherently evil in feudal times; rather, it could be an engine of unqualified goodness, provided the sovereign governed with fairness and justice. No longer did political philosophy recognise the absolute authority of the ruler; rather, the ruler's main function was to administer the law, not to make it or shape it of his volition.

This legal conception is somewhat reminiscent of the concept of natural law that was meant to underlie the civil law in the early Roman Empire (where ideally the state was not above the law), except that under feudalism there could exist no law as an expression of the sovereign's will; for there seldom was a sovereign strong enough to enforce his decrees. Instead, customs and tradition ruled the roost. The medieval social fibre rested on a system of reciprocal services and obligations intricately woven through a hierarchy. The overlord provided protection in exchange for certain services that his vassals were supposed to perform. It is as simple as that. The feudal system was then guided by the force behind customs, and the concept of law, natural or civil, had no place in it. The medieval philosophy of government thus championed the cause of extreme decentralisation, of what was actually a clearly accomplished fact.

Among the political ideas of medieval thinkers, there was at least one bone of contention. Who should be the supreme overlord was a question that created a gulf in the thinking of two schools. One, headed by Dante, believed in the ultimate supremacy of the Emperor, and the other, headed by St Thomas Aquinas, argued, not unexpectedly, for the supremacy of the Pope over everyone else, including the king. In fact this conflict is the ideological counterpart of the actual conflict that poisoned relations between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperors during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Of this I will shortly speak at length.

What was the role played by the Church during the feudal regime? Note that the main difference between Vipran and Vashyan eras is that although in both cases the intellect, not physical prowess, governs society, in the Vashyan era the ruling class rules because of its wealth, whereas in the Vipran era it rules because of its high acumen. The power

of Vipras in the Vashyan era diminishes somewhat, as they now become agents of the Vashyas, but the Vipras still exert influence in society. In fact, their influence is second only to that of the Vashyan class. Even in their activities and thinking, the Vipras get infected by the Vashyan mentality, and the two groups at times become indistinguishable.

During feudal Europe the Church, like every other institution, could not remain immune to the Vashyan contagion. Gone were its other-worldly concerns fostered, at least in theory, during the early years of Christianity and during the Merovingian age with which the Vipran era, as argued in the preceding section, had coincided. Religion underwent so much dissection, that Christianity emerged with almost a new face. The essential elements of monotheism and other cardinal principles were, of course, not discarded, but then the Church seldom took these fundamentals very seriously. If it had, it would not have accumulated so much wealth and land as it did as early as the fifth century. Its proclivities had always been for new dogmas, new doctrines interfering as much as possible with individual, family, state and religious affairs. And it is in the doctrinal arena that Christianity was now markedly altered.

Up to the early medieval period, the Church regarded the present life as essentially miserable; the picture of this world appearing on its optical screen was one of fatalism, gloom and doom. For this reason, man, whose nature was inherently wicked, had to disregard the sensual world and focus on the world beyond. However, as the Vashyan era emerged by the tenth century, even the Church doctrine succumbed to mundane melodies of the times. The forces of wealth were now dominant, and Christian theology could not but take them into account.

The transformation of Christianity, set in motion around 1050, was mainly effected by the triumvirate of St Thomas Aquinas, St Francis and Pope Innocent III. These theologians cast aside the garments of pessimism they had inherited from the Church Fathers, and painted a rosier picture of the present world, wherein life, for its own sake, was of supreme importance. No longer was a compromise with this world regarded as totally demeaning or devilish.

However, it would be too much to expect the Churchmen to be guided by lofty, unselfish sentiments in the new sermons. During the early Middle Ages, the state was still theoretically centralised in the person of Merovingian kings, and by controlling them the Church had been able to extend its umbrella over the entire society. But ever since the advent of Charlemagne and subsequently of the Northmen, its status had been declining. And when feudalism arose on the ruins of the Carolingian empire, the Church still could not regain its old power; for it could influence one feudal lord, or ten of them, but not all those hundreds of local magnates who were quite often inaccessible owing to poor communications. This is not to say that religion was less pervasive in

Western society than before, but simply that the ecclesiastic sway in political affairs had steadily gone downhill. It would be wrong to think that the Church watched these developments with complacency. What it had lost in terms of political sway, it tried to make up by tightening its noose around individual and family matters; and in this endeavour it came out with flying colours.

We are already acquainted with how the views of Thomas Aquinas, who exalted the Pope as the supreme overlord, towering even over the kings and the Emperor, had been disputed by the notable philosopher Dante among many others. However many other rulings of Aquinas, especially those dealing with theology and individual life, went unchallenged. While he elevated the present world, he also entitled the priest to greater interference in family affairs. The latter now came to inherit, albeit indirectly, some of the authority and magnificence of Christ. By virtue of this power the priest became the medium through whom God could perform certain miracles, heal the sick and grant absolution to the sinner. The moral strength and character of the priest were of no relevance in this regard. How could they be, it was theorised, when he had been ordained, through the instrument of the Pope, by Christ himself? No matter how unworthy the priest, no matter how tainted his mind, the rituals and sacraments that he administered were to be regarded as pure and sacrosanct. It may be recalled that something similar to this effect had first occurred in Egypt some thirty-five hundred years ago (see Chapter 4, p. 58): the Egyptian priest thus seems to have been resurrected as the Christian cleric.

Whatever its other ramifications, the new theology succeeded in strengthening the hold of religion on society. It is not clear, however, that the Church grew more powerful than before in matters of religion, for there were other cross-currents at work, and they tended to offset its influence. What is undisputable is that it became ever more wordly, conceited and mechanical.

Perhaps the most potent of these cross-currents was the breakdown of the former Church monopoly over education, a breakdown that was effected first by Charlemagne who had invited many new scholars to his court, and then by the Northmen who had demolished many monasteries which were the only centres of early medieval learning. In the eleventh century, education began to move from the remaining monasteries to cathedral schools which are somewhat reminiscent of modern colleges. Later, these schools were overshadowed by the rise of medieval universities, founded initially to produce and train teachers. But, other educational programmes, notably liberal arts, were gradually added. Between the tenth century and the twelfth, impressive centres of learning emerged at Salerno, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and Naples.

The rise of new schools and universities did not augur well for the Church. Their contribution to the surge of new ideas ever since the tenth

century shows precisely why the Church so zealously guarded its monopoly over education in the early medieval period. The Vipran forte is his intellectual superiority, and the Church sought to maintain this superiority, and hence its power-base, by first rendering education inaccessible to other classes and then regulating the curriculum in its own schools. The erosion of the Church monopoly over education was then a symptom as well as a cause of its decline in the Vashyan age.

In the medieval universities, the emphasis generally was more on secular learning, especially law and medicine, than on theology; particular attention was given to the study of rhetoric and logic. The sequel in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was an intellectual revival that later flowered into the Renaissance as well as the Reformation. Scholasticism is the name given by historians to literary achievements of the late Middle Ages, a name which does them ill-justice. For the term Scholasticism signifies an effort to rationalise theology in terms of dialectics and philosophy, whereas late medieval thought was by no means limited to questions of religion. If anything, some of the then philosophers were interested in examining only secular issues, ranging from social and philosophic to economic and political. In their methods of research, logic or rationalism took precedence over empiricism or personal experience.

We have already seen what the new theory of priesthood meant for the power of the clergy over lay people. However, side by side emerged the medieval humanising attitude, of which the Church was not particularly enamoured. It manifested itself in the cult of the Virgin Mary whose prominence tended to exalt the status of woman, of whom the Church Fathers had spoken with contempt. It is not surprising to find that the rise of the Virgin sprang mainly from popular sentiment foreign to the Roman Church. The words of Mary Beard are highly convincing in this regard:

> Thus the Virgin signified to the people moral, human, or humane power as against the stern mandates of God's law taught and enforced by the Church. As such, her position made trouble for the Church; but the Papacy, if it had been so minded, could scarcely have suppressed the urge of the people to Virgin worship, however successful it was in excluding women from the priesthood and the musical services of its choir. [2, p. 206]

The upshot of this whole discussion concerning the Church is that, although religion in the late Middle Ages was as pervasive as in their early part, new attitudes, new symbols, new centres of learning were emerging during the tenth and eleventh centuries, and they all served to undermine the formerly undisputed hold of the Church over the public mind. Why? Because, this was the Vashyan age, where the real say in social, political and economic matters belonged to the Vashyan overlords. Actually the Church itself was feudalised; it was by far the largest owner of land, with its territories administered by ecclesiastical overlords who behaved like the secular overlords. Thus the former Vipras also now displayed the Vashyan characteristics: they had become fake Vashyas. In fact, some of the Church power then derived from its vast holdings of land. Hunt and Sherman, commenting upon the feudal noose around the serfs who laboured on the manors or fiefs that the lords owned, confirm Sarkar's claim that in the Vashyan age, Vashyas and Vipras behave alike and work in unison to perpetuate their hold on other sections.

> Thus the manor might be secular or religious (many times secular lords had religious overlords and vice versa), but the essential relationships between lords and serfs were not significantly affected by this distinction. There is little evidence that serfs were treated any less harshly by religious lords than by secular ones. The religious lords and the secular nobility were the joint ruling classes; *they controlled the land and the power that went with it.* [9, p. 7 (italics mine)]

Let me now turn to the life-style of the lords themselves. Did they possess the Vashyan mind which runs after wealth? Did they control the Khatris who would do their fighting, as well as the Vipras who would devise theories to justify their dominion in society? Answers to these questions reinforce my argument that the period of European feudalism belongs to the Vashyan era of Western civilisation.

We have already seen how the Vipran churchmen and philosophers alike had advanced the political theory of a decentralised state. This theory, itself a drastic revision of the former belief in absolute government, plainly justified the primacy of important nobles who purchased the loyalty of their vassals by granting them land. Each noble held his estate as a hereditary fief from the king, divided it into pieces of varying size, and then parcelled them out to vassals of lower rank, and so on. This practice is called sub-infeudation. Whoever thus held the hereditary fief was called a lord. Those on top of the feudal hierarchy of lords, vassals-in-chief, were then the Vashyas, who in different places were called dukes, counts, earls, or margraves. Barons, who ranked next to the vassal-in-chief, may also be included in the Vashyan class. Actually, some barons were bigger proprietors than the dukes, as were some dukes than their kings. In comparison to the total population, even to the population of lords, the chief vassals were few in number. Below the Vashyan overlords were other nobles of various ranks, depending upon the size of their fiefs. Lowermost in rank among the nobles were the knights, whose life-style brings to mind the interests, ideals and activities of the Khatris. As a matter of fact, the vassal's chief duty to his overlord

was the provision of military service, but the brunt of this duty fell on the robust shoulders of the knights who have become legendary in medieval folklore and poetry.

To the term knight, two meanings were attached during the feudal period. The medieval theory entrusted the defence of the other two classes, the clergy and the peasants, to the nobles. All nobles, therefore, were knights in the sense of warriors; they were all, in terms of social prestige, a cut above the non-warring class of peasants and other physical labourers. At the same time, the term knight was reserved for the lord holding the smallest fief. Thus in the sense of military obligations to other classes, all nobles up to the dukes and counts were knights, whereas in terms of manorial size, the knight was one with the miniature fief. (It is in the latter sense that the term knighthood has been commonly used by historians, and unless otherwise specified I follow the same practice.) Regardless of the medieval usage of this term, all nobles were expected to lead a bustling life of adventure and warfare. Medieval literature exalts the chivalry and heroism of knights in battlefields and war. Especially during the tenth and eleventh century, knighthood was a title that measured the noble's ability and stamina to fight for the honour of his lord. However, to earn this title was no easy matter. Being born of a noble family was only its first prerequisite. A noble could be awarded knighthood only after a prolonged period of training in the use of variegated weaponry and in the military arts.

From this account it appears that all nobles were born warriors, were Khatris; that they all loved to wage warring campaigns and thus keep themselves busy in an adventurous life. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. What is true is that the knights holding small fiefs loved to go to war for its own sake, especially when fighting, not nearly as hazardous as in modern times, was at times a profitable business. Fighting behind the shield of his heavy armour, the knight was usually not killed in the battle, and if victorious he could obtain a large booty, or a sumptuous reward from his overlord. But the great overlords, the dukes, counts and barons, did not directly participate in battles unless they had to fight for their king or for their lives. Not that they were pacifists, desirous of leading a tranquil life. On the contrary, feudal warfare was common; sometimes too common. But usually the knights did the fighting at the command of their overlord. And whenever the great duke fought by the side of his knights and foot-soldiers, it was usually not for the sake of adventure but for the sake of riches and land. For on the size of his fief rested his social prestige, political power, as well as income and other prerogatives. Therefore, as far as the barons are concerned, the term adventure is a misnomer for their warring campaigns. It was concocted by the Vipras (philosophers and poets) simply to mask their patron's greed for land.

The fief-size could be increased in two ways – through marriage or war; and the rapacious overlord employed them both. Thus in feudal society, the chief overlords were the Vashyas, the clergy and philosophers the Vipras, knights the Khatris, and peasants and serfs the Shudras. At some places, as in Germany, the lines of demarcation among the social classes were not as clear, but these are roughly the groups into which feudal society was organised.

Reasons for much of the private warfare were petty and local in character. Quite often the feudal obligations were ignored, the oath of loyalty breached, and the bond of trust destroyed by both the vassal and the lord. And in redressing their grievances, real or imaginary, the nobles would assault their foes first and ask questions later. No section of society, the Church, peasantry and nobility alike, felt safe from this useless strife which was started on the flimsiest excuse. Monasteries were quite often its victims, so that many bishops, abbots and other clergy were forced to seek shelter with the barons, who, of course, were only too glad to oblige them for money. Sometimes the extent of the private warfare has been exaggerated by historians, because much of it could have been brigandage, and hence pure crime, usually involving the mugging of merchants and other travellers.

What was the lot of women in the Vashyan age? In the first three centuries of the feudal period, tenth, eleventh and twelfth, social attitudes towards women were still fashioned by the teachings of the Church Fathers, and therefore feminine status could not have improved from its low point in the Vipran era or the early Middle Ages. If anything, it was perhaps lower than before, because now a large class of serfs had come into existence and the serf-women were, of course, abused by their lords. Prior to feudalism, serfdom had existed but not as a preponderant feature of society. The female serfs, of course, shared in the oppressive physical labour that the male serfs had to perform on the manors, but, in addition, they were also called upon to satisfy the lust of their lordly masters. In some places, the lord reserved the right to sleep with his serf's bride on the first night of the honeymoon; while in others, the husband had to bribe his way out of the Church injunction exhorting chastity on the first wedding night, or even the first three nights. This inevitably worked to the benefit of the priest, who would let the poor groom off the hook in return for a paltry fine of, so to speak, expiation. I draw upon Thompson to reinforce my argument that women in the early Vashyan age fared worse than they did in the Vipran period.

> Medieval marital relations, far from being the sentimental attachments which romance depicts, were very often marriages of convenience and were brutally enforced. Young and tender girls were compelled to marry rough, and often lecherous, husbands. . . . Marriage was often a contract entered into to make an advantageous

alliance, to escape escheat of a fief, to keep a particular piece of land in the family, to acquire new lands. [15, p. 711]

Thus the Vashyan mentality found free expression in the matrimonial contracts which were administered by the lord with an eye on personal wealth. And in such marriages, designed either to increase the size of the fief or to strengthen the familial status and power, women were treated like chattels. Upon the death of a vassal, his property as well as his widow reverted to the jurisdiction of the lord, who usually made money from the tragedy. The lord's chief interest was in the services, military and otherwise, of a masculine vassal, and for this reason he usually forced the widow to remarry, as it were, a healthy 'bull' of his choosing. Her own preferences mattered little in this regard. Of course, the heiress could always buy her way out of the predicament by paying the lord a goodly sum of money. The threat of forced marriage to the widow was thus blackmail which she could escape only by paying a large ransom.

All in all, the lord's contempt for woman's rights was not just limited to female serfs, who, of course, bore the brunt of it, but it also extended to women of his own class. The ugly double standard which the Church Fathers had fostered in public attitudes towards adultery now struck at womankind with full fury. We have already observed how the serf-women were not safe from their lords, but in this respect the noblewomen fared only slightly better. Within his own fief a noble could not dishonour any woman, including, in theory, the peasant girls, but outside its bounds, his conduct was under few reins. Speaking of a knight in this regard, Sidney Painter makes this observation:

> Thus it was a serious offense for him to rape the daughter of his lord or one of his own vassals, but he could rape anyone else's daughter with impunity if he was powerful enough to ignore the ire of her relatives. [10, p. 7]

In other words, rape in feudal custom was not a criminal offence if a knight committed it under propitious circumstances. This is the kind of esteem in which women were generally held in early feudal society. Thus up to about the twelfth century, woman's status was no better, if not worse, than that of the Vipran era. Vern Bullough's words vividly capture the picture of the times:

> The feudal male was chiefly absorbed in war and the chase. His wife bore him sons, his mistresses satisfied his momentary lusts, but beyond this women had no particular place in life, and he was not particularly interested in them as individuals. When they appeared in the feudal literature, at least in the literature prior to the twelfth century, they were pictured either as sex objects or as noble and virtuous wives and mothers, nursing their children, mourning their slain husbands, and exhorting their sons to brave and often cruel deeds. If they dared to confront a male in any other role they were resented and vilified. [3, p. 165]

However, during the twelfth century there emerged two new currents that tended to soften the social attitude towards women, especially towards those belonging to the nobility. One was the concept of chivalry with its emphasis on platonic love, and the other, perhaps an offshoot of the first, was the cult of the Virgin Mary. The concept of chivalry, or courtly love, owes its origin to French lyrics and romantic literature embodying the love-songs that troubadours would sing in feudal courts. The essence of these effusive lyrics was romance and selfless love. Woman, that seductive tormentor of the Church Fathers, was now idealised as a being whose love is to be sought and won through one's heroism and gentle manners. Whatever else it achieved in society, the concept of chivalry gradually moved out of French poetry and replaced, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the former feudal ideal of excellence on the battlefield.

The other powerful current shaping the aristocratic attitude towards noblewomen, the cult of the Virgin, was the ethereal counterpart of the mundane idealisation of courtly love. The Fathers of the Church were not the ones to glorify Mary as the mother of God, and it was not before the twelfth century that Mary-worship struck roots in society. But once started, it spread with astonishing speed. Mary was raised to the pedestal of a goddess, something reminiscent of the pagan times. Men and women of all sections came to her fold and offered her their veneration; several imposing cathedrals were erected in her honour.

Whether all this idealisation of woman – as an embodiment of tender love and as the Mother goddess – really bettered ordinary woman's treatment in society is open to serious question. Georgia Harkness raises this issue by asking, 'but did this lift the position of the ordinary earth-bound woman?', and then answers it by affirming: 'There is no evidence that it did' [8, p. 80]. In the same vein, Eileen Power suggests: 'It is probable that the idea of Chivalry has had more influence upon later ages than it had upon contemporaries' [11, p. 407]. Such a theoretical elevation of femininity must have had some impact in the heyday of the feudal order, but whether it was strong enough to ease woman's plight at the time is not altogether clear. What is indisputable, however, is that it marked the beginning of the end of the scorn that womanhood, ever since the Vipran era, had encountered in Western literature. It also anticipates much of the improved status that women were to enjoy in the new Khatrian era which, as subsequently argued, emerged in the West during the fifteenth century.

In terms of economic conditions, the Vashyan epoch is usually superior to the Vipran age, and a glance at the early and later Middle Ages quickly confirms this view.[2] As a result of so many circumstances, some fortuitous, some emanating from the general pessimism of the Church Fathers, the Vipran era had suffered a considerable economic decline. Both Italy and France of the times paint a dismal picture of economic ruin and disaster; elsewhere in Europe the conditions were little better. And the decline was reflected in all economic units – industry, commerce, agriculture, population, cities. At the dawn of the Vashyan era around the end of the ninth century, such, then was its heritage – pestilence, famines, stagnation. By the early part of the tenth century, the landlord had become *de facto* master of his serfs, who lived in poverty and misery as their toil mainly benefited the landowner: consequently, labour-productivity and economic efficiency continued to suffer. But during the eleventh century, the diffusion of new technology replacing the old two-field method of crop rotation by a three-field system resulted in an agricultural spurt that was unprecedented at the time. In the words of Hunt and Sherman:

> A dramatic increase in agricultural output resulted from this seemingly simple change in agricultural technology. With the same amount of arable land, the three-field system could increase the amount under cultivation at any particular time by as much as 50 per cent. [9, p. 16]

Other changes, quite significant by standards of the day, took place in modes of transportation. Horses superseded oxen in ploughing, and this turned out to be a labour-saving innovation; in the thirteenth century, the four-wheeled wagon took the place of the two-wheeled cart, thereby substantially reducing the costs of travelling. Such technical improvements by modern standards are slight, but during the feudal period they culminated in great economic strides. The marked increase in agricultural output and surplus laid the foundation of industry, and urban and commercial centres. It also paved the way for a rapid increase in population that almost doubled in the three hundred years between 1000 and 1300. With a bulging population, the growth of cities could not stay far behind, and this in turn fostered industry and international commerce. All these developments tended to interact on each other, and thus provide further economic stimulus. The growth in agriculture nourished the growth in population, urbanisation and small-scale industry, and all this nourished the demand for agricultural goods and hence further agrarian improvements; the lords and a prosperous peasantry in turn nourished the demand for industrial products. Thus the Vashyan era opened with a murky economic horizon, with the desolation of deserted towns and widespread hunger, but within a few

generations it witnessed a new economic revival.

What did this revival have in store for serfdom? All these strides could not but loosen the strait-jacket of servility in which the bulk of the peasantry was caught by the tenth century. Right from its inception, feudalism was oppressive of free peasants and serfs, who were not slaves in the strict sense of the term, but their lot was no better. In theory both the serf and the lord were bound by reciprocal obligations, but in practice the lord's obligations were minimal in comparison with the array of services that the serf had to perform. For his hereditary right to plough the land, the serf owed various fees to his lord who collected them to the last penny, with no shade of mercy. The lord levied these fees arbitrarily, varied them according to his own needs and, with little coin money around, obtained them in kind. In Tuma's words:

> . . . the serf had to pay a fee, the *merchet*, upon marriage of his daughter; he paid another, the *chevage*, for any absence from the manor; upon a serf's death, the lord was entitled to take his horse and war equipment, *heriot* and *relief*. [16, p. 53]

In addition to all these dues, the serf also had to provide the lord with free farm labour for part of the week. However, as the agrarian economy expanded, some innocent changes occurred in the composition, though not in the essential character, of manorial labour relations, changes that were to alter the course of the feudal polity. With the growth in agriculture had come the growth in heavily populated and industrialised towns, which, for food and raw materials, depended on the rural sector. The sequel was a two-way flow of goods between manors and the cities, which opened up new opportunities for the manorial peasant who could thus sell them his surplus grain for money. He found it increasingly convenient, as well as profitable, to offer the lord a fixed sum of money as rent in lieu of physical labour. This practice, known as commutation, did much to alleviate the plight of the serf, who now began to enjoy the fruit of his work rather than see much of it expropriated by the lord. While labour dues were replaced by pecuniary rentals, other arbitrary dues also, much to the relief of the serfs, gave way to fixed monetary payments. Thus the Vashyan era began with the serfs (or Shudras), trampled under the wheels of grinding repression, but by the thirteenth century many of them had attained economic freedom. Even the lords themselves, ever in need of cash to taste the luxuries of industrial goods, came to prefer money to physical labour. As a result, by the fourteenth century money rents in many European areas surpassed the monetary value of labour services. Thus all sections of society eventually benefited from the general affluence that the Vashyan age had brought about.

This is not to say that feudalism was on the decline or that the stature

of the nobility had diminished – not yet. If anything, the new-found prosperity, by eliminating the thorn that for a while had poisoned the lord–serf relations, furnished a sounder agrarian base upon which the rest of the feudal edifice could stand firmly. But later on these very developments helped bury feudalism in the grave.

What were the economic, social and political conditions in medieval cities which practically existed outside the sphere of the feudal order? There things look different, but in reality are much the same. There one discerns the same political decentralisation with Vashyas, this time in the guise of wealthy merchants, firmly in control. Most of the city governments then were generally under the sway of an oligarchy of merchants, also known as burghers, although some places were fairly democratic, with power nominally exercised by the electorate. In the Vipran era, it may be recalled, cities and commercial towns had succumbed to the general state of economic decline. But during the tenth century an agrarian base was created for the resurgence of cities, at times around the old, diminished centres, at others around new centres in which the burghers had come to live and pursue their commercial activities. A good section of European population began to reside in cities and towns, and from the eleventh century onwards the urban centres had as large a role to play in Western evolution as the feudal institutions. In fact, much of the intellectual advance of the Vashyan age occurred in the lap of the cities – Venice, Florence, Paris, Milan.

At first, most cities were dominated by the feudal nobility, but in time they sought, and obtained, freedom from such control. The typical medieval city was governed by a council and some executive officers who were mostly elected from the ranks of the burghers. The feudal lord, depending on the extent of his dominion over the city, sometimes intervened in this election, but more often than not paid lip service to the city administration.

The urban economic ideology was, not surprisingly, constrained by the web of Christian doctrines and ethics, which generally condemned the greedy attitude towards profit as well as the practice of charging interest for any kind of loan. Needless to say, such prohibitions were flagrantly, though covertly, violated. The distinct features of city economies were the merchant and craft guilds, of which all burghers operating in the city were supposed to be members. A guild's principal interest was to ensure monopolistic conditions for the goods bought and sold by its members, and for this purpose its membership was usually denied to foreign merchants. Also, for the same purpose, the guild took it upon itself to regulate market prices and wage rates as well as the quality of goods produced within its jurisdiction.

For women the cities generally offered a freer and more bustling life, even though there too male attitudes as well as the literature displayed the misogyny of feudal society. Many women, single as well as married,

engaged in an assortment of trades, with dominance in some industries. However, economic discrimination, designed to shield male vocations from female competition, was commonplace, and, of course, for the same work, then, as now, women were underpaid relative to men. Of such women in the cities, Bullough has this to say:

> Throughout Europe they dominated the manufacture of beer and much of the processes of textile manufacture. In fact, the very word 'spinster' would indicate that spinning was not only the regular occupation of all women but also the habitual means of support for many of the unmarried. Still many craft regulations excluded females, and when they did work they often did so at wages lower than that of the man. [3, p. 179]

By now I have touched on the main aspects of the feudal society and established that its characteristics fit well into Sarkar's description of the Vashyan age. This, when added to conclusions already reached, implies that the evolution of Western society up till now has followed the tracks of Sarkar's theory of social cycle. A rotation of the cycle will be complete if the closing stages of the feudal or Vashyan period are marked by uprisings of the oppressed Shudras – the peasants, the serfs – and then followed by the age of absolutism so that the Khatrian era begins anew. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries turn out to be the centuries of such transition, of the kind of anarchy that bedevils the terminal phase of the Vashyan age.

The seeds of strong monarchies that were to emerge in Spain, France and England during the fifteenth century had actually been planted earlier in the feudal age. We have already heard of various feudal kingdoms, of which all, at one time or another, had succumbed to the power of the nobles. The map of tenth-century Europe displays a number of royal domains in England, France, and in the Holy Roman Empire comprising Germany and Italy, with the real rulers, of course, being the host of dukes, counts, and barons.

In France, the Carolingian dynasty ruled until 987 when it was replaced by the Count of Paris, Hugh Capet, whose descendants then became the French kings for the next three hundred years. During these centuries, the fulcrum of power shifted between the Capetian kings and their nobles, but, by a series of manoeuvres lasting over several generations, the kings were eventually able to lay the foundations of a national monarchy. Through one excuse or another they expropriated the fiefs of their vassals, with the result that by the end of the thirteenth century the king had become the most powerful of all the rulers in France. There still were some independent fiefs, but they now paid more than ceremonial homage to the king, who had begun to reassert the royal right to levy taxes. In the main, the royalty succeeded because it

broadened its support by seeking help from the cities.

In England, the basis of national monarchy was laid by William the Conqueror, whose conquest of the British Isles in 1066 spelt disaster for the native Anglo-Saxon rulers. Although William transmitted some features of feudalism from France into the British feudal structure, the monarchy he founded was stronger than the one he displaced. By assuming the right to coin money and by prohibiting petty feuds among his vassals, he kept the nobles under some degree of control. After William's demise, power alternated between the kings and nobles, a process quite reminiscent of neighbourly French developments during the same period. William's forceful personality had somewhat diminished the baronial sway, but the subsequent rulers were not always so successful.

In 1135, the country was ravaged by an internecine civil war between two pretenders to the throne, and the nobles swifly moved in to take advantage of the weakened monarchy. This is the way the pendulum of power switched to and fro between the royalty and the barony up to about the middle of the thirteenth century, when there occurred yet another civil war in which the king was defeated and captured. I have singled this event out, because it paved the way for the British parliament which was later to play a monumental role in the nation's affairs – when Britain did eventually emerge as a nation. Under the stewardship of Simon de Montfort, the leader of the rebellious barons, an assembly was convoked to discuss constraints on the king's authority. The assembly was attended not just by the great nobles and ecclesiastical authorities, but also by representatives of knights and city-dwellers. Thus a precedent was established for assembling a group of men, representing the three classes – of Vashyas, Vipras and Khatris – who could thus discuss political and economic affairs in unison. However, the credit for fathering parliament is usually given to King Edward I, who, in 1295, summoned the so-called Model Parliament – not, of course, for considering limits over the Crown, but for obtaining a broad-based support from the populace; this is how he sought to lessen his dependence on the nobles. Such then was the political map in England at the end of the thirteenth century.

Let us now move to Germany and Italy, and examine their political developments following the breakdown of the Carolingian empire. In 911 the last of the Carolingian kings died, and the German dukes, with no one powerful enough to unify them into one entity, reverted to the expedient of choosing a king who was meant to be no more than a titular overlord. In 936 Otto the Great was elected, but right from the beginning of his rule, he had grandiose designs of glorious conquests. Not content to remain a mere German king, he soon got involved with Italy and eventually with the papacy. As with Charlemagne, Otto too came to the assistance of the Pope, this time John XII, against the papal adversaries, and was in return recompensed with the crown of the Roman Emperor. This is how the Holy Roman Empire came into being. For its philosophical base, it rested on the contemporary theory of government whereby the Emperor was recognised as the supreme secular overlord, superior even to kings, with a mandate coming directly from God.

Whether Otto's coronation did anything to enhance his territory or power is questionable, but it did deflect his attention from his home base, Germany. Subsequently it brought his successors into open conflict with the papacy. In essence, all kingdoms of those days were feudal, resting on the slippery shoulders of the nobles who, in accordance with the swing of the pendulum of power, switched their allegiance from one overlord to another. Thus to hold on to both Germany and Italy in feudal times was no easy affair. Yet there was prestige, though that of an empty shell, involved with the imperial title, and this allure ultimately proved to be the scourge of Otto's successors. They neglected Germany, poked their noses into Italy, and the consequences were just as predictable: while the German nobility often dictated political affairs, Italians rose in sporadic revolts.

Another inevitable consequence was the collision between the papacy and the Emperor. Ever since the onset of the Vashyan era, the weakling popes had been under the sway of the nobles of Rome. The reason was that the papacy had lost face with the public because of its own rapacity and degeneration. After Otto came to the Pope's help, the latter had to contend with even more powerful rulers; consequently, for a while the Church was completely embroiled with feudal institutions. However, the Emperors did something which ultimately proved to be their nemesis: they set out to reform, in good conscience, the papacy and purge it of its corruption. The culmination was a gradual revival of the Church which soon endeavoured to free itself from the secular fetters. Its conflicts with almost all governments, and especially with the Holy Roman Emperor, were then unavoidable. For more than two hundred years, there occurred a struggle for supremacy between the papacy and the Emperor, a struggle in which the latter was eventually trounced, so much so that even in Germany the real governing power reverted to the myriad duchies. Unlike the kings in England and France, the Emperors failed to seek support from the growing cities and thus spread their roots deep into the heart of the general population. After 1273, when Rudolf of Hapsburg was elected to the ceremonial crown, the Holy Roman Empire could never rise above the shadows of its chequered past. But for the Hapsburg Dynasty, this event marks the beginning of prominence, which was to set its imprint on future generations – a story that, for its present irrelevance, must be postponed until a suitable occasion.

There remains the question of Spain, which had been conquered by

the Mohammadans during the early part of the eighth century, thereby evolving along a track differing from that of other European countries. But during the late Middle Ages, most Spanish domains had become independent to rejoin the ranks of western Europe and to share, as it were, in its essentially feudal character. The Spanish struggle for liberation had lasted well over two centuries during which both the Christian and the Muslim side had seen violent ups and downs. By 1248, however, only the small kingdom of Granada remained under the foreign yoke, with the rest of Spain split into four Christian domains of Castile, Aragon, Navarre, and Portugal. The end of foreign rule did not, of course, mean the end of warfare. It now occurred among the Christian kingdoms, which fought each other from habit. All this weakened the central governments to such an extent that the feudal nobles became predominant in much of Spain, especially in Castile which was its largest kingdom, comprising more than sixty per cent of its area.

Such was the political map of Europe at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. The characteristic flower of feudalism was then in full bloom: petty private warfare had somewhat subsided, and economic expansion and the resulting commutation had defused possibly the most explosive source of social and political instability – serfdom. Thus at the onset of the fourteenth century, the prospects for feudalism could not have been brighter. The then historians or the social philosophers cannot therefore be faulted for believing in the perpetuity of contemporary life. How myopic were they though? Because, within a few years after feudalism had reached its peak, there began its slide, a period of war, desolation, anarchy and Shudran revolutions in which, sadly, every Vashyan era is destined to end.

The fourteenth century was then a witness to major upheavals. It was a century which saw the inauguration between England and France of a war that lingered on for more than one hundred years. This conflict was so destructive that the private warfare of the entire feudal period pales before the ravages of this so-called Hundred Years War. It was a century in which the bubonic plague of 1348 did to feudalism what the past three centuries of agricultural and industrial expansion could not: there was a tremendous shortage of manorial labour, because over a third of the population succumbed to the so-called Black Death – the most horrifying epidemic in European history. This fortuitous development could not but sever the arteries of the feudal structure, which had rested all along on the pillars of excess labour supply.

PEASANT REVOLTS AND THE SHUDRAN ERA

The closing phase of the fourteenth century is a period of sheer anarchy, of the chaos of ever more savage war in which thousands of nobles were killed, of unprecedented bitterness between the former serfs and the lords suffering from the paucity of labour, of the inevitable peasant revolts.

Right from inception, feudalism had been oppressive of the Shudras – the peasants and the serfs – who were squeezed to the last penny by the nobles. To be sure, there were some just lords who felt responsible for the security of their labourers, but even the best of them insisted on timely payment of severe manorial dues. In general, the life of the physical workers was incredibly wretched, at least until commutation, by the thirteenth century, had enabled many serfs to free themselves from contractual obligations. But then came the fourteenth century during which wars and pestilence had wrought havoc with the population; wages had risen high, but rents of relatively plentiful land had drastically declined. The natural response of the nobility was to revoke the freedoms they had granted to serfs under commutation, and to reinstate their labour service obligations. But in this, the lords met with stiff resistance from the peasants, who knew from experience what serfdom had meant for their lives. From the vantage point of today's observer, nothing in that Vashyan age was more natural than the head-on collision between the peasantry and the nobles. Feudalism had begun with the Vashyan lords on top and the Shudran workers toiling for their masters. What is astonishing is that the system endured so long – for more than four centuries. But no era meets the grave before attaining its peak, which feudalism had scaled during the thirteenth century.

Thus when, beginning with the fourteenth century, Shudran anarchy in the guise of peasant revolts broke out all over Europe, the Vashyan era was simply following the tracks set forth by the law of social cycle. Such revolts were marked by crescendos of brutality and widespread destruction. And in this ferocity, both the peasantry and the nobility strove to excel each other.

When the peasants first erupted into violence to protest against economic oppression is not clear. One outburst, rooted in social and economic grievances, occurred in West Flanders as early as 1323, and set an example for the neighbouring regions of England and France. But it was not until 1358 that the peasantry in northern France took up the cudgels, and rebelled in the wake of rapacity and brigandage of the French nobles and knights. For a while, nothing had been safe from these marauding lords who plundered villages at will, dishonoured women with impunity, and destroyed anything that came their way either for the booty or for the sport. Therefore, when the peasants hit back in exhaustion, they had but little choice. Known by the name of the Jacquerie, this rebellion was led by two men of completely diverse origins and disposition: Guillaume Cale, a peasant by birth, was a Khatri by disposition, whereas Etienne Marcel belonged to the

merchant class which sympathised with the peasants' animosity towards the feudal lords. However, despite this alliance, the peasants were eventually put down. About the fundamental cause of this rebellion, Norman Gras has this to say:

> The Jacquerie seems to have been the peasants' sudden reaction to the loss of security and happiness and of the slowly developing emancipation from servile status and tenure. The peasants had been bettering their lot. Suddenly the tide turned against them. The despised countrymen having tasted of better things, refused to accept worse. [7, p. 109]

Similar causes were at work in the peasant uprising of 1381 that briefly shook the roots of England. The revolt has been given various appellations – Wat Tyler's Rebellion, the Peasant Revolt, the Great Revolt, the Social Revolt. As in France, the outbreak in England was also more than a peasant revolt, because it was not just confined to the peasantry; it was social, with causes ranging from economic and political to religious and legal. In its immediate objectives, which called for economic reforms and for complete emancipation from serfdom, the revolt was a failure. But taking a long-run viewpoint, it had some measure of success in that the alienation and plight of the peasantry gained nation-wide attention. Sixty to seventy years later, nearly all peasants had achieved freedom from manorial labour and serfdom.

Other parts of Europe too – especially Germany and Austria – felt the tremors from the peasant rebellions at the advent of the sixteenth century. Everywhere they were abortive, but they succeeded in pinpointing the festering social wounds which demanded nursing and careful treatment. Although feudalism was not laid to rest in their aftermath, its anachronism had been proved beyond any shade of doubt. By the fifteenth century, it had been exposed and weakened beyond repair. One striking feature of these outbursts is that they were mostly led by non-peasants who were either Khatris or Vipras, thereby testifying to Sarkar's thesis that near the end of the Vashyan era many non-Vashyan persons are forced into the Shudran level of living and thinking.

THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTIONS

Much of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the West belongs to the Shudran age, because virtually every corner of western Europe – England, France, Germany, Spain – was then plagued by the Shudran-age anarchy, of which the peasant revolts and the resulting horror were not the only symptoms. While England and France were

locked in bitter conflict for more than a century, the kingdoms of Spain were not sitting idle either. The Christian kingdoms fought and fought, not just with the Moors but also amongst themselves. To this the Spanish nobles made their own contribution by generating, as Ferguson and Brunn put it, 'a frightful amount of lawlessness and disorder'. [6, p. 385]. And in this respect, what held true for Spain held true for the rest of western Europe as well.

It is in such tumult that new leaders emerged to put an end to the Shudran-age anarchy in France, Spain, and England. The credit for Shudran revolution (or revolutions), therefore, goes to Louis XI in France, Isabella and Ferdinand in Spain, and Henry VII in England, as they all eclipsed the anarchical forces of the feudal nobility during the latter half of the fifteenth century. What is interesting is that such momentous events occurred within a short span of a quarter-century beginning with the 1460s. Is it a coincidence that such revolutions occurred so close to each other? Not according to Sarkar's hypothesis! Nor to my mind!

So far then, Western civilisation has evolved along the track of social cycle. Now, if Sarkar is right, comes the turn of those with physical prowess and high-spiritedness to rule again. The new age must again reflect the spirit of adventure as well as subordination of the other three sections to Khatris – to warriors.

NATIONAL MONARCHIES AND THE NEW KHATRIAN ERA

I have already traced the history of the West up to the fourteenth century. We have seen that by then national monarchies had risen in England and France, while Spain was dominated by the kingdom of Castile. These early developments towards centralisation turned out to be portents of the Khatrian absolutism, which emerged in France, Spain and England between 1460 and 1485. Thus, a new Khatrian era appeared in the West during the fifteenth century, and then spread over much of Europe in the course of the sixteenth and the seventeenth.

The French monarchy emerged from the debris of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453) with unquestioned authority. The credit for effecting this centralisation goes to Louis XI, who ascended the throne in 1461. Shortly after his accession, he had to face a revolt by the nobility, whose influence he finally effaced by military action as well as by bribing some of the nobles. Slowly but surely, in place of the feudal control over the army of knights, over taxation and over the administration of justice, arose the monarchical system of national taxation, a national structure of royal courts, a huge standing army of mercenary soldiers recruited from the ranks of the peasantry and the nobility. Most of the Vashyan lords were steadily diminished to the status of courtiers, with their titles

and prerogatives deriving principally from the monarch's whims, of which he had an abundance. Thus in the 1460s direct, centralised rule by one king took the place of the earlier indirect, decentralised rule of the French nobles.

At just about the same time (in the 1470s), centralisation also emerged in Spain after Princess Isabella of Castile and Prince Ferdinand of Aragon were bound in matrimony, which thus laid a sturdy foundation for the Spanish monarchy. Together the two monarchs not only crushed the feudal nobles but also annexed Granada and Navarre to their territories. In the early part of the sixteenth century, their successor, Charles V, was elected as Holy Roman Emperor, and, as a result, the Spanish absolutism was also extended to southern Italy and much of central Europe including Austria, which was to become a respectable power during the eighteenth century.

In England, on the other hand, absolute monarchy was not established until the rise of the Tudor Dynasty, of which Henry VII was the first ruler. While the Hundred Years War had all but destroyed the French nobility, the British nobility, though considerably weakened, was still breathing and alive. It took another thirty years of internal strife, called the Wars of the Roses, before the English aristocracy was suppressed. In 1485, in the aftermath of this civil war, Henry VII emerged with an unchallenged *imperium*. In Britain, in contrast with France and Spain, absolutism was tempered, and perhaps strengthened, by the presence of a legislative assembly. The Tudor kings have appropriately been called absolute monarchs in parliament.

Italy also emerged during the fifteenth century with despotism, but of a different variety. No nation-state took shape, but a number of city governments, notably in Milan and Florence, were organised into dictatorships of which centralised authority was the chief characteristic.

Thus towards the end of the fifteenth century, despotism dotted many areas of western Europe, and even though in some parts, as in Germany, decentralisation in the guise of rule by many princes still prevailed, there is little doubt that thereafter it is the centralised nation-state which shaped Western destiny. With the advent of this centralisation arose other features which usually highlight a Khatrian age, features that in some respects reflect its superiority over the preceding Vashya-dominated order. The new Khatrian era, as subsequently argued, lasted till the end of the seventeenth century, when it too gave way to another Vipran age.

The fabric of feudal society has been frequently compared by historians with organised anarchy, which it certainly was. The very fact that absolutism was accepted by the populace in many nations is a telling commentary on the kind of disorder that had prevailed in the feudal age, especially at its terminal point. In the new Khatrian epoch, the monarchs restored law and order by controlling the rapacity,

brigandage and private warfare of the barons with an iron hand. In this respect alone, the early phase of the new Khatrian era is superior to the preceding Vashyan age. But this alone is not the former's claim to pre-eminence.

More than anything else, the new Khatrian era is an embodiment of the spirit of adventure – adventure for its own sake and not just for booty or plunder that was the hallmark of the Vashyan age. Many activities of the time remind one of the direct struggle through which a Khatri battles with the hostile forces of nature, and strives for prestige and a sense of fulfilment. Quite a few daring spirits of this age immediately come to mind: Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Ferdinand Magellan are the luminaries among numerous explorers who dedicated their lives to the discovery of new lands, of frontiers unknown at the time to Europe and indeed to much of the world. In all these campaigns launched over the tempestuous seas, over endless oceanic waters, amidst unchartered currents and winds, state help was indispensable. And the state, of course, rose to the occasion, matching the ardour of certain individuals with generous funds and other assistance. Why? Because the West was then in the early phase of the new Khatrian era, and the sense of adventure and vivacity permeated most European nations – Spain, Portugal, England, France. America was then discovered; so were the new oceanic routes to India, to the South American continent and to numerous obscure islands.

In terms of intellectual and artistic attainments also, the new era surpassed the preceding age. In terms of the theory of social cycle, it is not a coincidence that the full bloom of what is sometimes called the civilisation of the Renaissance overlapped with the early phase of the new Khatrian age. Renaissance means intellectual revival, especially that in the secular arena. True, the interest in secular learning had surged with the rise of universities in the Vashyan period, yet the intellectual revival did not reach its zenith in Italy until the fifteenth century, and elsewhere in Europe until the sixteenth. The artistic genius of Leonardo da Vinci (who painted the Mona Lisa), of Giotto and Botticelli belong to the Italy of this age; so do the literary works of Machiavelli, as well as the scientific discoveries of Galileo. Regarding other intellectual centres of Europe, such celebrities as Shakespeare, Bacon, Newton, and Spenser of England, Rabelais and Montaigne of France, El Greco and Cervantes of Spain are the lasting bequests of the new Khatrian age to the world.

Women too could not do poorly in the new epoch, for this was the Khatrian age. The spirit of Humanism inspired by the cult of chivalry and of the Virgin, had already arisen in the later parts of the Vashyan age, but it could seep into the fabric of society only gradually, not before the Renaissance had spread its fragrance first in Italy and later in the rest of western Europe. To be sure, the social view of woman did not improve radically in the new Khatrian era, but it improved enough to be

noticeable. The Vipra-instigated attitudes of subordination of woman to man, of wife to husband, were still prevalent, and indeed have been prevalent till this day, but the general public was now exposed to such blasphemies as women's right to education, even to priesthood. Remember that such views in the Vipran and Vashyan eras would have earned their author nothing but social ridicule – ostracism.

To humanists, education was essential to all human beings, to men as well as women, because it helped everyone to become civilised, gentle and virtuous. After the first treatise emphasising woman's education was written by Leonardo Bruni in 1405, this idea steadily filtered into the mainstream of Italian life, and a number of princes employed learned scholars to tutor their daughters. In other parts of Europe too the humanist scholars expressed the same concern for women's education when the Renaissance spread beyond the Italian borders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There might be constraints on what women could read, but they were not to be denied the essentials of learning.

Another sign of woman's improved stature in the early phase of the new Khatrian period is the rise, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of ingenious and powerful women all over Europe. Italy of the time was witness to outstanding achievements of the two sisters, Beatrice and Isabella; a part of the credit for the discovery of America in 1492, regarded by many as an epochal event, must go to the Spanish Queen Isabella. It is she who, in the face of her courtiers' opposition and scepticism, gave Columbus all possible help in his herculean task that promised nothing but enormous risks and, at best, uncertain dividends. Then there are the French regents, Anne de Beaujeu and Queen Anne of Brittany, who, for many decades in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, overshadowed men in political and cultural spheres. To top them all, there is Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) who gave England its Golden Age. Although the general subservience of women was accepted by the new Khatrian society, even by female rulers, yet the rise of so many extraordinary women all over Europe could not but lend the feminine touch to the social view of womanhood. Bullough makes interesting observations in this context:

> Probably even more important than the humanist emphasis on learning in encouraging education for women was the fact that women played an important role on the political scene in the sixteenth century in their own right. That they were able to do so is indicative of some change in societal attitudes. Earlier women like the Empress Matilda, mother of Henry II of England, and Eleanor of Aquitaine, his wife, had tried to rule independently of their husbands, but they had been severely handicapped and in the long run unsuccessful. At the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, however, there were a number of women who were important as rulers in their own right or as regents. Isabella of Castille was a queen of Spain, while in England Mary and Elizabeth were reigning monarchs. In France Catherine de Medici fought like a tiger to see to it that her minor sons succeeded to their inheritance. The influence of these women rulers is evident from the fact that they were instrumental in forcing a reassessment of education of women. [3, p. 211]

The influence of the papacy and the Church, of course, drastically declined. The words of Ferguson and Brunn make this clear:

> In a great many ways the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were disastrous ones for the Catholic Church. The papacy, with its wide claims to supremacy over all Catholic Christians, had come into violent conflict with the growing power of the centralized territorial states and had been defeated. National interests had combined with moral disapproval to break the vast authority that the church had wielded during the High Middle Ages. [6, p. 375]

Thus by the fifteenth century, the rising power of the national monarchs had humbled the Popes, who in matters of religion were the supreme overlords as late as the fifteenth century. However, the knock-out punch to the papacy had yet to be delivered. It was left to the storms of the sixteenth-century Reformation which originated in Germany under the guidance of Martin Luther, and eventually overwhelmed the Catholic Church in many nations. But in the process Europe was drenched with blood. So pervasive had been the influence of the papacy for the past thousand years, that it took more than a century of sanguinary Wars of Religion among European despots before anyone could realise the futility of it all, the futility of imposing the word of God by gunpowder. Whatever else might be the achievement of the Protestant Revolution that Luther had inspired, the back of the Catholic Church was broken beyond repair. Never again was it to play as wide a role in common life as it did during the thousand years of the Middle Ages.

Economically too the new era surpasses the previous one. In Tuma's words:

> The period extending roughly between A.D. 1500 and 1700 has been recognized as a critical one in the economic history of the western world. Some observers in fact suggest that the foundations of the economic upsurge of Europe and the West which occurred in the next two centuries were laid during this period. [16, p. 131]

Actually many economic changes occurring in this period derive from the industrial development of Europe starting as early as 1300, but it was not before the discovery of America towards the end of the fifteenth

century that European economies really forged ahead, evolving eventually into the modern system of commercial banking and capitalism. All this suggests that, in many important respects, the new Khatrian period excels the preceding Vashyan age.

So far we have looked at the luminous side of the new age of centralisation; let us now examine its seamy side, by which unfortunately every age is possessed. I have already alluded to the Reformation, and the Wars of Religion it inspired. Almost the entire period of the new Khatrian era is scourged by these conflicts. The petty private feuds of the feudal age now gave way to the wars of the despots, but the warfare was petty no more; it was carried on by huge armies of professional soldiers, with weapons far deadlier than ever before, with stakes involving usually religion but occasionally dynastic successions in many nations. In fact, the years of peace in the new Khatrian era fall far short of the years of turmoil. It is indeed a miracle that despite this, European economies achieved impressive advances.

PRIME MINISTERS AND THE NEW VIPRAN ERA

My prognosis now reverts to England which has been the cradle of many an institution distinguishing the modern Western society. I have already spoken of Henry VII, who had founded the Tudor Dynasty in 1485 and inaugurated in England a new age of centralisation. The last of the Tudor monarchs was Elizabeth I who died in 1603, and then her cousin, James VI of Scotland, was invited by the British Parliament to wear the crown. The arrival of James, the founder of the Stuart Dynasty, was a poor augury for futurity, for the new king had none of the practicality of the Tudors who had manoeuvred the Parliament to their own advantage. He was exceptionally gifted with mediocrity, but it is his loquacity that really got him into trouble. He was not content with the reality of autocratic power, he had to brag about it as well. As a result, he quickly managed to anger the Parliament. It is James who proclaimed the doctrine of the divine right of kings in England – something he borrowed from the neighbouring French autocracy.

Thus when James died in 1625 and was succeeded by his son Charles I, the English people were looking forward to better days. However, the proverbial truth, 'like father like son', was never more appropriate. Charles continued the high-handed policies of his father, and eventually England plunged into a virulent civil war in which the king was defeated and then, in 1649, beheaded. The forces of Parliament had won a decisive victory, but constitutional monarchy was still a breath away. England escaped the frying pan of absolute monarchy, only to be hurled into the fire of dictatorship of the Protectorate, of which Oliver Cromwell was the first sovereign. However, in that charged atmosphere,

the new autocracy disappeared within a year of Cromwell's death, and a Stuart prince, Charles II, was invited by a newly-elected Parliament to wear the crown.

Charles II did not want to repeat his father's follies, but secretly he sought to restore the health and former power of the monarchy. He, and subsequently his successor, James II, had high hopes of reviving the autocratic rule. However, the Khatrian era in England had been going downhill right from the accession of the Stuart Dynasty, and it was only a matter of time before a Vipran era was to appear. The final blow was delivered by a bloodless coup in 1688—by the so-called Glorious Revolution that climaxed first into James' abdication and then into the diminished powers of the new king, William of Orange. The king was not then shorn of all authority, but soon after 1700 he had to play second fiddle to the Prime Minister, who came to head the Parliament.

In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, the Parliament had emerged supreme, but it was a heterogeneous entity with little prior experience or precedent of an authoritative body. Anyone who could then manipulate it with oratorical skills, intrigues, high-minded platitudes and, above all, with the lure of sinecure offices thus became the supreme ruler of British society. Such skills are possessed only by a Vipra. Therefore after 1700, through a confluence of peculiar circumstances such as a later king's inability to understand English among others, the real power converged to the head of the Parliament – the Vipran Prime Minister. Thus began a new Vipran age in Europe, and, of course, the Prime Minister, as in every Vipran era, could rule only indirectly, in the name of the King who was still esteemed by his subjects.

The British Parliamentary system at 1689, even up to 1867, was much different from the institution one finds today. It was anything but democratic, for democracy signifies the rule by a majority of people, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, an oligarchy of landed interests, headed by the Prime Minister, controlled the English Parliament. Almost from its inception, the legislative assembly had been organised into two distinctive chambers – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Lords, also called the upper house, was totally undemocratic, for it was composed of two highly privileged groups – hereditary peers and bishops of the Anglican Church. Elections were open to the House of Commons or the lower house, but to all intents and purposes were controlled by a group of big landowners who were members of the upper house. This suggests that Vashyas, not Vipras, governed the British society after the revolution of 1688. But a deeper investigation reveals something else.

It is true that the social supremacy in eighteenth-century England rested with the peers and the landed gentry, while the political power converged to the person of the Prime Minister. It is also true that the upper house was dominated by a few big landlords who shamelessly

controlled elections to the lower house by means of bribery, nepotism and intrigues. But this nobility, consisting of peers and the gentry, was far from the richest class. That distinction belonged to the rising class of wealthy merchants and capitalists, who then possessed all the money but only a bit of social stature and prestige. The prestige by tradition derived from land. Some of the biggest landlords were men of humble means, but their sway in the House of Lords as well as the lower house would certainly belie this impression. Furthermore, land was no longer the principal engine of production; it was capital, financial as well as industrial, and that, of course, was owned by the select group of capitalists, bankers and merchants. In other words, it is not the landowner but the capital-owner who now belonged to the Vashyan class.

How did the landed aristocracy wield so much influence? The answer lies in the force of traditions and ideas. The aristocracy governed by means of time-honoured ideas that exalted the dignity of owning land above everything else; by means of the injunctions of the Christian paternalistic ethic – preached earlier by the feudal barons and bishops to justify their exploitation of the serfs – which condemned not so much landed wealth as wealth acquired in the form of interest and profit, the twins that made the capitalist so rich; by means of intellectual trickery which enabled the hereditary peers as well as the Prime Minister to keep the lower house under their thumb. Ever since the Middle Ages, the Church (whether Catholic or Protestant) had set its vast moral authority against usury, profits and in general the acquisitive mentality, although its injunctions were carefully disregarded by some of its own members, not to speak of others. Still, this ethic served to slight the Vashyas who made money from business and lending. And who controlled the Anglican Church during the eighteenth century England! The aristocracy, of course! 'Its influence over the Church of England', asserts Daniel Baugh, 'was practically absolute.' [1, p. 3]

The landed aristocracy was dominant, because it took an active role in politics of the time, while the bourgeoisie were busy making money. The rule of the game then, as now, was to secure a majority for one's party, Whig or Tory, in the House of Commons whose members were generally elected, or recruited, from the ranks of the landed gentry dominating the countryside. 'Management' is the word that has been commonly used by historians to describe the way the aristocracy, under the guidance of the Prime Minister, kept the lower house in line. The first British Prime Minister was Robert Walpole, who came to power in 1721 on the shoulders of the Whig party. I cite Baugh again to describe the intellectual trickery in which the Prime Minister had to be adept in those days:

> Management constricted the political influence of the independent country members [of the lower house]. Sir Robert Walpole, the greatest of eighteenth-century managers, elaborated the system. By melding the patronage of the court, the interests of the great financial institutions, and the influence of the aristocracy, he secured a corps of loyal M.P.s [1, p. 19]

Actually there is yet another angle through which the mentality, in Sarkar's sense, of the upper-house peers ought to be viewed. Some peers were indeed men of affluence, but they evinced little interest in the accumulation of wealth – one infallible trait that distinguishes the Vashyan mind. In the feudal age, the big landlords were frequently on the warpath so as to accumulate wealth by increasing the size of their fiefs, which at the dawn of feudalism were the only instruments of production and power. In the eighteenth century, and a few centuries before, capital was fast emerging as the chief source of production, income and wealth, and it is a person's interest in the accumulation of capital that now mainly determined whether or not he possessed the Vashyan mind. But the interest of the aristocracy in this capital accumulation, in frugality that ultimately leads to it, was, if not negative, negligible. Some of the biggest landowners were in debt; the traditions of the time demanded that all peers live a life of pomp and ostentation, which rendered capital accumulation, despite fabulous incomes, well-nigh impossible. In short, the primacy of the landed interests stemmed not from their economic power but from the force of tradition, contemporary ideology and the cunning in which the Prime Minister had to be a virtuoso; and if he was not, his job did not last long.

Actually the fact that eighteenth-century England was ruled by the Prime Minister, who did not possess absolute power but rather depended on a small oligarchy consisting of seventy-odd peers, accords well with the Vipran character of the new age. All it displays is the relative decentralisation of political power which the aristocracy exercised, as in every Vipran epoch, in the name of the apparent ruler, the English King. Later on, as we shall see in the ensuing section, governmental authority became dispersed among the bourgeoisie, and the power-base became extremely decentralised, thus paving the way for a new Vashyan age.

Once England moved into the new Vipran era, other important nations of Europe did not, or could not, stay far behind. Not that, at the onset of the eighteenth century, parliamentary forms of government also developed elsewhere, only that in the European countries moulding Western society at the time real power passed into the hands of indirect rulers – the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, or diplomats, who all reigned in the name of their king. Fittingly, it is the almost perpetual state of war that the Khatrian despots had waged against each other for more than a century – the wars of religion, the wars of succession, and the like – that increased their dependence on the Vipran ministers.

Quite often had the monarchs found that they would win battles at the front but almost lose the war at the bargaining table, or that the treaties of peace did not measure up to their expectations, to their investment of time, national energy and lost manpower, to the degree to which the foe had been trounced. For these reasons, there arose the need for diplomats, for men of intellect shrewd enough to preserve what the army had accomplished at the battlefield.

This was one of the main reasons for the rising star of the Vipras. Another was that after 1700, many monarchs were simply too feeble to govern their nations amidst crescendos of international conflicts. And when the apparent ruler is feeble, the vacuum of authority has to be filled by the indirect ruler.

Let us examine the developments in France and see how the Vipran period reappeared there at just about the same time as in England. It has already been noted that a centralised French state had emerged in the 1460s on the debris of the Hundred Years War. Flames of the Reformation also eventually engulfed France during the sixteenth century; at the same time it had to fight a long war with Spain over Italy. The sequel was a weakening of the monarchy along with a resurgence of the old feudal forces. The absolute French monarch thus embroiled with Spain was Henry II who died in 1559, whereupon two factions of nobles – one Catholic and the other Protestant – came to dominate the political scene. For the next thirty years, their rivalry plunged France into civil wars of religion, until Henry of Navarre, the founder of the Bourbon Dynasty, brought order to the scourged land in 1593. Not only did Henry restore peace, he also revived the absolutist tradition to which the rest of Europe, as well as France, had already been accustomed. In his goal of national recovery, he was ably assisted by his Chief Minister, the Duke of Sully, who could not have lived in France at a more opportune time. Both Henry and Sully were energetic warriors and exceptional leaders, but Sully was a better administrator.

Henry's promising rule was, however, cut short in 1610 by an assassin's dagger, and after a disturbing interlude of fourteen years, the new king, Louis XIII, practically handed the reins to his Chief Minister, Cardinal Richelieu. For the next eighteen years, France lived and prospered under the shadow of this capable, energetic Vipran minister who set out to efface all internal opposition to the monarchy. Both the king and his minister died about the same time, and while the new king, Louis XIV, was a lad of four, the new Chief Minister was Cardinal Mazarin, whom Richelieu had carefully groomed for this appointment. Until his death in 1661, Mazarin was the real power in France.

It then appears that the Vipran era of rule by Chief Ministers had begun in France at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a full century ahead of its arrival in England. Even if Sully's rule is disregarded in this context, for his own king, Henry of Navarre, was the real ruler, Richelieu and Mazarin between them provide four decades of Vipran reign during which the kings, owing to infancy of age or of intellect, had to take a back seat. However, by Mazarin's demise in 1661, the king Louis XIV had come of age, and then began a long, direct, iron rule, lasting for over fifty years, during which the ministers and other administrators played only a phantom role. In the person of Louis XIV, absolutism reached its apotheosis; he was the Law; he was the State; he was the sun around whom his subjects, like planets, revolved. However, after his death in 1715, most of the kings were weaklings and their absolutism was in reality exercised by others – their mistresses, the ministers, the bureaucrats – and it is then that the Vipran era really began. The reign by Richelieu and Mazarin thus turned out to be a harbinger of the new Vipran epoch, not its beginning. Every era casts its shadows in the preceding age, and Richelieu and Mazarin were in this sense the shadows of their counterparts who reigned for much of the eighteenth and parts of the nineteenth century.

From 1715 until 1789, the memorable year of the French Revolution, France was in reality governed by ministers of the royal council, of which Cardinal Fleury, the *premier ministre* from 1726 to 1743, was the one and only effective administrator. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the renowned Napoleon Bonaparte was catapulted into power, and the direct Khatrian rule reappeared. But this proved to be a counter-revolutionary event (in Sarkar's sense) – for Napoleon's star collapsed as fast as it had risen – and after twenty years of his rule, the Vipran era returned, only to be tested soon by the forces of direct, monarchical rule. This story, however, must be reserved for a later occasion.

At the beginning of the new Khatrian era, Spain, France and England were, in that order, the three dominating powers of Europe. Spain particularly was among the leaders in oceanic exploration, and this activity, as noted before, played a monumental role in determining the future of Western society. But by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Spanish orbit of influence had shrunk and two new powers had emerged in its place – the Austrian House of Hapsburg and Prussia. Both had been more or less centralised during much of the seventeenth century, Austria under the sceptre of Leopold I and Prussia under that of Frederick William I. During the eighteenth century, while Prussia continued to be under the direct rule of its king, the Hapsburg ruler came increasingly under the sway of his advisers, of whom some became the state Chancellors. Leopold himself had been ably served by his foreign ambassadors, who, in those days of poor communications, held wide powers in international affairs. This was the age of diplomacy and the European balance of power was on the mind of each and every diplomat. Political fortunes were made or marred in this arena, and it is to the shrewdness of the Hapsburg ambassadors that the credit must go for enhancing their king or queen in European affairs.

The House of Hapsburg during the first half of the eighteenth century was represented by a weak ruler, Charles VI, who reigned from 1711 to 1740. But he received sound advice first from Count Wenzel Writislaw, who helped maintain an intricate alliance with England, and then from Count Karl Friedrich Schönborn who went on to become the state Chancellor. Thus in the case of the Hapsburg Dynasty, with its vast domains in Europe, the germ of the Vipran era had been planted in the second half of the seventeenth century, in the reign of Leopold. But the Vipran influence came to light only during the eighteenth century, especially in the second half, even though the then Austrian rulers themselves – of whom Queen Maria Theresa is the most renowned – were persons of sound intellect and judgement. This is because their Chancellor, Prince Wengel Anton Kaunitz (1753–92), was intellectually more than their match. Later on in the nineteenth century, Vipran dominance displayed itself in the person of Prince Clemens Lothar Metternich, who was undisputed master of Austrian affairs from 1809 to 1848.

Thus we see that in three of the four most important centres of western Europe during the eighteenth century, in England, France and Austria, it was not the King (or the Queen) who actually ruled, but the Vipran minister or the Chancellor. The Vipras were then the real arbiters of Western destiny, not the apparent rulers.

Womanhood had made great strides during the new Khatrian age, and without much difficulty, because during the preceding Vashyan age the social respect for woman had reached a point so low that it could not sink any further. We have already seen how, around the sixteenth century, education was no longer regarded in Europe as just the prerogative of men. Furthermore, so many outstanding women had surfaced on the European political scene that the social attitude towards them had to become more cordial than before. Louis XIV himself had furthered the cause of feminism by inviting some noblewomen to the royal court and by granting them positions of honour. However, as the Khatrian era drew to a close and the new Vipran age got under way, the progressive forces working for feminine rights received a serious setback. This became evident in France from the death of Louis XIV, when the reaction of the privileged male nobility set in.

The discussion of social attitudes towards women in eighteenth-century France, and elsewhere in Europe, is tied with an institution called the salon. The salon had been transplanted from Italy into France as early as the sixteenth century when royal women provided it with patronage; gradually it filtered into the lower stratum of society, and by the eighteenth century permeated the intellectual fabric in major cities. Basically, a salon was a place of congregation for many kinds of social functions – balls, dancing, gambling, gossiping. Gradually it became an outlet for new ideas, philosophies, the latest literature, religion and any

other subject that could be the focal point of intelligent conversation. It is through this conduit that the fervour of revolution eventually spread all over France.

Women had a particularly important role to play in this haven of the intelligentsia; they were particularly adept in the functions of a hostess who would start the ball rolling by introducing new guests, by initiating conversation, and, at times, by entertaining the guests with witty comments. In the working of the salon, therefore, women enjoyed a good deal of say and responsibility. Some women themselves were creative, intelligent and influential, although intellectual discourse was not something society expected of the hostess; nay, it discouraged it. From France, the salon was exported to many other European nations. In fact, with women of an intellectual bent, it became more popular in England than anywhere else.

It thus appears that women in eighteenth-century Europe were breaking new ground, opening up new careers, and even assuming equality in some intellectual circles. But unfortunately, time was not on their side; Europe had passed into the new Vipran era, and the seeds of woman's liberation from the age-old clutches of servility were to fall on barren and hostile soil. For one thing, in the then European society there were to emerge few outstanding women who could have inspired feminism at a time when many of the *philosophes*, the philosophers of France, were beginning to see through the real cause of woman's subordination in society: they were beginning to realise that men, not God, were to blame for woman's so-called inherent inferiority. However, such ideas, for some reasons, made little headway.

The age of Louis XV was an age of debauchery in which the king himself was the ringleader. He had quite a few mistresses, and numerous other men quickly stepped in his shoes, eventually arousing the ire of many citizens. However, the blame, as usual, was to fall on women, for men, who actually dictated society, could not by time-honoured tradition be faulted in this regard. This was then one force retarding the feminine cause. Another such force appeared in the writings of some *philosophes* themselves, who, ignoring their king's lechery, emphasised woman's penchant for sexual pleasure. Thus, through their erotic works, they were spewing the same venom which for different reasons the Church Fathers had once taken pains to spread. As a result, the general attitude towards woman reached a new low in literature and society, which, because of its medieval training, was quick to accept the amatory thought demeaning womanhood. And in this respect, what was true of France was also true of the rest of Europe.

Even some of those who championed human liberty from the tentacles of absolutism, whether of king or of his ministers, limited their progressivism to the male population. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that progenitor of the concept of democracy, himself argued for the subser-

vience of women. To him woman had been created on earth for only one purpose: to please man by her presence, and entertain him by her grace and skills. In short, while the ideas of individualism, of freedom from everything superstitious and totalitarian had been gaining ground in many parts of Europe, especially in England and France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, woman was not meant to be their beneficiary. Man was supposed to have monopoly over liberty, woman over servility. The reason: while the Khatrian era was on the decline, the Vipran age was on the rise.

CAPITALISM AND THE NEW VASHYAN ERA

The new Vipran era in the West lasted till the middle of the nineteenth century, when it too gave way to a new Vashyan epoch in which capitalists, embodying the new forces of wealth and the means of production, came to dominate society. We are already familiar with how undemocratic the British parliamentary system was at the outset of the eighteenth century; how the landed aristocracy and gentry controlled the House of Commons by manipulating elections. And in any case, less than four per cent of the population exercised the right to vote. In this set-up, not only the poor masses, but also the emerging middle and upper classes (in terms of income) were clearly at a disadvantage. Not only did this system poorly reflect the glaring shifts that had occurred in the composition of population following the rise of industrial cities and centres, it also tended to pass laws that favoured the landed interests and hindered economic development, capitalism as well as industrialisation.

This anomaly, of course, did not go without protest. But the aristocracy was so deeply entrenched in the seat of power that little corrective action was undertaken until 1832, when the famous Reform Bill somehow sailed through narrow crevices of the House of Lords. The upper house had all along stood in the way of all progressive legislation that originated in the lower-house, and it is only when the King threatened to create new peers that the Reform Bill was enacted. However, it was merely a palliative, raising the number of voters to no more than five per cent. Thus political power remained with the Prime Minister, who had enough intellectual trickery to control the lower house and have his way in most affairs. It is not before the Reform Bill of 1867, when almost a million names were added to the list of voters, that the power-base was sufficiently decentralised to herald the beginning of a new Vashyan era wherein elections to Parliament were controlled by none but the rising class of capitalists. Control over the House of Commons also then slipped out of the Prime Minister's hands as elections could no longer be as easily managed as before. Prior to 1867, there were several Prime Ministers, such as Robert Walpole, who got themselves elected for three or four consecutive terms, lasting altogether

for as many as twenty years; but after 1867, there is not one who reigned for more than eight continuous years. Of course, there were some who intermittently came to office many times – Disraeli and Gladstone are conspicuous examples – but in the two-party system prevailing in England, this is not surprising.

Thus after the passage of the second Reform Bill, political power got much more decentralised as it passed into the hands of affluent capitalists who displayed all the features of the Vashyan mind. They represented the forces of wealth, believed in its accumulation, and controlled the factories and banks – the new engines of production.

In France too, the new Vashyan era emerged around the 1870s. We have already noted that a council of ministers ruled France after the Sun King, Louis XIV, died in 1715. This indirect rule, however, was cut short in 1789 when the famous French Revolution cast off the *ancien régime* like old garments. In the ensuing turmoil, Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in 1795, and with him the direct Khatrian rule as well as absolutism made a resounding comeback. This, however, as stated before, turned out to be an episode of counter-revolution, for in 1815 Napoleon met his Waterloo, which sealed his fate once and for all. France then reverted to constitutional monarchy, in which Louis XVIII, a descendant of the deposed Bourbon Dynasty, was the first ruler. This is how the French Republican tradition was born; extensive executive powers were then given to the king who was to govern with the help of a Chief Minister and a two-chamber parliament patterned after the British model. However, stiff property qualifications were introduced for voting rights, with the result that less than one per cent of adult males enjoyed the privilege of suffrage. The Republic had been born amidst defeat and pandemonium, and its essentially unstable character soon came to the surface. In the next fifteen years, ministries frequently changed hands, until another revolution took place in 1830, and the last of the Bourbon kings was deposed. The next king was Louis Philippe who promised to be a titular ruler, and to govern in the interest of the bourgeois and the working class.

In his promise, the new king was faithful to the letter; he tried his best to be as nominal a ruler as possible, and when one's objectives are lowly, success is inevitable. The policy of prosperity and peace at home and abroad is what the new king pursued in cooperation with his more influential ministers, of whom the name of Guizot immediately comes to mind. The government did little to change the constitution and make it more democratic so as to secure in parliament a better representation of the bourgeois class. But ultimately it is the excessive caution of the Guizot ministry in providing everything but leadership in foreign affairs that proved to be its undoing. In 1848, France was on the brink of another crisis, with the majority of the people demanding a more open government and democracy.

However, another counter-evolutionary event was to take place, before the forces of Vashyan decentralised democracy were to prevail over those of the relatively centralised Vipran rule. In yet another revolution of 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (or Napoleon III), a nephew of the celebrated Napoleon, was elected President with a resounding margin. Monarchy was thus abolished, but the new Napoleon gave free reins to the old Napoleonic penchant for self-aggrandisement and power. In three years, he proclaimed himself as the dictator and later as the Emperor of France. This way despotism and the Khatrian rule staged an unexpected return, but they could go no further than 1870, when a Paris uprising overthrew Napoleon and with him the final vestiges of autocracy. In 1875, a new constitution was introduced, and this time the French Republic really became democratic, with universal manhood suffrage, a cabinet system borrowed from Britain, and a titular President elected by the Parliament. The influence over elections, of course, passed into the hands of the affluent capitalists within the bourgeois class. Thus it is only after the 1870 crisis, three years later than the British Reform Bill, that a decentralised government and a new Vashyan era were born in France.

By the end of the nineteenth century, democracy, and hence the new Vashyan era, had also been established in many other countries of western and central Europe – Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark. In fact, in some of the smaller nations, democracy was more advanced than in their bigger English and French neighbours. Similarly, in the United States of America, whose story as an offshoot of the West must become a part of my story (to be told in Chapter 9), the democratic tradition had struck firm roots by this time. There were, however, some notable exceptions in Austria and Prussia, which by then had evolved into a unified German state.

In Austria the real power during the eighteenth century had been by and large exercised by its state Chancellor, and even though, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a constitutional monarchy had emerged, democracy was still far away. The Austrian House of Hapsburg and its empire actually lingered on until the end of the First World War in 1918, when the undemocratic monarchy was abolished and a republic took its place. However the forces of democracy were soon trampled by those of fascism, and it took another world war before the republican governments could emerge again.

In Prussia and Germany, a somewhat different evolution took place. We have already noted that while most other important European centres were in the Vipran era, Prussia still chafed under Khatrian absolutism. However, other German states were only partially centralised under the rule of many princes who were so jealous of their independence that a German nation remained undeveloped as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. Stirrings of democracy had, of course, occurred in both Austria and Prussia ever since the 1789 French Revolution, but Prussian monarchs and the Austrian Chancellors had managed to keep them under control. In 1849, following the revolution of 1848 in neighbouring France, the Prussian king granted his subjects a token constitution embodying a bicameral parliamentary system. Even though the royal absolutism did not then abate in Prussia, the new development did foreshadow the advent of its Vipran age, which soon found a powerful spokesman in the personality of the famous statesman Otto von Bismarck.

Rasied in a conservative tradition, Bismarck entertained grandiose visions of a vast Prussian empire, with all German states unified under its command in one nation. He got his opportunity in 1862 when King William I appointed him as Chief Minister. Bismarck wasted little time in restoring the military strength of the diminutive state, and soon his foresight yielded dividends. Within a short span of the next eight years, Prussia was embroiled in three wars, and in each it emerged triumphant. This is how a German nation, and its empire, were born in 1871; and the credit for all this must go to Bismarck's ingenuity, statesmanship and machinations. Thus, Prussia, which had long played a pivotal role in the destiny of Europe, moved into the Vipran era when Bismarck came into prominence. Up to 1890, when he was finally removed rather brusquely, Bismarck was the unchallenged master of the German Confederation.

At the end of the nineteenth century then, while most of the prominent centres of the West, England, France, and the United States, were in the Vashyan era, two other regions – Germany, and vast European domains controlled by the Austrian House of Hapsburg – had lagged behind in terms of Sarkar's evolutionary cycle as they were still languishing in the Vipran age. A tussle for supremacy between these divergent forces was then inevitable, a tussle that in 1914 erupted in a world-wide conflagration of unprecedented horror. When the First World War was over in 1918, the Vashyan forces, after paying a frightful price, had won, and Austria and Germany were forced to accept democratic regimes. However, the energies of absolutism, whether of Khatrian or of Vipran variety, were not yet spent. Soon Austria, Germany and even Italy were caught in the straight-jacket of dictatorships. The international atmosphere became so combustible that even a little spark could then ignite it into an infernal fire. The climax was the Second World War (1939—45), even more tragic, more formidable, more cataclysmic than the first. However, time was still on the side of Vashyan forces, and before them the agents of absolutism eventually had to kneel. Ever since, at most places which once nurtured Western civilisation, the Vashyan era has prevailed.

In most democratic countries today, parliamentary representation can be bought with money. The capitalistic wealth rules the roost; the

political structure is extremely decentralised, and there is scarcely any respect for authority, for law and order. Most of the laws, civil or criminal, are designed to further the interests of the rich: they can escape taxes through legal loopholes, while the poor and the middle class pay disproportionately high amounts; can usually avoid prison sentences for committing the so-called white-collar crimes. Social and political hegemony thus now ostensibly belongs to the Vashyan class.

SUMMARY

This has been an inordinately long chapter and a compendium is in order, if only to keep a clear track of the pattern to which I have reduced the vast narrative of Western society. I have argued in the foregoing pages that the annals of the West provide an exquisite fit for Sarkar's law of social cycle. As we have seen, the period of the Roman Empire conforms with the Khatrian era, of the early Middle Ages with the Vipran era, of the later Middle Ages or Feudalism with the Vashyan era, of the peasant rebellions with the Shudran era, culminating in the Shudran revolution that was brought about by Louis XI in France, by Isabella and Ferdinand in Spain, and by Henry VII in England. The evolution of this entire period of about fourteen hundred years following the birth of Christ completed one rotation of the social cycle. Another cycle commenced with the new Khatrian period of centralised national monarchies, followed first by the Vipran age portraying the influence of the Prime Ministers and then by the Vashyan era dominated by the affluent capitalists. That is where the West now stands.

NOTES

1. The petty 'I' refers to that feeling which restricts oneself to one's body. Unless a person transcends the mental and hence the physical plane, unless one identifies oneself with just the thought 'I' and dissociates from all other thoughts, one cannot prevail over one's instincts. Such a sublime stage cannot be attained if there is even a little narrowness in the heart. Therefore, it is hard to understand why the ascetic emphasises just the control over the sex instinct – which is only one among so many other instincts – while despising women at the same time.

2. Some comparisons between one era and the other become invalid if the new era is imposed on society by a foreign power. This, for instance, happened when the British imposed a Vashyan era on India and unleashed the engines of exploitation. This is one case where the Vashyan age was economically worse off than the preceding Vipran age. For details, see Chapter 7.

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6 The History of Russia

The early history of Russia, to borrow a phrase from Florinsky, is shrouded in an 'opaque veil of oblivion'. As a matter of fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say that more is known about ancient Egypt, which basked in splendour long before the birth of Christ, than about Russia of even as late as the seventh century A.D. It is only the eventful episodes of the eighth and ninth centuries that first bring Russia into the limelight of history. The main sources of information in this regard are the Russian *Chronicle* – regarded by some as unreliable – and foreign historical records and writings, especially those furnished by Byzantine and Arabic scholars.

As elsewhere, but more so in Russia, geography has played a paramount role in shaping social evolution of the Russians, who are basically of Slavic ancestry. Russia today is the biggest nation with an area sprawling over two continents – Europe and Asia. In its early history, however, only the geography of its European wing mattered, because until the sixteenth century no Russian set his footsteps in Siberia which constitutes its Asian arm.

At this point one wonders why Russian history is not studied as an integral part of Western civilisation. The reason lies in the vast social, economic, political, cultural and even religious gulf that right from its inception has separated the Russian state from the rest of Europe, a gulf explained chiefly by the radical geographical differences between them. According to Toynbee, for instance, Russian narrative is a tributary of the Orthodox Christian society and not of the West.

Since its early history is so murky, it is not surprising to find the origin of the Russian state riddled with controversy, which has mostly centred around the formation of what is known as Kievan Russia. It is not my intention to get embroiled with this debate, and for the purpose in hand it turns out to be refreshingly unessential. I therefore take note mainly of those Russian events and characteristics on which the historians are in substantial accord.

From the third century to the ninth, it is believed that parts of European Russia were inhabited by several Slavic tribes – the Alans, the Antes, the Goths, the Huns, the Lithuanians, the Finns, the Khazars. In the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, many of these tribes were

overwhelmed by the Normans (or Vikings), and it is this event which is credited with opening a new chapter in the annals of Russia. As in the West, the Normans gradually merged with the native population.

Early Russian history is closely linked with the body of a people called Rus, who later lent their name to Russia. Now the question is: did the Rus have anything to do with the Normans and, if so, when did they first set their feet on the Russian soil? If we accept the *Chronicle's* word verbatim, then the Rus was a Scandinavian tribe, and the first ruler of the unified Russian state was Riurik, a famous warrior and pirate, who around 862 founded his regime in Novgorod and restored order in the turbulent Russian affairs. He was succeeded by Oleg, who in 882 enlarged his domain by conquering Kiev, a commercial and military town situated in the Dnieper basin. This is how Kieven Russia was born. The centre of activity shifted from Novgorod to Kiev because of the latter's geographical advantage as a confluence of trade routes to the Black Sea and Byzantium, and as a fortification against the constant menace of assaults from the eastern and southern nomads.

There are those, however, who question first the Scandinavian origin of the Rus and then the existence of any Riurik. They also go a bit too far by objecting to the use of the word state in describing Kievan affairs. A quote from Riasanovsky, who represents the majority view on Kievan historiography, may be used to settle this argument:

> To sum up, the Norman theory can no longer be held in anything like its original scope. Most significantly, there is no reason to assert a fundamental Scandinavian influence on Kievan culture. But the supporters of the theory stand on much firmer ground when they rely on archaeological, philological and other evidence to substantiate the presence of the Normans in Russia in the ninth century. . . .
>
> In any case, whether through internal evolution, outside intervention or some particular combination of the two, the Kievan *state* did arise in the Dnieper area toward the end of the ninth century. [5, p. 30 (italics mine)]

As far as Sarkar's hypothesis is concerned, it matters little if Kievan Russia was, throughout its history, organised as a centralised system or as a loose federation of city states. What matters most – for which there is little margin of doubt – is that in the period between the ninth and the eleventh century, Russia, as subsequently shown, was politically more centralised than in the immediately succeeding period. My argument is that, as far as can be judged from the information we have, at least the first half of the Kievan period belongs to the Khatrian age.

KIEVAN RUSSIA AND THE KHATRIAN ERA

The foundation of the Kievan state (or federation) rested on military activities, on fire and the sword. The expansion of the State – first founded by the legendary Riurik and then augmented by Oleg – continued unabated, until by the year 1000 it extended from the Finnish Gulf in the north to the Caspian Sea in the south, and from the Don River in the east to the present-day Hungary in the west. Much of this territory was conquered by a prince named Sviatoslav whose reign – lasting from 964 to 972 – was cut short, not unexpectedly, by war. Most of the early Kievan princes were thus endowed with Khatrian qualities and disposition. About Sviatoslav, for instance, Vernadsky has this to say:

> Sviatoslav seems to have gloried in the hard life of the military campaigner. In the words of the old chronicler, he was as brave and quick as a panther. When he attacked, he scorned stealth and sent messengers ahead announcing 'I come against you'. [6, p. 34]

Similar traits, perhaps to a lesser degree, also distinguished other princes, especially Sviatoslav's predecessors. Whenever, the succession to the throne was in question, it was settled by fratricidal wars. Such blood-baths occurred after Sviatoslav's death, when Vladimir won the day, and then again following Vladimir's demise, when Iaroslav was the victor. Upon Iaroslav's death in 1054, however, the tradition of bloody feuds of succession was broken, albeit temporarily, and Russia was divided into many principalities ruled by his sons. The fecundity of princes, however, culminated in a great multiplicity of these city states, and the so-called Rota system had to be devised to determine, among the multitude of relatives, the seniority for purposes of succession. Thus until 1054 the Kievan state was centrally ruled by one prince, but following Iaroslav's reign the political *imperium* was divided among many princes, although one prince, depending on the prestige and commercial significance of the town under his governance, continued to be regarded as the first among equals.

In spite of the subdivision of Russia in 1054, the militaristic foundation of the Kievan state did not immediately disappear. The princes, even before Iaroslav, were not autocratic rulers and shared power with their retinue, called *druzhina*, which was a privileged group of persons known as boyars, a term whose origin still eludes us. The privileges of the boyar-aristocracy, however, arose not from material acquisitions and wealth but from naked military might. The prince and his boyars, though holding large domains, were relentlessly ready for warfare, which was quite frequent among the princes, who all coveted the prestigious principality of Kiev. Their main function was the defence and expansion of the territory under control. In short, the boyar-aristocracy then displayed the Khatrian mentality.

Some areas were, however, fairly democratically organised, and there – especially in Novgorod – a modicum of power was exercised by the *veche*, a city assembly composed of all the adult townsmen, who occasionally engaged in armed skirmishes to reach agreement on decisions and policies. With the passage of time, and especially during the twelfth century, the *veche* became more important in almost all cities.

From the facts presented above, it is safe to conclude that relative political centralisation and hence the Khatrian era prevailed in Kievan Russia at least until 1054. The exact origin of this era must still evade us, because the critical information regarding the socio-political set-up in early Russia is unavailable. The embryonic stage of the Khatrian period could have started with the third century, or even before, when the Russians were organised in various tribes under, possibly, the tutelage of Khatrian chiefs. What is unequivocal, however, is that the onslaught of the Vikings during the ninth century heralded, if not reinforced, the advent of the Russian Khatrian age, which, as argued above, lasted at least until Iaroslav's demise in 1054.

MONGOL DOMINATION AND THE VIPRAN ERA

One of the memorable events during Vladimir's reign (978–1015) – one that played a monumental role in steering the ship of the subsequent Russian state – is the conversion of pagan Russians to Christianity. Vladimir repudiated paganism, and in 988 accepted the Christian religion – of the Greek Orthodox variety with its centre at Byzantium – as the official Church of Russia. One would suppose that Russia's official baptism drew it closer to the West in thinking, attitude, and culture, but in fact the effect was just the opposite. Richard Pipes tells us why:

> The fact that Russia received its Christianity from Byzantium rather than from the West had the most profound consequences for the entire course of Russia's historic development. Next to the geographic considerations ... it was perhaps the single most critical factor influencing that country's destiny. By accepting the eastern brand of Christianity, Russia separated itself from the mainstream of Christian civilization which, as it happened, flowed westward. . . . . . Thus, the acceptance of Christianity, instead of drawing it closer to the Christian community, had the effect of isolating Russia from its neighbours. [4, p. 223]

The late arrival of Christianity in Russia derives mainly from its geographical remoteness from the hub of the Roman empire where, it may be recalled, the religion of Christ was at first rejected but later patronised by the government. In the West, Christianity had spread from the grass roots to the top, whereas in Russia it was imposed from

above – as a state religion. Therefore right from its birth the Christian Church in Russia enjoyed privileges unavailable to the lower strata of society. It did not, however, overshadow the princes, at least not until 1054, and perhaps not before a foreign power – the Mongols – was firmly entrenched at the head of the Russian political structure.

Despite the unflinching official patronage that it enjoyed at its introduction, Christianity was not readily accepted by the common people. Its dogmas and rituals, especially of the Greek Orthodox variety, were too cumbersome for the illiterate masses to understand. Therefore, for a long while both Christianity and paganism endured in Russia in an unhappy but unavoidable alliance. The state, as in most other countries, did try to impose the divine love of religion by the earthly vigor of fire and sword, but the old Russian faiths just would not die.

Vladimir's successors did not share his enthusiasm towards the Church and the latter was dependent upon them to a greater degree. Following Iaroslav's death in 1054, however, when the relatively centralized rule by one prince gave way to joint rule by many princes, the Church, through its own status and through its influence on the *veche* to which I have already alluded, assumed a more vocal role in political affairs. Fedotov, an authority on Russian religious history, corroborates this in a forceful way:

> The loose monarchy of Kiev, after reaching its climax under Vladimir, who died in 1015, and his son Iaroslav, who died in 1054, began to split into a multiplicity of local principalities. . . . Their ties were very weak, and of moral rather than legal character; the primacy of the prince of Kiev was merely honorary.
>
> In every local state the prince had to face many social forces. . . . The Church was the most powerful of these social elements and the princes could not even dream of dominating it. [2, p. 22]

One of the most celebrated episodes representing Church intervention in secular affairs is what Clarkson [1, pp. 37 and 45] calls the 'democratic revolution' that rocked Kiev in 1113. There, in response to the appeals by prelates and local magnates, a junior prince, Vladimir Monomakh, condescended to the wishes of the people and accepted the throne in the full knowledge that his action directly violated the Rota system – the then law of primogeniture.

Events such as these do not prove that during the twelfth century the Church and hence the Vipran era had been firmly established, but they do signify a general decline of the Khatrian era, of relative centralisation, and the beginning of the Vipran ascendancy which, as we shall presently see, was to receive help from a completely unexpected source – the Mongols. The latter thus played the selfsame role as the Germanic barbarians who had earlier, in the fifth century, inflicted a lethal blow upon the Khatrian Roman empire, and thus enabled the Roman Church first to fill the power-vacuum and then to emerge supreme in Western society.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century when Kievan princes were preoccupied with their own petty feuds and the nation was torn with strife, in distant Mongolia occurred a momentous event that a little later virtually shook the foundations of Civilisation. Around 1206 the fierce Mongolian nomads dwelling on the periphery of northern China were united under the chieftainship of Temuchin, later known as Chingis Khan (or Genghis Khan). After soon conquering North China and Turkestan he set his ominous footprints on Russian soil, and inflicted a crushing defeat on the half-hearted response of the feuding princes now seemingly unified behind a common cause. The Mongols, however, withdrew as abruptly as they came, leaving behind an unprecedented cataclysm of devastation, slaughter and rapine.

Unfortunately the breathing-space for the Russians was very short. The Mongols returned, but this time as overlords of Tatars, a people who themselves had been overwhelmed by the fearsome nomads. The Mongols had now come to stay; they had brought their wives and children with them.

It is not clear what the Russians could have done to block the triumphant advance of the Mongolian colossus, but the trifling squabbles among the princes did not help either. The then loose federation of the city states would perhaps have crumbled anyway under the burden of its own disharmony, but the Mongolian *Völkerwanderung* added the finishing touch to its decline. By 1241 the entire country, except Novgorod, had fallen under the alien rule.

Among the European nations only the Russian polity had long contact with the Mongols. For more than two centuries certain parts of Russia were to pay tribute to the Asian nomads, while its western portion, including the Dnieper basin, after a century of Mongolian rule fell under the subjection of other non-Russian powers – Poland and Lithuania. It is worth noting here that the area relevant to the Russian history shrank drastically during the Mongol domination. It was confined to a region called Oka-Volka Mesopotamia that included the principality of Moscow, whose rise was to steer Russia's destiny to a somewhat familiar track of centralised government. Only this time, the centralisation would be far more pervasive and imperious than that encountered by early Kievan Russia.

Russian history during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries is referred to as the 'Tatar Yoke' or the 'appanage period'. Catastrophic as the Mongol conquest had been, it created few immediate ripples in the internal politics of Russia. Economically, of course, the country was decimated for a very long time, but politically there were only subtle changes in the native ways of governance, not drastic surgery involving

amputation of political institutions.

There is perhaps one exception – the *veche*. The city assembly, which used to be the vehicle of any popular discontent, ceased to function. In China, as in Persia, the Mongols had overthrown the native regimes and assumed direct control. In Russia, by contrast, they found no centralised state and the princes seemed too feeble to pose any menace, especially when most of them were eager to accept subservience and alms. Russian princes, all those successors of the mythological Riurik, were allowed to remain in power as long as they timely paid the tribute and swore fealty to the Khan of the so-called Golden Horde. In fact, no prince could gain legitimacy without first currying favour with the Khan and obtaining from him a charter of investiture, which was granted to those promising the maximum amount of tribute. To secure this sanction, the prince had to journey, through long, formidable terrain, to the city of Sarai and sometimes even as far as Karakorum. In so doing, some princes ran the risk of terrible humiliation and even of losing their lives.

While the princes were thus humbled, the Church emerged out of the holocaust considerably stronger and glorified. This is certainly remarkable, for Christianity and the Mongolian hordes had little in common. But the time was ripe for the Vipran era in Russia, and the nomads simply played their role in furthering the advance of Sarkar's law of social cycle.

At first the Church met the same fate as princes and the masses. The Mongols did not discriminate, and their axe fell with equal severity on the bishop and the commoner, on the privileged and the underprivileged. The Russian Church, however, had one thing working in its favour – the religious tolerance of the Khans. Despite the savagery with which the Mongols demolished their enemies, they were an intensely religious people, and, regardless of religious denomination, respected those engaged in the profession of preaching the love of God. Once the dust settled after the wars, the Church was granted a series of charters (*yarlyki*) which not merely confirmed but also expanded its former prerogatives. Priests, monks and most others associated with the Church were exempted from all fiscal obligations and also from the Tatar tribute, which, it may be remembered, even the princes could not escape. From 1267 onwards, the Church was also allowed to send a bishop to the Khan's capital.

However, the grant of such charters was by no means a one-sided exchange. The Metropolitans of the Church promised to perform the exacting task of publically praying for the Khans. They also served as Mongolian agents in calming the rebellious masses who had to bear the brunt of the tribute which the princes, in order to stay in the good graces of the Mongols, would collect so ruthlessly.

There is another dubious way in which the Mongol invasions and the resulting carnage proved of lasting assistance to the Church. It may be recalled that Christianity had been imposed on Russians by the state. It had failed to capture the illiterate masses, who despite centuries of official prodding did not care much about it. The widespread destruction caused by the Mongols, however, enabled the Church to provide some leadership; for once the Church played a useful role in Russian affairs. The priests moved from place to place, and provided much needed spiritual guidance and solace to the people dazed by misfortunes. As a result, Christianity spread very fast: for once the Church, which heretofore had been accepted out of fear, actually gained ground in people's hearts.

The latter part of the thirteenth century therefore is a witness to the Russian Church at the zenith of its glory and power. The Vipran era – whose beginning is discernible during the twelfth century – had thus been firmly established in thirteenth century Russia. At least on this issue, there is little dispute among the historians. Pipes affirms this in convincing words:

> The *Golden Age* of the Orthodox Church in Russia coincided with Mongol domination. The Mongols exempted all the clergy living under their rule from the burdens which they imposed on the rest of the subjugated population. . . . The main beneficiaries of Mongol favour were the monasteries. In the fourteenth century, Russian monks undertook vigorous colonization, and before it was over built as many new abbeys as had been established since the country's conversion four hundred years earlier. [4, p. 226 (italics mine)]

Sometimes it is argued, and with good reasons, that the Russian Church was never as powerful as its Roman counterpart; that the former, under the Byzantine tutelage, never made a sustained effort to proclaim its supremacy over the state. Does this in any way impair or even negate my basic conclusion that by the end of the thirteenth century, Vipras wearing the Church garments, enjoyed the highest status and esteem among the native Russian classes? The answer cannot but be no, because what matters here is not the comparison between the Russian and Roman Church, but between the social standing of the Russian Church at two points of time in its own history. What happened elsewhere in the annals of a different civilisation makes no difference to my argument here. What is of greater interest is that though the Russian Church believed in the ultimate superiority of the state in secular matters, it did emerge to overshadow the princes during the early part of appanage Russia. This is because, under the pressure of circumstances, the princely authority had been so emasculated that the state, if there remained any, could not possibly prevail over the Church, even though the priest had been long tutored to submit to the ruler. All this accords so well with Sarkar's doctrine of social cycle, because here we have an in-

stance where Vipran priests rose to primacy in spite of their habitual subordination to secular authorities.

The positive role of leadership played by the church during the convulsive years of Asian conquests did not, of course, last long. It would be too much to expect continued morality from the priest who had become used to all the creature comforts which the Kievan princes had provided. Soon after the return of normality in Russia, the Church resumed its accumulation of land and wealth. Church property had grown, though at a sluggish pace, even during Kievan Russia, but now tax exemption and other privileges enabled it to acquire land at an unprecedented rate.

The clergy, always willing to perform the demanding task of praying for others, received large estates from princes and other wealthy classes in return for its services. It constantly preached that the generous bequest of wealth to the Church was the one infallible means to achieve, even though posthumously, the security of eternal peace. At the same time it made sure that the religious rituals and dogmas remained too complex to be intelligible to the common people, thereby making its intermediary role in prayers all but indispensable. Thus the same drama played by the Roman Church in European Middle Ages was replayed in appanage Russia by new characters. The plot was the same, the script was the same, only the stage was different. There were, to be sure, important changes on the Russian scene, but the methods that the Russian Church used to enrich itself had been with success tried before.

The assiduity with which the Church sought to acquire land ultimately made it the biggest landlord. A similar distinction had been achieved by the Roman Catholic Church in medieval Europe, but in Russia it came somewhat later – during the sixteenth century. Florinsky, among many others, may be cited to confirm this point:

> It is believed that in the middle of the thirteenth century the holdings of monasteries were relatively modest, but three hundred years later the Church owned about one-third of the entire area under cultivation. [3, p. 133]

The upshot of this discussion is that towards the end of the appanage period, the churchmen gradually turned into the Vashyas. Bishops and other prelates came to acquire the acquisitive mentality that mocks the plight of others. Their interests became identical with those of other aristocratic groups which were single-minded in exploiting the toiling peasants and serfs. More will be said about this subject in the ensuing discussion.

The Vipran era in Russia lasted until the end of the fourteenth century. As may be expected, the fortunes of the Church varied in proportion to those of the Mongols. As long as the Tatarian yoke appeared robust and impenetrable, the Church enjoyed the esteem and envy of all

other people – princes, boyars, merchants, peasants. About the middle of the fourteenth century, however, chinks began to appear in the Mongolian armour. The nomadic behemoth, which thus far had crushed all rebellions by the Russian masses with the help of some princes and the Church, no longer seemed invincible. The first to take advantage of the situation were Lithuanians who, after defeating the Mongols around 1362, occupied Kiev and a large part of western Russia. Had Russian princes been unified under a single command, they could have liberated their states then and there; but they had everything but unity, and as a result the Mongolian rule on eastern Russia was to linger for another century.

This is not to say that some princes, especially the prince of Moscow, did nothing to profit from the tottering alien rule. They occasionally rebelled and even bested the Khans in some battles, but until 1480, when the Tatar yoke was formally put to an end, they had to pay tribute to one Khan or another. At some times the tribute was substantial, at others inconsequential. In short, the Mongolian noose around Russia had considerably eased at the outset of the fifteenth century, and as a result the Vipran influence could not but decline. At the same time Vipras themselves had been steadily evolving into landed aristocracy of Vashyas. Riasanovsky is of the view that 'the Mongol domination over the Russians lasted from 1240 to 1380 or even 1480 depending on whether we include the period of a more or less nominal Mongol rule.' [5, p. 72] It is thus safe to conclude that the Vipran era, commencing around the twelfth century, came to an end with the weakening of the Mongolian yoke at the end of the fourteenth.

THE QUESTION OF FEUDALISM AND THE VASHYAN ERA

Let me now digress a bit to facilitate further exposition of the Russian social evolution. There has been considerable controversy regarding the question of feudalism in appanage Russia, although this one cannot be blamed on the lack of informative and unjaundiced archives. The controversy has arisen because both the Marxian and non-Marxian historians have taken inspiration from the Western brand of feudalism which, as seen in the previous chapter, prevailed in the late medieval Europe. To be sure, many economic, political and social features prevailing at the conclusion of Mongolian rule in Russia are sadly reminiscent of the feudal West. The feebleness of central political authority, the debasement of the Church into citadels of land, wealth and corruption, the existence of large private estates, the delegation by princes of fiscal and judicial powers to the ruthless landlords are all tragic reminders of the conditions that almost contemporaneously bedevilled western Europe. However, there are others who make much of the principle of sub-infeudation that characterised medieval Europe

but was only partially present in Russia; of the fact that some peasants in the appanage period were free to move from one estate to the other, whereas in western Europe they had been mostly tied to particular landlords; and of the premise that the princes conferred judicial and fiscal privileges on the landlords only for a few years.

Some, especially Marxists, suggest that differences between medieval Europe and medieval Russia (as appanage Russia is sometimes called) are purely semantic, more apparent than real. For one thing the peasant mobility in Russia was more or less theoretical, and in reality the financial strength of the landlords and active collusion among them frequently curbed the peasant's movements. Similarly, the judicio-fiscal prerogatives of the governors, landholders or otherwise, were usually extended indefinitely.

However, the main point missed by many historians before is that in the latter half of both medieval Europe and appanage Russia, the Vashyan era prevailed. In both places the Church, which usually helped everyone but the needy, had amassed an incredible amount of land and wealth; in both places the landlords, secular as well as ecclesiastical, had become the instruments of oppression over the common masses who were forced to pay extortion to their *de facto* masters. In short, in both places, the acquisitive mentality was predominant.

Most contemporary scholars outside the sphere of Marxian influence argue that feudalism never existed in Russia, or at the least the Russian brand was vastly different from the Western variety. In his summation of this issue, Riasanovsky strikes a deft compromise:

> In sum, it would seem that a precise definition of feudalism, with proper attention to its legal characteristics, would not be applicable to Russian society. Yet, on the other hand, many developments in Russia, whether we think of the division of power and authority in the appanage period, the economy of large landed estates, or even the later *pomestie* system of state service, bear important resemblances to the feudal West. . . . Therefore, a number of scholars speak of the social organization of medieval Russia as incipient or undeveloped feudalism. [5, p. 128]

For my purpose, it is immaterial what label is assigned to the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the late appanage period. As the Vipran influence declined with the Mongols towards the end of the fourteenth century, social primacy passed into the hands of a new class, a new aristocracy which rose on the strength of its landed wealth. It is the acquisitive mind which then swayed the Russian society, and that is just the hallmark of the Vashyan age.

How did all this come about in medieval Russia? How did Sarkar's social cycle move from the Vipran to the Vashyan era? It is towards these questions that I now turn.

One of the striking political developments in the appanage period is the meteoric rise of the principality of Moscow from a virtual nonentity until the middle of the thirteenth century to a force that, by the end of the fifteenth century, succeeded in unifying the scattered fragments of Russia under one banner. The credit for this goes mostly to Ivan III who, as grand duke of Moscow, reigned from 1462 to 1505. A pragmatic ruler of great foresight, Ivan not only brought the cities of Novgorod and Tver under his control, but, with his declaration of independence in 1480, he also put a formal end to the Mongolian yoke.

The Tatar domination, however, did not end overnight. The Russian road to emancipation was long, precarious and tortuous. It also resulted in a considerable diminution of the Church coupled with a swift ascendancy of the boyar aristocracy. The new boyars, however, were no longer the warriors that they were during the early Kievan days; they now possessed an acquisitive mentality as well as vast estates and wealth. Years of subservience to the alien rule had completely sapped their strength and vitality, while the princes, who needed them badly first in the inter-princely feuds and then in the struggle against the Mongols, rewarded them generously in terms of land. In point of fact, as the struggle for supremacy among princes grew bitter, the influence of the boyars increased manifold. Actually some boyars came from the princely families which had been forced by other princes to retire from politics and administration.

During the late Kievan Russia, the princely authority had been limited by many social elements including the boyar duma (*druzhina*) and the *veche* (the city assembly). In the early appanage period, the *veche* had all but disappeared and the Church had come to dominate society. All this time the landed boyars had remained on a high point of the social pyramid, but they had not been able to get to the top. During Kievan Russia their presence had served to restrain the irresponsible actions of princes, but at that time they were constantly ready for warfare and possessed Khatrian qualities. As landed proprietors, however, they attained social dominance only during the fourteenth century when Church influence began to decline with the Mongolian power, and when princes continued to need their assistance to fight other princes. Thus the Vashyan era, i.e., the period dominated by landlords, secular as well as ecclesiastical, was born in Russia around the end of the fourteenth century. As in the feudal West, the dominion of the landowners in late appanage Russia stemmed from their ownership of vast areas of land and their resultant economic power. This is then an unmistakable sign of the Vashyan age. About some of the boyars, Pipes has this characterisation:

> Rich boyars were *virtual sovereigns*. The administrators of the prince's household rarely interfered with these people [boyars], and

> sometimes were formally forbidden to do so by immunity charters. [4, p. 46 (italics mine)]

Princes themselves displayed a Vashyan disposition as they made frequent grants of land to those who would wage their battles and wars. About Moscow's grand princes, who were typical of other princes at the time, McKenzie Wallace has this to say:

> They were not a chivalrous race, or one with which the severe moralist can sympathize, but they were largely endowed with cunning, tact and perseverance, and were little hampered by conscientious scruples. Having early discovered that the liberal distribution of money at the Tatar court was the surest means of gaining favor, they lived parsimoniously at home and spent their savings at the Horde. [7, p. 202]

This quote from Wallace should dispel any remaining doubts about the Vashyan mentality of the princes of medieval Russia. The control over society by a handful of persons through their wealth is exactly what characterises a Vashyan age. The princely Vashyan mentality is also emphasised by Pipes who observes that the appanage prince

> had an obsession with accumulating real estate. He bought land, traded it, married into it and seized it by force. This preoccupation had the consequence of transforming the more ambitious of the appanage princes into ordinary businessmen, strengthening in their mind the already well-developed proprietary instincts. [4, p. 54]

There were two sources of the boyar's power and supremacy in society: they were rich, at least some if not all, and by long established tradition, had been independent of their so-called masters (or employers) – the princes. This tradition, inherited from the old *druzhina*, held that boyars were not obliged to stay with their employer through thick and thin; that they were free to choose their master and desert him at any time, if necessary. At times the disgruntled boyars chose to exercise their right of desertion at precisely the time when their employer needed them most – at the time of war with other principalities. In the contractual agreement between princes and boyars, therefore, the former clearly were at a disadvantage. The princes, of course, did not care for this practice, but they were too powerless to abolish it, at least until the sixteenth century.

At first, perhaps, the boyars acquired their land through direct purchase or occupation. Such estates were called *votchina*, where the owner had complete freedom of management without any obligation to the prince save the collection, and payment, of taxes. It is worth noting, however, that some *votchina* estates, especially those belonging to the

Church but also those belonging to some boyars, were exempt from taxation. Around the middle of the fourteenth century, as cultivable land became scarce, there arose another form of landholding called *pomestie*, where the tenure was obligatory. In this case the landholder obtained his land from the prince and in turn agreed to perform some duty – usually military service. The *pomestie* form of landholding increased in importance with the passage of time, and became the general rule in the sixteenth century when some form of government service was required of all landlords.

All landholdings, *votchina* and *pomestie*, were cultivated not directly by the landowners but by peasants and slaves. As with the boyars who were free to choose their masters, the tenants in the early days were free to move from one landlord to another. The economic disadvantage of this practice was not lost on the landowner, who did his best to restrict their mobility. However, the legal rights of the peasants to move freely were by tradition as unimpeachable as those of the boyars. Accordingly, the princes, especially those of Moscow, eventually made pacts with other princes, agreeing not to accept the free tenants of each other. Of greater significance in limiting peasant mobility, however, were the financial obligations of the tenants to the landowners, who exacted high interest rates for their loans. In Florinsky's words:

> As early, perhaps, as the thirteenth century, the debtor-creditor relationship became an important source leading to the *de facto* enslavement of people who were *de jure* free. [3, p. 107]

Thus, as in Western Europe, it is a combination of several forces and circumstances that culminated in the Russian Vashyan age. Regardless of what label is attached to the socio-economic conditions prevailing in late medieval Russia, there is little doubt that the then society was dominated by the Vashyas: wealth ruled everything and the government was highly decentralised. The state had been split into miniature, quasi-sovereign entities, and private law had emerged in place of the law of the state.

The Vashyan era in Russia lasted roughly from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth. By then a series of tumultuous events and revolutions had given Russia a face-lift. While the boyars and feuding princes were humbled, the governmental machinery became extremely centralised under the *imperium* of Moscow's prince, better known as the tsar.

OPRICHNINA AND THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

As happens during every Vashyan era, medieval Russia slowly drifted towards the extreme economic disparity, lawlessness and anarchy of the

Shudran age. Also, as with ancient Egypt prior to the emergence of the Middle Kingdom and as with feudal Europe, the end of the Vashyan era in Russia was preceded by a move towards political centralisation and a number of social rebellions.

It may be recalled that the burden of onerous taxes and tributary payments to Mongols fell largely on the frail economic shoulders of tenants, independent farmers, artisans and other common people. While princes and landlords basked in their fortunes, the masses lived in squalor and misery. In time, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the financial noose of landowners around the tenants became really tight, so much so that the once free peasants were reduced to serfdom. Meanwhile the influence of boyars increased manifold as Moscow's princes needed their support to bring other principalities and princes under subjection. This the Muscovite rulers were able to accomplish, though not without a protracted struggle, with all the machinations, trickery and wealth at their command. By the onset of the sixteenth century, all of Russia's princes had been subdued by the grand prince of Moscow, and some of them were settled away from their earlier domains; they thus joined the ranks of boyars.

The unification of Russia under one banner produced unexpected results for the landed aristocracy which had been Moscow's staunch ally through the dark days of struggle for dominion. No longer did the Muscovite princes need the boyars. Furthermore, the chief source of the boyars' hegemony, namely their threat to switch from one prince to another, vanished with the consolidation of political command under one prince. These developments portended convulsions of a kind Russia had never seen before.

The supremacy of Moscow also spelt further trouble for the peasantry's phantom freedom of mobility. For instance, in the economic interests of ecclesiastical landlords, Vasili II of Moscow decreed around 1455 that the free tenants working on certain Church estates could no longer abandon their tenancy. Developments such as these contributed further to serfdom, which to be sure was not yet fully developed: its full-blooded rise was to occur much later – during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, in medieval Russia partial serfdom, combined with oppressive taxation, made the tenant's physical survival all but impossible.

As expected, the strife between boyars and Muscovite rulers intensified during the sixteenth century and continued with inevitable vicissitudes into the early part of the seventeenth. The rise of Moscow in the political firmament had become a fact of life by 1533 when Ivan IV succeeded his father, Vasily III, at the age of three. Ivan, better known as Ivan the Terrible, was a mercurial, some say pathological, character; he was at once capable of extreme cruelty and deep piety. Ivan was a typical Khatri; he believed in family discipline with himself as the head of the family, except that his family extended to the entire state. Ivan was thus a champion of the ruler's absolutism, an idea which the Mongolian despotism, still fresh in Russian memory, had left behind. He was the first prince to assume the title of tsar which previously had been associated with the Mongols. In fact from the long-run viewpoint, absolutism is perhaps the only Mongolian legacy to Russian society, which is scourged by it even today.

No historical narrative of Russia, even the one as brief as mine, can afford to neglect Ivan's childhood impressions of boyars' misconduct, if only because they vividly portray the times of acute strife between the then Muscovite rulers and the entrenched landed aristocracy. Throughout his life, Ivan had to live with the childhood memory of the scenes of violence in which feuding factions of boyars, jockeying for power, had freely participated; how they would tear up the robes of the Metropolitan and frequently help themselves to the palace jewellery and valuables; how his own mother had to contantly fight them for her survival.

When Ivan turned sixteen in 1546 and took over the rule from boyars, he had perhaps already made up his mind to efface their influence. Towards this end he was ably assisted by a council of advisers. A series of important reforms were instituted and a new assembly called *zemsky sobor* convened in 1550 to counter the exclusive sway of boyars in governmental affairs. The judicio-fiscal powers of landlords and boyar governors were also curbed.

However, none of these reforms could erase from Ivan's mind his innate distrust of boyars; he began to suspect even his own advisers. In time, this suspicion grew so deep that he began to ignore their advice. For instance, when in 1558 he waged war against Livonia, which in turn sought protection from Lithuania, he did this despite his advisers' strenuous objections. The Livonian war produced the normal ups and downs in battles, but each defeat Ivan would ascribe to the treachery of boyar commanders, of whom several were arrested or executed. This policy merely added fuel to the fire. Ivan's own associates began to fear his whims. After losing a battle in 1564, a former adviser to Ivan, Prince Kurbsky, defected to Lithuanians for purely this reason. Shocked by what he considered treason, Ivan finally decided to take peremptory action.

Ivan had it all planned. In December 1564 he secretly left Moscow for a nearby town, and then sent a message to the people, declaring his intention to abdicate on account of the boyar's perfidy. However, upon receiving earnest requests, which he must have fully expected from the people of Moscow, he graciously agreed to return. But he insisted on the grant of absolute power to punish those who had betrayed him, to confiscate their lands, and to form a new administration unencumbered by the existing aristocracy. Around these confiscated estates evolved a new

social contract, called *oprichnina*, which literally means a separate household (or a private court).

In the *oprichnina*, Ivan was the supreme master. Of all the people, he trusted the lower gentry, merchants and the commoners, and it is to such people that he parcelled out land he had seized from boyars. In return the new landowners were enjoined to provide military service as recruits of the *oprichnina* guards, who at one time numbered as many as 6000.

At first the new political order adversely affected only the boyars, and their status and power were all but annihilated. Many had to pay the price for earlier excesses in terms of their lives. Later on, however, the *oprichnina* guards spread so much terror that they became a menace to Ivan's own government. In 1571 they were disbanded, although some were allowed to join the regular army. The boyars also then heaved a sigh of relief. They were assigned new lands in restitution for the properties confiscated before. Never again were they able to rise in society.

How is one to appraise the momentous event of *oprichnina* in terms of the theory of social cycle? I am inclined to interpret this episode – and others occurring at the turn of the seventeenth century that finally broke the back of the boyars – as Sarkar's Shudran revolution in which the lower strata of society, oppressed by years of boyar rapacity and strife, directly or indirectly participated.

It may be recalled that Shudran revolution according to Sarkar is one where the Khatris or Vipras, reduced to Shudran ways of living and thinking, revolt against the entrenched Vashyas and cause an abrupt change in the conventional mores and ideas towards the established socio-political order. There are two prerequisites: the successful revolt of non-Vashyas, and the sudden introduction of new ideas. The *oprichnina* satisfies them both. For one thing the revolt by Ivan, a Khatri, against the boyars was elaborately prepared; and when he proclaimed his abdication, the boyars as well as other privileged groups were keenly aware of the strong military force – recruited from the common masses (or the Shudras) – that was ready to back his ultimatum with vigorous action. Much as it despised capitulation, the aristocracy was really left with no choice.

Secondly, the *oprichnina*, more than any other action by Ivan and his predecessors, demolished the social status of boyars, the Vashyas. True, they were subsequently resettled on different, perhaps more fertile, lands, but they had been uprooted from their strongholds and then banished to new areas where traditionally they had mattered little. And it is the tradition – inherited from the old *druzhina* – that lay at the basis of their hegemony in society. Thus the fact that a boyar's rights to freedom and inheritance were no longer inviolable was a revolutionary new idea that found ready acceptance following the *oprichnina*. It is in

these respects, rather than the systematic terror which Ivan perpetrated on the landed aristocracy as well as on others, that the *oprichnina* episode qualifies as the Shudran revolution in Russia. Florinsky's words add further weight to this conclusion:

> The two most significant consequences of *oprichnina* were the final destruction of the political influence of the old landed aristocracy and the forcible transfer of land on a huge scale. [3, p. 202]

It is worth adding here that according to some historians the real impetus for social revolt against the boyars came not from above, not from Ivan, but from below, from other non-Vashyas. Their chief spokesman was Peresvetov, who belonged to the class of lower gentry. Peresvetov frequently attacked certain aspects of the Muscovite political hierarchy of which he himself had been the victim. After Ivan's coronation, he wrote several treatises, exhorting the tsar to tame the boyars and form a strong and just government based on the Turkish system of administration, a system for which Peresvetov had nothing but admiration. In Vernadsky's succinct words:

> Peresvetov may be considered a mouthpiece of the lower Russian gentry, expressing their readiness to become the mainstay of the tsar's power. [6, p. 110]

The upshot of this discussion is that *oprichnina* was instigated by the non-Vashyas against the undeserved, but extensive, privileges of the Vashya-minded aristocracy of the boyars. It was a Shudran revolution that turned violent and oppressive because its leader, Ivan the Terrible, was by disposition a Khatri.

Following Ivan's death the political and social antagonisms came to the surface again, and Russia had to go through what is usually described as 'The Time of Troubles', which is really reminiscent of a period of adjustment following a Shudran revolution. It lasted only for fifteen years, from 1598 to 1613, but during that short span, the Russian economy and morale were all but exhausted. This is a period when factional strife among boyars bedevilled society again; Russia was again catapulted into revolutionary turmoil and a civil war, and although peasants and slaves in the end gained little from their revolt, the remaining vestiges of the boyar-power were annihilated.

It may then be concluded that the tremors of Shudran revolution shook the Russian polity not only during Ivan's reign but also during 'The Time of Troubles'. Russia had passed through so many upheavals that its anarchical order could not sink any further; it had to give way to some peace and relatively better times for all concerned.

TSARDOM, ABSOLUTISM AND THE NEW KHATRIAN ERA

My discussion so far has shown that the Russian historical experience accords well with Sarkar's hypothesis. We have seen that, in accordance with the law of social cycle, the Russian society evolved from the Khatrian to the Vipran era and then to the Vashyan era, culminating in social revolutions against the Vashyas. This completes one rotation of the social cycle. Now, if Sarkar's thesis holds good, it is the turn of the Khatrian era, of political centralisation to rise again. In the ensuing discussion I argue that it is precisely this era that has prevailed in Russia from the turn of the seventeenth century till today. Now and then the fulcrum of power has briefly swayed from absolutism to relative decentralisation, but on the whole the Russian body social has been caught in the strait-jacket of totalitarian regimes for the last four centuries.

'The Time of Troubles' came to an end when Michael Romanov was elected as the tsar by a *zemsky sobor* convoked in 1613. Thus was founded a dynasty that was to rule Russia for the next three hundred years, until in 1918 its last ruler, tsar Nicholas II, met a violent end at the hands of Bolshevik revolutionaries. The chief asset of the first Romanov was his mediocrity, a trait from which his supporters fully expected to profit. Actual political control during his reign and during the times of his two immediate successors was exercised by the tsar's relatives. From 1619 to 1633 tsar Michael was dominated by his father, Filaret, who, as the Patriarch, headed the Church. In theory both Michael and Filaret were to share power in governance, but in practice Filarêt was the master. Therefore, it seems that Russia, following the Shudran revolution and the period of adjustment, sidestepped the Khatrian era and rushed into the Vipran age. In the state of utter confusion that attends the Shudran revolution, a non-Khatrian group may come to dominate the polity, but it cannot stay in power for long. This is precisely what happened with Russia following the accession of the first Romanov as the tsar, as Filaret's rule lasted only fourteen years. Later, a similar attempt by Patriarch Nikon to regain power proved abortive and led to his downfall. As a result no subsequent Patriarch staked claims to primacy in secular affairs.

The first three Romanovs had one trait in common: they all seem to have specialised in ineptitude and feebleness of mind. On their supple shoulders had fallen the gigantic task of national reconstruction for which they were sadly ill-equipped. The movement towards political centralisation – which is discernible during the fifteenth century and which, following the *oprichnina*, reached its heyday during the reign of Ivan the Terrible – was temporarily thwarted during the times of the first Romanov. The next two rulers were weak, but the state nevertheless moved towards totalitarianism which was spearheaded by a new militaristic, Khatrian nobility. Thereafter came the short, but vigorous, reign of Sophia, followed by Peter who was anything but a figurehead of state.

During the first four decades of the Romanov regime the institution that attained some prominence was *zemsky sobor* which, it may be recalled, was the one that had elected Michael as the tsar. The *sobor* appeared to show some promise at the time, but it was a medley of heterogeneous social groups openly suspicious of each other. Thus the internal friction in *zemsky sobor* allowed it to be no more than a consultative body, even though the first three Romanovs were incapable of strong rule: they were weak, but the restraining influences on their power were even weaker. The last significant *sobor* was summoned in 1649 to create a code of laws.

Social primacy gradually passed into the hands of *pomestie* landowners called *dvoriane* who, it may be recalled, had been granted land by Ivan the Terrible in return for military service for the state. It was their military prowess or Khatrian qualities, of which the tsar was always in great need, that enabled the *dvoriane* to become the new aristocracy. Khatrian domination, and the concomitant centralisation of authority initially in the hands of *dvoriane* and later in the hands of the tsars, had become the order of the day even in the final years of the first Romanov. The interregnums, during which the Patriarchate, first headed by Filaret and then by Nikon, was dominant, thus merely provided the brief novelty of Vipran supremacy in the general monotony of the new Khatrian age. As a matter of fact when Fedor, the third Romanov ruler, died in 1682, the Church had already become subservient to the state.

Fedor died childless, whereupon a bloody struggle ensued for succession, and, through a military coup, a tsarevna named Sophia won out. Her rule, though eventful, was very brief and the same tide that had swept her on to the shores of power swept her aside in 1689. Upon Sophia's forced retirement, Peter, later known as Peter the Great, ascended the throne.

In 1689 Peter was merely a youth of seventeen, but even then he possessed a physique unusually tall and developed for his age; he had a remarkable penchant for military discipline and skills. It is said that at barely the age of eleven, he formed a *poteshnye* regiment which by 1689 had grown to a force strong enough to determine Peter's accession to the throne. In short Peter was a first-rate Khatri, a trait that explains why during his reign absolutism reached a new high. He believed in glorification of the Russian state, not necessarily of the Russian people: no longer was the tsar a titular head of state.

The reign of Peter the Great opened new chapters in the annals of Russia, which perhaps for the first time heavily imported Western culture. Russia truly became a member of the European comity of nations, as many of its institutions were restructured along the Western archetype. At the same time, the Church suffered a further decline. The

tsar became the head and arbiter of its destiny, its internal administration, its policies. The Patriarchate itself was abolished.

Many new reforms in trade and industry were introduced, and, as a result, economically Russia developed apace. Peter's absolutism as well as progressive reforms have moved some historians to conclude that his reign was marked by benevolent despotism. His reforms, however, were marred by some backward steps, as the *zemsky sobor*, the last remaining bastion in which the masses had a say, was dismantled in 1708. The government, as a result, completely lost contact with the people at large. Eventually it faced popular unrest, which it silenced with much brutality and harsh measures.

The army was also reorganised along Western lines. Peter created a first-class navy which won him not only laurels in battle, but also the formal titles of Father of his Country, Emperor and 'the Great'.

One result of his military reforms was that the privileges of the *dvoriane* increased further. Of course the new nobles detested the element of compulsion in the military or civil service that until then some of them had escaped, but the heavier burden was not without its compensation. The hold of the *dvoriane* nobility over the army and the administration augmented manifold. At the same time it retained rights to its estates which were farmed by serfs, who had every reason to resent the reforms that in effect bound them as slaves to their landlords. The army officers, especially regiments of guards, were mainly recruited from the nobility. These regiments were soon to play a decisive role in the succession to the Russian throne.

The rest of Russian history until 1917 may, for our purposes, be disposed of very quickly. The Khatrian era associated with direct absolutism continued with few interruptions. There were some episodes which make it appear that Russia moved into the Vipran or the Vashyan era, but they were either short-lived or their impact on society is subject to muliple interpretations.

Consider, for instance, the indirect rule by the regiments of guards following Peter's demise in 1725. The tsar had named no successor, and naturally there were many pretenders to the throne. The next thirty-seven years produced an era of intrigues and a series of coups in which the regiments took more than a helping hand. It is not clear what label should be assigned to the so-called period of palace revolutions, when power truly belonged to the *dvoriane* from which the regiments had been recruited. During Peter's regime the *dvoriane* had been forced to provide lifelong military service and fight his myriad wars. In his grandiose designs they were the reluctant partners even though their perquisites had substantially increased. After Peter's death, however, the *dvoriane* got the best of both worlds. They continued to retain their privileges, especially their stranglehold on the serfs, and at the same time managed to escape the burdens of obligatory military service.

Some people may argue that during 1725–62, Russia had a brush with the Vashyan era, while others may legitimately question the Vashyan characterisation of the *dvoriane* nobility as a whole. A fraction of the nobility, which during Peter's times had been coerced to perform military functions, continued to honour such commitments. However, most of them were interested not in service to the state but in tightening their noose around the peasants toiling on their estates. In this endeavour, they succeeded more than ever before. One by one the serfs were deprived of all remaining rights. In 1727, even the serf's right to join the army was repealed. With one stroke he was thus divested of the one and only avenue of escape from servility.

Thus it is not clear whether the period of palace revolutions was dominated by the Khatris or Vashyas. The source of conflict lies in the fact that the power base of *dvoriane* derived from their hold on the armed forces, but a sizeable section of the nobility displayed Vashyan mentality: it furthered its own economic interests without caring for what happened to the serfs.

In any case the era of palace revolutions was short-lived. It came to an end with the reign of Catherine II (1762–96) who also was catapulted into power by regiments of guards. But after securing the throne she moved to give new life to royal autocracy. She did this by pursuing a robust foreign policy as well as by using royal influence in settling disputes among politically powerful groups.

Despite this, however, Russia did not return to the Petrine period of impervious despotism where no section of society dared challenge the unrestrained powers of the tsar. Like Peter the Great, Catherine too has been honoured by some historians with the title of enlightened despot, something for which, it is interesting to note, she herself yearned. But there was usually a yawning chasm between her intentions and actions. She undoubtedly had many enlightened ideas, but few were translated into benign policies, some of which reflected a confused mind and had unintended effects. Towards the plight of the serfs, for instance, she expressed great compunction; yet the serfs had reason to rue her reign. Despite her pangs of conscience, she made generous grants of land to her courtiers, and the result was a further consolidation of serfdom. To her credit, it must be added that some of her reforms were frustrated by the uncooperative bureaucracy of *dvoriane* nobles who were naturally wrapped up in their own interests. And she was too smart, or realistic, to jolt the basic structure of her power, at least as long as it posed no threat to her own dominion.

It is appropriate to say that there was then a sort of stand-off, a kind of unstable equilibrium, between the tsardom and the *dvoriane* aristocracy, with the pendulum of power slightly tilted towards Catherine. In 1917, the year of the Bolshevik revolution that sent Russia topsy-turvy, the same stand-off prevailed except that now the *dvoriane*'s

power base had shifted from their control over vital army positions to their control over large estates and over the bureaucratic machine. For this reason the Russian social order at the dawn of the fateful year of 1917 is commonly described as semi-feudal, signifying a situation where the autocratic state and the landed aristocracy, because of mutual distrust and fear, preferred the *status quo* to progressive change. It was not purely feudal because serfdom, which had been abolished in 1861, as well as the decentralised political authority that is supposed to accompany feudalism, did not exist at the time.

The credit for outlawing serfdom goes to tsar Alexander II (1855–81) who, along with other farsighted Russians, had come to realise that if action to reprieve the serfs did not come from above, from the state, then a volcanic action might come from below, from the servile peasants themselves. Besides, the intelligentsia rightly regarded serfdom as a stigma marring the Russian image in the eyes of Europe. However, the serf-owning aristocracy was so powerful that its interests, the tsar felt, could not be trampled on with impunity. Therefore, when serfdom was abolished in 1861, the nobility was to be generously compensated for the loss of labour services as well as for releasing the land that the serfs had formerly cultivated for themselves. The nobility's lands were partitioned and a part ceded to village communes, called *mir*, in which the liberated serfs were free to toil for themselves and make their own production decisions.

However, the reform simply fomented unrest among all classes concerned. The greedy nobility felt cheated despite receiving more than adequate compensation, while the peasantry felt bitter because it could not own the allotted land, quite often barren, until the landowners were recompensed. Instead of making rental and labour payments to the landlords, the peasants now had to pay heavy restitutory taxes to the government: they thus became the serfs of the state. But despite all this ire, both the state and the peasantry were major beneficiaries. While the area under cultivation increased a little, the productivity of farm labour increased many times, and the two combined to pave the way for the early stage of industrialisation and capitalism.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the heavy weight of taxation on the peasantry was still one of the most cancerous tumours afflicting the Russian polity. Another was a complete absence in government of popular representation for which social consciousness had begun to sprout from the spread of education as well as industrialisation. Several clandestine political groups, with disparate philosophies and objectives, had by then come into being. Even though these groups could not have been more diverse, they were all united in their disdain for autocracy, and in their desire for a representative government based on the secret ballot and universal suffrage. Countering these groups were the governmental bureaucracy as well as the conservative wing of the nobility with roots struck deep in landed interests. In 1905, following Russia's trouncing by Japan, the simmering embers of unrest erupted into revolutionary violence and a series of political assassinations. However, before the situation got out of hand, the tsar caved in and, in deference to popular sentiment, offered certain concessions. Among other things, he cancelled the peasantry's debt to the state, and proclaimed a bicameral legislative system coupled with a limited suffrage.

It then appears that at the outset of the twentieth century Russia was ripe for a new Vipran age. The Khatrian era, because of the tsar's unenlightened despotism, had been declining for some time, and the elections of 1906, however undemocratic, seemed to herald a constitutional monarchy and hence a new era of the Vipras. However, this was not to be. The lessons so painfully learnt from the 1905 revolution were quickly forgotten by the tsar, who, under the mesmerising influence of the privileged classes, was ready to disssolve any Russian parliament (or duma) of which his ministers did not approve. Finally, in 1912 was elected a fourth duma which was prepared to compromise with the tsar and even rubber-stamp some of his policies. To cap it all, the First World War broke out in 1914, and any drive towards further reforms seemed to be indefinitely stalled. A kind of equilibrium, unstable and vulnerable to any external trauma, had by then emerged between conservative and liberal forces. Revolutionary fervour had subsided, but radicalism was very much alive. It had merely gone underground, from where it marked time to strike back at the political anachronism which for decades had been standing on shaky grounds.

Such then was the Russian polity at the dawn of 1917, when two revolutions, whose impact no epithets describing brutality and bloodbaths can fully capture, occurred only a few months apart, tore the country to shreds, and reimposed on it the ugly totalitarianism of which the Russian people were undeserving and helpless victims. The Khatrian era which was about to witness its own eclipse thus returned with a vehemence reminiscent of the terror of Chingis Khan, only this time the terror sprang from within.

Ever since, Russian society has been living in the agony of the party and state despotism. Theoretically it is ruled by the communist party (formerly the Bolshevik party) of which any countryman can be a member, but in effect the power has revolved around one person, usually the General Secretary of the Party, who only recently has faced hushed challenges to his authority.

The first head of the Soviet Union (as Russia has since come to be called) was Lenin who inaugurated the communist tradition of rule by terror, a tradition that was more than faithfully upheld by his successor – Stalin. Stalin's long reign of twenty-five years constitutes one of the darkest pages in the Russian book of history. Few sections of society escaped the tyranny of his diabolical mind. His was a police state

where innocent people would be summarily killed at the dictator's numerous whims. True, economically Russia then developed at an unprecedented rate, but the human cost in terms of life and liberty was incalculable.

After Stalin's death in 1953, a collective body of party leaders ruled for about five years, until Khrushchev manoeuvred his way to the top in 1958. The era of one-man rule thus staged a comeback, giving rise to apprehensions of a reversion to the hideous days of Stalin. However, Khrushchev, himself having been reduced to sychophancy in his early career, actually denounced Stalin and his policies. During his reign many relics of Stalin's repression were effaced, and economic centralism and restrictions on society slightly eased.

Khrushchev, however, was abruptly overthrown in 1964, and the principle of collective leadership resurrected. This time the new leaders broke off the venerated tradition of communist Russia, and spared the life of the ousted leader. Since then the principle of collective leadership has been preserved. This is not to say that Brezhnev, the party's General Secretary since 1964, was content to remain the first among equals. He made some attempts to attain dictatorial power, but the alacrity of other party leaders, wary of reversion to Stalinism, successfully thwarted his designs. Politically, not much has changed in the last decade or so, except that in 1977 the Soviet President Podgorny was brusquely removed and his office taken over by Brezhnev.

Today Russian society is a little more relaxed, a little more liberalised, a little more tolerant of dissent than under Stalin's regime, yet the basic commitment of the leaders to 'collective dictatorship' or 'party dictatorship' remains. They are still devoted to their ideal of state supremacy, even at the expense of individual freedom and fundamental human rights.

That Russia today is languishing in the decadent phase of the Khatrian era there is little doubt. Whether a particular era is in its progressive or retrogressive phase is determined not by its imposing structures of institutions, nor by its awe-inspiring militaristic colossus, but by the degree to which fundamental human liberties are respected, by the degree of its humanitarianism. On this count, the Russian Khatrian era today is on the decline and has been so for a long time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The objective of this chapter was to examine the validity of Sarkar's theory of social cycle in terms of the history of Russia. I argued that the Kievan state, with which the Russian narrative usually begins, evolved as a Khatrian era, the early appanage period as a Vipran era, the late appanage period up to the middle of the sixteenth century as a Vashyan

era that terminated in the Shudran revolution involving the episode of *oprichnina*. This completed one full rotation of the social cycle. Another cycle began with a period of adjustment following upon the *oprichnina*, and lasted till the conclusion of the 'Time of Troubles'. The fact that this adjustment took so long is perhaps the reason why the new Khatrian era, which thereafter ensued, has lasted so long, for the past four centuries. Western civilisation, on the other hand, managed to by-pass the barbaric and anarchistic phase following its own Shudran revolution. Its transition from the Vashyan age of feudalism to the Khatrian era of centralised monarchies was much more smooth than was the case with the *oprichnina*, and perhaps for this reason the social cycle moved in the West much more swiftly than it did in Russia.

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7 Hindu Civilisation

About the time when the pharaohs were busy building their massive pyramids in the valley of the Nile, another ancient society was ready to sprout in the East – in the valley of the Indus. The so-called Indus society, which turns out to be a forerunner of what we call Hindu civilisation, dates from about 2500 B.C., the time when Egypt, as I have argued before, was already in its first Vipran age. Its remains, unearthed at the ancient towns of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, suggest that the Indus society was among the earliest developed societies (dating, some say, as far back as 3000 B.C.); that it reached its zenith some time between 2500 and 2000 B.C., and that in accomplishments it came close to the contemporary cultures of Egypt and of Mesopotamia, with which it seems to have had some contact and trade relations.

Around 1500 B.C., the Indus valley was invaded by semi-nomadic tribes of a people called Indo-Aryans, who infiltrated by way of Afghanistan through the flat passes of the Hindu Kush Mountains, which stood between the then India and the Aryan homeland of Central Asia. The culture of the native Indians then sank in the deluge of marauding aliens, who transplanted a distinct religion, social norms, and institutions. It is to these Aryans that credit is usually given for giving birth to what is now called Hindu civilisation.

We have already seen that, as regards the three societies examined before, the hypothesis of social cycle provides a bond of underlying unity, even though each society emerged with a face of its own, its own destiny, its own mode of expression pointing to surface diversity. With Hindu civilisation this surface diversity is even more pronounced, even more muddled and difficult to penetrate than with civilisations analysed before. For this is a society where no ecclesiastical organisation ever came into prominence. Yet its sublime religion, at once the instrument of salvation for some but bondage for others, has kept its flame aglow down to this day. This is a society where almost from its inception the professions of farming and money-lending have been slighted by the priest, yet this did not preclude the times when some kind of capitalism as well as feudalism prevailed. Like Egyptian society, the ancient peoples of India – an area so vast that it has come to be called a sub-continent – also passed through travails, through moments of glory and

decay, through barbarian invasions and internal strife. Yet unlike the ancient Egyptian culture that sought eternity in stone, the Hindu culture has survived the ravages of man and time, and for this the credit goes to the frequent appearance of sages who inspired others through their self-denial. It is because of their cosmic ideas that Hindu society is still alive, even though over the last one thousand years it has had to face one trauma after another.

Although the history of the Indian sub-continent, incorporating the modern nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma and Afghanistan, is more unwieldy than any other, we will find that this one too yields to the ordering of the law of social cycle. Of the Indus society we know hardly enough to test Sarkar's hypothesis. But on the subsequent Indian polity, on its Vedic and post-Vedic age, the ancient scriptures – some of which are mixed with legends and mythology – throw enough light for us to commence our historical journey from relatively late, but still ancient, times, going as far back as 1500 B.C. With any ancient society, the historian of necessity has to rely on archaeological, scriptural, and numismatic evidence, but with Hindu civilisation this necessity has gone a bit too far. For the historical record of India, that is, the literature dealing purely with history is missing until as late as the thirteenth century A.D. Not that there is a dearth of written material, only that much of it is ahistorical and tinged with the bias of those who chose to jot down the exploits of their kings and other notables.

THE VEDIC AGE AND THE KHATRIAN ERA

The bane of every historian of the sub-continent is the complete lack of chronology for ancient times. However, on the basis of certain reliable criteria such as the evolution of language and literature, the Aryan scriptures, which refer to the times ranging from 1500 to about 600 B.C., have been broadly divided into two categories. The earliest literary works of the Indo-Aryans are collectively known as the Vedas, of which there are four, and of which Rig-Veda is the oldest. The Vedas essentially consist of a *samhita*, or a collection of hymns, prayers and spells; but certain supplementary literature, embodying the prose Brahmanas and Upanishads, is also regarded by many as parts of the Vedas. There is a perceptible change in the tone, diction and contents of the Brahmanas which, though still ancient, belong to the post-Vedic days. On linguistic evidence, Rig-Veda seems to have been composed somewhere between 1500 and 1200 B.C., the later Vedas by 800 B.C., and the Brahmanas and the Upanishads by 600 B.C. The social setting of the first Veda differs significantly from that of later Vedas and Brahmanas, and it is with the Rig-Vedic period that we usually associate the Vedic age.

And what do we find in the Rig-Veda? – none other than the familiar features of an early Khatrian society; a society of clans, each organised under the leadership of a warlike Khatrian male or a group of males. The Rig-Veda gives us a glimpse of how the Aryans destroyed the Indus valley inhabitants, variously described as Dasas and Dasyus, how warfare was then frequent among Aryan tribes themselves, and how all this led to the exalted position of tribal chieftains whose principal duty was to defend their citizens. Some of the chieftains were selected while others were elected, but they all had to be men of physical strength and valour – the two assets indispensable for security and defence.

The Aryans worshipped various gods, of whom some were images of a mighty Khatri. Their principal god Indra, for example, reminds one of a war hero slaying his enemies. In fact, so deadly and barbaric are some of his deeds that to this day it remains an open question whether Indra was a nature-god or simply a military commander who led the Aryans to sweeping success in battles with the Indus valley people. Besides Indra's battles, frequent mention in the Rig-Veda is made of intra-Aryan wars, such as those pitting King Sudas against a confederacy of ten kings. Matters concerning the kingship and political organisation of early Aryans are summarised in these words of R. C. Majumdar, an eminent authority on the history of India:

> The organization of the tribal State was varied in character. Hereditary monarchy was the normal form of government, but sometimes we hear of election of king. In some States there was a sort of oligarchy, several members of the royal family exercising the power in common. . . .
>
> The kingdom was, generally speaking, small in extent. But various passages in the Rigveda indicate a king's supremacy over other kings and his great wealth. . . . The word *samrāt*, which in later days meant an emperor, as well as an expression meaning the ruler of the whole world . . . occur in the Rigveda. In any case, the king was not always a petty tribal chief. Sometimes he occupied a position of great dignity, markedly distinguished from that of the people. . . .
>
> He led the tribe in war and considered the protection of life and property of his subjects as his most sacred duty. [11, p. 45]

The question now arises: did the king and Khatrian warriors enjoy supreme status in the early Aryan society? The answer is by no means obvious, because the well-known Indian caste system wherein the brahman or priest is accorded the highest social status is itself quite ancient. According to some, it is as old as the Rig-Veda itself. If this were true, then the Vedic times cannot unequivocally be called the Khatrian era of Hindu civilisation. However, most authorities now believe that the caste system generally developed in the age of the Brahmanas, which came to surface many centuries later. In the Hindu caste system, which

is, not surprisingly, a wily concoction of the priestly class, the brahman is placed at the top of the social pyramid, followed by the warrior class, then by the class of artisans and money-lenders, and finally by the class of physical labourers. Over the aeons, these classes have become hereditary, although in the beginning they were based purely on merit and profession. Thus, any person of knowledge and wisdom could join the brahman caste, and a person with brahman parentage could move a step or two down along the social ladder if he so deserved.

This is perhaps the most opportune time to draw a line of distinction between Sarkar's conception of the four types of human mind and the four-pronged Hindu caste system. It is of particular relevance here, because it is easy to mistake Sarkar's concepts for the caste designations. In order to avoid confusion, the differences between the two ought to be clearly stated. Fortunately, in cases where the confusion is most likely to occur, my way of spelling Sarkar's concepts distinguishes them from their counterparts.

The difference between a Vipra and a brahman is crystal clear, for a brahman is a Hindu priest, whereas a Vipra may be a priest or any person relying on intellect to further his or her interests. The warrior in India has long been called a *kshatriya*, who must be distinguished from Sarkar's Khatri, as the latter may be a warrior or any person of high-spiritedness, ready to face problems in a direct fight rather than depend on others. Similarly the artisans and money-lenders in the caste system are called *vaishyas* who must be distinguished from Sarkar's Vashyas – those reflecting a mentality bent on excessive acquisition of wealth. An artisan, or any skilled worker, in Sarkar's nomenclature is a Khatri, whereas in the caste system he is a *vaishya*. On the definition of a Shudra, Sarkar and the caste designation both agree, for to them both a Shudra is an unskilled worker. But while the caste system has despised the Shudra, made his torment hereditary, conspired to perpetrate all kinds of atrocities on him, Sarkar cries out against this age-old repression which occurred, and is still occurring, not just in India but in all civilisations. In his view, Shudras are the backbone of any economic system, of any social order, yet they are the ones whom other classes have shamelessly exploited all over the world ever since the genesis of Civilisation. In any case, Sarkar's classification permits changes in mentality whereby a Shudra can turn into a Khatri or a Vipra, and others can turn into Shudras, depending on their actions; but the caste system is inflexible, although it is now slowly easing its grip on Hindu society.

Reverting to our question as to who dominated the early Aryan society, we see that in the Rig-Veda there is seldom any mention of a *kshatriya*. Even brahman does not appear too often. There is only one hymn, out of 1017, that refers collectively to the brahman, *rajanya* (later *kshatriya*), *vaishya* and Shudra. From this kind of evidence, Majumdar, among many others concludes that

it would thus appear that towards the very end of the Rigvedic period the distinction between the four classes had just begun to take shape, foreshadowing the development of the caste system in future. [11, p. 48]

Therefore during the early Vedic times, what we observe are class and not caste distinctions, distinctions which were also common among the early Persians and other contemporary peoples. Since the caste system was as yet undeveloped, there can be no question of the priestly hegemony over the Khatrian king. It is not that there were no priests, only that they were subordinate to the king. In his interpretation of the early Vedic literature, Charles Drekmeier observes:

> One of the coronation sacrifices (*vājapeya*) included a chariot race in which the king was the victor. This may be a reference to the time when military superiority, as tested in the charior race, was the basis of kingship. . . .
>
> The position of the king was strengthened by the warfare of the Vedic period. As the military organisation, the nucleus of government, grew in influence and defined its sphere of action more broadly, the associations representing the different interests and functions of the community were more closely integrated with the 'state' and deprived of the autonomy they had once possessed. [3, p. 21]

Not only was the king superior to his priestly ministers and advisers, the warrior class as a whole stood a notch above the class of priests. The Rig-Veda, a priestly composition, regularly conveys this impression. 'In the Rigveda', asserts Drekmeier, 'the brahman frequently appears to be of less importance than the rajanya (kshatriya).' [3, p. 21] In other words, the Rig-Vedic period of the Hindu civilisation belongs clearly to the Khatrian age. How long this period was is anybody's guess. It could have lasted from 1500 to 1200 B.C. or to as late as 1000 B.C.

Whether vast empires or great kingdoms were formed during these times cannot be readily determined. The mention in the Rig-Veda of *samrat* or *maharaja* (great ruler) as well as of the horse sacrifice (*ashvamedha*), reflecting the king's sway over vast domains, indeed point to large empires. However, each epoch must be judged from its own standards, and the impressive titles of samrat, etc., may very well reflect the absorption of smallish tribes by large tribes; the resulting kingdoms would be vast by the standards of those times but not of ours. In any case, even the Rig-Veda is not so assuring in this regard. Thus my argument that the Rig-Vedic period is reminiscent of the Khatrian era derives principally from the mentality of the ruling warrior class and not from the fact that, as with Egypt of the Old Kingdom and the West of the Principate, India was then knit in the fabric of a vast empire ruled

centrally by one, or even two or three, monarchs. In terms of political organisation and the traits of the rulers, India of those days points to the Egyptian kingdoms of the pre-dynastic times. This was an early Khatrian era and the sway of *dharma* or the moral law was the general rule. True, the king was way above the common people, above the priests, above every other institution, yet he was supposed to govern not only in the interest of security but also of common prosperity and welfare. Such in any case were the political ideas or ideals of the times.

Since early Aryan society was a Khatrian society, women could not but enjoy a high social stature. Even though the family was based on strict patriarchic principles, in which the father exercised absolute authority over his children, the wife enjoyed a high position. None of the latter-day taboos constrained women at those times. Child-marriage was forbidden; sati, a practice forcing the widow to immolate herself at her husband's cremation, was non-existent; inter-class marriage was common. Early Aryan society was a kind of uninhibited society where women were freely allowed to mix with men: they did not have to cover their faces with veils. The wife could freely participate in the family rites and other religious ceremonies. Even polygamy, which has been the scourge of all medieval societies, was practically absent in the then India. In the words of H. G. Rawlinson:

> Women held a high place in society; the wife was mistress of the house, shared in the sacrifices, and ruled over the slaves and female members of the family. . . .
>
> The bride was adult, and child marriage was not practised. Polygamy seems to have been unknown, and marriage was regarded as a sacrament. The bridegroom, taking the bride's hand, repeated the verse (R.V. x. 85), 'I clasp thy hand for happiness, that thou mayest reach old age with me thy husband.' [18, p. 22]

THE BRAHMANIC AGE AND THE VIPRAN ERA

There is a visible difference between the picture of society painted by the Rig-Veda and that painted by later Vedas as well as Brahmanas. For this reason, the study of the Aryan culture is conveniently divided into the Rig-Vedic period and the subsequent Brahmanic age, which is so called because this caption, better than any other, reflects the social character of the post-Rig-Vedic times. It is an age where the priest or the brahman comes to the forefront in society; where the kshatriyas, not to speak of other classes, come out as inferior to the brahmans; where women begin to feel the onus of priestly injunctions; where the caste system begins to take concrete shape. And all this fits only too well with Sarkar's description of the Vipran age.

Historians are often at a loss to explain why in a country like India, where religion has permeated the social consciousness for ages, no ecclesiastical organisation of the type of the Egyptian or the Roman Catholic Church ever came into being. The point is that it did not have to, because its place was taken by the inexorable caste system which failed to make a dent in other civilisations. The caste system has done in India what ecclesiasticism did in other societies, namely, it preached, and at times managed to ensure, the supremacy of the priestly class over other classes. And in his self-interest, the brahman marshalled all his wit just as his peers did in Egypt as well as in Europe.

During the post-Rig-Vedic period, lasting roughly from 1000 to 600 B.C., the Aryans gradually migrated from their north-western sanctuary in the Punjab towards the East and South until they spread over the whole of northern India, from the foothills of the Himalayas to those of the Vindhyas. Their expansion stemmed mainly from their missionary zeal and from their conquests over the native peoples. For a long time the Vindhya hills provided a line of demarcation between northern, Aryan India and the South inhabited by the Dravidians. But it appears that around 1000 B.C. the Aryans, and their culture, had begun to filter into southern regions as well, and by 400 B.C. they had penetrated the southernmost province of Kerala, with the Indian Ocean kissing its beaches and shores. However, the ancient history of India, until as late as the illustrious king Ashoka of the third century B.C., is a narrative of its northern wing, as so little is known about the ancient South, where the Aryan colonisation was far less sweeping and complete. This does not mean that the Dravidian lands lagged behind while the Aryans in the North basked in splendour, only that ancient southern history remains obscure to this day.

The Aryan progress in the North eventually resulted in large kingdoms, with the older tribes merging into new territorial states. As a result, battles were now fought for bigger stakes, and victory appeared to depend not only on heroism and fortitude but also on the intercession of gods. The priests, and their talent for performing sacrificial rites, were therefore in demand more than ever before. Thus with the rise of kingdoms came the rise of brahmans, who managed to trap the entire society in a web of rituals and dogmas explaining the origin of kingship and of other professions. The process by which all this emerged is succinctly described by R. S. Sharma in these words:

> In the later Vedic period smaller communities coalesced into larger units. . . . The rulers no longer depended on uncertain tributes, but probably claimed a portion of agricultural produce. Secure in their regular income they could support a large number of priests, who composed rituals that constitute our only important source for the portrait of later Vedic polity.

> Settled life led to the division of the Vedic people into four varnas [castes]. Brāhmans who originally formed one of the 16 classes of priests came at the top, and, in the Vedic ritual tests they composed, claimed both social and political privileges. [22, p. 272]

In some Brāhmanas, the brahman is slighted when compared with a kshatriya, although it occurs very rarely. This may explain the fact that the caste system had not yet become totally hereditary, and that some kings, apparently belonging to the kshatriyan class, were qualified to compose hymns and perform sacrifices. However, the general tone of the Brahmanas is that the priest is the crest of society; that he is the very nucleus of the kshatriyan power, and so while a kshatriya cannot prosper without a brahman, a brahman can. This view at once brings to mind what the Roman Catholic Church later thought of its status in society, and is eloquently expounded by Drekmeier:

> The differentiation of Brahma and Kshatra and the question of which constituted the higher authority does, however, have a parallel in European history – the Gelasian theory of the 'two swords,' first stated in the fifth century. The dispute implicit in the Gelasian doctrine came to a head when, in the eleventh century, the Church claimed exemptions from the controls of the secular power. . . . The brahmans formed no corporate body as such and thus lacked the strength of the hierarchically organized medieval Church; but through the *purohita* (the royal chaplain) the spiritual authority was able to exercise considerable political influence. . . . The *purohita* shared the governing function with the king. According to the *Aitareya Brahmana* the purohita is 'half the self' of the king. The sacrifice of the king is not accepted by the gods if the king has no *purohita*. [3, pp. 32–3]

In later Brāhmanas, the kingship was exalted as a divine creation. A hymn in *Shatapatha Brahmana* hailed the kshatriya to be an expression of Prajapati or God. [See Apte 1, p. 430.] But the rank of Prajapati (or Brahma) himself was reserved for the brahman. Above all, while the brahman by birth had a divine status, the king could secure his quasi-divine status only after performing the *Rajasuya* sacrifice in which the priestly role was indispensable. The end result was that the royal power, while bowing to the priesthood, grew at the expense of commoners.

While the kshatriyas were resigned to remain in the shade of brahmans, it is the other two groups that had to bear the brunt of the caste system. However, it appears that the kshatriyas had not handed the supreme status to brahmans on a silver platter. There seemed to have been a long tussle for supremacy between the two upper classes. But the poor vaishyas and Shudras, the artisans, craftsmen and farmers, who all

toiled for the rest of society, were no match for the crafty brahman, and they had to yield even before the battle began. For the shrewd priest had already won over the kings by granting them a semi-divine authority and position.

In order to perpetuate their rule and to preclude revolts of the lower classes, the brahmans abused the supremely logical theory of karma and the transmigration of soul. Now the theory of karma, first discernible in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, says that each and every action begets its own fruit, its own reaction; so our present circumstances are dictated by our past actions, and our future by the present actions. If one believes in transmigration, then this theory suggests that the soul passes from one birth to the other until it has enjoyed or, so to say, exhausted, the fruit of all its actions; that is when it attains emancipation and reverts to its pristine state of eternal beatitude.

Whether or not one believes in it, the doctrine of karma cannot be disputed on purely logical grounds. Now what the brahman chose to emphasise was the part which attributes one's birth in a lower caste to one's misdeeds in the past life, while ignoring altogether the fact that the future – and the near future, not just the next life – could be bettered through present actions. The whole set-up thus tended to discourage social reforms, for they were equated to subversion of the established, sacred order which God had ordained for the good of everyone in society. Thus, the brahman on the one hand viciously exploited the lower castes, preyed on them with his silver-tongued blows, yet on the other admonished them not to cry, not to protest, admonished them to be content with servility, for which they were taught to blame none else but they themselves. While ensuring his own luxury and comfort in the present life, the priest advised everyone else to look forward to the next birth or the life beyond. And was there any way to an exultant after-life other than serving the brahman? 'No', said the brahman!

Thus brahmans did what priesthood has done in all civilisations, and in their objectives the caste system was a handy tool, a perfect substitute for ecclesiasticism. In M. W. Pinkham's words:

> The Brāhmanas represent the ideology of a sacerdotal caste which played upon the natural religious instincts of the Hindus. The priests succeeded in changing the early Nature-Worship of the Hindus into a code of intricate artificial ceremonies of sacrifice. . . . These religious leaders unceasingly strove to gain control over the minds of the people. They encouraged a divine halo to be placed upon the priesthood. [16, p. 50]

On the next page, Pinkham continues in the same vein:

> There is a decided difference in the primitive worship of the Rig-Veda and the highly complicated ceremonial of the Brāhmanas. In many instances the Brāhmanas resorted to a fantastic interpretation of the early Vedas in order to make them justify ceremonies in which priests of various classes could officiate. [16, p. 51]

Do these words have a familiar ring from the early Vipran eras of civilisations explored in preceding chapters? They do, and no one can deny that. Did the Vipran priest behave everywhere alike? They did, and none can dispute that. Yet most historians today question the underlying unity of civilisations and harp on their superficial diversities.

In the Vipran era, the status of women, of course, could not but decline. The wife in the Rig-Vedic age was free to participate in family rites; but these the priesthood considered its sole prerogative and would not share with anyone else. Women were lumped by the priests in a separate class, different from the male group, yet responsible for certain essential functions of servile nature. Just as it was found necessary to bind the male non-brahman in doctrinal shackles, the same way woman had to be bound, except that for her the shackles had to be of a different metal. Aware of certain physical and psychological differences between men and women, the brahman proceeded to subjugate women on a different, and meaner, plane. While non-brahman males were taught of their inferiority to the brahman owing to their professions, women were taught of their inferiority just because they were women. In Pinkham's explicit words:

> Primarily the priests realized they must control women. In this respect they had much to overcome. There was the early worship of goddesses with which to reckon. Likewise woman's sex nature, giving her the power of motherhood, had to be reckoned with. Her freedom was a hindrance to the power and domination of the priests. The Brahmans felt that this must be conquered; so with verbal agitation they succeeded in lowering the position of woman. She must be considered an inferior creature without a mind. With heartless cruelty they decided that gradually even religious rights must be taken away from woman.
>
> The priests saw to it that their directions for worship contained a tremendous overemphasis on the physical aspect of womanhood. . . . Also the necessity of male offspring for salvation was stressed emphatically. . . . A son begotten became involved in the idea of salvation. Such desire was one factor which increasingly helped to bring about unfortunate child-marriages, with all the accompanying misery. [16, p. 54]

To be sure there are a few passages in the Brahmanas where the wife is looked upon with great respect. In the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, she is exalted as a 'better half' complementing her husband. But this is typical

of the deception in which the priesthood in the past tried to soothe its victims in all civilisations: its trick was to puff them up with flattery, but cheat them of their self-identity, as well as wealth, for the sake, of course, of their own good and welfare. Majumdar makes it crystal-clear in his remarks about the position of women in the Brahmanic age:

> Theoretically the wife was still accorded a very high position.... But there are unerring signs that her status and dignity were lowered a great deal during this period. Thus many of the religious ceremonies, formerly left to the wife, were now performed by priests. She was not allowed to attend the political assemblies. A *submissive wife* who would keep her mouth shut and dine after her husband is now held up as the ideal. [11, pp. 89–90 (italics mine)]

But when it came to sexual indulgence, the brahman took the lead. No man's wife, not to speak of his daughter, was safe from priestly excesses once the priest came to ravish her. A hymn in the Atharva-Veda reserves the right of the brahman to marry any woman even if previously she has had ten non-brahman husbands [11, p. 89]. Thus polygamy, and priestly debauchery, were common in the brahmanic period. What it all did to womanhood is not hard to envisage.

Until now my account of the brahmanic period has painted a sorry picture of priestly treachery and oppression. But no age is without its bright moments, and in this case they shine through the Upanishads, which rank with the most cosmopolitan works ever composed. This perhaps illustrates one of those paradoxes to the Western observer of India where for ages class prejudice has cohabited with catholicity, heinous customs like child-marriage and widow-burning with unequalled patience, self-conceit with self-denial. The Upanishads are also called Vedanta (the end of the Veda), signifying that they came at the end of the Vedic period.

All those tricks by which the brahmans secured their dominion ultimately gave rise to social resentment. Unable to dislodge the crafty priesthood, many took refuge in asceticism and a life-style of complete renunciation. The end-products of their vigorous efforts, of their beatific experiences are the Upanishads in which has been stored for centuries the sublime knowledge that leads one to perfect harmony with oneself, to the ultimate goal of all – unbroken tranquillity of mind. A. L. Basham has captured the kernel of the Upanishads as well as the cosmic experience of an ascetic with an understanding that is hard to match:

> Gradually plumbing the cosmic mystery, his [the ascetic's] soul entered realms far beyond the comparatively tawdry heavens where the great gods dwelt in light and splendour. Going 'from darkness to darkness deeper yet' he solved the mystery beyond all mysteries; he

> understood, fully and finally, the nature of the universe and of himself, and he reached a realm of truth and bliss, beyond birth and death, joy and sorrow, good and evil. And with this transcendent knowledge came another realization – he was completely, utterly, free. He had found ultimate salvation, the final triumph of the soul. The ascetic who reached the goal of his quest was a conqueror above all conquerors. There was none greater than he in the whole universe. [2, p. 245]

This is the ultimate in spiritual experience, where only ONE remains, either 'I', or 'Thou', or God or the 'Son of God'. There is no duality, no thought in that super-conscious state, only the human, conscious being, who, prior to this beatitude, was the witness of all those thoughts saying 'he or she was a John or a Joan or anyone else.' Since no thought then remains to tell the person the existence, or non-existence, of the universe, there is Oneness, with the human being merged into cosmic consciousness, the microcosm into the macrocosm. Transcendental indeed is the sublime message of the Upanishads, and one wonders how they could have been composed in an earthly environment of the brahmanic age.

BUDDHIST PERIOD AND THE VASHYAN ERA

The Vipran era lasted as long as brahmanism remained unchallenged in society, and since the warrior class would not confront the priest, the priestly wave was eventually swept aside by a tide that ironically had been denigrated in the Vedas for a long time. The Aryan economy of the Rig-Vedic and the brahmanic period had been predominantly an agricultural or a pastoral economy. Money had not yet been invented, and so money-lending as a profession was not widespread, at least in Rig-Vedic times; barter was the general rule, and we catch a glimpse of the cow serving as a medium of exchange. There was some amount of trade, and we find that a merchant appears in the Vedas as a *pani*, as a vaishya, and is spoken of in a derogatory way. As Max Webber observes:

> In the Vedas the merchant (*pani*) appears only as a wanderer, as a rule from strange tribes, haggling by day, stealing by night, collecting his riches in secret hoards, hated by God because he acts the miser against gods (in sacrifice) and men, especially holy singers and priests.... He should give, and give again; when he does, he is 'the darling of gods' and men. But the merchant simply does not do this. [25, p. 85]

Thus the merchant in the brahmanic days was ranked below brahmans and kshatriyas, and although theoretically his status has ever since been

third-rate, there have been times when he was a respected member of society, eclipsing every other class. One of these times in Indian annals was the Buddhist period – stretching roughly from the seventh century to the fourth century B.C. – which is so called because at the beginning of this period the prophet Buddha was born. At the time of his birth, brahmanism permeated Aryan society to the core, but the reason why it had spread in every corner of north India was not just the royal patronage, but also the brahman's eagerness to perform sacrificial rites for rich households and merchants. Materially the economy had been making strides ever since the Aryan tribes had settled down in the Rig-Vedic times. The forces of wealth had thus been gaining ground long before the seventh century B.C., but it was not until then that they became powerful enough to hold the people in their sway. In the seventh century B.C., the Indian economy, as well as society, crossed an important milestone in that money came in vogue perhaps through contacts with the neighbouring Persians. From the coins that have been found, it appears that originally the merchants issued them as silver blanks, with some tiny coded marks punched on one side to guarantee purity and a proper weight. The stimulus that the discovery of coined money gave to the hitherto barter economy is not hard to imagine. It facilitated trade, the growth of industries, money-lending, even instruments of credit, new urban centres and a whole array of new products that could now be bought and sold in the market.

With the advance in trade and industry arose men of considerable means, of fabulous wealth, especially when, as the narrative of Buddhist times suggests, there was not a speck of state intervention in the free play of the market forces. Some sort of capitalism then prevailed, and it could not but spawn millionaires. I will shortly provide evidence for all this from celebrated authorities. But for now, I venture to say that at the time of Buddha's birth around the seventh or sixth century B.C., Aryan society was well into the Vashyan age.[1]

The historian's main source of information concerning social, economic and political conditions in the post-brahmanic age is the prodigious Buddhist literature, principally the Jataka, as well as the contemporary brahmanic works of Sutras, especially Grihya and Dharma Sutras. Generally, Sutras are assigned to a period ranging from the seventh century to the second century B.C. In both the Buddhist and the brahmanic literature, one finds that the Vedic-age odium of being a merchant or a money-lender, by the sixth century B.C., had disappeared. In the Buddhist tradition, the brahman is portrayed as inferior to the affluent merchant. This is confirmed by E. W. Hopkins who, commenting on these times, observes that then 'the world of India was one in which the ancient priestly caste had lost its authority; that nobles and wealthy merchants were more regarded than Brāhmans.' [8, p. 221] This was particularly true in the eastern part of northern India, but even in the western part, that old citadel of brahmanism, it appears that brahmans had lost their pre-eminent position to men of affluence. The rich trader, or money-lender, who had been spoken of so contemptuously in the Rig-Vedic times, was now called by brahmans a *shreshthi*, meaning superior or prominent. And allusion to this word occurs as early as the brahmanic period. Describing the economic conditions in the Vipran era, V. M. Apte observes that 'rich Vaiśhyas (*Śreshthins*), who had acquired wealth in trade or agriculture, and who were probably the headmen of guilds, are often referred to. That money-lending was a flourishing business is indicated in various ways. *Kusidin* is a designation of the usurer in Śatapatha Br.' [1, pp. 464–5]

What this quote suggests is that the advent of the Vashyan era had not been so abrupt; rather the Vipran era of priestly influence had steadily evolved into the Vashyan epoch in which wealth rules the roost. As Webber observes, 'even the Atharvaveda contains a prayer for the increase of the money which the merchant takes to market in order to make more money. . . . Indeed, Indra is considered the god of the merchants and the Rigveda permits wealth to gain heaven. Wealth gives even the Shudra influence, for the priest accepts their money.' [25, p. 85] Thus, at least in one respect, the priesthood all over the world has been above discrimination: whatever its professed reservations, it has quietly accepted money from all classes. Drekmeier explains how and why the Vashyan era came into being:

> With the development of a money economy in the sixth and fifth centuries (and the resultant phenomena of debt and mortgage foreclosure) and with the expansion of commerce . . . a new distribution of wealth and power took place in India. These changes affected the position of the privileged orders of Aryan society adversely; . . . The priests, whose status was challenged . . . sought to reinforce religious distinctions. . . . The sutra literature undoubtedly represents one attempt of Brahmanism to meet the challenge of new values and beliefs. [3, p. 35]

It is therefore not surprising that in the Sutras brahmans are still assigned the pivotal position in society; they still rank above every other class, even above the king, but, curiously enough, they are not forbidden from professions of the lower castes. No longer is it necessary for them to be confined to the priestly activities; trade and agriculture are open to them as never before. From this Hopkins concludes that 'at the time of Sutras there were many nominal members of the priestly and royal orders who lived as farmers and traders, perhaps even as usurers.' [9, p. 248] Here then is yet another confirmation for Sarkar's claim that in the Vashyan era many Vipras get infected by the acquisitive mentality.

Actually the fact that brahmanism was still alive fits well with Sarkar's depiction of the Vashyan age, for Vashyas rely on the Vipran intellect to advance their interests. The influence of wealth in the Aryan society of the time has been forcefully documented by Kosambi:

> The existence of new classes in the Gangetic basin of the sixth century [B.C.] is undeniable. . . . Traders had become so wealthy that the most important person in an eastern town was generally the *śreshthi*. . . . The *śreshthi* was actually a financier or banker, sometimes the head of a trade guild. Even absolute, despotic kings treated these śreshthis with respect. . . . However, the prime indicator for the new class is the changed significance of the word *gahapati* (Sanskrit, *grihpati*); literally 'lord of the house.'. . . It had meant the host and principal sacrificer at any considerable but not royal sacrifice in Vedic and Brahmana literature. Now, for the first time, it came to mean the head of a large patriarchal household of any caste who commanded respect primarily because of his wealth. . . . The *gahapati* . . . could do what he liked with the riches at his disposal. [10, pp. 100–1]

As stated earlier, the economy of the Vedic times was primarily agricultural, although during the brahmanic epoch a number of arts, handicrafts and industries involving the use of copper and other metals were beginning to flourish. In the Buddhist period, however, industry and trade played a role more important than ever before, although the village economy was still based primarily on farming. Many large cities had by now emerged and they were centres of multifarious crafts and industries, most of which were organised in the form of guilds. We come across organisations as well as whole villages of weavers, jewellers, potters, basket-makers and the like. According to the Jataka, there were eighteen such guilds, each headed by a president or alderman (*jethaka* in Jataka or *jyeshtha* in Sutras), and some of these chiefs wielded considerable influence with princes and the king. The head of all these guilds had his office in the city of Beneras. In this connection Mrs Rhys-Davids notes with interest that the office of this supreme head was established at a time when the kingship was elective and the king happened to be the son of a merchant. [19, p. 206] In other words, money had begun to talk in the political sphere as well. And in a Vashyan era, this is not surprising.

Besides *jethaka*, the Jatakas frequently speak of the title of *sethi* (Sanskrit, *shreshthi*), and of the famous *sethi*, Anathapindika, the millionaire follower of the Buddha. *Sethis* were usually men of considerable fortune, and even among them there were gradations – *anusethi* (an executive officer), *maha sethi* (meaning the chief among millionaires).

Aside from various crafts and industries, trade, both regional and international, played a great role in the Indian economy at that time. Anathapindika himself was a great travelling merchant who would organise huge caravans to move goods into different parts of India. Such caravans were not uncommon, and were organised for both inland and oceanic trade.

The picture of the economic system painted just above is somewhat reminiscent of the modern-day Western capitalism, where a free market economy coexists with industrial monopolies and administered prices. The principle of private property was respected in the Buddhist period, and no stigma attached to earning profits from industrial and commercial activities. There was hardly any state intervention in the free operation of demand and supply, the twins that determine the price in a free-market economy. According to Mr T. W. Rhys-Davids:

> It is only in later times that we hear . . . of any market price being fixed by government regulation. In the sixth century B.C. there is only an official called the Valuer, whose duty it was to settle the prices of goods ordered for the palace – which is a very different thing. And there are many instances . . . of the prices of commodities fixed, at different times and places, by the haggling of the market. [20, pp. 100–1]

Mrs Rhys-Davids also affirms this working of a market economy, unencumbered by state regulation, by observing that 'the act of exchange between producer and consumer, or between either and a middleman, was both before and during the age when the Jātaka-book was compiled, a "free" bargain, a transaction unregulated, with one notable exception, by any system of statute-fixed prices.' [19, p. 216] The 'notable exception', of course, was one where prices were fixed for goods purchased by the royalty. In addition to the market for commodities, there existed a capital market which dealt with loan-transactions as well as credit instruments, although there were few banking facilities. There is frequent reference to promissory notes through which the merchants would extend credit to each other at rates of interest that are unfortunately not specified, although the Dharma Sutras furnish, for somewhat later days, an interest rate of eighteen per cent on loans secured by personal mortgage. In the Jataka, one also catches glimpses of a rudimentary market for futures-contracts or for some kind of speculative activity. How else can one explain the rare mention of a profit rate of 20,000 per cent, and the none-too-rare mention of 400 and 200 per cent? It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that the distribution of income was extremely inquitable at those times. To be sure, no one then starved, and in general the common people enjoyed a comfortable living standard; but the number of fabulously rich persons, of millionaires, was extremely limited. There were some wealthy kings,

but that in monarchical states does not count. In the words of Mr Rhys-Davids:

> We hear of about a score of monarchs . . ., of a considerable number of wealthy nobles, and some priests, to whom grants had been made of the tithe arising out of certain parishes or counties or who had inherited similar grants from their forefathers; of about a dozen millionaire merchants . . . and of a considerable number of lesser merchants and middlemen, all in the few towns. [20, p. 102]

Thus there were only a dozen traders who were millionaires, and if we compare the exorbitant price levels of today with the generally low prices of Buddhist times, these millionaires were no less affluent than the modern-day Sheikhs as well as the multimillionaires in the United States and other Western nations. And since we are all aware of the tremendous social, political and economic clout that men of affluence exercise in the world today, it is not hard to envisage the kind of influence that the millionaire merchants must have had in Buddhist times. In this regard, Webber's words speak for themselves:

> Caravan trade was typically organized by caravan leaders and the guilds . . . rivaled the knighthood and priesthood in power. The king became financially dependent on the guilds with no means of controlling them other than playing them off against one another or bribery. Even in the epics the king, after a defeat, expresses his concern about them (excepting his relatives and the priests). . . . Now the three genteel estates were those of the secular and priestly noble and the trader. They were often considered peers, they often intermarried, they had concourse with princes on equal footing.
>
> The merchants financed the wars of the princes and had them mortgage or lease-prerogatives to them as individuals or to their guild. . . . Even rich artisans, i.e. those who participated in trade, trafficked with the prince. . . . It was a time in which people of all classes, even the Shudra, were able to obtain political power.
>
> The rising patrimonial prince with his disciplined army and officialdom was increasingly embarrassed by the power of the guilds and his financial dependence on them. We learn that a *vanik* (trader) denied a war loan to a king with the comment that the *dharma* of princes was not to conduct war, but to protect peace and peaceful prosperity of the citizens. [25, pp. 87–88]

From all these accounts, it is clear that the forces of money then held the reins. Vashyas had the edge not just in social and economic affairs but also in the realm of politics and administration. Some of the guilds and caravans had their own armies, which came to the rescue of many a king hard-pressed at times of war. Thus the Buddhist period, stretching roughly from the seventh to the fourth century B.C., belongs to the Vashyan era of Hindu civilisation. If Sarkar's theory holds water, it is now the turn of a revolution to occur, a revolution that must precede the onset of another Khatrian age.

Before proceeding to examine the storms that blew the Vashyan era aside, let us see how women fared in the new social order. Did they gain or lose in terms of social respect for their rights? There is little evidence available one way or the other. All one can say is that womanhood certainly did not benefit from the new arrangement of power. The Sutra literature continues to exclude women from many religious and social functions. In one respect, at least, their position had changed for the worse. They were now increasingly looked upon as property, to be enjoyed either by the owner or by others [9, p. 247]: no longer did the brahman have a monopoly over debauchery.

CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA AND THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

The political map of India during the Buddhist period reflects a situation of decentralisation along with certain developments that foreshadow subsequent centralisation. In the seventh century B.C., a number of monarchical states are known to have existed by the side of a few republics or oligarchies; the number of important states is put at sixteen, but most likely there were many more. Some scholars argue that republics in India existed as early as Vedic times, but the evidence on this is far less than conclusive. The Buddhist period, however, suggests that monarchy was not the only form of government, either in the North or in the South. Indeed, at the time of Buddha's birth it was not even the dominant form of government. Buddhist literature mentions eight oligarchies, and the remaining eight were perhaps ruled by kings. These republican governments functioned something like the present-day democratic systems: Not surprisingly, their strings were pulled by the magic spell of money. Hopkins [7], for instance, notes that among the thirty-six members of a republic's legislative council, twenty-one were vaishyas.

Of all the kingdoms, those at Kosala and Magadha seem to have been the most powerful. Some of the kings were related by matrimonial alliances, but that did not preclude sporadic warfare among them. During the early part of the fifth (or sixth) century B.C., the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha were locked in a bitter struggle for supremacy over north India, a struggle that was sanguinary and indecisive for a long time, but in which Ajatashatru, the Magdhan king and a contemporary of Buddha, eventually won out. Thus was paved the way for the sub-

sequent Mauryan empire, with a vastness that in India has never been equalled again.

This was a period of great unrest in the Indian polity. Ajatashatru himself had ascended the throne after murdering his father, and while the former was peacefully succeeded by his son Udayi, Udayi and his descendants of three generations were not so fortunate: each had to pay for the royal privilege in terms of his life. All this, according to the Buddhist tradition, alarmed the people so much that they elected as their king a minister named Shishunaga who thus founded a new dynasty. The fifth (or sixth) century B.C. coins seem to support this view. By then the kings were stamping their own marks on the coins, and some of the Magadhan coins reveal signs of having been hammered several times, suggesting violent dynastic changes, indicating that the new ruler attempted to replace the marks of the deposed king with marks of his own [Kosambi, 10, p. 125]. It is in such heavy weather that Shishunaga had come to power with a promise to restore order and peace. However, the scourge of conspiracies and assassinations eventually caught up even with the new dynasty, because Shishunaga's successor fell victim to another usurper named Mahapadma Nanda, of whom the literature reveals little. The new king, seemingly carrying forward the tradition that Ajatashatru had inaugurated, extended his domains far and wide. The truth of so many episodes of parricide, to which the Buddhist tradition has given prominence, is not possible to ascertain, but what seems fairly certain is that Mahapadma Nanda came to the throne through conspiracy and a palace revolution. At this point all the records seem to contradict each other, and when the curtain lifts again we find an India threatened by Alexander's invasion, which took place in 326 B.C.

Unfortunately for the historian, Alexander stopped at the outskirts of the Magdhan empire, otherwise the Greek accounts might have shed more light on the then Nanda king who is hidden from us by the veil of history. Alexander, having conquered parts of the Punjab, did want to cross swords with the Nanda monarch, but his army, fatigued mentally and physically from years of warring campaigns, refused to advance any further. From those paltry Greek records we learn that the reigning Magadhan king, because of his avarice and wickedness, was extremely unpopular; that he was the son of a barber – allegedly belonging to the lowest caste – who had removed the royal family, and usurped the throne.

This narrative, which accords with the evidence of contemporary brahmanic works called the Purnas, suggests that the Nanda dynasty was of obscure origin, and that it endured for only two generations – Mahapadma Nanda and his son Dhana Nanda, who was evidently contemporary with Alexander. Dhana means riches, so that the last Magadhan king was either very rich or possessed a greedy, Vashyan mentality. Later, the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang also alluded to the Nanda king as a man of fabulous wealth.

Such were the political conditions when Alexander invaded India, a goodly part of which then constituted the Magadhan empire. Still no paramount power then dominated the Indian political scene. In the Punjab and Sind, the two provinces invaded by Alexander, there were several independent kings along with some republics. And such political decentralisation was the general rule. The Greek visitor Megasthenes later wrote that at the time of Alexander's invasion India was divided into 118 distinct nations or tribes. And constant warfare bedevilled them all. Thus India around Alexander's days was plagued by internal dissensions and the oppression of the Nanda king, who like many other rulers of the time, represented the influence of money. These are symptoms of a shudran era of restiveness and anarchy, and the country was ripe for a revolution that would end this state of turmoil.

It turns out that a revolution did occur at this time. It was engineered by a certain Chandragupta Maurya, a warrior of humble origin, and his brahman adviser Chanakya, both of whom seem to have been earlier humiliated by the king Dhana Nanda. The revolution at that time was by no means an easy task. The Punjab and Sind were then occupied by Alexander's governors, whereas the Magadhan king was bolstered by a powerful army. It took the combination of the Khatrian genius of Chandragupta and the Vipran shrewdness of Chanakya to overthrow not only the Nanda monarch but also the Greek governors. What followed this momentous event is a vast empire, along with the demise of many small states and the sway of money. A new Khatrian age was then born, and that is why the rebellion of 324 B.C., master-minded by Chanakya and executed by Chandragupta, qualifies as the Shudran revolution of Hindu civilisation.

THE MAURYAN AGE AND THE NEW KHATRIAN ERA

There is little doubt that, after the overthrow of the Nanda king, the turbulence in which much of India was caught during the last days of the Vashyan era gave way to peace. Within a few years, Chandragupta's military genius unified all of northern India, including the modern nations of Pakistan and Afghanistan, under one centralised rule extending from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. But whether this political and administrative centralisation propelled India immediately into a new Khatrian epoch is open to question. For it is not altogether clear whether the sceptre was then held by Chadragupta or by his influential minister Chanakya (who is also known by the names of Kautilya and Vishnugupta). Was the apparent ruler also the real ruler?

About Chandragupta's innate courage and other Khatrian qualities, there is no dispute. But some scholars contend that he had to live in the shadow of his Machiavellian adviser Chanakya, whereas others argue

that the latter, after removing Dhana Nanda, renounced everything to become an ascetic. A sixth-century A.D. play, *Mudra Rakhasa* (or 'The Minister's Seal'), portrays Chandragupta as Chanakya's tool. [See Mookerji, 13, p. 4.] If this were true, then following the Shudran revolution, the Hindu civilisation really moved into a Vipran age, where persons of intellect reign in the name of the apparent ruler. Even if true, it is not unusual, because in the confusion of the Shudran revolution, society may drift into conditions conflicting with the Khatrian era, but this cannot last for long: After the termination of the Vashyan age, it is the Khatri's turn to become pre-eminent. Indeed, this is what seems to have transpired following the deposition of the Nanda dynasty, because within a few years of Chandragupta's demise (or abdication), which occurred twenty-four years after his coronation, we hear of no personality as strong as Chanakya holding the hands of the Mauryan king. Thus the new Khatrian age of political and administrative centralisation, which, as subsequently argued, lasted about two centuries, followed either immediately upon the dethronement of Dhana Nanda around 321 B.C. or a little later. It is worth stating at this point that Chanakya's role as a king-maker is disputed by the Buddhist literature. It is the brahmanical tradition of the Puranas which assigns pride of place to him, who was a brahman himself. It is also possible that Chanakya remained active as long as conditions were uncertain, but, after the dust settled, he chose to retire from politics and become a hermit during Chandragupta's lifetime.

Chandragupta Maurya must at least be credited with laying the foundation of the new Khatrian age where his successors were the absolute rulers – untrammelled by any backstage authority – of an immense empire. Before I proceed further with my analysis, it may be noted that the Rig-Vedic as well as the Mauryan period are two different species belonging to the same genus. They both belong to the Khatrian era, but, in some respects, are highlighted by far-too-diverse features. True, in both periods, Aryan society was ruled directly by men of Khatrian mentality, by men of fortitude and physical strength, by men of the warrior class. But in Rig-Vedic times, India was politically decentralised, as it was divided into disparate tribes frequently at war with each other. Somewhat similar political, though not social and economic, conditions also prevailed around the pre-Mauran times which, as is now clear, constituted the degenerative phase of the Vashyan age. Is there then a contradiction? Not really, because during the Rig-Vedic days Aryan society was in the embryo of the Khatrian age, one that emerges when a Shudran community first evolves into civilised existence, or when a palaeolothic society first matures into a neolithic organisation marked by tribes and agriculture. In terms of political conditions, the Vashyan era is not far from the rudimentary Khatrian society in that political power in both systems is exercised by local elements.

Obviously, it cannot be expected that at the very first stage of social evolution, through which all ancient societies had to pass, great kingdoms were born, or the entire area, in which a race or community subsisted, was centrally governed by one ruler. But once civilisation had come into being, once vast empires had been established, usually during Khatrian but also during Vipran eras, any subsequent division of that empire into a multitude of distinct units might then be called political decentralisation. Thus the numerous states that dotted the map of India during the Buddhist period or at the time of Alexander's invasion are reminiscent of such decentralisation, and it is on this, together with some other characteristics no less important, that my analysis of the Vashyan era was based.

In any case, the tribal form of the Khatrian society, in which the Rig-Vedic Aryans were organised, was centralised in relation to their early Shudran, palaeolithic subsistence. Exactly when the Aryans surged out of their Shudrahood, out of their palaeolithic phase, has not yet been determined. Nor is this information essential to my analysis, because at the time they left their original home of Central Asia and colonised northwest India, their polity was well into the rudimentary form of the Khatrian age. However, the Rig-Vedic Khatrian era stands out in sharp contrast to the Mauryan Khatrian age, even though in both cases the warrior class had gained the upper hand. For with the latter, in contrast with the former, the government, power structure, and administration were highly centralised. If the Rig-Vedic period was the rudimentary Khatrian era, the Mauryan polity was the full-blooded Khatrian age. All it shows is that in the past twelve hundred years of a steadily expanding Aryan umbrella over the native peoples, India had come a long way. The rise of the Mauryan empire was a logical development in a civilisation that had yet to find its efflorescence, its zenith, its fullest expression. While during the Mauryan days the Hindu civilisation failed to scale the peak, it came very close indeed. The peak was to be reached during the subsequent Gupta period, which too, as I shall argue later, turned out to be another species belonging to the Khatrian genus.

Around 300 B.C., Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Bindusara, known in the Greek tradition as Amitraghata or 'slayer of foes' – a title reflecting his many conquests. He seems to have annexed many parts of the Deccan (southern India) to the already vast domains to which he was heir. Other than this, his reign appears to be lack-lustre, and one reason may be that he has been historically overshadowed by his illustrious father and by his son and successor, the celebrated king Ashoka, who is the cynosure not only of the Mauryan age but also perhaps among kings of all times. When he came to the throne around 273 B.C., Ashoka showed few signs of the brilliance and compassion that subsequently distinguished his administration. In fact, soon after his accession, he made war against the southern kingdom of Kalinga, but the war turned

out to be bloodier than he could stand. After hundreds and thousands of soldiers were killed and mutilated, Ashoka could no longer ignore the horrors and the pangs of conscience. He vowed to shun war for ever, and to work for a social order from which the sentiment of aggression would be exorcised. For all his humanitarian deeds which followed from this, for all the monuments that have survived to reveal his benevolence, Ashoka has been acclaimed by H. G. Wells as the greatest king of them all. In any case, from Ashoka's times, southern India also begins to share the spotlight of history, as his empire extended to all but a smallish southern extremity of the sub-continent.

After the Kalinga war, Ashoka was converted to Buddhism, which during his long reign prospered as never before. And while he was not the one to persecute other religions, they, especially brahmanism, suffered from benign neglect. Therefore the formerly influential brahman class, the Vipras who had ruled society during the brahmanic age and then enjoyed a status second only to Vashyas during the Buddhist period, were now overshadowed. The king was absolute and all-powerful, but to his credit he never misused his power. Rather Ashoka called upon his officers to be as considerate to the general public as he was himself. And he did not just give them lectures, but also set an example to them by leading a virtuous life. Much about Ashoka's reign has come down to us from his inscriptions engraved in the form of Rock Edicts. In the Fourth Pillar Edict, for example, he says, 'Just as one entrusts one's child to an experienced nurse, and is confident that the experienced nurse is able to care for the child satisfactorily, so my *rajukas* [officers] have been appointed for the welfare and happiness of the country people.' [See Thomas, 24, pp. 120–3.] Without doubt, India was then in the benevolent phase of the Khatrian age, and, not surprisingly, in many respects Aryan society surpassed what it had accomplished thus far. New heights were achieved in art, architecture, education, economic prosperity, and the efficiency of justice and administration.

While brahmanism had declined in the Mauryan period, the Vashyas too could not remain unscathed. Economically, the Mauryan age was one of complete antithesis to the spirit of capitalism that had prevailed earlier. In Buddhist India, we hardly hear of any reference to state intervention in the operation either of markets or of the craft and merchant guilds. But now the tables were completely turned. The Mauryan state regulated the economy much as the socialist nations do it today. Merchants and other wealthy persons were heavily taxed, as were people in general. Many industries were nationalised or operated under the state monopoly, and their profits accrued to the royal treasury. Price-fixing by merchants was subject to severe penalties. Thus even though India was then richer than ever before, its economy functioned under the watchful eyes of the state. Gone were the Buddhist days where a market economy coexisted with price-fixing by merchants as well as the guilds. Needless to say, the mercenary armies of the traders were now barred.

While both Vipras and Vashyas gave ground, the Khatris recaptured the pivotal place they had lost owing to their intellectual poverty ever since brahmanic times. The Mauryan kings maintained a huge, well-paid army, which made constant demands on the state treasury: hence the state monopoly of some industries and the multitude of taxes. It was not a force of militia but a standing army of some 600,000 men, ready at the command of their emperor to march for further conquests (as with Chandragupta and Bindusara) or to quell the germs of rebellion. Actually the warrior class had been gaining ground ever since the Nanda dynasty, but until Chandragupta's rise, its supremacy in society was open to question, because in order to finance their wars the kings were pitifully dependent on affluent merchants.

With the decline of brahmanism and the steady rise of Buddhism, the status of woman changed for the better, for while the brahmans had emphasised her innate inferiority and excluded her from religious rites, Buddhism stood for the opposite. The Buddhist order admitted women as nuns and laid stress on their education. There are clear signs that the Mauryan period was adorned by many highly educated women, commanding respect in society and the household. Some were even admitted to military training. Megasthenes tells of the female bodyguards who attended on Chandragupta, especially on his hunting expeditions. They were capable of handling chariots, horses, all kinds of weapons, and even elephants. All in all, the Mauryan period paints a much more luminous picture of womanhood than the preceding Vipran and the Vashyan age.

The new Khatrian era began to decline soon after Ashoka's death around 232 B.C., because his successors lacked his charisma and forceful personality which had managed to knit the disparate polities of India into one fabric, despite his avowed renunciation of force and violence. The empire, somewhat truncated, as well as the Mauryan dynasty, lingered till 185 B.C., when the last of the Mauryan kings was overthrown and slain by his own commander Pushyamitra. The Sunga dynasty, of which Pushyamitra was the founder, then came to power, and although the new monarch was by birth a brahman, he was by temperament a Khatri, a warrior who was able to hold on to the bulk of the Mauryan empire. In any case, brahmanism was back in the saddle, and it was not much later, perhaps soon after Pushyamitra's demise, that another Vipran era came into being.

SUNGAS, KANVAS, ANDHRAS, AND THE NEW VIPRAN ERA

Pushyamitra spent much of his life in warfare, in which he had his ups and downs. While he suffered some reverses at the hands of a King

Kharavela of Kalinga, he successfully defended the bulk of his empire from attacks by a Greek intruder named Menander. The north-western part of India, including the Punjab, had already been lost to the Greeks, and Pushyamitra was unable to make any impression there. Still, his domain was then the largest in India, although he had to beware of powerful neighbouring kingdoms which were on the prowl to grab the remains of the Mauryan empire. During his reign the sacrificial rite of horse sacrifice – through which he proclaimed his supremacy over northern and central India – staged a comeback, indicating the revival of brahmanism and the decline of Buddhism, which does not permit any violence, much less animal sacrifice. Yet there is little evidence that Pushyamitra was just a figurehead and a plaything of the brahmans. Therefore the direct rule of the Khatrian era seemed to have continued until 149 B.C., when he died and was succeeded by his son Agnimitra.

Not much is known about Pushyamitra's successors, some of whom succumbed to the swords of their assassins. It is quite possible, nay very likely, that they were weaklings and mere tools in the hands of their brahman ministers. Because this much we know – that Devabhuti, a debauchee and the last of the Sunga kings, was murdered at the orders of his brahman minister Vasudeva, who then seems to have placed a puppet on the throne. On this matter historians disagree, and the Puranas deserve the blame. On the one hand, the latter record that Vasudeva founded the Kanva dynasty which ruled for forty-five years until 27 B.C., when its last ruler was overthrown by a king of the Andhra or Satavahana dynasty; on the other they suggest that the Andhra king destroyed the Kanvas as well as the remnants of the Sungas. The truth seems to be that the Kanvas were the real rulers but that they ruled in the name of the Sunga kings. E. J. Rapson confirms this view:

> We may conclude, then, that the Çungas [Sungas] were a military power, and that they became puppets in the hands of their Brahman counsellors. [17, p. 522]

It then appears certain that after Pushyamitra's demise around 149 B.C., a new Vipran era came into being, because the Sunga kings, too feeble or licentious to reign themselves, were overshadowed by their brahman ministers. As usual in a Vipran era, there was now some diffusion of governmental authority, because neither politically nor administratively was India now as much centralised as the Mauryan state. As stated earlier, although the Sungas (and Kanvas) held the bulk of the former Mauryan empire, they had to contend with other powerful kingdoms. Consequently, they were more dependent on their officers than the

Mauryan kings. Also brahmanism now flourished as much as it had in the post-Rig-Vedic age, and continued to do so even when the Kanvas were overthrown by the Andhras, because the Andhras too claimed brahmanical parentage. Although this by itself does not prove anything, as Sarkar's definitions of mental attitude are not based on familial descent, it does suggest that brahmans as a class could not but have prospered. As Kosambi observes:

> Official (not monastic) caves at the important Nānaghāt pass ... record full details of the innumerable donations as *yajna* [sacrificial] fees made over to brahmins by the Sātavāhana kings: cattle by the thousand, elephant, chariot, horses, coined money, and so on. [10, p. 184]

The Indian narrative at the dawn of the first century A.D. is highly muddled and not amenable to clear analysis. For, in addition to the confusion caused by the contradictions of the Puranas and by a deficient chronology, the picture is complicated by foreign invaders of diverse origin. Soon after Ashoka's death, the Greeks had captured Kabul and the Punjab but were then stopped there by Pushyamitra. However, around 65 B.C. the Greek sovereigns of the Punjab were overcome by the Sakas, again a tribe alien to India and migrating from central Asia. One Saka tribe, which ruled over extensive domains south-west of the Punjab, was rapidly Indianised, assuming Aryan names as Rudradaman, and came into violent contact, despite matrimonial alliances, with the neighbouring Andhras. But this is not all. Around the first century A.D., another alien tribe, the Kushans, seized some Indian territories from the Greeks as well as the Sakas. Thus at the end of the first century A.D., about half of the sub-continent was ruled by the aliens. Who governed there, whether the Khatri or the Vipra, is not clear. The issue depends on how deeply the foreign sovereigns affected the social and political institutions of their subjects, and in view of the great paucity of in-depth records, the answer cannot be given with any precision.

If we limit our discussion to the North-east and the South, it seems that the Vipran era, which reappeared after Pushyamitra's demise, continued when the Andhras, around 27 B.C., demolished the Kanvas and the remnants of the Sungas. This is because the literature of the time portrays a brahmanism that matches, nay excels, the brahmanic sway of the age of Brahmanas. On linguistic evidence, the celebrated law book, *Manu-Smriti*, that absolute champion of the brahmanic supremacy in society, seems to have been written in the first or the second century A.D. [Sharma, 22, p. 16] This is, at best, indirect testimony, for ideally we should examine the socio-political life in the vast Andhra domains and see who really wielded the sceptre. But since such data are scanty, we

must have recourse to circumstantial evidence. In this case, however, it turns out that the indirect testimony may more than make up for the lack of on-the-spot inquiry. So vehement is the support of *Manu-Smriti* for the supremacy of brahmans, the very fact that it was permitted by the royalty suggests that it contains a grain of truth. The brahman in this work claims precedence in every imaginable respect, although adequate space is allocated to the qualifications on which this precedence may rest. Not surprisingly, the caste system became more rigid around the first century than ever before. Even in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, the Shudra's duty was to serve the other three classes, but 'Manu', according to Drekmeier, 'holds that he was created expressly for the service of the brahman.' [3, p. 86] Similarly, Manu insists that the high administrative offices ought to be reserved for the brahmans. In *Manu-Smriti*, Drekmeier continues,

> brahman superiority is described and justified in the most extravagant terms. *Even the gods depend on the brahmans.* Though the prosperity of the community rests on the king, the king's welfare, in turn, depends on the brahman class – the spiritual power is the source of the temporal power. To anger the priest is to seek destruction. [3, p. 231 (italics mine)]

In terms of legal concepts also, the brahman claims impunity. While he is not totally above the law, the severest sentence for him, even for rape, murder or treason, is banishment, and that too only from his homeland, not from his property and possessions. Thus even though the brahman did not claim wholesale immunity from the arm of the law, he did claim it from harsh penalties including capital punishment – a privilege, of course, denied to other castes.

As far as woman is concerned, *Manu-Smriti* treats her no better than it treats the Shudra. Every now and then it provides her with some sops, not only to maintain a semblance of objectivity and compassion towards the so-called weaker sex, but also to keep her from rising against brahmanism.

If all these prerogatives were in fact granted to the brahmans, then in parts of India unoccupied by the foreigners, there is no doubt that Vipras were predominant. We do not have any conclusive testimony regarding actual living conditions, but the testimony of *Manu-Smriti* is indisputable. Since, as is practically certain, it was compiled around the first or second century A.D., I conclude that the new Vipran era, which began around 149 B.C. at the time of Pushyamitra's death, continued into the second century A.D. The existence at the time of somewhat decentralised administrative and political system all over the sub-

continent, of empires composed of feudatory kingdoms also tends to confirm this view.

THIRD CENTURY INDIA AND THE NEW VASHYAN ERA

Within a few years after 27 B.C. when the Andhras came to prominence, their word prevailed not only over the Deccan and the south-Indian peninsula but also over Magadha and central India. It is only towards the end of the first century A.D. that the tranquillity of such vast domains was perturbed by the winds of violence which the invading Greeks and Sakas had brought with them. It is then that the Andhras had to cede some territories south-west of the Punjab to the victorious Sakas. However, before long the celebrated Andhra king Gautamiputra Satkarni came to the throne, and around 106 A.D. he avenged his precursor's humiliation and recaptured the lost areas. Gautamiputra, like the other Andhras, boasted of a brahmanic descent, but by his actions and attitude he was a first-rate Khatri. Through extensive campaigns of conquest, it is said that he extended his domains from sea to sea. He regarded himself as the defender of Hindu faiths, both brahmanic and Buddhist, against the foreign onslaughts. After a splendid reign of about twenty-five years, he was succeeded by his son Pulumayi, and it is he who had to cross swords with the Sakan king Rudradaman of whom I have spoken before.

The intermittent conflicts with foreign powers ultimately proved fatal to the extensive Andhra empire which, at the end of the second century A.D., splintered into myriad principalities, each ruled by a petty prince. We hear of the Abhiras, the Ikshvakus, the Bodhis, the Chutus, the Brihatphalayanas, the Pallavas, the Vakatakas, among many others, who all battened on the debris of the Andhra empire. At just about the same time, perhaps half a century before, the vast empire of the Kushans had also split into small kingdoms. Thus at the end of the second century, the entire sub-continent was divided into numerous political units. Such a decentralisation is reminiscent only of a Vashyan age. That is why I venture to say that the third century India belongs to a new Vashyan era, which might have begun as early as the middle of the second century. This is the only point that I have in support of this argument. For the historical narrative of the first and second century is sketchy, but that of the third century is even sketchier. With little data to stand upon, I do not want to hazard any conjectures regarding socio-economic conditions of the time. One thing seems certain though. As the third century progresses, politically India becomes more and more divided; the average size of the kingdoms grows smaller and smaller, with each kingdom constantly at its neighbour's throat, ready to mutilate it, but unable to do so owing to internal dissensions. In other words, during

the third century the new Vashyan age was moving towards Shudran anarchy, thus paving the way for a new revolution.

SAMUDRA GUPTA AND ANOTHER SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

At the dawn of the fourth century, a certain Chandra Gupta, who was a petty chieftain somewhere in Bihar, married a daughter of the powerful Lichchavi clan, and in the process acquired the principality of Magadha. Upon his coronation in 320 A.D., he greatly enlarged his kingdom, extending it to all of Bihar and part of Bengal, and proclaimed a new era called the Gupta era. Thus, with Chandra Gupta's accession, there began the reverse, cyclical process of the decentralised polity moving back towards political unification. However, Chandra Gupta could not finish what he had started, for he died in 330 A.D., and the mighty task of unification fell on the rugged shoulders of his son Samudra Gupta, who through his military genius conquered far and wide, and thus put an end to the Vashyan age. He, therefore, gets the credit for engineering another Shudran revolution.

THE GUPTAS AND ANOTHER KHATRIAN ERA

Samudra Gupta's manifold military expeditions and conquests have moved Vincent Smith to call him the Napoleon of India. He uprooted so many principalities and kinglets that his campaigns give an idea of the numerous fragments into which India was divided at the time of his accession. But when he breathed his last around 380 A.D., these fragments were once again welded into an empire that was the largest since Ashoka. About half of the sub-continent then was either part of Samudra Gupta's kingdom or paid him tribute. Simultaneously, in the Deccan there emerged another large and powerful state, that of the Vakatakas, with whom the Guptas had friendly relations. Thus about three-fourths of India during the Gupta period was unified under the centralised rule of two dynasties, of whom the Vakatakas were clearly overshadowed by the Gupta sovereigns.

The Gupta kings, like their Mauryan counterparts, have been occasionally accused of being despotic rulers. Smith implies this in his narrative. Describing Samudra Gupta's capital city, he asserts that 'the real capital of an Oriental despotism is the seat of the despot's court for the time being.' [23, p. 310] Now the Gupta kings were admittedly strong, unquestioned masters of their vast domains, and echos of their forceful rule can be heard in *Narada-Smriti*, the law book written during their times. But they were also absolute champions of brahmanism

which, as we have learned before, had already experienced a resurgence. Their autocratic impulse, if any, was tempered by their brahman ministers, variously called *mantrins* or *amatyas*, whose offices seem to have been hereditary for several generations. In addition to their ministers, the Gupta kings were advised by a council (*mantri mandalam*), which was a deliberate body, headed by a minister called *mantri mukhya*. This council exerted some influence in administrative decisions, and Drekmeier goes as far as to assert that 'there is little reason to believe that the king dared act without consultation, or that he could controvert the decision of a cabinet constituting the best minds in his kingdom.' [3, p. 184] Thus, the view that the Guptas were Oriental despots must be discarded. If anything, they gave free rein to talented persons in the interest of efficient administration.

Brahmanism was now as strong as ever, although Buddhism was allowed to flourish. In fact, the Gupta period reveals itself mainly from the work of a Chinese monk, Fa-hsien, who came to India to study Buddhism. The prerogatives claimed for brahmans in *Manu-Smriti* were recorded in *Narda-Smriti* verbatim with one prominent exception. Whereas Manu exalts the brahman above every other caste – even above the king – Narada, while still placing the brahman on the crest of the social hierarchy, is a champion of monarchical absolutism. While Manu proclaims the king to be subordinate to the sacred law or *dharma*, by which he means the brahmanic interpretations of the Vedas, Narda, according to Drekmeier, insists 'that the king be obeyed whether right or wrong in his actions, though he doubts that it is possible for the king to be wrong.' [3, p. 232] Drekmeier further observes that 'the *Naradasmriti* is the only political treatise in which an unrestricted absolutism can be found: a ruler must be obeyed irrespective of his worth and competence if the social order is to be preserved.' [3, p. 251]

Why do the two Smritis differ so radically on the matter of royal prerogative, even though regarding the brahman's social primacy they fully concur? The reason lies in the different political environment in which the two books were written. *Manu-Smriti*, scholars believe, was written during the first or the second century when India was divided into large kingdoms, when the monarchs were feeble and therefore very probably under the control of their brahman ministers. *Narada-Smriti*, on the other hand, was written during the Gupta period, and it could not possibly ignore the vigour with which the king welded his empire and managed his administration: it could not but be infected by his majestic vivacity and grandeur.

Without doubt the Gupta period belongs to the benevolent Khatrian age. The apparent ruler was now the real, and magnanimous, ruler. And is it a coincidence that this epoch has been enshrined by historians, of both Indian and Western origin, as India's Golden Age? Is it a mere coincidence that this golden era, much like Egypt's and England's, also

blossomed during a Khatrian age? Not according to Sarkar's theory of social cycle!

In almost every sphere – in art, literature, drama, poetry, science, economic prosperity, music, crime-prevention – the Gupta period surpasses the preceding eras, even the Ashokan days. For while the tranquillity and prosperity of the Mauryan times are now preserved, the Mauryan system of extreme administrative centralisation is not. Individual initiative is now given the fullest expression, and the culmination is a civilisation that in India has been excelled neither before nor since.

In order to attract individual talent to government, especially to local administration, the Gupta sovereigns unwittingly planted the germs of feudalism, which was to unfold in the future. Like Charlemagne, who reigned in Europe some three centuries later, the Gupta rulers made grants of land to learned scholars and to administrative officials in lieu of cash payments, and in due course the local lords became the hereditary owners. I will dwell more on this in the ensuing discussion.

The Gupta empire, and peace, lasted from the beginning of the fourth century to about the end of the fifth, when under the onus of the Huna-*Völkerwanderung* it cracked into large pieces. But soon the Hunas were repulsed by either Yasodharman or by Narasimha Gupta, who is popularly known as Baladitya. Thus the empire seems to have survived well into the middle of the sixth century, although its energy, under the Huna shock waves, had been all but spent. For the next half-century, India was ruled by provincial governors and feudal chiefs, but the Khatrian era was to make at least one more attempt at a comeback – this time at the hands of one Harsha Vardhana, who came to the throne around 606 and ruled until 647. Within six years, he reconquered much that was part of the Gupta empire, although he had to accept defeat from the powerful southern kingdom of the Chalukyas. Harsha, a man of considerable vigour and energy, provided efficient administration for his people; but he died without an heir, and upon his death his empire faded away.

The next six centuries are again obscure, and my arguments that follow are partly based on known facts and partly on inference. The history of India constantly plays hide-and-seek with the scholar, but following Harsha's death it hides for a really long time. For this reason, I am not sure exactly when the third Khatrian era of the Aryan society came to an end. It could have passed away with Harsha, for towards the end of the seventh century we begin to hear of the rise of new dynasties with brahmanical parentage, and the brahmans could not but have prospered. Only vigorous rulers like the Guptas and Harsha could keep the brahmans under control; and since following Harsha, there were few monarchs of that calibre, the priesthood, the brahman ministers, and other administrative officers must have thrived. Yet we also hear of new and powerful dynasties rising in the eighth century – in Kashmir and Bengal, as well as the Deccan – with few officials prominent behind the scenes. Some accounts of ministerial sway over the kings come to light from narratives of the ninth and tenth centuries. Especially is this true of Kashmir, whose history a learned brahman named Kalhana has preserved in the metrical chronicle called *Rajatarangini*. It turns out that in Kashmir's case the ninth and tenth centuries unambiguously belong to the Vipran age. With other kingdoms, since the historical record is deficient I have to rely on secondary evidence.

NINTH AND TENTH-CENTURY INDIA AND ANOTHER VIPRAN ERA

Kashmir is pertinent to Indian history from ancient times. It was a part of Ashoka's empire, and later it paid homage to Harsha. But on its own it came into historical limelight only with the beginning of the eighth century, when a king named Lalitaditya extended his dominion far beyond its normal mountainous frontier. In a series of brilliant military expeditions, he defeated the Tibetans, Bhutias, and Turks settled along the Indus, and the king of Kanauj, which had been Harsha's capital and for which major dynasties were vying at the time. His son Jayapida, reputed to have single-handedly killed a lion, extended his influence still further. He won victories over Nepal and also over the rebellious Kanauj. Thus towards the end of the eighth century, Kashmir's word prevailed over substantial territories of north-west and central India. However, at the dawn of the ninth century, Jayapida seems to have incurred the ire of brahmans, who conspired to have him overthrown. Puppet kings were then placed on the throne, first by the maternal uncle of the deposed king and later on by a minister named Sura. In the tenth century, a minister named Prabhakara was at the helm for a short time. From him the role of the king-maker passed into the hands of a powerful political organisation called Tantrin infantry; but power was soon concentrated in another minister, Parvagupta, who eventually became so prominent that he usurped the throne for himself. In the second half of the tenth century, a queen named Didda ruled as regent for her son, but she also relied on a number of ministers. Thus during the ninth and tenth centuries, the real authority was exercised either by the ministers or by an assembly of the brahmans, while the kings were mere puppets whose strings were pulled by others. The history of Kashmir, with its extensive influence on vast territories, thus provides an argument for regarding these two centuries of the Hindu civilisation as belonging to the Vipran age.

Another argument derives from the annals of the Pala dynasty, which

rose to supremacy in Bengal during the second half of the eighth century. Soon, through several military campaigns, it ruled over all of the north-east, central and some parts of north-west India. The Palas were at their zenith during the reign of Dharmapala, who reigned from 770 to 810. Their vast domain lasted till the end of the ninth century, after which much of it was annexed by Pratihara-dynasty kings. The Palas were not graced by the presence of a Kalhana, or else we might have known at first hand who really held the sceptre – the kings or their chief ministers, who all seem to have come from a prominent brahman family. In this connection, U.N. Ghoshal asserts that 'making due allowance for evident exaggeration in the claims of these ministers, we may conclude that they exercised a commanding influence on the early Palas.' [5, p. 242] In the neighbouring and contemporary kingdom of Assam, too, there are clear indications that some prominent officials (called elders) could not be ignored even in matters as important as the succession to the throne [Ghoshal, 5, p. 243].

The story of north and central India of the time remains incomplete if no reference is made to the Pratihara dynasty which came to prominence in the second half of the ninth century, mainly at the expense of the Palas. The Pratihara kingdom was large enough to be called an empire, but the Pratiharas too boasted of brahmanic descent, and brahmans, especially those well versed in the Puranas, could not but flourish. A pointed example of the priestly sway is that the commoners were by law required to pay the priests a regular tax (*brahmanavimsati*), which is reminiscent of the tithe collected by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages [Kosambi, 10, p. 176]. At the same time the idea of *Manu-Smriti* that the king is below the sacred law (*dharma*) was resurrected in jurisprudence. It found its most assertive exponent in Medhatithi, who affirms that the kingship, deriving its sanction from the people, is subservient to the fundamental law expounded by the Dharma-Shastras (law books), which, of course, can be explained by none else but the brahman.

In the South, the eighth to tenth centuries witnessed the rise of the Rashtrakutas, who also at times dominated the kingdoms of the North. This dynasty, though blessed with some mighty warriors, generously patronised religion. During their times, brahmanism uprooted Buddhism, and developed faster than ever since Buddha's birth. Much of this was accomplished by an ascetic brahman named Shankaracharya whose wit, erudition and eloquence no contemporary could match. Almost single-handedly he shook the foundations of Buddhism around 800 A.D., and ultimately helped it vanish from the land of its birth. This was the zenith of brahmanic renaissance, and it supports my view that, despite the full-blooded warriors that the Rashtrakutas produced, even the southern part of ninth- and tenth-century India reveals brahmanic dominion and hence the Vipran age.

The ostentatious temples that were then built only serve to reinforce my argument.

FEUDALISM AND ANOTHER VASHYAN ERA

I have already mentioned that by making generous grants of land to learned scholars and administrative officials, the Guptas had planted the seeds that later were to sprout as some kind of feudalism. Such gifts of land had also carried with them the administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the villages in their jurisdiction. Subsequently, around Harsha's times, the landlords were also granted judicial privileges, thus turning the village into a self-sustaining system, much like the latter-day manorial economy of feudal Europe. If we define feudalism as a decentralised political system where the big landlords, by virtue of their landed wealth, become local nuclei of power, attracting local loyalties, then a full-fledged feudalism was on the rise in India after the demise of Harsha and his empire. But this was not to be, for during the eighth to tenth centuries powerful new dynasties, as we have seen before, arose one by one to preserve a semblance of centralised authority: the Kashmiris, the Palas, the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas appeared almost contemporaneously to organise, as it were, the sub-continent into semi-centralised bastions of Vipra-dominated communities. True, the typical monarch of the time had his own feudatory kings paying him homage and tribute, but he was not as yet greatly dependent on his vassals.

Political decentralisation and powerful landed magnates really emerged towards the end of the tenth century. By this time warfare among the kingdoms of the post-Harsha Vipran era had so emasculated the social fibre that there was no king powerful enough to tame his vassals. There is one exception, of course, and that refers to the Chola dynasty which assembled a large kingdom in the South during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries; but the Chola empire covered less than one fifth of the sub-continent, which is an area as vast as Europe minus Russia. The rest of India, however, was split into numerous warring principalities which, if any one cared to count, ran into hundreds – perhaps thousands. Thus feudalism in India really emerged at the dawn of the eleventh century, and, not surprisingly, it is at this time of deafening internal dissensions that regular incursions from the aliens – this time the Muslims – began and struck deep into the heart of India. The eleventh, twelfth, and the thirteenth century, throughout which centrifugal forces were supreme, thus belong to the Vashyan age. K. M. Munshi observes that during this period 'a king, instead of being the only source of power, was no more than the first among the equals, the head of inter-related overlordships, never in a position to overrule

the wishes of his feudal lords.' [14, p. xiii] In the same vein, B. P. Mazumdar contends that[2]

> the period between 1030 and 1194 A.D. may be regarded as the heyday of feudal anarchy . . . [because] the feudatories acquired so much power and influence that it became necessary for the King to watch their movement and conduct very carefully. [12, p. 11].

Actually the Mohammadan invasions had begun as far back as the eighth century when the Arabs conquered the Sind, but that merely turned out to be a forewarning of the protracted conflict which commenced with the eleventh century. Lured by tales of India's fabulous wealth, many Mohammadan warriors then invaded the sub-continent, but it was not until the fateful year of 1192, when Muhammad of Ghur trounced Prithvi Raj Chauhan, that the Muslims gained a permanent foothold on Indian soil. Soon afterwards, in 1206, Qutabddin Aibak established a sultanate in Delhi and started the Muslim rule. But the Vashyan era continued, because the centralised Muslim rule made but a small dent in the torrents of political decentralisation that had bedevilled India for the past two centuries. Even after deadly exposure to the ruthless adversary, who plundered countless villages and temples without remorse, the remaining Hindu kinglets were too myopic and vain to unite. It is not that they were wanting in valour and resources, only that, wrapped up in their own petty little feuds, they would not present a united front. Even as the muslims were steadily expanding their stranglehold, the Chalukyas and the Cholas were battling it out in the Deccan.

THE SHUDRAN ERA AND THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTION

The political scene of thirteenth-century India brings to mind either the degenerate phase of the Vashyan era or the Shudran era, which is marked by lawlessness and total anarchy. In the South the Chola empire, during the first quarter of the thirteenth century, had broken into numerous petty states constantly at loggerheads with each other. In the North the Delhi Sultanate was a hotbed of countless conspiracies, which were prompted by the absence of any law of succession and by the unmitigated resistance of the Indian people, whom the Muslims called infidels or Hindus. Nowhere in India could a civilised society then exist, much less prosper. The Delhi sultanate, in the first half of the thirteenth century, was tyrannised by the famous group of 'forty slaves' attached to the court. On top of this, the sultan's authority was constantly challenged by his provincial governors and the Hindu chieftains. Even when the kings were powerful, as with Iltmush and Balban, they had

constantly to fight to hold on to their territories. The chief interests of the sultanate were plunder and conquests, of which Hindus were the hapless but resisting victims. Therefore, as far as the Hindu civilisation is concerned, the thirteenth century belongs to a Shudran era where brutality and the law of the jungle prevailed everywhere in India.

If civilised life is to continue, such a state of affairs cannot endure for long. But among the Hindu kings, reeling under disunity amongst themselves, there was then no one potent and wise enough to stem the torrents of anarchy. The burden of putting an end to the Shudran era, therefore, had to fall on the shoulders of a Mohammadan ruler. In 1296, a powerful military commander named Alauddin Khilgi rose to the sultanate and soon established his *imperium* all over India, thereby putting an end to the Vashya-cum-Shudran forces of decentralisation and anarchy. He also abolished private property, thereby smashing the power-base of the feudal lords. In other words, his Khatrian prowess brought about yet another Shudran revolution in Indian history.

KHILGIS, TUGHLUQS, MUGHALS, AND THE MUSLIM KHATRIAN ERA

To be sure, the Khilgi dynasty was perhaps no less barbarous than the so-called Slave Sultanate of the thirteenth century; but now much of India, for the first time since the Guptas, was unified under one central command from Delhi, although the South was held in mere feudatory relationship. Until Alauddin's accession, the Muslim religion represented by Ulemas had played some role in administrative affairs. In theory, though not in reality, the Muslim domains in India were extensions of the eastern Caliphate. Alauddin was the first Indian ruler to shake off this theoretical vassalage and assert independence from the orthodox church. As a result, the Hindus got some reprieve from the fanatic policies which the earlier sultans had followed.

In 1320 the Khilgis were superseded by the Tughluq dynasty, of which Muhammad Bin was the most colourful, as well as eccentric, ruler. During his reign, the vast Muslim empire began to break down and a number of military states, such as the Bahmani and the Vijaynagar kingdoms in the South, came into being. In 1398, the remnants of the Tughluq empire were plundered by Timur the Lame, and in the ensuing carnage his successors established a Sayyid dynasty. Thus throughout the fourteenth century India was either centrally ruled or organised into a few militaristic states, which were all despotically governed, with perhaps the one exception of Vijaynagar. But even there, the king and his military had the upper hand, for in those days of the survival of the fittest the non-Khatrian classes had no chance of coming into prominence.

The fragmentation that had once again begun in India during the reign of Muhammad Tughluq continued during the fifteenth century, but still large pockets of centralised rule existed. In the South, the Vijaynagar kingdom continued to flourish, although the Bahmani domains were broken up into five provinces. In the North, the Sayyids were replaced by the Lodis who quickly began to expand their kingdom, so much so that by the end of the fifteenth century their rule extended from the Indus to the western fringes of Bengal. Simultaneously there existed some other good-sized kingdoms – Mewar, Gondwana, Gujrat, Malwa and Bengal – all organised on a war footing, distrustful of their neighbours. Thus the Khatrian era continued, with India of the time resembling contemporary Europe which, by the end of the fifteenth century, was also divided into centralised nation-states.

This system of about a dozen centralised kingdoms continued well into the sixteenth century, until a Mughal ruler, Akbar the Great, by virtue of his military genius, conquered the whole of northern India and organised it into an efficiently managed empire. The reader may have been searching for the benevolent phase of what we may call the Muslim Khatrian age. Well, it arrived during Akbar's times, which surpassed the Sultanate period in all those achievements that reflect the flowering of a civilisation. The reason why the facet of benevolence appeared so late in the Muslim Khatrian era is that at the onset of the Mohammadan occupation the Muslims and Hindus were too suspicious of each other to live in harmony, which is a prerequisite for social efflorescence. And the early sultans did little to soothe the Hindu panic or the mutual phobia that naturally arises when two disparate cultures run into violent collision. However, Akabar was of different mettle. He introduced a policy of toleration for all religions, and thus paved the way for a long reign of creativity and prosperity.

THE MUGHAL-MARATHA VIPRAN ERA

Akbar's cosmopolitan attitude towards all faiths was devoutly followed by his son and successor Jahangir, but during the former's reign one also discerns the germination of forces that were soon to lead the Muslim Khatrian era into another Vipran age. Akbar was unquestionably the master of the state as well as of the church, but his catholicity aroused the ire of the orthodox or Sunni section of the Muslims. They discovered an eloquent champion in the person of a saint named Mujaddid Sarhindi, but, despite his great influence on some nobles, he was unable to bring either Akbar or Jahangir round to his view. Nevertheless, in Jahangir's times the Vipran era reappeared but in an altogether unexpected way. The real power during his rule rested with his queen Nur Jahan and her brother Asaf Khan, whom she

appointed as Prime Minister. And the sister and brother combined to dictate all policies and administrative affairs. But these early warnings of the new Vipran epoch vanished with Jahangir's demise, because during the reign of his successor, Shah Jahan, the despotic and direct Khatrian rule staged a resounding comeback.

Meanwhile during the half-century (1605–58) reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the orthodox Muslim faith had been steadily gaining ground, and when Aurangzeb succeeded Shah Jahan in 1658, the writ was there for all to see. Most autocratic of all the Mughal rulers, Aurangzeb took instructions from Sarhindi's son, Khwaja Muhammad Masum, as well as from his grandson, Khwaja Muhammad Saifuddin. Their influence was visible in almost all his activities and policies, whether towards the unorthodox or Shia Muslims, or towards the Hindus. Mark Naidis remarks:

> Aurangzeb's religious bigotry seemed to grow with the years. As early as 1667 he imposed a discriminatory tax on Hindu traders. In 1669 he issued a general order to demolish all the temples and schools of the Hindus. . . . The climax of this policy came in 1679 when Aurangzeb revived the poll tax on unbelievers. [15, p. 78]

But Aurangzeb's fanaticism, as Mohammad Yasin states, was inspired by Mujaddid Sarhindi's teachings as well as by leaders of the Sunni Muslims:

> The Puritan in Aurangzib was not a sudden outburst or an accident but the logical consequence of the long cultivated reactionary tendencies. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Aurangzib's *state policy* was prompted by the *voice of Sarhindi* from behind the scene. His dictates and orders were approved and counter-signed by the religious heads of the Sunni sect. [26, p. 171 (italics mine)]

It is not that the Muslim religion and its emissaries, the Ulemas, had never wielded any influence in state policies before. But Balban, Alauddin Khilgi, Muhammad Bin Tughluq, among many other sultans, had made it sure that the Ulema influence was kept under control. Seldom were Indian political affairs so positively subordinated to the wishes of the Sunni sects, and, as S. A. Rizvi [21, p. 292] argues, there were many other orthodox saints and scholars, besides Sarhindi's children, who dictated state policy in Aurangzeb's times. Thus the Vipran era, whose roots are discernible even in Jahangir's days, came into full swing with the accession of Aurangzeb.

After his death in 1707, the indirect Vipran dominion continued and showed up in two ways. First, his successors were mostly weaklings and therefore tools in the hands of their ministers (*wazirs*). Second,

Aurangzeb's myopic policy of contempt for the non-Muslim sentiments had sown seeds of rebellion among his subjects – Sikhs, Jats, Rajputs, Marathas – and within thirty years after his demise, his empire, which was vast enough to rival Ashoka's, split into several pieces. On the ruins arose the paramount Maratha power which a great warrior named Shivaji had moulded into a force that could not be ignored even during Aurangzeb's reign. Thus Indian history in the eighteenth century is mainly a history of the declining fortunes of the Mughals and the rising fortunes of the Marathas, and in both cases the apparent rulers were swayed by their Vipran ministers. Hence the title of this section: the Mughal-Maratha Vipran Era. While the Mughals were in the grip of their wazir, the Marathas were in the grip of their brahman minister, Peshwa. The Maratha king (Raja), the descendant of Shivaji, was so overshadowed by the Peshwas throughout the eighteenth century that they have often been likened to the mayors who had kept the Merovingian king under their thumb during the early Vipran era of Western civilisation (see chapter 5). In short much of the seventeenth century and all of the eighteenth belong to the Vipran age.

THE BRITISH PERIOD AND ANOTHER VASHYAN ERA

The Maratha dominion in India lasted, with inevitable vicissitudes, until the end of the eighteenth century, when another power rose to primacy in an unexpected way. In the context of Western civilisation, we have already seen how, during the fifteenth century of adventure on the high seas, a new route to India had been discovered. Following this emerged the Portuguese, Dutch, French and English companies to conduct trade with India. Gradually all four companies were embroiled in Indian politics so as to win favourable trading rights. Each tried to outdo the other, and, if necessary, to fight it out with gunboats and soldiers. In this quadrilateral struggle, lasting well over two centuries, eventually the British East India Company won out, so much so that in 1765 it obtained the right to administer the states of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal from the Mughal emperor. Thus was paved the way for the British umbrella to spread quickly over India. Within the short span of the next four decades, the English annexed – or obtained tribute from – many Hindu and Muslim territories, including those of the Peshwa, and became the paramount Indian power. By the onset of the nineteenth century, therefore, the British could not be challenged by anyone, save the powerful Sikh state of Punjab ruled by Ranjit Singh, with whom they judiciously avoided collision. After the Sikh ruler's death though, the Punjab fell on evil days, and in 1849 met the fate that had befallen many other provinces.

Usually the victorious nation superimposes upon the vanquished its

own phase of civilisation; this, for instance, was India's experience with the Aryans as well as the Muslims, both of whom transmitted to it their own Khatrian age. The British, around 1800, were not as yet in the Vashyan era, as their mercantile concerns were subordinated by their Prime Minister and the House of Lords to the landed interests (see Chapter 5) but they were virtually knocking on its doors. The Vashyan era actually arrived in England during the second half of the nineteenth century, but in India it arrived in the first half. This is because, until 1858, the economic, social, and political affairs of the bulk of the subcontinent were managed, or mismanaged, under the watchful eye of the British parliament, by 'servants' of the East India Company which was controlled by London's capitalist merchants. And as far as Indian society is concerned, these voracious capitalists inflicted upon it the worst kind of Vashyan exploitation. While itself wary of the English merchants, the English parliament could not care less if they ran amuck with an alien land and reduced its peasantry and craftsmen to abject poverty. By one trick or another, by imposing extortionate land taxes, or by destroying indigenous handicrafts and industries, the Company and its officers working in India enriched themselves beyond imagination.

The tax revenue, which was previously collected by the Muslim and Hindu landowners (*zamindars*), was now mostly expropriated by the Company's officers in India and then remitted to England. In itself, this would not have increased the exploitation of Indian workers, except that the system now functioned in two new, and detrimental, ways. First the taxes, though not necessarily raised in some cases, were so ruthlessly collected that the tax revenue increased many times. As a result, many peasants, and even *zamindars*, were forced either to sell their land to the village money-lender or get into heavy debt. Thus the British Vashyan domination over India germinated the prominence of Indian Vashyas, of usurers who charged confiscatory interest rates, followed dubious accounting practices, and proved, with little let-up so far, to be the scourge of the rural sector of which three-fourths of India today is composed. Second, prior to the British conquest, the *zamindars*, spending their incomes within India, provided a demand for Indian industries. With the transmission of this income now to England, that source of demand disappeared, and so did India's vast industrial wealth. And if any industrial base remained, British commercial policy, designed to convert India into a source of cheap raw materials for English manufacturers, took care of it. Prohibitive tariffs barred Indian silk and cotton products from British markets, while no, or nominal, duties were imposed on English exports to India. In Michael Edwardes' words:

> In the first half of the nineteenth century . . . India was to lose the proud position of supremacy in the trade and industry of the world

which she had been occupying for well-nigh two thousand years, and was gradually transformed into a plantation for the production of raw materials, and a dumping ground for the cheap manufactured goods from the West. [4, p. 225]

Such policies continued with little change even after 1858 when, in the wake of widespread mutiny in India, the Indian administrative affairs passed directly into the hands of the English parliament. The end-product of all this was that the Indian economy became increasingly agricultural and rural; urbanisation declined, many agricultural workers became landless, and the usurer emerged with a parasitic role unknown in India before. Never has the Indian peasant been under such thraldom to the village money-lender as he is today, and for this he has to be grateful to the British occupation. Eventually British self-interest gave rise to that extreme inequity of income distribution which comes to prevail during every Vashyan age. After the Indian mutiny of 1857, the British felt the need for a class of natives allied to their cause. The village *zamindars*, and also some Indian industrialists, were granted concessions and carefully pampered. As a result, another Vashyan group of wealthy landlords and capitalists arose in India; along with them arose the impoverished agricultural and industrial workers. When the sub-continent attained independence from the British yoke in 1947, and got partitioned into India and Pakistan, this system, wherein the affluence of the few mocked at the penury of the masses, remained.

Yet the British contact was not wholly damaging to Hindu civilisation. India was divested of many of the heinous practices that had afflicted Hindu society for a very long time. *Sati*, or widow-burning, was then abolished; brahmans could no longer claim precedence over the arm of the law. Above all, the British system of education created an unprecedented sentiment of nationalism, of which Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Subhash Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the most prominent leaders. Eventually these stirrings of nationalism convinced the British of the injustice of their occupation and the fact that it was doomed, and they decided to grant the sub-continent its long-cherished independence. The peaceful manner in which they consented to let go of their vast Indian empire is an act of self-denial which is a credit to the English people and their democratic institutions. According to Sir Percival Griffiths:

To that great act of abdication there is no historical parallel. . . . This final act has released India from all the inhibitions of subjection, purged Britain from the racial pride of domination, and established between the two countries a bond of friendship which may well prove

stronger and more enduring than the political tie which it has replaced. [6, p. 488]

Even after the British departure, the Hindu civilisation,[3] now confined to territories outside the area of Pakistan, continued to move through the Vashyan age. Its leaders could have then choked the Vashyan dominion, but they frittered away all the goodwill and esteem they had earned as the vanguard of the nationalist movement. In a country as illiterate as the then India, with numerous latent tendencies towards fragmentation, with an income distribution as inequitable as can be, they chose the system of British parliamentary democracy. The inevitable happened: soon, the forces of money took over; smuggling, profiteering, black-marketing, tax evasion and overbearing bureaucratic corruption came to permeate each and every pore of Indian life. The greed of Vashyas impeded whatever half-hearted efforts the Indian leaders made to lift the masses out of the morass of poverty.

From the year of Independence to the fateful year of 1977, the Congress party, the spearhead of nationalistic fervour, remained in power. Not that there was then no other political party, only that there were too many, and consequently too feeble to provide effective opposition. The first Prime Minister of modern India was the charismatic Pandit Nehru, the next one Lalbahadur Shastri. He was followed by Mrs Indira Gandhi (no relationship with Mahatma Gandhi); and now Morarji Desai, belonging to the Janta party, holds the reins.

The Vashyan forces of political decentralisation let loose with India's adoption of the parliamentary system came to a head in June 1975 when Mrs Gandhi was convicted of illegal practices during the preceding election. The opposition parties called for her resignation; general strikes were threatened and, above all, the police and the military were allegedly incited towards rebellion. In response, Mrs Gandhi proclaimed a state of emergency, assumed wide executive powers, and then unleashed a reign of terror in the public mind. To inculcate a new sense of discipline, she sent many smugglers and black-marketeers, along with political opponents and numerous innocent people, to prison. The Indian Constitution was also then amended to perpetuate her new status. The press was gagged, and the police given extraordinary powers. And all this was done in order to serve the people – the people whose fundamental rights were trampled.

But sooner or later every abuser of power has to pay the price. Mrs Gandhi had to pay it sooner than expected. When power goes to a person's head, all perception of reality is lost. Just as Mrs Gandhi felt that the public was solidly behind her draconian measures, she called a new election. But this time her party (the Congress party) had to contend with a united opposition, whose leaders had been jailed during the emergency. To the surprise of all political pundits, Mrs Gandhi suffered

a landslide defeat at the polls; and this is how Morarji Desai, the opposition (Janta party) candidate, was catapulted into power in March 1977: Mrs Gandhi's fall is thus the latest warning to dictators everywhere that tyranny is its own nemesis.

How are we to evaluate the fateful event, the emergency of June 1975? I have chosen to dwell at length on this event, because it occurred at a time when India was, and is, passing through the degenerate phase of the Vashyan age. The change of government in 1977 was healthy, but it cannot undo the ill-effects of the last two centuries of Vashyan exploitation. Only a revolution can.

Fortunately, India is now fast moving towards the Shudran revolution, one that will put an end to its Vashyan, or the present Vashya-cum-Shudran, age. By my calculations this revolution should occur by the year 2000. The present Vashyan era began in India when the British defeated the Peshwa in 1803 and removed the last Vipran bastion out of their way. This means that the preceding Vipran era, starting as early as 1605 when Jahangir came to the throne, lasted about two hundred years. The Vashyan era should also last that long. In other words, it will terminate in a Shudran revolution towards the end of this century, and then pave the way for another Khatrian era of centralised authority and social discipline.

It is in this light that the import of the 1975 emergency ought to be seen. The centralisation ushered in by Mrs Gandhi was a harbinger of the Khatrian centralisation that is yet to come; but the coming centralisation, being in the early phase of the Khatrian era, will be benevolent. It will bring lasting relief and prosperity to the impoverished masses. What Mrs Gandhi did reflects the desperate act of a fake Vashya trying to maintain her exploitative hold on society. The centralisation she introduced did improve the country's economic condition; it did bring smuggling and black-marketing under control. But all the healthy effects of her actions were more than offset by her brazen disregard for human rights, by her attempts to crush all dissent. Consequently, she had to go. If there is one lesson of the Emergency, it is that India badly needs social discipline and centralised political authority, one that despite its wide executive powers rules with compassion, and feels for the improverished masses. India today needs a benevolent Khatri at the top – another Ashoka, or Samudra Gupta, or Akbar. Is this all possible in the present Vashya-cum-Shudran age? No! But the new Khatrian era is not far off.

The current Indian milieu has a parallel with the final days of the Vashyan era around Buddhist times. Then, as now, money ruled the roost. Dhana Nanda was then a powerful, but corrupt, ruler commanding a powerful army. He could have unified the whole of India under the aegis of a just and efficient government. He did not! Sure enough, a Chanakya and a Chandragupta Maurya emerged from the grass roots to

wrest the initiative and ultimately bring an end to the Vashyan age. Ever since Independence, the Indian leaders, especially the late Nehru and Mrs Gandhi, have had the same opportunity. At times, they have had the charisma to smother the torrents of corruption, to relieve the masses of their penury, to do the maximum good to the maximum number of people. They did not. They frittered their moments away, and now the disorderly trend is irreversible. It will move apace until it is met by the powerful shock of the Shudran revolution, whereupon, as stated above, a new Khatrian age will be born.

SUMMARY

An interpretation of Hindu civilisation in accordance with Sarkar's theory of social cycle was the objective of this chapter, and the objective has been fulfilled. When enough evidence was available, whether archaelogical, numismatic, scriptural or inscriptional, the hypothesis of social cycle was shown to be clearly valid. And even when at times Indian history drew a blank, Sarkar's theory found support from secondary evidence. Going through the Hindu civilisation, we found that the Vedic age, traceable as far back as 1500 B.C., belongs to the Khatrian era, the subsequent brahmanic age to the Vipran era, and the ensuing Buddhist period to the Vashyan era, which terminated in the Shudran revolution engineered by Chanakya and Chandragupta Maurya. Then came another Khatrian era of the Mauryan period, followed by another Vipran age of the Sungas, Kanvas and the Andhras, then by another Vashyan era of the pre-Gupta times, culminating in another Shudran revolution brought about by Samudra Gupta. Following this event, another social cycle began with the Khatrian era of the Gupta period, the Vipran era of the brahman chief ministers, the Vashyan era of feudalism, culminating in the Shudran revolution of Alauddin Khilgi. Thus began the Muslim Khatrian era, followed first by the Mughal-Maratha Vipran era, and then by the Vashyan era under the British domination. That is where Hindu society, more properly Indian society, now stands. By the year 2000, it will be engulfed by another Shudran revolution, paving the way for another Khatrian age.

NOTES

1. The year, and even century, of Buddha's birth is a matter of controversy among historians. See Majumdar [11] and Smith [23], for example.

2. The quote from Mazumdar says nothing about feudalism in the thirteenth century, but as subsequently argued, the Vashyan era then degenerated into the Shudran age.

3. Actually it is a misnomer to regard modern Indian society as Hindu civilisation, because even after the germination of Pakistan, which siphoned off a majority of the Muslim community of the sub-continent, a sizeable section preferred to remain in the modern Indian state. Therefore, modern Indian society is, and has long been, a Hindu-Muslim society, with the Muslim minority accounting for as many as ninety million people.

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8 The Downfall of Totalitarian Communism

I have argued in Chapter 6 that for the last four centuries Russian society has been moving through the Khatrian era, of which extreme political and administrative centralisation is the chief characteristic. During this rather long period, the Russian polity has gone through radical changes, through several economic, political and cultural upheavals, but its total commitment to the supremacy of the state over everything else remains. Even the plastic surgery to its face since the Bolshevik Revolution has made no dent in its absolutist tradition.

The central theme of this chapter is that the new Vipran era in Russian society has been long overdue, and that the transition could come any time, perhaps in the next twenty-five to fifty years, perhaps in another century. But come it must. And the current Soviet repression of Vipras, of intellectuals, is simply a harbinger of the new Vipran age. The contemporary Russian system may be called totalitarian communism – totalitarian, because it is autocratic, and exalts the ruler and the state over every other institution; communism, because whenever it suits its purpose, it draws upon, or reinterprets, the communist thought of Marx. In the new Vipran era, however, the present set-up will give way to the rule by intellectuals, by those who concoct new dogmas and govern society indirectly in the name of the apparent ruler. There will be totalitarianism no more; nor will Marxism survive in its present form. Hence the title: The Downfall of Totalitarian Communism.

In order to chart the future course of Russian society, it is first necessary to understand how it has evolved ever since the revolution of 1917;[1] how, and why, in spite of its transmutation, it has maintained some links with the past which officially is so patently denounced; how the transmutation itself has generated conditions that will invariably give rise to a Vipra-inspired social evolution or revolution.

RUSSIA UNDER LENIN, STALIN AND KHRUSHCHEV

After the Bolsheviks took over the reins of government, Russia, having

already been battered by the First World War, slipped into a state of enhanced agony and turmoil. Lenin had expected that the revolutionary spark in Russia would quickly ignite fires in neighbouring capitalist countries – such as Germany – which would then help the Russian movement to stand on its own feet, even though the Russian semi-feudal structure was not yet ripe for a successful socialist revolution. According to Marx, capitalism must precede socialism and communism, so that a successful revolution was by implication ruled out in an under-industrialised country like Russia. Therefore, the fact that the disciples of Marx first came to power in an under-developed country made a big difference to the future development of Marxist ideology as well as to Russian society. The Bolsheviks had expected help from industrial countries, they got unmasked hostility instead. Far from triggering revolutions elsewhere in Europe, Communists in Russia were confronted with enemies at home and abroad, with civil war as well as economic catastrophe. All this could not but spawn anarchy and help the autocratic forces to regain their stranglehold over society.

In the first blush of revolution, the Bolsheviks displayed great zeal in giving effect to the Marxian vision of an egalitarian society, including worker-control over industry, decentralisation in government, and eliminating inequalities in income distribution. The peasants were allowed to seize lands from the aristocracy, workers to take over and run the factories; salaries of managers, government officers and technicians were curtailed to bring them more in line with factory wage rates. Thus, for a few months it appeared that Marx's humanism would be taken out of his writings and translated into reality. But all these visions were cut short when the anticipated help from the West failed to materialise, when the communist leaders had to fight for their own survival, when the infant revolution continued to face rough weather. To that life-and-death struggle, the Bolsheviks responded by replacing worker-control over industry with centralised decision-making by the government. Former tsarist managers and bureaucrats were recalled into government and industry, with their high salaries and other privileges partially restored. Economically, the results were even more catastrophic than before. While the workers were disenchanted and their incentive to work stifled, the inexperienced government provided faulty guidance. The inevitable happened: by 1921 the entire economy was in a shambles, with the peasantry and the workers standing on the verge of revolt.

In the face of mounting opposition, Lenin relented and introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP), in which capitalism was partially restored. The government retained control over heavy industry, banking and finance, transportation, and communication; but light industry, agriculture and trade were left to private enterprise, where the forces of demand and supply could determine the allocation of resources. Not that Lenin had given up his ideal of a centralised economic and political

system, only that he had relented to gain time, regroup his demoralised forces, and design a coordinated attack on those he considered inimical to his cause.

The NEP met with instant success. The limited revival of the private sector, along with government control in areas involving heavy investment which private enterprise could not afford, enabled the entire economy to move apace. Within five years, the country recovered from the economic dislocations caused by the wars and the government's meddling with private life. The communists also realised, more than ever before, that their revolutionary fervour was not contagious to other countries; that the revolution could be safeguarded and extended only by first erecting an imposing industrial structure within Russia; that for the sake of speedy industrialisation, the state had to take over the task of saving and investing, and thus completely demolish the private economy; and that the state itself would have to become absolute and autocratic in order to transform the Russian economic weakling into an industrial giant.

Thus when the crunch came the communists threw Marxian humanism down the drain and decided to build apace an industrial state regardless of how it afflicted other walks of life. Perhaps the outcome would have been quite different had Lenin not prematurely died and the communist party taken over by Stalin who proved to be the apogee of absolutism. Once Stalin manoeuvred his way to the top by erasing all opposition within the communist party, any serious debate on economic planning ceased altogether. Stalinist communism is quite divorced from the Marxian version and devoid of any concern for the people. It may be simply defined as a strategy to achieve rapid industrialisation through draconian means. It has very little to do with Marxism proper; yet Stalin did not officially abandon the Marxian doctrines. He drew upon them to sanctify his economic, religious and social policies, or simply reinterpreted them to stifle the dissenting view, if any. Thus when it came to capital accumulation, regarded by every communist as indispensable for industrialisation and growth, Stalin cited Marx, who too had stressed the role of capital goods in this regard. This is how Stalin justified his extreme emphasis on investment in the capital-goods sector, while neglecting the consumer-goods sector as much as possible. But as regards the Marxian egalitarian view of minimising wage differentials, he dismissed it by simply begging the question – by suggesting that in the absence of private ownership, income inequalities were impossible. In practice several groups, especially some military officers, were accorded highly favourable treatment. Similarly, Marxian prophecy of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was read as the dictatorship of the communist party, and, eventually, as the dictatorship of the party chieftain himself.

The Stalinist strategy for rapid industrialisation involved two major

steps: first, peasant labour, which constituted the majority of the labour force, was transformed into industrial and urban labour; second, industrial labour was heavily employed in the production of capital goods. The state also took over the function of price-fixing and in the process extorted the maximum amount of investment from peasants as well as industrial workers. While low prices were set for farm products, so that the agricultural surplus accrued to the state, high prices were set for industrial consumer goods, of which the production was also monopolised by the state. Thus both peasants and industrial workers were squeezed to the utmost to generate the maximum investible surplus, which year after year was ploughed back into heavy industry. The result was a phenomenal rate of industrialisation and growth, coupled with ubiquitous productive inefficiency and social tension.

It should not be forgotten that this success story conceals in its wake the incalculable cost paid by millions of human lives. There is a decided difference between Marxian humanitarian communism and Stalin's ruthless version rooted in the aggrandisement of the state which, I venture to say, has nothing to do with proletarian welfare. Whatever Stalin did was rooted in egomania, in his desire to tower over everything else in society. His own glory lay in glorifying the state, in exalting nationalism, even though this idea was also at variance with the internationalism of Marx. The Marxian view regarding the international brotherhood of workers was, of course, used to advantage when Stalin needed sanction for Soviet imperialism over Eastern Europe. Even today the Soviet leaders preach Marxism whenever their dominion is threatened by their subjects in the satellite states. The evolution of Russian society under Stalin is thus a lengthy tale of atrocities, hypocrisy and brazen propaganda unleashed to mask its ugly totalitarian face behind the cosmetics of socialism. Since Stalin's death in 1953, life in Russia has eased somewhat, but its leadership is still committed to the dictatorship of the sovereign or a body of sovereigns.

Even the Soviet constitution adopted in 1938 is a cosmetic document, a sham designed to dupe the Russian people and the gullible in other parts of the world. In theory it seems little different from the constitutions of democratic nations in Europe, but in practice it is openly flouted. Thus it duly provides for universal suffrage to all adults, a bicameral legislature called the Supreme Soviet, an executive and administrative body elected by the Supreme Soviet and called the Council of Ministers, as well as a bill of rights guaranteeing the citizens some human rights such as the freedom of speech, of assembly, of religion, and of the press. The Supreme Soviet, consisting of a thousand elected members in the two chambers, is given broad legislative powers; when out of session, it is represented by the Presidium, a body of thirty-seven members enjoying the same powers as the Supreme Soviet.

The Soviet constitution, however, was, and still is, a façade designed

to mask the dictatorship of the leader (or leaders) of the one and only communist party. How perfidious this system is is apparent not from what the Constitution emphasises but from what it fails to emphasise. In its 146 Articles the Party is mentioned only once, much like a minor addendum to the main text. Yet the sway of the Party on Soviet life belies this impression. The constitution would have us believe that the Party is a nonentity in the Soviet system, yet ever since the 1917 Revolution the Party's decrees and regulations have been the gospel, carrying the solid force of law.[2] The day-to-day administration is in the hands of a vast bureaucracy headed by the Council of Ministers, but all its operations are overseen by thousands of Party members who debate, decide and then execute various policies dealing with all aspects of life. Heading the Party hierarchy is its Political Bureau (Politburo), which now consists of sixteen members; in theory it is responsible to its Central Committee, but the reverse has really been the case. Membership of the 426-man Central Committee is formally bestowed by the Party Congress, which in turn is composed of members selected from lower echelons on the basis of a series of indirect elections. Thus ultimately power rests with the Politburo chieftain, who is also called the Party Secretary or the General Secretary. The command of the General Secretary, the boss of all bosses, filters into the bureaucracy as well as the rest of society through the arteries of a body called the Secretariat, which has far fewer members than the 426-man Central Committee.

In such a monolithic set-up, society can be free from oppression only if its sovereign is a benevolent ruler; but the Soviet leadership until today has been anything but benevolent. With perhaps the singular exception of Lenin, all the party Secretaries have been self-centred, caring nothing for the empyrean humanism of Marx, although every repressive act has been committed by them in his name.

By Stalin's death, the Soviet-style communism had spread its tentacles over all facets of Russian life. The economy, by then completely collectivised and organised under state capitalism, had grown at an astonishing rate, but moral and social fibre lay prostrate and bleeding. It was against a background of police brutality that Khrushchev succeeded Stalin, and within a few years returned to the now familiar one-man rule. Already the economy had shown signs of strain. Much of the unemployed labour and other natural resources by then had been fully utilized, and further development could come only from economic reforms, reduced bureaucratic meddling, and new technology. Under the brutal prodding of the state, the economy had grown enormously, but it was far from efficient. With individual initiative choked by centralised decision-making, it is not surprising that after attaining near full employment in the 1950s the economic engine had come to a screeching halt. It is in this perspective that Khrushchev, at first imperceptibly and then systematically, began to dismantle the authoritarian machine that Stalin

had designed. Khrushchev's total denunciation of Stalinism, his efforts to loosen the reins on the economy, failures of Soviet agriculture, and his abortive skirmish with the United States over the Cuban affair were among the reasons that brought about his downfall in 1964.

The Soviet leadership since then has been a collective leadership of sorts; it has been spearheaded by the Party Secretary, Brezhnev, and the Head of the Government, Premier Kosygin. While Lenin and Stalin were children of the Revolution, Khrushchev was a child of civil war and of the early phase of Stalinist communism. The new leaders, however, have been raised in an atmosphere more settled than the early atmosphere of intrigue and bloodshed that attended the Revolution. Consequently, the influence of ideology has declined while that of government bureaucrats has gone nowhere but up. All this has served to erode the charismatic appeal of the Party Secretary. No longer is his office combined with the office of the Premier in one and the same person.

CONTEMPORARY SOVIET SOCIETY

As a result of many economic, political and social changes during more than half a century of communist rule, the contemporary Soviet polity differs radically from old tsarist Russia or from Russia at the time of the Revolution. The only surviving link is provided by the absolutist heritage, and even there some fissures are beginning to appear. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was virtually a homogeneous unit at the dawn of 1917. Inspired by a revolutionary fervour, by the egalitarian ideology of Marx, it was solidly united behind Lenin, a gifted political leader with a rare magnetism over his followers. He was at once the chief ideologist, the founder of the Bolshevik movement, and above all a keen administrator of the economy and the state. Stalin was less charismatic but he continued to embody various Party and state functions in his person, as one opponent after another, thanks to the secret police and the purges, disappeared. Khrushchev, the least charismatic of the first three main rulers of the Soviet Union, condemned Stalinism, but then attempted to impose his own authoritarian rule over the Party and the state. But, as Brezinski [1] observes, no longer was the leader able to provide a 'fusion of leadership functions'. Since Khrushchev the division of such functions has continued with the leadership. No longer is the Party chief the top ideologist and the top administrator or technician. The typical leader now is simply the bureaucrat who has been a witness to Stalin's scourge but not its victim. With him the formal commitment to Marxist ideology is the least, and acquisitive instinct the highest.

The change in aspirations of the top leadership is simply a mirror-image of the change in lower Party echelons as well as in the rank-and-file members. The Party is no longer a homogeneous entity of ideologists and propagandists, but a medley of conflicting interests that inevitably arise in an industrially advanced society. Whereas in the aftermath of the Revolution, the rigid class structure of tsarist Russia was destroyed, massive industrialisation ever since has produced a tremendous growth of administrative and technical personnel, which, together with the Party leadership, has for some time become the new leading class. Scientists, engineers, artists, professors and other intellectuals have joined the ranks of the new elite in increasing numbers. Russian society today, therefore, is remarkably different from what it was just three decades ago. Its aristocracy is steeped as much in materialism as anywhere else in the world.

Russia today presents a striking contrast of a highly educated society enduring a dictatorial regime. The commitment of the Soviet leadership to public education has been admirable and total, and as a result almost everyone is literate today. But the growth of education, correlated as it is with industrialisation, has also given rise to Party heterogeneity and new tensions in society. Without well-educated social and physical scientists, the industrial machine will grind to a halt. However, the intelligentsia are not so amenable to Party indoctrination, and this makes them suspect in the eyes of the Party, which can ill afford to do without them yet cannot let them move to the top. The relatively dull Party stalwart increasingly feels inferior to the intellectuals, yet must accept their membership to fathom the functioning of an increasingly complex socio-economic system. This dilemma has been partly solved by a device called *nomenklatura*, which is the nomenclature or classified list of those considered suitable for sensitive positions. It is through this system that the top leadership, up to the Party Secretary, maintains its privileged status in society. *Nomenklatura* exists at practically every stratum of Soviet life – from the topmost posts to lower-level appointments. By restricting their hiring to those on the secret roster, the Party bosses make sure that potential trouble makers are shut out from the inner circle. They thus have a vested interest in keeping those with initiative, drive and intelligence out of the seat of power. For these reasons, the current Soviet leadership has been often called a self-perpetuating oligarchy, interested in promoting the dullards in society: 'A new generation of clerks' is how Brezinski puts it [1, p. 8].

The composition of the Party has thus radically changed with the advance of education and industrialisation. The intellectuals conforming to the Party doctrines, which exalt nationalism, the absolute supremacy of the Party and state, and ideological formalism, have been allowed to join the Party ranks in increasing numbers. This growing trend towards intellectualisation of the Party, combined with increased political

stability and economic prosperity, has considerably diminished the role of ideology in the formulation of policy. It is this erosion of ideological formalism that may explain in part the growing materialism now creeping into society at all levels, especially at the top. In the process even the formal adherence to Marxian ideals has been evaporating into thin air.

Nothing illustrates the divorce of the Soviet regime from Marxian egalitarianism better than this materialistic bent of the new elite which, according to Hedrick Smith, constitutes 'a sizeable chunk of Soviet society – well over a million and, counting relatives, probably several million' [2, p. 35]. As mentioned earlier, apart from the Party chiefs and bureaucrats, the new elite includes the conformist members of the intelligentsia, including senior social and physical scientists, artists, writers, and so on. It also includes army and naval officers. (In spite of the Party's unquestioned dominion, the military has a great say in the Soviet polity.) Not surprisingly, only the elite have access to privileges and luxuries – automobiles, television, lush apartments and villas, education in prestigious schools, foreign travel – that are denied to the general public. In fact the Soviet system at the top of the social pyramid is as inequitable as any other in the world: all this shamelessly goes on in the name of Marxism. (Brezhnev prides himself on his motley collection of foreign luxury cars – Rolls-Royce, Lincoln, Mercedes, Cadillac.)

I have dwelt at length on the corruption and materialism of the Soviet regime to argue that Russian society is now languishing through the degenerate phase of the Khatrian age. It now displays the marks of a society in transition from one era to another. Even though Vipras (the intellectuals) are steadily gaining in importance, it may still be called a Khatrian society – or more properly a Khatri-dominated society in flux. Some might argue that Russia is now in the Vipran era, because the Soviet leaders have displayed some Vipran qualities since the Revolution. Have they not subdued the Khatris – the military, the secret police (KGB), etc. – through extensive indoctrination into the Party ideology? Yes, they have. Ever since the Revolution, the military has had to submit to the Party ideologist, especially in Stalin's days when army officers too feared the secret police. Even today the military has to bear with constant meddling from the Party. Yet contemporary Russian society cannot be called a Vipran society, for its absolutist linkage with the tsarist regime remains. The Soviet approach seems little different from that of Peter the Great, who imposed modernisation and Western culture on Russia at great human cost and repression. It is only in the last decade of modern Russian history that the government has begun to resemble a government by consensus. Otherwise, it has been ruled by one autocrat after another, be it the Tsar or the Party Secretary. In this light, the change that has occurred since Khrushchev's fall is certainly remarkable, yet it falls short of a move into the Vipran age. Extreme

centralisation in politics as well as administration continues with few signs of abatement.

Even the military, subdued by Lenin and Stalin, has shown signs of resurgence. Since Khrushchev's fall its influence and command over national resources have been on a steady rise. The secret police too has waxed again. Actually, the fact that it is hard to pin a label on contemporary Russian society in terms of Sarkar's concepts is precisely why Russia may now be said to be passing through the degenerate phase of the Khatrian age. While Vipras are on the rise, they are not yet at the helm. At the same time, the Russian leaders display a mixture of Khatrian and Vipran mentality. On the one hand they are committed to their dictatorial rule, on the other they have trapped their people in the web of rigid rules and dogmas. Their corruption, worldliness and brazen disregard for human rights, coupled with the continued sway of the military, are clear symptoms of a Khatrian society gasping for a fresh breath of life.

FUTURE RUSSIAN SOCIETY: THE NEW VIPRAN ERA

Despite the hazards of forecasting the future course of Russia, and despite a dismal past record in this connection, the Soviet future continues to fascinate the scholars of Communism. They have not been deterred by the fact that almost all such predictions have failed; nor is it going to deter me. Some of this predicting, however, has derived from revolutionary euphoria or wishful thinking. In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Marxists foresaw the spread of their fervour all over the capitalist world. They have been sobered by subsequent events, but the diehard and orthodox communists still believe that Communism is the wave of the future; that world revolution is inevitable.

If the predictive record of the Marxists has been poor, that of the anti-Marxists is even poorer. That the Soviet experiment is doomed to failure has been prophesied again and again by Western observers. Among the latest of such prophets of communism's doom is Michel Garder, who had predicted the collapse of the Soviet collossus by 1970. Most scholars today believe that the apocalyptic visions of an imminent, or even the near future, demise of Soviet communism rely more on hopes than on careful analysis; that although the system will probably undergo some change in line with current trends, its basic features, such as the one-party system, state capitalism, ideological formalism, etc., will, in some form or the other, remain.[3] In part, and only in part, I tend to agree with this view, although admittedly such a broad generalisation about the Soviet future leaves little room for disagreement. But the Soviet polity, I believe, will not only reflect the picture now in the making but also

some radically new features that are predictable from the application of the theory of social cycle.

Currently the Russian people are under the dominance of what we may call pseudo-Khatris, i.e., those exhibiting partly Khatrian and partly Vipran mentality. As described earlier, their dominion rests on ideological deception, on extensive political indoctrination of the citizenry by what has been often called the *apparatchiki* – career politicians or those trained in the Soviet version of Marxism. At the same time, the Soviet leaders are champions of social discipline and of the absolute supremacy of the state. Thus they are a mixed breed. The fact that Russia today is being ruled by pseudo-Khatris is not surprising, because it is now, and has been for several generations, lingering through the terminal phase of its Khatrian age. Its leadership, in Toynbee's terms, is a dominant minority, one interested only in self-perpetuity and personal gain at the expense of other classes. The change in Russia, in terms of the law of social cycle, has then been long overdue, and as suggested earlier, the new Vipran era could emerge any time in the near future. It still might take many more generations, but most likely the Russian body social will soon cast off the thraldom of pseudo-Khatris and advance into a society ruled by intellectuals. That in any case is the decree of the theory of social cycle.

The group next in line of succession to power, the Vipran class, has been subjected to intermittent persecution for more than three hundred years – more so in the Soviet than in the tsarist regime. This is then a fitting prognostic of a new society that is bound to emerge in the fullness of time, because usually the section that struggles against the dominant clique in one era inherits power in the next. The law of social cycle is rooted in human evolution, and if evolution is inevitable, so is the social change in accordance with this law.

Let us then briefly examine the history of social repression in the annals of modern Russia. In the times of the tsar, the group that suffered most comprised the servile labourer toiling on estates owned by the bureaucracy and the militaristic nobility. In other words, the serfs or the Shudras were repressed the most, and this was nothing unusual because the physical workers bear the brunt of persecution in almost all phases of the social cycle. Only slightly less persecuted were the Vipras – the churchmen or intellectuals, or both. During the seventeenth century, there was a general belief among the prelates that the Russian Church had done everything but lead the people, that the country's misfortunes mostly stemmed from ecclesiastical apathy and inertia, and that religious reforms were badly needed. This sentiment found its champion in Nikon, the Patriarch from 1653 to 1656, who introduced many changes in the religious ritual. However, the reforms did not go well with the conservative churchmen, and before long an anti-Nikonian movement came into being. The affairs of religion, ironically, seldom

preclude the use of force: the tsar took harsh measures against the protesters, who came to be known as Old Ritualists. Their leader, Avvakum, was burned alive, along with many others. Incredible as it may seem, thousands of protesters, out of despair, immolated themselves on flaming pyres. And brutalities against the Old Ritualists continued during the eighteenth century. The government was particularly fond of burning the leaders at the stake, although the last quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed a measure of religious tolerance. Unfortunately, the reprieve to the dissenters was short, as in the middle of the nineteenth century the government resumed its repressive policy, which persisted in one form or another until 1905 when some constitutional reforms guaranteed the freedom of worship and faith.

Stronger tremors, however, were yet to come. From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, the dissenters of all persuasions had been repressed, but at least religion was still alive; its need, despite murmurs of atheism, was not yet questioned. As a matter of fact, the Church, in some respects, was still robust, ready to assume moral leadership in society. Its prestige had been restored in the nineteenth century by a number of illustrious leaders who commanded great esteem from the public by living up to pure and lofty ideals. The world-renowned saint and author, Leo Tolstoy, was only one among them.

After the revolution of 1917 the Church encountered something that it had never faced before – disintegration. Marx, the mentor of all communists, regarded religion as the 'opium of the people', something that exploits humanity and should be done away with. Following the revolution all monasteries and theological academies were ordered closed and the Church property nationalised. Many bishops were arrested, and in 1918–19 about twenty-eight lost their lives for what they believed; another fifty were murdered between 1923 and 1926. In spite of such persecution and the state's unrelenting anti-religious propaganda, religion has survived in communist Russia. A sizeable minority still believes in God and patronises what few churches that remain. At present the government is a little more tolerant of religious sentiment; there is freedom of worship but nothing more. While atheistic ideas are part of the school curricula, the religious faithful are not permitted to preach and proselytise.

Let us now turn to the issue of governmental persecution of the intellectuals – scientists, literary writers, university professors and the like. For over two-and-a-half centuries, Russian literature has been subject to censorship. That is, both under tsardom and communism, those errant writers who failed to toe the official line were, and are still, shown the light by censorship boards either through endless literary criticism or through the threat of physical punishment, or both. A system of censorship unfolded in tsarist Russia as early as the eighteenth century, by which time a Russian intelligentsia had matured enough to become

noticeable. At first the responsibility for correcting the wayward writer rested with the Church, but following the French revolution in 1789, the government itself stepped in. By 1863 this task was taken over by the top state organ – the ministry of the interior. Censorship in the eighteenth century mainly afflicted those intellectuals and writers who were infected with 'liberal' Western thought that seemed to undermine the imperial government. Some writers, such as Radischev and Novikov, who would not care for 'enlightenment', were awarded long prison sentences. At times, however, punishment involved only reprimands, fines, excommunication, and the outright banning of books and journals.

Censorship has continued under Soviet rule, except that in tsarist Russia it was overt, vested in a ministry of the government, whereas in communist Russia it is covert, hidden under euphemisms. The Soviet constitution provides for a free press, and officially there is no censor. Its place has been taken by a governing body called Glavlit which is the chief administrator for publications and literary works. At the same time the leaders of the Soviet Union, from top to bottom, are personally involved with censoring any material deemed objectionable to 'proletarian welfare'.

Censorhip in communist Russia has been much more stifling and pervasive than it ever was during tsarist times. Not only is there now a list of topics that cannot be discussed, the Soviet writer must write what he is told; he must conform to the official style of the so-called Socialist Realism. Whether he believes it or not, he must demonstrate the inherent superiority of all socialist institutions over their counterparts in the West; and this he must accomplish in a way that sounds logical and appealing to the rational mind.

Prior to Stalin's Great Purge of the 1930s, when thousands of Party workers were killed, the intelligentsia in the Soviet polity had a somewhat chequered career. During the civil war, they met the same fate as the former elite, and were treated with contempt. Despite their services to the economy and the war effort, they were scorned as bourgeois specialists, and forced to live on subsistence. The situation changed for the better during the period of NEP, and those loyal to the Revolution could expect advancement and improved living conditions. However, after Lenin's death, the radical Marxists took over again, and that spelled disaster for the intellectuals. The bourgeois specialists were accused of being reactionaries, of showing partiality for capitalism, of impeding industrialisation. Some were simply purged, while others were removed from sensitive positions. But then came the Great Purge which at one stroke swept the radical Marxists aside. Surprisingly enough, the old bourgeois specialists now returned but only as mute sheep, ready to obey Stalin's whims and commands. Gone were the days of even the phantom autonomy they had enjoyed in their work only a decade before. The Party now demanded their full loyalty, a total commitment

to the cause of socialism: in that atmosphere of terror, any dissenting voice was out of the question.

After Stalin's death, some dissenting voices made a whispering return. They were particularly encouraged by Khrushchev's scathing denunciation of Stalinism, and the writers now obtained a degree of literary freedom unthinkable just before. Following Khrushchev's fall, however, the Soviet leadership restored Stalin's image to a degree, and met the writers' demands for increased autonomy with repression – not like the old-style terror but terrifying enough. Since then the non-conformism of the so-called dissidents has become a political issue both in Russia as well as in the West, which has often reacted with shock and dismay at the Soviet contempt for the fundamental rights of its citizens. Actually the most amazing phenomenon of post-Stalin Russia is not that the intellectual dissent has been silenced, but the fact that such dissent has been grudgingly permitted by the authorities. This is yet another sign that Russia is now slowly veering away from the customary communist penchant for bloodshed, and evolving towards a somewhat pluralistic society with some tolerance for opposition as long as it remains within bounds and does not undermine the establishment.

Despite the heavy hand with which the authorities have struck down the non-conformist writers, the intellectual dissent has displayed the fortitude and resilience of the Soviet religion. Many young writers, who prefer to publish of their own free will, have been tried since 1966 and convicted of anti-Soviet activity. They have been deprived of their jobs, occasionally sent to jail and quite often banished to lunatic asylums. But the underground press, known as Samizdat, continues to breathe. The 1974 exile of Solzhenitsyn, the maltreatment of Andrei Sakharov, and the recent arrests of Yuri Orlov and Alexander Ginzburg are only the latest episodes in the continued saga of Soviet dissidents against the official tyranny.

The crux of the discussion thus far is that Vipras – churchmen and the intelligentsia – have been the prey of persecution for much of the new Khatrian era that has prevailed in Russia for the last four centuries. This phenomenon has a certain parallel with the intermittent Roman oppression of Christianity during the first three centuries following the birth of Christ. Who could have then imagined that the Christian leaders would one day hold the vast Roman state in their sway? Yet Vipras in the West inherited the power of the Khatris just as inevitably as the Roman empire declined. The social cycle in Russia has been moving at a tortoise pace at least in comparison to that in India and in the Western world, and it is for this reason that despite occasionally savage repression of Vipras by the Khatris the Khatrian era still lingers in Russian society. But now its days are numbered, and nothing manifests this more than the fact that the self-conceit and materialism of the Soviet leadership are pitted against the dedication, sacrifices and self-denial of such intellectual giants as the Nobel Prize winners, Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov. Sooner or later the change has to come, but it will not be easy. The entrenched Soviet establishment will not surrender to the progressive forces, unless and until it is left with no choice. For this reason the struggling dissidents of Russia need, and deserve, all moral as well as material support from all the enemies of repression. The Western world, especially the U.S., is now doing an admirable job of stirring up the question of human rights in the Soviet Union, and this should be zealously pursued in the future as well. Those who want to see the Soviet leadership humanised must help those spirited enough to confront the Soviet authoritarian machine. It is not easy, or possible, to visualise the exact process that will spur the Russian society into a Vipran era, but since such movement is inevitable, the strengthening of dissidents will hasten the demise of the present regime.

Will the new era arrive peacefully or under the pall of violence? Or in Sarkar's terms, will there be a Vipran evolution or revolution? Posing this question is easier than answering it. Current informed opinion is not helpful either, as it is itself divided between those suggesting that any future transformation will be but gradual and others arguing that because of the self-conceit of the Soviet leadership no change can occur in Russia without convulsions. It is my belief that the change in Russia will be swift and violent, but not necessarily revolutionary, as some features of the future Russian polity have already surfaced. And this is not unusual, because the outer shell of government and administration of the Khatrian era remains more or less unchanged in the Vipran era. But while the political structure remains intact, the balance of power swings visibly in the direction of the Vipras who govern in the name of the apparent ruler.

Let us now apply this principle to Soviet evolution. Ever since the Revolution, the country has been ruled by the Party Secretary, who in the person of Lenin or Stalin was also the top ideologist and the top administrator. As mentioned earlier, such leadership functions have been increasingly differentiated ever since Stalin's death. Today the Party Secretary is neither the top ideologist nor the head of administration. But he is still the most powerful figure in the state – the first among equals. He is the chairman of the Politburo and of the Party Secretariat, two bodies that are the command and nerve centres of the Party, and ultimately of Russian society. In the forthcoming Vipran era, however, this will no longer be the case. The Party Secretary, the real as well as apparent ruler thus far, will have to defer to the Head of the Government – the Soviet Prime Minister. Not that there will be any basic alteration in the present Constitution or the system of government; only that the Party which has been supreme so far will lose much of its influence. The Constitution which has been good only in theory until now will assume a more positive role, and the Supreme

Soviet will assert itself in governance.

The Soviet polity will be dominated by the intelligentsia, and the Prime Minister will be adept in oratory as well as in the art of balancing diverse interests of various groups which have already come into being. In terms of politics, the future Soviet society will be reminiscent of the British parliamentary system that developed immediately after the Glorious Revolution. There will be some surface differences of course. For instance, the Soviet party system will perhaps continue to remain monolithic as opposed to the two-party system of England. But in most respects the Soviet polity will display the features of the British Vipran era of the eighteenth century. Thus the Party Secretary, much like the British king, will enjoy high privileges and public esteem but only nominal political influence. Similarly, the Soviet Prime Minister, like his early British counterpart, will be an efficient 'manager', displaying Vipran qualities. He might even come directly from the ranks of the intelligentsia.

The early British parliamentary set-up, though far from democratic, was less centralised than the Khatrian regimes of the Tudors, Stuarts and Oliver Cromwell. By the same token, the Soviet Vipran era will not be democratic, at least by present-day Western standards, but it will certainly be more decentralised than the present regime. The Head of the Government or of the Council of Ministers will be somewhat more responsible to the Supreme Soviet and ultimately to the general public. In addition to the political process, the administration will also become more diffused in all spheres; centralised economic decision-making will give way to greater autonomy at the entrepreneurial level. No longer will the Party *apparat* be allowed to meddle so extensively with the people; no longer will the intellectual community be subject to so vast an instrument of censorship, harassment and persecution. But the freedom of thought, press and speech will not approach modern Western standards.

Those losing the most from the change will be the present Party cadre of pseudo-Khatris and the genuine Khatrian groups such as the secret police and the military. No longer will there be so great an allocation of scarce resources for heavy industry as well as the military establishment. The Soviet consumer will see a rise in his general standard of living; but the intelligentsia will be the biggest beneficiary, and, in comparison, the lot of the industrial worker and the peasant will improve only slightly.

Another distinguishing feature of Russian society will be an extensive recasting of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The dominion of the Prime Minister will be justified by novel and, as always, self-serving interpretations which will demolish the spirit and substance of Marxism if not its outer forms. It is precisely this kind of work in which Vipras are particularly proficient. No one should be surprised if in the future Soviet scholars find some kind of backdoor support for private property

as well as the profit motive. In short, the new Vipran state in Russia will not be totalitarian; nor will it adhere to its present interpretation of Marxian Communism. In truth, there will be a downfall of totalitarian communism, which will be replaced by a decentralised structure, although the degree of decentralisation will not approach that prevailing in the West today. This will also come one day, as it must, but not in the near future.

It is possible that my scenario of the Soviet future outlined above may never materialise in its entirety. This will not be the first failure either, for many predictions made before in this regard have come to naught. My prophecies may not then come true in all details, yet one thing is certain: Soviet society is now evolving towards a Vipran era which will be highlighted by the dominance of the intellectuals, Therefore the present regime of pseudo-Khatris is doomed to extinction in the near future.

Why is Russian society now ripe for a new Vipran era any more than it was at the outset of the twentieth century? After all, the present regime is no more oppressive of its people than the tsarist state. Is it not then possible that, given Russia's long absolutist tradition, totalitarian communism may continue to endure as far as one can peer into the future? My answer is no. It is true that Russia at the dawn of the twentieth century displayed all the symptoms of internal decay, yet a Vipran society was beyond its reach, simply because a broad Vipran base had not been prepared. Russian Vipras, to be sure, had been struggling for a long time, yet they were in a stark minority amidst a populace that was overwhelmingly illiterate. Neither the Church nor the intelligentsia had the ability to lead the groping society. The result was that even though an emaciated tsarist structure crumbled under the first wave of Bolshevik assault, the absolutist inheritance survived and later recoiled on the citizens with a vengeance.

The complexion of Russian society is drastically different today. Since nearly all are literate, the foundation on which the government of the Vipras may stand is there. When the latent rift between the subjects and the state erupts into an open protest on a large scale – and for this we may not have to wait long – the resulting change will lead Russia into the Vipran age. This is simply inevitable.

NOTES

1. I have spoken of this in Chapter 6, but will now discuss it in greater detail.

2. In 1977 a new, amended Constitution was introduced, but the emendations only confirm one's faith in the duplicity of the Soviet regime. The new Constitution merely puts the old wine in a new bottle, adding some sweeteners

in the process. It now addresses itself directly to the question of the Party's ultimate command in society; also, the Russians now have more phantom rights than before, but they are openly asked to submit to the state. In addition, Brezhnev is now the Party Secretary as well as President of the country.

3. See the excellent discussion on the Soviet future in various articles compiled in [1].

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9 The Downfall of Capitalism

Towards the end of the fifth chapter I argued that ever since the second half of the nineteenth century, Western society has been moving through the Vashyan age in which men of affluence hold the reins. The dominion of the ruling class then stems from its control over wealth as well as the means of production, while all other classes – the warriors, the intellectuals, the labourers – readily submit to the affluent elite. It is in this era that the system of government is extremely decentralised and, as a consequence, crime flourishes, families break down, prostitution soars, and extreme individualism comes to permeate the social order. Such a socio-economic system prevailed in the West in the second half of the Middle Ages and is generally called feudalism; today it prevails again and is called capitalism. In this chapter I argue that, despite overwhelming surface disparities, feudalism and capitalism have many features in common; that the demise of capitalism is as inevitable as the demise of feudalism; that it will be first brought down by a Shudran revolution at a not-too-distant future, and then replaced by a new centralised, but benevolent, rule of the Khatris. Such a vision of capitalism flows logically from an application of the law of social cycle to the future of Western society.

In prophesying the doom of capitalism, I, of course, am not alone. A large body of literature, based on the writings of Marx and Lenin, has sought to demonstrate that capitalism is its own foe; that it is an economic order riddled with self-demolishing contradictions. Such a prognosis has been generally unpopular with Western intellectuals, not only because it has been disproved by history but also because Marx's own analysis has been found wanting in logical perfection. Yet the doomsaying for capitalism has not been a favourite pastime of Marxists alone. Many non-Marxists, such as Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Heilbroner and Toynbee among others, have also foreseen the end of capitalism, though not in a violent revolution. Despite serious differences, my own prognosis is reminiscent more of Marx than of any other scholar. I agree with Marx in suggesting that capitalism will end up in a revolutionary turmoil, possibly violent, but I disagree with him in that this revolution will not be the handiwork of the proletariat but of the Khatris and Vipras, who have so far accepted the dominance of the

capitalist class and attempted to emulate it in many ways. Neither will capitalism be replaced by the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' nor by communism, but by the rule of the Khatrian class, which is composed of military and skilled industrial workers. I argue that on the political front there is a possibility of the military taking over the Western world, with full regard for fundamental human rights, whereas in the economic sphere the workers will take over the management of factories. After the hard-fought conflict of the Shudran revolution, a new era of high-spiritedness, adventure and social discipline will be born.

That capitalism is eventually doomed to extinction, even its most ardent supporters would admit. Many would argue that by gradual evolution itself the facial features of capitalism will be altered, if not transformed. However, I believe that the Shudran revolution will occur in the next twenty-five to fifty years. Thus it should occur in our own lifetime, or certainly in the lifetime of our children.

WESTERN SOCIETY AND THE UNITED STATES

Before I elaborate on the conclusions presented above, it is necessary to see how capitalism has evolved, especially in the United States of America, which is among the youngest offshoots of Western civilisation. The United States is currently the nerve-centre of capitalism, and its history deserves a separate treatment. For this reason, I ignored its analysis in Chapter 5 and postponed it to this chapter.

In terms of Sarkar's thesis U.S. history presents few complications. It is easy to see that right from the influx of Europeans to the North American continent, the U.S. has been moving through the Vashyan age. This is not to suggest that capitalism has always prevailed in the U.S. society, only that right from its inception the forces of wealth have been predominant. Prior to the American Civil War (1861–5), the landed proprietors of great wealth were in command of society and government, but since then the supreme social status has belonged to owners of financial capital and of industries. Thus in one form or another, the affluent have dominated U.S. society right from its birth, and this signifies the long continuance of nothing else but the Vashyan age.

Although it is customary to commence U.S. history from 1492, the fateful year in which Columbus discovered America, American settlements really began with 1607 when an English merchant company arrived at Jamestown and founded the colony of Virginia. Another colony was settled in 1620 at Plymouth – this time by the Pilgrims who left England to avoid the persecution of James I and the Anglican Church. These two experiments were merely the beginning of what turned out to be a steady stream of immigrants sailing from Europe, especially England, to America. Within a span of another century, thirteen-odd English colonies were established along the Atlantic coast of North America. In addition, Spain and France occupied the remaining areas of what today is the U.S. mainland.

Europeans came to settle in the colonies for a wide variety of reasons. Some groups such as the Pilgrims, Puritans, Quakers, Roman Catholics and Huguenots came for the sake of freedom in their religious practices. Others like the English merchants were lured by trade and good economic prospects. Most of the early settlers in the English colonies were determined to assert religious and economic freedom. Having suffered much at home, they were not inclined to accept monarchy or any other autocratic government in the colonies. They had come as private groups of people, and, except in the earliest years, they did not regard themselves as agents of the British king or of anyone else who could command them from home. For all these reasons, the system of government that developed in the colonies was from the earliest much more representative than the British counterpart. Even as England chafed under the autocracy of Stuart kings, the colonists enjoyed some form of representative government.

The basic structure of each colonial government resembled the British archetype. Each colony was headed by a governor, appointed either by the king or, as in Maryland, Delaware and Pennsylvania, by private proprietors who, in hopes of high profits, had decided to attempt settlement in the New World. The governor was advised by an appointed council and a lower house, which was elected in general elections by those who satisfied certain property qualifications. In theory, therefore, each colonial government could have been an autocracy dominated by the governor or the proprietor, but in practice the real power gradually passed to the elected legislators, who were either owners of vast estates, or, as in New England, wealthy merchants. And several reasons were responsible for this shift of power.

Most of the proprietors who obtained charters from the king had grandiose visions of royal prerogatives and authority. They had hoped to impose on their colonies the same social stratification as characterised England, where land was scarce and a landed magnate was a man of influence and prestige in society. Conditions however, were entirely different in America, which was one vast expanse of unmolested land. Any repressive system based on the relationship between landlords and landless peasants was simply doomed to failure in the New World, because if a person disliked living under one proprietor, he could move elsewhere. It is not then surprising that as economic enterprises most proprietorships proved to be colossal failures. Hence, in most colonies, one by one the proprietors relinquished their claims to the royal authority.

While the proprietors were patently unsuccessful in establishing

political oligarchy, the governors did not have much luck either. In principle they had veto power over all legislation enacted by their legislative assemblies, but in practice they could do little but treat the assemblymen with deference. This is because the assemblymen came to control the allocation of revenues; even the governor's salary depended upon their appropriations. Thus the power of the purse generally prevailed over the threat of veto, and the colonists deftly employed it to run their own affairs: they were masters in their own land.

Another experiment at some kind of centralised government was made in Massachusetts, which was founded in 1629. This was an attempt to establish a theocracy – a government based on religious tenets. Massachusetts had been settled early by a group of English Puritans, men imbued with evangelical zeal, who, having been deprived of their visions in the mother country, now hoped to build a Christian commonwealth on the new soil. It is not that the Puritans displayed tolerance for other faiths, only that they sought to found a society of like-minded, God-fearing people. In their system, the civil authority was supposed to submit to the dictates of the Church. The Puritan regime did prevail for a while, but it was doomed to failure for the same reasons which subverted the proprietors' attempts to found an oligarchy. As the colonists moved from the coastal areas to the interior, some of the early religious zeal waned, and economic concerns in the harsh, unfamiliar environment began to take precedence. As the economy grew over time, religious matters were subordinated to mundane affairs. Even though religion and the clergy continued to have some sway, by the eighteenth century the theocratic experiment in Massachusetts died under the unrelenting onslaught of improving economic conditions.

A similar fate awaited the later theocratic experiments in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. There too economic concerns eventually prevailed over the sagging currents of religion, resulting in some kind of democratic government. The crux of my argument so far is that all attempts to found Khatrian or Vipran varieties of relatively centralised governments eventually failed in colonial America. By the eighteenth century, representative governments were established in all English colonies with varying, but mostly nominal, degrees of intervention by the Church in secular affairs.

Colonial American society is quite often pictured as a homogeneous society with few of the class conflicts that bedevilled contemporary Europe. This was perhaps true of the early settlements, but as the abundance of natural resources led to considerable economic growth, social stratification resulted from differing economic fortunes. The early settlers tended to have an advantage over the latecomers, as the former occupied the best and well-located tracts of land. In any case, even though few aristocratic families migrated from England to American

colonies, and even though most colonists brought with them little wealth, a native aristocracy, based on wealth differentials, did develop by the eighteenth century. In America, unlike contemporary England, capital and labour were extremely scarce, but land and natural resources abundant. In England wealth belonged to the capitalists, in America to the owners of vast estates, especially those in the Middle and Southern colonies. It is mainly in New England, which throve on trade and commerce, that wealthy merchants appeared, and there, unlike contemporary Europe, no stigma was attached to income derived from interest and profit.

Regardless of the source of wealth, those who owned it commanded great esteem and influence even in colonial America. The office that an ordinary American then coveted most was the governor's council, which was composed mainly of the richest men in the land. Appointed for life, the councilmen participated in the making of laws as well as in executive decisions. In the fullness of time, the governors and their councils were overshadowed by the elected legislative assemblies, but the assemblymen too were far from men of humble means. This sway of opulence in early American life emerges strikingly in the words of Charles A. and Mary R. Beard:

> In each colony the representative assembly, by whatever process instituted, was elected by the property owners. The qualifications imposed on voters were often modified but in every change the power of property ... was expressly recognized. In the South, where agriculture was the great economic interest, land was the basis of suffrage; Virginia, for example, required the elector in town or country to be a freeholder, an owner of land – a farm or a town lot of a stated size. Where agriculture and trade divided the honors, politics reflected the fact; in Massachusetts, for instance, the suffrage was conferred upon all men who owned real estate yielding forty shillings a year income, or possessed other property to the value of £40. [1, pp. 109–10]

Thus, right from the beginning American society has evolved in terms of the Vashyan age, and although religion also played a strong role in the early settlements, its influence was soon swept aside by the rising tide of economic growth and prosperity. Does this in any way contradict my conclusion reached in Chapter 5 that the eighteenth century of Western civilisation belongs to the Vipran age? In other words, does the Vashyan era of eighteenth-century American society, an offspring of western Europe, nullify the result already obtained? It does not. The earlier result is at most weakened somewhat but not negated, for several reasons. One reason concerns the population. The U.S. population, though growing at astronomical rates, was for a long time just a fraction

of the population of England and France. It is only after 1850 that America overtook either in this regard. Another reason concerns the U.S. influence in Western society in which England and France were dominant until the end of the nineteenth century. It is not until the turn of the twentieth century that the U.S. assumed leadership of the Western world. The industrial revolution had originated in England, but by the late nineteenth century America had far surpassed every European nation in industrial might. Capitalism had its roots in the British soil, but it is in America that it attained its biggest triumphs, its full bloom. In the arena of international politics also, U.S. actions, especially its imperialism in Hawaii, Cuba and the Philippines, then caught the attention of European imperialist powers. Thus it is only towards the end of the nineteenth century that America began to affix its stamp on the West, and by then the leading nations of western Europe, such as England and France, had moved into the Vashyan age. Thus the fact that America, even in its formative phase, had begun with the Vashyan era, while its European parents were moving through the Khatrian or Vipran age, does not in any way impair the validity of the law of social cycle for Western civilisation. The U.S. then was not what it is today.

Going back to U.S. history, the thirteen American colonies, strewn along the Atlantic coast, remained under the formal dominion of Britain until 1775, when a series of British policies designed to squeeze more taxes out of the colonies led to their revolt. Out of that revolutionary turmoil, an American nation was born. It is then that the democratic forces got a new shot in the arm, but the hegemony of wealth continued. The independent country made a fresh start by adopting a new constitution, which on the whole has served it well to this day. Three different branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial – were established, with each serving as a check on the potential abuse of power by the other two. Within a few years, a Bill of Rights guaranteeing some fundamental rights to all people, not just the citizens, was added to the original Constitution. In this bill, the Vashyan imprint can be clearly seen. While it contained some human rights such as the freedom of worship, speech, the press, and petition among others, it ignored the fundamental human right to work and employment. Yet the unlimited right to private property was duly included.

Even though the U.S. Constitution did not then establish a democracy based on universal suffrage, as voting rights still derived from property qualifications, it was nevertheless the first experiment in history to ensure a rule of law and not of men and institutions. In practice, of course, the intent of this noble document was frequently flouted, for its enforcement was still left to men; yet it was more humanitarian than any other set of principles guiding contemporary governments. True, it was unable to abolish slavery of the black people, but slavery had been a relic of pre-independence times. Ultimately, however, the Constitution did

play a role in its abolition. True, it was not without a frightful civil war (1861–5) that Abraham Lincoln, a man of courage and boundless love for humanity, could finally exorcise the curse of slavery from the nation; yet it is under the auspices of the Constitution that Lincoln, born of ordinary parentage, could in the first place become the U.S. President. Thus the U.S. Constitution is a magnificent document that can take credit for many admirable achievements, but it has also been often abused by men of Vashyan mentality.

One notable instance of this abuse immediately comes to mind. Until the Civil War, wealth derived mainly from land and natural resources. While the manufacturing sector had been far from backward, agriculture was the dominant sector of production all this time. This fact, of course, had been reflected in politics, as the political arena, with but few exceptions, was a playground for landed magnates as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. Following the Civil War, however, the roles were gradually reversed. Although agriculture continued to grow, it failed to keep up with manufacturing, which became the dominant sector of the economy. This was not a sudden development, but a product of decades of rapid industrialisation and capital accumulation. Politics too could not but reflect this gradual shift of economic power from landlords to businessmen and merchants. At the outset, there was only one political party – that of the Federalists – which was dominated by landed interests with no effective opposition. The birth of the modern system of two parties, each with distinctive programmes, styles and policies, is a later development which reached its culmination in 1854, when the Democratic Party, formed earlier in 1825, was opposed by the Republican Party. However, while both political parties differed from each other in significant ways, they both gradually came into the hands of big capitalists, financiers and merchants. And it is this group of Vashyas that used the Constitution to its own advantage, and has been using it to this day.

Following the Civil War, Congress (the U.S. legislative assembly) passed the first Civil Rights Act as the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Ostensibly, American blacks were to be the major beneficiaries of this law, which granted them citizenship and equal rights and forbade any state government from taking away the life, liberty, or property of any person without due process of law. However, for several decades the Fourteenth Amendment did little to protect the civil rights of American blacks, who were forced to live in misery, squalor and poverty – hardly better than slavery. Instead, the Amendment became a handy tool in the hands of capitalists for self-enrichment. Most state courts ruled that corporations were persons and therefore entitled to protection under the due process clause. Each time a state government passed legislation to curb the anti-social practices of a corporation, the federal courts would step in and proclaim the state regulations un-

constitutional as they flouted the 'due process' clause of the Amendment. State governments thus became helpless before the might of giant enterprises.

Unencumbered by any state intervention, and with the federal government at their beck and call, corporations throve in America as never before. The economy grew at an unprecedented rate, while small businesses were gobbled up by a few giants. The wheeling and dealing that went on among businessmen towards the end of the nineteenth century have earned them the label of Robber Barons, men who, according to Fite and Reese, 'built poor railroads, turned out shoddy products, cheated honest investors, sweated labor, and exploited the country's natural resources for their own wealth and satisfaction.' [2, p. 355] Almost every major industry became a monopoly. The economy might not have grown as fast without these swindlers, but there were certainly distressing side-effects of this concentration of economic power on so vast a scale – a malady the U.S. society has never since been able to shake off. So outrageous were their practices that by 1889 the whole country was up in arms. In response the Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act, which barred any person or corporation from conspiring to form monopolies or to stifle competition in any way. This, however, turned out to be a carrot dangled by the business-dominated Congress before an aroused public. As with the Fourteenth Amendment, this Act too was eventually used by businessmen to their own advantage.

For the next few decades, the Sherman Act was interpreted by the courts in a way that emasculated the labour unions. Their strikes were ruled as anti-competitive practices. Thus a law meant to sooth the public ire became an anti-labour and eventually an anti-public law.

What businessmen detest most is competition among themselves, for competition increases uncertainty and trims profits. They are also, in general, wary of governmental intervention and regulations, lest their profits are adversely affected. Regulation, of course, is welcome to them if it cuts competition and ensures a steady and high return. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, while most industries became concentrated in the hands of a few barons, the railroads continued to be competitive. In fact, the competition there was so intense that they themselves demanded regulation from Congress, which, of course, was quick to oblige them. In response to the moans of the poor businessmen, Congress in 1887 established the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to regulate the railroads in the public interest. Thus one might say that from the Civil War down to the fateful year of 1929, the year of the greatest economic depression, the Vashyan era in the U.S. was at its zenith. Capitalists flourished on all fronts: on the one hand, feeble antitrust laws like the Sherman Act provided the smokescreen under which monopolies, oligopolies and trusts could flourish while labour unions remained on the leash; on the other, various regulatory

commissions such as the ICC were instituted to eliminate competition among oligopolies, which seemed unable to collude and thus act in unison as a monopoly. One by one, competition, the bane of exuberant profits, was smothered in virtually all industries. Since then the covert collusion between the government and big business has steadily increased, as the latter can earn monopoly profits with the blessing of various regulatory agencies. These agencies are composed of hirelings of the very industries they are supposed to regulate. A nice racket thus goes on day after day under the watchful eyes of the government.

That capitalism is subject to unique internal traumas had been fathomed by Marx long before other economists began to diagnose this malady, whose symptoms were discernible as early as the first quarter of the nineteenth century. U.S. capitalism was in its infancy when it had its first bout with economic depression in 1819; it weathered that storm, only to be hit by it again in 1837. Thus during the first half of the nineteenth century, it encountered two economic crises; during the second half, however, it encountered five (in 1854, 1857, 1873, 1884, and 1893). The twentieth century opened with brighter prospects, but the jinx of depression would not let go of the economy. After giving a mild foretaste of its impending assault in 1907, 1923 and 1927, the jinx struck with a vengeance on 24 October, 1929 – the day of the Great Crash. On that day, the bottom fell out of stock prices on the New York Stock Exchange. The downward spiral of security prices that then began quickly engulfed the entire American economy, and eventually the entire capitalist world. The economic catastrophe of the Great Depression cannot be easily pictured. Within three years, there were 85,000 business failures in America, and twelve million people, equal to 25 per cent of the labour force, became unemployed. The brunt of the lay-offs, of course, fell on the blacks who had been exploited ever since colonial times.

The economic blight spread overnight to other troubled nations linked with American economy through international commerce. The entire capitalist world then stood on the verge of collapse. The apocalyptic Marxian vision of the demise of capitalism seemed closer to fruition than ever before. But then came a brilliant economist, John Maynard Keynes, and the Second World War. Keynes prescribed the medicine, while the war served to show that it would work. Under the enormous government expenditures occasioned by the war, unemployment slowly disappeared, and, for a while, gave way to shortages of labour. Keynes had recommended massive doses of government spending to combat unemployment, and the war proved him right. Ever since, Keynesian economic theory has been guiding the capitalist world.

Under the watchful eyes of Keynesian policies, capitalism seemed to be operating smoothly for a full quarter of a century following the Second World War. There were mild relapses occasionally, but no

duplication of the 1929 tragedy. But just when the war against economic crises seemed to have been won, another intractable problem, potentially more dangerous than large-scale unemployment, cropped up and has persisted since 1969 – namely the coexistence of inflation with a high level of unemployment. This problem eluded Keynes, for there is supposed to be a trade-off between unemployment and inflation in the Keynesian system: both cannot rise or decline at the same time. As yet there is no consensus among economists – and there hardly ever is – as to how the new challenge should be met. Not that the problem has faded away, just that it admits of no simple, and politically feasible, solution.

On top of all these troubles, the capitalist colossus was in 1973 jolted by an international cartel called the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). There was a four-fold rise in oil prices as a result, and capitalism tottered once again. The recession of 1973–5 was the steepest since the Great Crash, but more than that it was accompanied by an unprecedented double-digit inflation. Keynesian remedies were applied again, and as a consequence the worst seems to be over. But since no fundamental reform has been undertaken, the crisis is still simmering, ready to erupt any moment again.

THE IDEOLOGICAL PILLARS OF CAPITALISM

No socio-economic system can last long unless it rests on an appealing ideological structure. In this regard, capitalism is no exception. And, as with every exploitative system, its ideological thread is sound in theory but tenuous in practice. Capitalism is defined as a social, economic and political system where the means of production – industries, banks, natural resources, etc. – are owned by private corporations and individuals, where the political system operates in the interests of such owners, and where the distribution of national income is determined by them. It is quite often associated with the free enterprise system, which may be defined as one where capitalists, the owners of the means of production, are free to maximise their profits. This freedom in profit maximisation is central to capitalism, for during the modern Khatrian and Vipran eras, when state dominance and the Christian paternalistic ethic worked to minimise income from interest and profits, the prevailing economic systems were called mercantilism and 'physiocratism'. Industries and commerce existed even during those days, although not on so vast a scale; merchants did own financial capital, but the state did not permit them a free hand in making profit-maximising decisions. Hence economists do not refer to those systems as capitalism: aggrandisement of state income and power was then the chief concern of scholars. Thus the word 'free' in the free enterprise system refers really to the capitalist's freedom to maximise the return

from his investment, and not, as many would have us believe, to the free operation of a market economy. The latter definition is only a special case of my definition, one that applies when perfect competition among businessmen prevails. The days of competition have long been gone, but capitalism continues to be called the free enterprise system. This is because while competition is there no more, the capitalist's ability to maximise his profits has soared more than ever before.

I have already noted that in a Vashyan era Vipras come forward to offer theories justifying the dominion of Vashyas. To the majority of Vipras, it matters little how specious their justification is as long as it is catchy and acceptable to the system. Only a few advocate genuine reform and concern for the exploited, much to the dislike of the ruling class. It is in this broad perspective that the economic theory of capitalism propounded by Adam Smith, the father of Economics, ought to be viewed. The period between 1500 to 1700 is traditionally associated with mercantilism, which apparently overlapped with the modern Khatrian age. It may be recalled from Chapter 5 that it is during this period that the foundation for modern-day capitalism was laid. Yet the activities of merchants and industrialists were curbed by myriad state regulations. Even though many merchants and other special interest groups made a fortune from these regulations, the real driving force behind capitalism – the acquisitive instinct or the profit motive – was sanctioned neither by the state nor by the Church. Since the Church had submitted to the king, the responsibility for restraining the merchants from unbridled pursuit of self-interest fell on the crown. However, the state regulations continued to derive from medieval ideology – the Christian paternalistic ethic.

Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, dogmas exalting the power of state gave way to those exalting individualism and ultimately the acquisitive instinct. All this intellectual ferment occurred during the Vipran era in which income from land commanded more moral and social prestige than income from usury and profit. Thus when Adam Smith wrote his masterpiece, *The Wealth of Nations*, in 1776, merchants and capitalists, though not as encumbered by state regulations as during the preceding Khatrian era, were still not completely free to pursue their quest for profits. Smith's contemporaries sought refuge in the argument that human beings are moved primarily by selfish and egoistic motives; all human actions are rooted in self-preservation, and hence in egoism and self-interest. Selfishness and avarice, therefore, are not vices but virtues for hard work and economic prosperity. By implication then, the state should keep its intervention in human activities to the minimum so that individual and social welfare is at the maximum.

This sanctification of greed and acquisitive behaviour that had found support from the Vipras – many of whom were employed by great trading enterprises – was readily embraced by the capitalists. But its

excessive stress on individualism produced apprehensions of anarchy in quite a few minds. It is Smith's brilliant contribution that tended to calm their fears. His carefully thought-out analysis of the capitalist system, blessed with keen competition, removed from the doctrine of individualism many of its flaws that had worked to impede its general acceptance. Smith argues that, left to themselves, capitalists and workers are guided by self-interest to put their capital and labour to uses where they are the most productive. The mechanism which ensures this is the 'invisible hand' of a free market where producers compete for consumers' money in an egocentric search for profits, and where consumers seek to obtain the best-quality product at the cheapest price. In quest of profit maximisation, the producers are impelled to employ labour only in those goods for which there is demand, and to use productive techniques that are the most efficient so that unit costs are minimised. In a free market economy, therefore, everyone is happy: while the producers earn maximum return, consumers are satisfied with a high-quality product available at the lowest price ensured by maximum productive efficiency. All this is the miracle performed by the 'invisible hand' in spite of, or rather because of, relentless human greed and acquisitive behaviour.

Smith thus assailed the myriad mercantilist regulations that had worked to perpetuate monopolies and further the interests of various groups. For monopolies destroy operation of the free market that ensures maximum social welfare. His work, therefore, was on the one hand a scathing denunciation of mercantilism, and on the other an eloquent plea for free enterprise or *laissez-faire*. However, the free-enterprise system that Smith had in mind condoned the capitalist's search for profit, but only in an environment characterised by keen competition among businessmen.

Not only would the free operation of the forces of demand and supply for goods lead to maximum economic efficiency, it would also, according to Smith, ensure a high rate of economic growth and hence a rising standard of living. But growth depends on capital accumulation, which in turn depends on the adequacy of profits. This is then another line of defence for acquisitive and self-serving behaviour, for it ensures the continued economic progress of society. Thus growth and efficiency are the two pillars on which Smith erected his eloquent defence of the free enterprise system unencumbered by any state interference. Although his prognosis relied on the calculating instincts of individuals, it was also a moral indictment of mercantilism, which now stood exposed as a culprit impeding maximum social welfare. It is perhaps for this reason that his thought left its mark on writings for generations to come. Businessmen and labourers alike found passages in his work to support their own concerns.

The doctrine of *laissez-faire*, first propounded rigorously by Adam

Smith and later refined by his disciples such as David Ricardo and J. B. Say, among others, is now known as the classical theory of economics. With this 'liberal' economic ideology went a political creed that slighted the state or government as a necessary evil – evil because of its encroachments on individual liberty, but necessary for an escape from anarchy. To government, Smith assigned three basic functions: justice, national defence, and the provision of certain public goods that are too unprofitable to be ever provided by private enterprise. This is a very general list of state functions, and although he denounced the state patronage of economic interests in any form, his political ideas were seized by businessmen, and their hired Vipras, to justify government paternalism whenever they themselves were the beneficiaries. (See Hunt and Sherman [6, pp. 52–4].)

At the time Smith wrote his book, capitalism was still in embryo. His vision of a competitive system where the consumer is sovereign, and where the powerless producer is scrambling to satisfy market demand and preferences did, to an extent, reflect economic reality. But by the late nineteenth century, capitalism had grown into adolescence. All over the capitalist world, but especially in Germany and America, industrial colossi had sprung up to undermine the market mechanism that is supposed to generate maximum social welfare. While the forces of demand were free to operate, those of supply had been effectively constrained. But all this failed to deter a new breed of economists from erecting an even nobler defence of the free-enterprise system.

At precisely the time when the process of industrial concentration was under way, some economists, notably Jevons, Walras and Marshall among others, set out to clothe the classical economic ideology with an elaborate mathematical apparatus, while maintaining the assumption of perfect competition. Theirs is the so-called neoclassical economic analysis, but in their basic theme of espousing *laissez-faire* they differ little from their precursors. Thus while the economic reality of capitalism had been drastically altered, economic theory emerged with new make-up applied to the old face. Even as the Robber Barons were soaking away national wealth in their coffers, the neoclassical economists recommended 'hands-off' economic policies by the government, lest the giant corporations be inhibited from acting in the public interest.

The neoclassical analysis presents the vision of an economy consisting of a large number of small producers and consumers, each unable to sway the market by himself. Unable to control market prices, businessmen can maximise profits only through maximum production at minimum costs. Motivated by self-interest, they hire factors of production from the households – land, capital, labour – in such a way that each factor is paid the value of what it contributes to the total product. Thus all factors, including capitalists, earn what they con-

tribute to society – no less and no more. In such a frictionless world, there is no possibility of any exploitation, for everyone earns what he deserves or what he contributes to society. There are no extortionate profits, for the very process of profit maximising leads businessmen to earn no more than their social contribution. This is the neoclassical vision of distributive justice. Far removed as its underlying assumptions are from reality, even this conclusion ignores the fact that mere ownership of capital is not a productive activity; nor is the productivity of capital enhanced by the fact that it is owned by a particular individual. Thus the neoclassical defence of capitalistic distributive justice rests not on the fact that capitalists are productive but on the social sanction of their unlimited and unqualified rights to property.

On the side of demand, the neoclassical economists suggest that each consumer seeks to maximise utility, which is quantifiable and depends upon the consumption of goods and services. In a free market economy the consumer, endowed with certain income and wealth and acting in self-interest, divides his spending among purchases of various commodities in such a way that his utility is maximised. Ultimately, the utility maximisation by each consumer means that, given the distribution of national wealth and income, social welfare, the sum total of all utilities, will be maximised. And not a step in this process needs help from the government. The neoclassical economists thus raised the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith to an even nobler pedestal, added their own voice to the growing mystique of *laissez-faire*, while choosing to be deaf to the deafening voices of surrounding economic reality. While the reality clamoured for a diagnosis of the bulging concentration of economic power, of monopolies and trusts, of graft, wheeling-dealing and staggering corruption in the business arena, the economists confined themselves to their stylised, and idealised, conception of the world. The result was that their ideas, while far divorced from the earthly capitalist environment, were, and are, frequently used in the ideological defence of capitalism.

While the foundations of the neoclassical economic theory were laid during the late nineteenth century, its progress and refinements continued well into the twentieth century and in fact they have continued, with brief interruptions, down to this day. In America a new generation of neoclassical economists began to recognise some of the flaws in capitalism – namely the absence of perfect competition, underproduction of socially desirable goods such as roads, parks, armies, etc., undesirable social externalities such as air pollution and a squalid environment, and, above all, the economic depressions. But while such afflictions of capitalism were explicitly recognised, most economists reared in the neoclassical tradition continued to regard them as aberrations tending to correct themselves. There were some who saw the need for serious governmental intervention to cure these socio-

economic ills, but they were in a stark minority. As a result, economic theory was ill-prepared to prescribe medicine for any economic cataclysm such as the one that beset the world in 1929. In short, the neoclassical economists had undying faith in the ability of capitalism to pull itself out of any crisis as long as the state abstained from rendering help. For, in their view, official intervention could only make matters worse.

The Great Crash of 1929, therefore, caught the economists napping in their idealised world. It was not supposed to last that long – not when the entire conventional wisdom was dead set against it. The entire capitalist world was then frightened not of any natural calamity, nor of any war on which the public wrath could be easily focused, but of the man-made calamity with no avenue of escape in sight. Before the medicine could be prescribed, the malady had to be properly diagnosed; the venerated dogmas had to be discarded.

It was Keynes who set out to reshape and fundamentally reorganise economic theory to bring it in line with reality, which clamoured for speedy treatment. In contrast to the major neoclassical concern with micro-economics, i.e., with the economic behaviour of individual economic units such as businessmen, consumers, etc., he addressed himself to the question of macro-economics, i.e., with the analysis of the entire economy. Keynes observed that businesses perform two-pronged functions: as producers they supply goods; but simultaneously they pay incomes to factor-owners in the form of wages, rents, interest and profits. The factor-owners in turn spend money to buy goods from the businessmen. There is thus a circular flow with money flowing from producers to consumers and then from consumers back to producers. As long as businessmen can sell all their goods at a reasonable profit, this circular process continues uninterrupted.

But several hitches may arise. A part of factor-incomes is saved and deposited with financial institutions, a part taken away by the government in the form of taxes, and a part spent on foreign goods in the form of imports. These are what we may call leakages from the total expenditure, and they tend to keep the aggregate demand for goods short of the aggregate supply of goods. Counterbalancing these leakages are the three-pronged injections to total expenditure – business borrowing for investment, government spending, and exports. If the leakages are matched by injections, total expenditure matches the total value of goods produced, and the economy may be said to be in equilibrium, that is, it has no tendency to move up or down. If the leakages exceed injections, aggregate demand falls short of aggregate supply and some goods remain unsold, so that businessmen are forced to trim production and hence their employment of labour; in the opposite case of the injections exceeding leakages, national production and hence employment tend to rise.

This, in simple terms, is the well-known Keynesian process of national income determination. It is noteworthy that in this system aggregate spending or aggregate demand plays an active role, and the aggregate supply a passive role in the sense that the latter converges to the former. High national income and hence high employment call for high aggregate demand. The implication is unmistakably clear: during years of low aggregate demand, the economy suffers from high unemployment and hence economic recessions or depressions. The policy prescription is also unmistakably clear: in order to cure unemployment, the government should step in and raise aggregate spending in the economy by means of fiscal and monetary policies.

Moreover, the state must constantly feel the economy's pulse. This is because business investment is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, investment expenditure contributes to total spending, thereby adding to the aggregate demand, but on the other it adds to the economy's productive capacity and hence to its aggregate supply. Thus initially investment acts to balance the aggregate demand with the aggregate supply, but over the long run it tends to create an imbalance. Furthermore, Keynes believed that those with higher incomes tend to save more than the poor, and this holds good for society as well. Thus with increased investment comes increased supply of goods and incomes, and eventually increased savings, which must be matched with ever-increasing amounts of investment to avoid an excess supply of goods. In other words, the growth process is explosive, as investment must rise each year to keep up with increasing levels of savings. But profitable investment outlets are in limited supply. So a time comes, when in order to eschew additional risks, businessmen curtail their investment. It is then that goods go unsold, and there begins a downward spiral, which halts only when national income has declined enough to generate a level of savings matching the reduced level of investment. Thus the government ought to keep an eye on the functioning of the economy, increasing aggregate demand in times of depression, and curtailing it in times of inflation. For to Keynes, the inflationary situation is just the opposite of the case of depression.

What kind of policies should the government follow? Here Keynes advocates a twofold attack in the form of fiscal and monetary policies. Fiscal policies involve the weighing of government expenditure versus tax receipts. During a depression, the fiscal policy calls for a budget deficit, i.e., for government expenditure to exceed the tax revenue; but with inflation the cure lies in a budget surplus. Monetary policy, by contrast, affects the economy indirectly – through its effect on business investment. Keynes argued that monetary expansion encourages investment, while a contraction discourages it. Hence during a depression, the monetary policy has to be expansionary, but during inflation, contractionary.

Keynesian economics is thus an antithesis of the neoclassical ideology, for the government is now cast in the role of a constant watchdog indispensable to continued economic health. The appeal of Keynesian theory lay in the fact that not only did it properly diagnose the economic ills, but it also advocated policies well within the reach of governments. For this reason its spread was swift and decisive, and, in spite of stubborn initial resistance from doctrinaire economists who detested any state intervention on purely ideological grounds, Keynesian thought soon displaced the ideas of his predecessors. Today it has become the orthodoxy to which challenges from other quarters are often posed. The most notable challenge was posed in the 1960s by the Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman, who is credited with pioneering a whole new approach, called the monetarist approach, to the question of economic fluctuations under capitalism.

In a way, what Friedman has done most is to partially rehabilitate the neoclassical economic theory and philosophy. He may be regarded as the Adam Smith of the twentieth century, for he too has championed the philosophy of *laissez-faire* in the midst of an economic environment that is very much swerving away from it. Friedman argues that the source of most economic cycles is the monetary sector and not, as Keynes believed, the goods (or investment) sector; that is, the single most important determinant of the price level and employment is the level of money supply. While to Keynes the deficiency of investment relative to savings is the catalyst for recessions, to Friedman the causal factor is the change in the community's stock of money supply, whose growth, he argues, has shrunk prior to the advent of any recession in the United States [4]. Furthermore, this shrinkage was in most cases brought about either by inept actions of the monetary authorities or by the intrusion of politicians. Unlike Keynes, therefore, he does not believe that it is possible to fine-tune the economy and still expect it to remain in excellent health. Government, to him, ought to be limited mainly to the protection of property rights, printing and managing money, courts, and the maintenance of law and order [3]. But his writings touch not only on individual liberty but also on the rights of children and of lunatics.

At present the majority opinion of economists is represented by the views of another Nobel Laureate, Paul Samuelson, whose varied contributions are marked by mathematical rigour and elegance. He has been instrumental in integrating Keynesian and neoclassical economics in what he calls 'the neoclassical synthesis'. The Keynesian prognosis can be fruitfully used to maintain full employment, and the neoclassical ideology can be the beacon light for free operation of markets within the Keynesian framework. Thus under capitalism, the society can thrive on both fronts – full employment along with a high degree of productive efficiency [7].

It is hard to believe that the views of Friedman and Samuelson have

attained so much popularity in an economic milieu dominated by industrial giants that glaringly defy the requirements of perfect competition on which neoclassical thought is based. The same kind of gulf that separated economic theory from reality on the eve of the Great Depression is very much in evidence today, and displays few signs of abatement. Not only is the neoclassical world downright unrealistic, it is also heartless, with little concern for those for whom the labour-market finds no use. It is not my intention, however, to dwell at length on the inhuman aspects of capitalism, for volumes have already been written from this viewpoint, and I can do no better than wholeheartedly agree with them. For decades capitalism has been indicted for the fact that it rewards the affluent, the gifted, the intelligent, the privileged, but penalises the weak, the handicapped, the poor. In a word, the system is cruel. What I wish to stress now, and in a short while, is that most critics of capitalism are no different in mentality from its proponents; that they are hardly in a position to throw stones at others, for they themselves live in the glasshouses of materialism; that those who decry the profit mentality today, themselves exhibit acquisitive behaviour – in short they are the fake Vashyas or the fake capitalists.[1]

FAKE CAPITALISTS AND CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SOCIETY

A fake capitalist may be defined as a Vipra, an intellectual, whose acquisitive and economic instinct has been aroused by long contact with genuine capitalists. A fake capitalist, in other words, is a person of keen intelligence who began his career in the employment of a capitalist, quickly acquired the skills of management as well as unquenchable acquisitive instinct, and eventually became rich enough to merge with genuine capitalists – those who were born with wealth and acquisitive behaviour. Few fake capitalists are as rich as the genuine capitalist, but in terms of greed and guile the former outclass the latter. Western society today is functioning under the sway of this mixed breed of capitalists and has been so since the 1930s, when the onslaught of the Great Depression exposed the ineptitude of genuine capitalists, and the sickly system turned to intellectuals for diagnosis and survival. To be sure, genuine capitalists still command some influence in society, but the political apparatus has gradually slipped out of their hands. It is the fake capitalist who now moves the Western world.

One subtle difference between fake and genuine capitalists is that while the relentless pursuit of pelf marks the behaviour of them both, fake capitalists do it all under the cloak of noble principles and catchy slogans. Genuine capitalists come out in the open in defence of their exuberant profits, for without profits, they claim, factories will not run, workers will be laid off, and the entire economy will be in shambles.[2] The fake capitalists, however, denounce the high profitability of giant industrial concerns, label high corporate incomes as 'obscene', condemn the extreme concentration of wealth in business hands, come out with grandiose schemes of tax reform riddled with loopholes, and so on and so forth. But in all these fulminations, they overlook their own bank accounts, their own 'obscene' incomes. They give lectures to businessmen on equity and morality; but all these are for others, not for themselves. I can cite myriad examples of this perfidy and rank hypocrisy, but only one will suffice as it is so pointed and fresh in our memory.

Consider the behaviour of the U.S. Congress in 1977 regarding its salary increase. In the name of attracting talented people earning high incomes as executives in industries, each congressman and senator gave himself a $13,000 raise in yearly salary. The parliamentary procedures were so manipulated that no lawmaker was required to vote on the proposed income hike. It was one of the most underhanded ways in which a salary increase could have been legislated. Yet these are the very people who denounce the acquisitive behaviour of genuine capitalists, portray themselves as champions of the weakling, the downtrodden, the infirm, the poor. Few in their lifetime have experienced hardships and poverty. Yet they pass all sorts of laws, medicaid and welfare schemes, and feel that their duty to the public is done. They revel in profligacy and opulence, but to society, instead of genuine reform they offer a pittance.[3]

There is thus a gaping chasm between the words and actions of politicians – the fake capitalists. While their hearts bleed for the poor, their pockets overflow with money. While the rest of society toils hard to make both ends meet, to cope with the twin problems of inflation and unemployment, they shrink not from extorting one perquisite after another. Why? Are they blind to their own constituencies, to their own conscience, to the widespread public resentment to their self-serving actions? No. But they are helpless before their own acquisitive mentality, which in them has been aroused after long contact with genuine Vashyas. They criticise big business, because that is where the votes are, not because they feel sympathy for the poor: they are simply masters of double-talk, hypocrisy and deception.

The arm of the fake capitalist extends to all facets of Western life. He controls the media – television, newspapers, radio. There one discerns the same penchant for hypocrisy that characterises the demeanour of politicians. The media cannot be said to be pro-business either; they too pounce on anything that smacks of excessive profits; they too condemn greed – but only of other people, only of capitalists. The incomes of some of our journalists, television commentators and editors run into

six or seven figures, but they still want more. There too the profit mentality is under attack, but the media-men are oblivious of their own avarice. Similarly some other groups – notably physicians and lawyers – have learned their lessons well from their Vashyan mentors: as with genuine capitalists, they too enrich themselves by following monopolistic practices, restricting advertising and new entry into their fields. However, while the fake capitalist grows rich on the sweat and toil of labourers, he professes to keep the public service paramount in his mind: as the politician, he serves the poor; as the physician he serves the patient, as the lawyer he serves the client – in short, he claims to serve everyone but self-interest.[4] Let us face it: if fake and genuine capitalists have too much wealth under their control, the rest of society must have too little. If excessive income in the hands of genuine capitalists is injurious to the health of society, so too is the excessive income of certain intellectuals, of politicians, of those self-styled moralists.

Education too is infested with many fake capitalists. There are many radical economists and social scientists who have made a fortune out of their criticism of the capitalist system. But would they part with some of their wealth, and help the poor and the unemployed? Would they make sacrifices that they expect from genuine capitalists? No, they would not. What would they do? They would come out with new theories calling on the government to step in and legislate an egalitatian society through progressive, but avoidable, taxation of income, and through welfare plans so vulnerable to fraud. What can this tinkering do? It can only make matters worse, for the capitalist system of production, already riddled with monopoly-induced waste and inefficiency, is known from experience to have performed worse under government meddling and regulation. All that egalitarianism of the last forty years has made no dent in the concentration of wealth in the U.S. and other capitalist countries. Much of it, as before, is controlled by a few thousand people.

While all that government tinkering with the economy has done little to redress the inequitable distribution of wealth, heavy taxes have undermined much of the incentive and work-spirit of the middle class. The ailing British capitalism is a classic example of how egalitarianism cannot be legislated through taxes: it has to become an integral part of the economic system itself. Many other capitalist economies are today standing on the precipice, yet it is the self-serving policies of the fake capitalists, champions of the so-called democratic socialism, that must take much of the blame. Here again the career politicians are interested in preserving the system, and their own hegemony, but not in genuine reform that would transfer economic power – stocks, bonds, etc. – from capitalists to labourers. This transference of economic power is the only way to legislate egalitarianism in Western societies, not the passage of ineffective tax laws and welfare schemes.

CAPITALISM AND FEUDALISM

I have said it before that capitalism has much in common with feudalism which prevailed in Western society from about 900 to 1400 A.D., and I say this again in the full knowledge that surface disparities between the two systems are overwhelming. If capitalism is confined to an economic set-up where the owners of capital are in charge of hiring factors, producing goods, and determining the distribution of national income, then the two systems could not have been more apart. But that would be too narrow a definition of business-dominated society, one that does it ill-justice. Capitalism, as stated before, is not only an economic order, but also a socio-political order that goes with it. For without the social sanction of the capitalist's unlimited property rights, the business world would not last another day. If we look only at modes of production, the disparities between capitalism and feudalism make the mind boggle. While capitalism presents the picture of a highly industrialised, technically advanced society capable of assailing the moon, its predecessor was, in comparison, an economic pygmy organised in a series of small, self-sufficient rural communities. But if we look for the power-base of the ruling class, the similarities in the two systems could not be more striking. Similarly, the social and political philosophy underlying the two systems reveals greater unity than has been hitherto recognised.

As far as the mentality of the ruling class is concerned, capitalism and feudalism are both alike. Then, as now, wealth reigned supreme. Under feudalism the rich ruled because of their control over vast estates, which then comprised wealth; today the rich rule because of their control over stocks, bonds and other capital assets. Feudalism was marred by constant feuds among landed magnates over land, capitalism has been marred by industrial warfare in which big corporations have been constantly preying on smaller corporations. In late medieval Europe, wealth was concentrated in the hands of landlords – dukes, barons, earls, margraves; today it is concentrated in the hands of capitalists – corporation presidents, vice-presidents, executives. Feudalism was barbaric and oppressive of peasants and serfs, capitalism has been cruel and oppressive of under-developed countries, blacks, and unskilled workers. And in both cases, exploitation is based on economic deprivation and inequities.

In terms of social and political philosophy, the ideas of individualism permeated the feudal order much as they do now. Then, as now, the main function of the sovereign authority was to administer the law, not to make it or shape it out of his own whims. In theory, the ruler's capricious behaviour was then as much a social anathema as it is today. The dominion of landlords was then justified by the Christian paternalistic ethic in the name of a God-created order; today the dominion

of capitalists is justified by the neoclassical ideology in the name of economic growth and productive efficiency. People then used to argue in terms of theology, hence the Vipras, in the guise of the clergy and other intellectuals, provided a theological defence for the feudal order. Today the intellectuals speak in terms of logic; hence the defence of capitalism also derives from logical arguments. Thus in both systems, Vipras can be seen to have been sold out to Vashyas; in both they can be seen to have ultimately become fake Vashyas.

In terms of ordinary life, too, there are many similarities. High prostitution and crime rates were as much the scourge of feudalism as they are today of capitalism. Then, as now, family bonds had become loose; then, as now, political authority and administration were highly decentralised. In the feudal order, the knights fought the wars of their overlord; today their place has been taken by army lieutenants, captains and generals. In short, then as now, the acquisitive mentality ruled the roost. It is for reasons such as these that I regard feudalism and capitalism as two different branches of the same family-tree called the Vashyan age.

THE SHUDRAN REVOLUTION AND THE ECLIPSE OF CAPITALISM

The reader may have noted an obvious difference between the two systems compared above: while feudalism has come and gone, capitalism remains, and seemingly in good health. But while it continues to survive, I believe that capitalism is now gasping for breath, with the end coming in twenty-five to fifty years. It has been in its declining phase ever since the 1930s, when the neoclassical ideology of *laissez-faire* gave ground to the Keynesian thinking. It is then that interventionist sentiment began to find favour with governments in the capitalist world, and today that sentiment has resulted in a bureaucratic monster which is exceedingly difficult to contain. Prior to the Great Crash, state interference with the system had been minimal, and that too was contrived to shield unruly businesses from close public scrutiny, or to curb competition among feuding corporations. But when Keynes demonstrated the need for constant governmental watch on the economic system to keep it from collapsing, the influence of capitalists began to decline. Their loss, of course, was a gain for the fake capitalists, and today it is the latter breed that holds the reins.

The Vashyan era begins when the forces of wealth take over the social and economic levers of society and foist on it a decentralised political system; it reaches its peak when the Vashyan dominion is absolute and unchallenged; and its decline commences the moment the political machinery is taken over by the fake Vashyas. Scrutinising Western

history, we find that capitalists had reached the top of the social hierarchy by the 1860s, at least in England and the United States. By then the odium of earning income from interest and profits, which were denounced earlier by the Christian paternalistic ethic, had disappeared. But now the same old odium has returned. The profit mentality is now again under fire; the motives of businessmen are being constantly questioned, while high incomes from other sources fail to invite so much publicity and condemnation. This whole atmosphere is reminiscent of the physiocratic era when Christian paternalism was used to glorify income from sources other than usury and profits. It is then clear that time does not now favour the genuine capitalists. To be sure, they have not yet been trounced – their influence in fact is second only to that of fake capitalists – but they are retreating. They are still fighting, spending millions of dollars to refurbish their image, but it is a rearguard action designed to delay doomsday as long as possible. Thus it is noteworthy that the Vashyan era begins to decline the moment the political apparatus slips out of Vashyan hands.

The symptoms of this decline are now all there if anyone cares to see. The horrifying crime rate, the breakdown of family ties and the concomitant plight of the elderly, the appalling divorce rate, the scandalous tolerance of pornography and prostitution, the rising tide of drug-abuse and alcoholism, the commercialisation of art, sport and practically everything else, the insensitivity of the employed to the unemployed, the insensitivity of the bureaucratic colossus are all symptoms of the malaise that now bedevils capitalism. These are all symptoms that appear in a Vashyan era only towards its end. The apologists of capitalism assert that the system is still healthy, that never in history has there been so much prosperity, and that, despite the enormous concentration of wealth in a few hands, never has a system provided so much comfort and happiness for so many citizens. This is precisely where they err. To them materialism is all that matters; but at bottom it is this super-materialism, especially the materialism and hypocrisy of fake capitalists, that is squarely to blame for all the social ills. The leaders of the Western world today inspire neither confidence nor respect; all they inspire is envy – envy for their luxurious life, envy for the ease with which they dupe the general public, envy for the light or no sentence they receive for their known excesses. Is there any wonder that the masses emulate them and attempt to attain the same comforts by any means? Is there any wonder that the crime rate is high? The real culprits go scot-free for all their known and unknown crimes, but the poverty-stricken people, who are simply following in the footsteps of their leaders, get all the blame.

Even on the material front, some, though not all, claims of capitalism are hollow. America, for instance, with a six per cent share of the global population, consumes at least thirty per cent of the natural resources of

the entire world; yet within its borders there is considerable poverty, especially among the blacks and other minorities. If this is the best that capitalism can do after annually gobbling up one-third of the world's resources, one wonders what all this fuss regarding economic prosperity is about.

Currently the West is passing through the Vashya-cum-Shudran phase of its social cycle. This is because the people, under the contagion of their leaders' greed, are gradually acquiring the Shudran mentality. The masses understandably try to attain the comforts that capitalists have, but in so doing they have to work long hours. Both the husband and wife in a family have to strain to keep up with creeping inflation. Consequently, the Khatrian and Vipran interests of pure adventure and art find little time for self-expression. Thus, infected by the capitalist's acquisition disease, the masses are being forced into Shudran behaviour. This, and this alone, is at the bottom of the present malaise in capitalist countries. And the malaise is going to get worse in the next few decades. Eventually it will invite rebellion from the masses, even if, in the unlikely event, the capitalist economies continue to function well. If my calculations are correct, then the current Vashyan era began in the West around the 1860s, reached its peak by the late 1930s, and has been going downhill ever since. From historical experience, the periods of up-trend and down-trend of an era are roughly equal. If the up-trend of capitalism lasted for about seventy to eighty years, its decline will roughly take the same number of years, which means that the Shudran revolution, that will dethrone the genuine and the fake capitalists, should occur by the year 2010, give or take one decade.

Those entrenched in the seat of power have the most to fear from my prophecy, but I do not think they will believe it. But then never have they believed this in all past revolutions. A careful study of the major revolutions of the world – the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, Mao's Revolution, etc. – reveals one common cause. They were all provoked by the excesses of an overbearing bureaucracy insensitive to the plight of the masses. The same bureaucratic behemoth, thanks to the constant meddling of the fake capitalists, now threatens to undermine the stability of the Western world. The behemoth is still growing, and will continue to do so in the near future, eventually compelling the masses to rise in arms, and to sweep it aside along with its progenitors.

Who will bring this revolution about? Who will be in its vanguard? According to the theory of social cycle, every Vashyan era ends up in a Shudran revolution which is engineered by a group of disgruntled Vipras and Khatris. Today in Western society, the Vipran class is composed of the intellectuals – the writer, the teacher, the white-collar worker, the lawyer, the physician, the politician – although some of them have joined the ranks of fake Vashyas. The Khatrian class comprises the army officer, the policeman, the firefighter and the skilled

blue-collar worker. The semi-skilled and unskilled workers belong to the Shudran class. Despite occasional murmurs, the Khatrian and Vipran classes today support the system in which they live. Those who wish to see the system uprooted are today called extremists; they are decidedly in the minority, but their ranks are gradually swelling. The Shudras today, as in most epochs, are the most oppressed and exploited by the capitalist order, but their feeble voices of protest go unheeded because the Vipran and Khatrian groups enjoy adequate standards of living. The aristocracy, composed of fake and genuine capitalists, does not today inspire revolt among Khatris and Vipras, only envy for its fabulous wealth to which everyone else aspires. Within two decades, this situation will change under the burden of creeping economic troubles that now confront the capitalist countries. While fake and genuine capitalists will be able to maintain their conspicuous consumption, the living standard of non-capitalist classes will progressively decline. Some of the Khatris and Vipras will become as impoverished as Shudras are today. It is out of this impoverished group of Khatris and Vipras that revolutionaries will be born. It is they who will be in the vanguard of the Shudran revolution.

Will this revolution be peaceful or violent? Will it blaze a trail of terror or be marked by an orderly transfer of power? The answer depends on what the ruling class does between now and the next two decades; how it copes with impending economic dilemmas; how it shares the sacrifices that will determine the fate of all concerned. True, the storms that are now in the making are among the most tempestuous that capitalism will ever face. The crippling energy shortages that now loom in the horizon pose a challenge no less catastrophic than the Second World War, in which the Vashyan forces came out with flying colours. But if the ruling class sets an example by making all the sacrifices that are well within its reach, if it shows sympathy and compassion for the misery of the under-privileged, then there will be an orderly transition of power from the ruler to those who, in terms of the theory of social cycle, are next in line of succession. The Shudran revolution will then represent the smooth introduction of new and radical ideas untainted by violence and social turmoil. Fortunately, the West does have precedents of peaceful change, such as occurred in the Glorious Revolution in England, and I sincerely hope that such will be the case in the forthcoming Shudran revolution as well.

Is the revolution I Speak of inevitable? The answer is yes; and in so saying I am not oblivious to the fact that such Marxian prophecies have been thus far disproved by history. In the days of Marx, the Vashyan era was still in its infancy; capitalism was then much more exploitative of the masses than it is today. Child labour, the abuse of women workers, insanitary and inhuman working conditions, incredibly long working hours were very common. In view of this grinding oppression, Marx

thought that capitalism could not survive long. Had he realised that each system must reach a peak before its end, he would not have predicted an impending collapse of the capitalist order. To me the fact that capitalism has flourished and thriven so long is not at all surprising. It had to be this way, because it could not die before acquiring adolescence, youth and maturity. The same kind of evolution had accompanied feudalism, which at its genesis around 900 was more repressive of the serfs than when it attained its zenith in the thirteenth century. Then also the general standard of living had risen above the level of the preceding Vipran age, but that could not prevent its eventual breakdown. The question in my mind is not whether the Shudran revolution is inevitable, but whether it will be tranquil or marked by convulsions. The past record of Shudran revolutions points to bloodshed and horror, but then the West has by now discovered avenues of peaceful change. Hopefully, sanity will continue to prevail over brute force.

FUTURE WESTERN SOCIETY: THE NEW KHATRIAN AGE

The end of capitalism does not mean the end of the Western world and culture, but only the end of one link in the long chain of Western civilisation. Following the Shudran revolution, a new Khatrian era will be established with leadership passing into the hands of the rebellious Khatris. Whether the Khatrian leaders will emerge from the military or from skilled blue-collar workers is a question that cannot now be answered. Past human experience points to the military officers, but quite often the outer shell of the ruling class differs markedly from that of its predecessors, although the ruler's underlying mentality in a particular era of different social cycles remains the same. Feudalism and capitalism, for instance, reveal monumental differences in appearance, but in both cases the dominating aristocracy displays a Vashyan disposition.

But even though I am not sure where the future Khatrian leaders will come from, some characteristics of the forthcoming Western society can be safely foreseen from Sarkar's theory of social cycle. The present decentralised system will definitely give way to a centralised political and administrative order. The Constitutions of various capitalist democracies will perhaps remain in force, but the executive will be the most powerful branch among the three branches of government. Elections might still take place, but candidates will come out of the Khatrian class. In spite of a high degree of governmental centralisation, the fundamental human rights of all people, not just the rich, will be respected. This is because in the early stage of a Khatrian era the ruler provides a benevolent administration. This happened with most civilisations in the

past, over the last 6000 years and there is no reason why it should not happen in the future.

Those who stand to gain the most from this change are women and the Shudras. Both these groups today are victims of economic and social discrimination, but they both have a great future; both will be accorded the esteem they have long deserved in society. Shudras deserve our respect because they do the hard work considered dirty by others. Similarly, women deserve not only equality with men in social, economic and political spheres, but also privileges superior to those that men have. This is because whereas both men and women cooperate in the perpetuation of society, women carry a much heavier burden. True, it is a biological necessity, but the truth remains that woman, not man, becomes pregnant and bears the load of a baby for nine months along with all the inconvenience that goes with it. Therefore, while both men and women, when given equal opportunities, have equal capacities to make contributions to society, women's burden is much greater, and for this they ought to be duly compensated. Thus woman's stature in society, especially that of a mother, ought to be higher than of man not only in theory but also in practice. I am not sure whether men will ever agree with what I say, but in the coming Khatrian era, Western women will get better opportunities for self-expression than they now have. In fact the current assertiveness among women reflected in the form of the women's liberation movement is a harbinger of the respect that awaits them in the not-too-distant future.

In the new Khatrian era, while the entire Western society, emancipated from the clutches of super-materialism, will resume its forward march up the evolutionary ladder, in America, Canada and Australia will dawn a golden age. This is because these nations are mere saplings of an old tree that we call Western civilisation.

In all past civilisations, the golden age flourished mostly in Khatrian eras. Whether it was in Egypt, India or the West, as seen in preceding chapters, the golden era appeared when men and women of Khatrian qualities held the reins. America, Canada and Australia are infant nations that have yet to witness the glory of a Khatrian era, and for this reason, I think, they will progress as never before.

In contrast with the current malaise caused by the greed of the capitalist class, the new age will be the embodiment of vivacity and adventure. As with the fifteenth-century Khatrian era in Europe, the state will participate in the discovery of new habitable lands; only this time the discoveries will be made among the planets and the stars, and human beings will begin migrating to the 'New Earth'. In fact, the seeds of the future interplanetary migration have already been sown by the historic voyage of American men to the moon, much as the attempts to discover alternative oceanic routes to India had begun in Europe some time before the advent of its Khatrian age.

The economic set-up of the new Khatrian era may be called the cooperative economic system, as it will involve the cooperative management of factories by skilled workers. The unlimited property rights of capitalists will no longer be recognised; instead, corporations will be collectively owned and administered by labourers. This system will guarantee full employment without inflation, as well as an equitable distribution of income, for profits will now be distributed among workers. Within such a framework inflation is unlikely, because quite often it results from the high wage demands of labour unions attempting to preserve their real income position that is threatened by prices raised by producers. Therefore, in the modern capitalist order inflation tends to feed on itself. But in a cooperative economic system, labour unions are unnecessary, so that the cost-push type of inflation is unlikely to occur. Once inflation is under control, full employment can be easily maintained through a proper mix of monetary and fiscal policies.

In the new era, not only will the West be delivered from its three-pronged ills – inflation, unemployment, and concentration of wealth and income – but also from other afflictions besetting it today. Crime will recede, pornography will recede, and so will all the commercialism. In short, the new Khatrian era in the West will bring with it another golden age.

NOTES

1. See the definition of fake Vashyas in Chapter 2.

2. Lately genuine capitalists have begun to catch up with the double-talk and deception of fake capitalists.

3. See the account by Robert Shrum [8] for all the royal prerogatives and privileges of the U.S. Congressmen, who each cost the treasury $1.5 million.

4. Of course, these remarks do not apply to all politicians, physicians and lawyers. I am sure many of them are conscientious workers who are appalled at the money-grubbing practices of some of their colleagues.

In concrete terms of income, a fake capitalist in the U.S. may be defined as one who annually earns not less than $100,000 and still wants more. As Heilbroner [5] points, there are some 200,000 families with such an income. In percentage terms, that comes to less than half of 1 per cent of American families. Since richness or poverty is a relative concept, the fake capitalist in other Western countries must be defined in terms of different income levels. Genuine capitalists usually earn half a million dollars per annum or more. In terms of wealth, fake capitalists are usually millionaires, and genuine capitalists multi-millionaires. These income and wealth levels are admittedly arbitrary and high for my definitions, but they are so much higher than the living standard of an average American family (earning about $15,000) that few can disagree with my classification of capitalists in terms of incomes.

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10 The Spiritual Renaissance

The foregoing pages have given us an account of Sarkar's theory of social cycle, of its innate strength to explain the evolution of various civilisations, of its predictive ability and content, of its vision and generality. It is now time for a summation – for an overall view of what I have said thus far, of its submission, and the message it conveys to my fellow world-citizens and to future generations.

If there is one central theme that runs through the veins of this work, it is that human nature is everywhere the same; that the surface disparities of language, customs, religion and skin colour are too tenuous to mask the underlying unity of human behaviour in different parts of our planet. This absolute truth, recognised by prophets since ancient times, has been distorted by vested interests again and again, but today, with the world shrunk into a family of interdependent nations, it is more apparent than ever before. Many in the past have suggested the contrary; to my mind, they stress the forms but overlook the substance.

If human culture is basically the same everywhere, so must be human evolution. That is why Sarkar's law of social cycle, which is rooted in the Evolutionary Principle, must be valid everywhere – for all civilisations. In the foregoing, only four civilisations were analysed, but each portrayed a different picture altogether; each had a unique origin, a unique expression, a unique destiny. However, despite surface disparities, all four of them turned out to have evolved in tune with the law of social cycle. It is my belief that all other civilisations, upon closer examination, will be found to be following the same rhythmic evolution: to my mind, Sarkar's masterly work has universal validity.

Today historical determinism is in disrepute, and for good reasons. Time and again, scholars have sought to unravel the mystique of history, to see an invisible hand weaving uneven historical threads into a smooth fabric, to make sense out of the unruly trends of the human past – in short, to tame history into meek, interpretable hypotheses. But critics have surgically examined their evidence, dissected their dogmas, and eventually torn their message to pieces. The champions of historical determinism spent their lifetimes detecting historical patterns, but their peers had an easy time spotting flaws in their views. Sarkar's contribution, however, is of a different variety. It will no doubt generate a good

deal of controversy, a good deal of ferment among intellectual circles, but it will not present as easy a target for attack as other deterministic views that are now generally considered seriously deficient.

The main line of defence of the Sarkarian hypothesis is that, unlike the dogmas now in disrepute, it does not emphasise one particular point to the exclusion of all others: it is based on the sum total of human experience – the totality of human nature. Whenever a single factor, however important or fundamental, is called upon to illuminate the entire past and by implication the entire future, it simply invites disbelief and, after closer scrutiny, rejection. Marx committed that folly, and, to some extent, so did Toynbee. They both offered an easy prey to critics, and the result is that today historical determinism is regarded by most scholars as an idea so bankrupt that it can never be solvent again. Perhaps, perhaps not! Sarkar's novel theory, I think, will generate a new storm in the settled waters, if only because it is an attempt to revive the very idea that today would lull the historian into sleep. But Sarkar's message is universal, and as in the preceding chapters which affirmed its validity to various civilisations, it will survive the test of questions raised by the reader and celebrated historians.

While Sarkar's thought is universal, its underlying theme is very simple. It recognises the fact that every civilised society is basically composed of four groups, each comprising people with a distinct frame of mind: some by temperament are warriors, some intellectuals; some abound in acquisitive instincts and some are physical workers. In this order, Sarkar calls them Khatris, Vipras, Vashyas and Shudras, with each group reflecting a certain mentality. Now the theory of social cycle simply says that the first three groups take turns in holding the reins of society, while the fourth group, of which the other three usually take advantage, seldom comes to prominence. Specifically, in the annals of every civilisation, society first evolves under the dominance of Khatris, then of Vipras, and finally of Vashyas; the rule of Vashyas eventually ends up in the flames of revolution by Shudras, and society for a while reverts to the relative anarchy of a primitive order. This social evolution in terms of the dominion of Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas culminating in the Shudran revolution is simply Sarkar's law of social cycle. Following the revolutionary turmoil, Khatris rise to power again, and the social cycle begins anew.

Sarkar characterises his law as infallible, something applicable without reservation to all civilisations – dead or alive, ancient or modern, oriental or occidental. In the present volume, I have attempted to evaluate this claim in terms of four civilisations – Egyptian, Western, Russian and Hindu – and found that they all evolved in tune with the law of social cycle. In fact, the corroborative evidence is so overwhelming that it is surprising that the historical patterns attuned to Sarkar's theory have not been discovered by scholars before; especially

is it surprising in view of my finding that all these civilisations have, or had in the past, undergone the social cycle more than once. Specifically, the now defunct Egyptian civilisation went through three social cycles before succumbing to internal decadence and time. The Hindu civilisation has passed through four such cycles, and is now languishing through the declining phase of its Vashyan age, which is soon going to face the avalanche of the Shudran revolution. Western society, beginning with the Roman Empire, is now in the final phase of its second social cycle, and here too the Vashyan ruling class is now preparing the soil for the impending Shudran revolution. Russian society, by contrast, is the youngest of the four examined in this volume: it is now lingering through the first phase of its second social cycle, has been doing so for the last four centuries, and is now ripe for moving into another Vipran era, i.e., the era dominated by intellectuals. I am not sure whether the impending Russian evolution will be peaceful or marked by bloodshed and violence; but come it will.

This, in short, is an account of the conclusions I have reached thus far. All in all, I have expounded Sarkar's doctrine of social cycle, compared it with the well-known views of Marx and Toynbee, subjected it to the test of four different civilisations, and finally utilised it to predict the future course of the Hindu, Western, and Russian societies. The stage is now set for my submission; for a panoramic view of the global social landscape – whither it is heading, its direction, its needs, its destiny.

Sarkar's contribution appears on the world horizon at a time when a powerful wave of materialism is moving through all nations. Whether we look at the Vashya-dominated societies, such as India and the Western world, or the Khatri-dominated societies, such as the Communist block, much of the under-developed region, and the major oil-exporting nations, materialism permeates the flesh and bone of them all. That the acquisitive instinct sways the Vashyan societies is not all surprising, but the Khatrian societies too are today afflicted by this sickness, because most of them are now passing through the downward phase of their Khatrian eras. This situation is quite unprecedented. Seldom before has the entire world chafed under the torrent of ultra-selfish materialism, by which I mean not the healthy international concern for the economic health of under-developed nations, but the fact that most countries today are ruled by people steeped thoroughly in their own interests. And if we look deeper, it is this self-centered behaviour of the ruling classes all over the globe which is at the root of world poverty and other problems facing humanity at large today.

Actually problems have always been there; challenges have always existed. There is nothing new in the fact that the world today is beset by dilemmas – population explosion, wealth and income inequalities within, and among, all nations, the energy crisis, the possibility of

nuclear holocaust, and the whole host of other tumours. What the world is woefully lacking today is that moral fibre which can meet the challenges head on. In Toynbee's terminology, its response is poor and inadequate. Its leaders are parasites who all have their own axes to grind. Their acquisitive instinct has infected their subjects to the point that portents of impending international catastrophe are appearing in all directions. The problems of the world, in short, seem so onerous, because it now moans under the wave of materialism that has sapped its spirit of response.

It is in the cradle of such waves that mighty spiritual currents are born and nurtured. It is when the human spirit gets stifled by a failure of nerve that spiritual leaders emerge to guide it towards a new path, a new destiny: the history of all nations is a mute witness to this phenomenon. And the soil of the world is now fertile for the birth of a new spiritual movement – a new ideology that will steer it through the storms which are now, and have been for some time, in the making. The new movement will help the forces of selflessness triumph over materialism, of moralism over lethargy, pornography and alcoholic addiction, of humanitarianism over insensitivity. It will exalt the virtues now forgotten, and its leaders will provide guidance to the groping world by leading exemplary lives, by practising the high principles they will preach. Not only will the new ideology touch on individual behaviour, but also on all the vexing national and international problems. It will not be inimical to economic growth and science; nor will it undervalue a habitable environment. It will discard all religious dogmas and other narrow ideas that impede the essential unity of humankind. It will preach the cosmic sentiment of international brotherhood, of the one world government. In short, it, and it alone, will be able to deliver the world from the impending disaster.

If we peer deep into the acquisitive behaviour of the world leaders, in it we will find the cause of all international problems. I have said it before in Chapter 2, and, for emphasis, I will now say it again. Every human being is an embodiment of pure consciousness, of the knowledge of self-existence; this consciousness knows no dimensions, and, therefore, its reach is infinite, its propensity for self-expression unlimited. Every human body has limits, but not the conscious human being. Some may mistake this for religion or philosophy, but to me it is an empirical fact of which every person is subconsciously aware. It is because the human consciousness lacks dimensions that the human thirst for happiness is infinite, unlimited, cosmic. It is because of this thirst for the infinite that the human mind becomes bored with what it has, and runs after what it does not have. The attainment of more and more material objects, however, is not the answer to this thirst, for the material objects themselves are finite. Something which is finite cannot be the source of infinite joy; only the awareness of oneself as a dimen-

sionless conscious entity can. This fundamental point has been true since time immemorial, and will be true for all time to come. Even the mastery over the entire universe, which too is finite, will not bring the infinitude which each and every one of us seeks. Therefore to attain what we subconsciously crave, we have to turn to the realm of morality, of selfless and humanitarian action.

A self-centred action moves the person towards the realm of finiteness, because that action, by limiting his attention to himself, produces smallness and eventually debasement. The pursuit of self-interest alone is ultimately the cause of misery and disillusion, for it runs against the fundamental truth that, because of our dimensionless consciousness, we all yearn for limitless joy and beatitude. If the unchecked expression of self-interest ultimately makes one miserable, we can only imagine what the pursuit of self-interest by all, under the contagion of their leaders' lust for power and money, can do to a nation, and ultimately to our global fraternity of nations. If 'every man for himself' becomes the motto of the day, then crime, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and other social tumours cannot stay far behind. For then the mind, after making merry in the realm of finiteness, has to suppress its innate urge for infinitude through wine, whisky and drugs. This, however, is a primrose path to nothing else but individual and social disaster, which ultimately plants the seeds of spiritual rebirth. The law of systaltic motion, enunciated earlier in Chapter 1, implies that the uplifting force in society develops in proportion to the preceding degenerative force. In degeneration, the world today abounds; so the new spiritual movement is bound to appear before long – within the next two decades.

In the preceding chapters, I have spoken of the internal turmoil in which the societies of India, the West and Russia will be caught in the near future. All portents and calculations point towards the turn of the twenty-first century – the year 2000. The ensuing internal conflicts, either before or a little after 2000 A.D., will eventually assume international dimensions. The entire world will then seethe under international intrigue. It is quite likely that the arsenal that the world is now collecting, thanks to booming gun factories in America, Russia and Europe, will then get a chance to come into some kind of action. It is in the wake of this turmoil that the new spiritual movement will come to the surface. Humanity will then be at the crossroads, on the eve of a new alignment of forces which will usher in a new epoch in World Civilisation. We are fast approaching this turning-point, a point at which the new breaks away from the past, when the gospels we have long venerated become bankrupt, conventional wisdom becomes a nightmare, familiar concepts and words no longer apply, and the treatment on which we have relied for ages no longer cures. Such tumours are now in the making; they are still benign, but in the next two decades they will

become cancerous, ready to be surgically cut off, so that the way is paved for a fresh start.

In the past, the birth of every new epoch was preceded and aided by the birth of a new ideology. For instance, the Renaissance movement preceded the dawn of the new Khatrian era in Europe, and eventually culminated in the Protestant Reformation. Actually some changes in ideology occur whenever one era is replaced by another; but when the new social cycle is about to emerge, as will be the case with India and the West at the turn of the next century, the ideological change is momentous and far-reaching: it then embraces every facet of individual and social life. By the time the Shudran revolutions eventually erupt in India and the West, revolutions of which I have already spoken in previous chapters, the new spiritual movement will have been born and established. In fact, it will likely provide ideological inspiration to these revolutions.

Who will be the leaders of this movement? Stated somewhat differently, who will be the people leading the world by means of their exemplary lives? At the outset, it is notable that every epochal movement eventually spreads its umbrella over accessible areas of the region in which it originates. This has been the experience of all great movements in the past – Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, the Renaissance. Today the regional boundaries extend to the entire world; therefore, eventually the new movement will spread over all nations, unifying them in its wake and laying the foundations for world government. By the same token, even in its infancy, its leaders and followers will come from different nations. They will proclaim that all narrow sentiments – racism, casteism, nationalism – are enemies of humanity; they will demonstrate the need for world unity in order to solve all its problems. But even though the new spiritual leaders will eventually be men and women of all complexions, they will initially come from India and the Western world. This is because these are the two societies that are now destined to pass through epoch-making conflicts. These are the ones that are about to make a break from the past and enter into a new social cycle. And for spiritual leaders to emerge, social conflict is indispensable. Those disgruntled Khatris and Vipras, of whom I have written in preceding chapters, constitute the group out of which the world spiritual leaders will be born. Character and the strength of mind cannot be built without going through the difficulties and privations. Only when the mind has undergone gruelling tests and churning is it transmuted into a mighty spirit, unconcerned with its own well-being but ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of others. The ensuing social turmoil will be the bane of the establishments in India and the West, but those made of sterner stuff will battle hard against official exploitation, and ultimately emerge victorious to become the world's spiritual leaders.

The new movement will win over the hearts of the young, the uncommitted, the unbiased. No democratic nation will be immune to its encroachments; and even though the iron curtains of the communist countries will initially be able to block its advance, eventually they too will succumb to its cosmic ideas and universalism.

To under-developed nations, the new movement will bring the boon of prosperity. Today the ideologies of capitalism and of totalitarian communism compete for their attention. None of them has any say in international economic policies that govern their economic conditions. They are desperately trying to cope with the problems of overpopulation, poverty, and food and energy shortages, while some other countries wallow in extravagance. The world economic and political system today is inhuman; but it cannot survive long. The new spiritual movement will quickly capture the hearts of under-developed nations. It will bring new radiance to their glum eyes, and ultimately deliver them from poverty.

The new ideology will attempt to solve every problem by applying the principle of genuine love for humanity. Hatred and extremism will not be its forte. It will not abolish private property, nor will it condone unbridled private accumulation of wealth. The question of the transfer of economic power from capitalists to workers, for example, will become a political issue in capitalist countries in the near future. Its portents are already there. Nominal worker representation on the governing bodies of corporations already exists in many Western countries such as Germany, Sweden, Norway, Austria, France, among others. Soon, under the burden of increasing economic troubles, workers will demand greater representation in corporate management; but these demands will run into conflict with the capitalistic control of economic power, of stocks, bonds and other assets. In any transfer of economic power, the question of compensating the capitalists for their assets will prey on the Western mind, much as it did in Russia during the reign of Alexander II, who abolished serfdom in 1861 but generously compensated the landlords for giving up semi-fertile lands. In other words, the issue of private property will soon become a source of conflict and tension in many democratic countries. Many election campaigns will be won or lost on this question. Some will argue that the capitalist ought to be duly compensated by the government for handing over his assets to workers, while others will rule this out completely on the grounds that he has already exploited the people enough. The humanitarian solution to this problem will be to fully compensate those owners of capital who for some reasons are unable to work – the elderly, the handicapped – and provide partial or minimal compensation for others. At the same time the able-bodied capitalists will have to be provided with jobs consistent with their qualifications.

A spiritualist has sympathy and compassion for everyone, even for the exploiter and social parasites. Those with an excessive urge for acquisition have to be treated in the same way as those addicted to alcohol and drugs, because the acquisitive instinct is also a mental malady, an addiction. And for this, a greedy person deserves as much help as any other addict. Humanitarian treatment of all socio-economic and political ills will thus be the motto of the new movement.

A question that hangs heavy over the international scene today concerns the barbaric inequity in the distribution of global wealth among nations. Some, like the capitalist, OPEC, and a few communist countries, enjoy extravagant living standards, while the rest live in abysmal poverty. This issue is quietly simmering today, its explosive potential is currently recognised by scholars, but the affluent nations oppose any effort towards a transfer of their wealth to the hunger-stricken nations. Not only that, some of them mask the real issue under the cloak of slogans, while others offer a few crumbs to needy countries. Thus the OPEC members try to blame the capitalist block for economic ills of troubled nations, while the capitalist countries offer a pittance; and communist countries simply stay clear of this mess by offering next to nothing. Let us face it: OPEC is as much responsible for adding to the economic troubles of the under-developed world as the capitalist nations, and the communist countries are no less culpable in this brutality for doing nothing while the teeming millions of the world starve to death year after year. The entire economic and political order of the world is in a morass of which only the affluent within affluent nations are the beneficiaries; it needs rearrangement not only for the continued health of the world fraternity but also for its survival. However, none of this is possible until the world is united under one banner, under one common ideology. And for this task, the new spiritual movement will soon emerge to offer downtrodden humanity a new dispensation.

Many scholars will ask to see my proof for all these assertions; many will brush them aside as dreams of a visionary or as utopian ideas blind to the current world reality. To them I say, look into past human experience, peer into the historical pageant of all nations, and therein you will find support for my views. Whenever any civilisation moved from one social cycle to another, or whenever its Vashyan era, after winding up in the Shudran revolution, moved into another Khatrian era, this was accompanied by ideological changes that dwarfed all such changes in its recent memory. The dogmas that it had long venerated were abruptly discarded; the economic system it had long been accustomed to was surgically altered; the political set-up that its ruling classes had used to their advantage was radically transformed – in short, its structure was overhauled. Take, for instance, Buddhism. It appeared in India at a time when Hindu society was grinding under the repressive wheels of brahmanic and Vashyan institutions, and it helped bring

about the decline of brahmans during the subsequent Khatrian age. Similarly, consider the Renaissance movement. It emerged at a time when the medieval religious order was corrupted by sloth and simony; the Church had been in the seat of power for more than a millennium; it had decayed beyond belief, had supported the exploitative feudal system, had helped everyone but the needy. There was a clamour for reforms, a desperate need for fresh thought and vigour, a leadership vacuum, and the Renaissance emerged from the grassroots to fill that vacuum. But the movement went into full swing just before the time when another Khatrian era was born in the West; and in demolishing the Vashyan era of feudalism, the Renaissance lent a helping hand.

Similarly, the Protestant Reformation, which finally broke the back of the medieval Church, jolted Western society only a few decades after its modern Khatrian era had been established in the 1460s. Actually the inspiration for the Reformation had come from the teachings and sacrifices of sages who had lived during Shudran times, or during the period of transition from the Vashyan era of feudalism to the new Khatrian age. John Huss was the founder of a movement that demanded religious reforms at the turn of the fifteenth century. It is he who was burnt at the stake in 1414, because he refused to recant his sermons against the moral turpitude of the Catholic Church. It is his martyrdom that later provided the spark for the Reformation. Thus momentous ideological changes in the past have occurred whenever a society entered into a new social cycle.

I am not suggesting that all great movements in the past have emerged around the death of a Vashyan era, or around the birth of a Khatrian age; only that most of them have, and my reasoning is that the Vashyan greed and onerous exploitation of the Shudras generate such a degree of materialism in society that to offset this materialism a new spiritual movement has to appear. And the time is now ripe for another spiritual regeneration.

Why a spiritual movement? Why not any other kind of movement? The Renaissance, after all, was far from a spiritual resurgence. In fact, some may argue that it was just the contrary, as its emphasis was less on the world of spirit and more on the present life; some of the Renaissance writers even championed the old Roman-style paganism, its ideals, its virtues. However the important point is that each new movement emerges as a revolt against the decadence of the established order. During the second half of the Middle Ages, the decadence of the Church was an open secret; its support of the feudal order made it an accomplice in the Vashyan exploitation of peasants and serfs. Every exploitative institution was sanctified in the name of God by his clerical emissaries. Thus the need of the day was an emphasis on individualism and secular learning, and a de-emphasis on theology and the Church's supremacy, for every repressive act was committed in God's name. The

Renaissance, therefore, emerged as an answer to the collusion between the priest and the feudal magnates for maintaining their hold on society.

Today conditions are just the opposite. Every exploitative act is currently committed in the name of either individual liberty or the public interest. Our society today lays stress on superficiality, on artificial mannerism, on what is apparent and pleasing to the eye. The stress is so much on personal gain that humanitarian concerns have been completely forgotten. As a result, while earthly pleasures are readily accepted by the world, moral and spiritual values have become old-fashioned. What humanity today needs most is a spiritual revival; a return to the old-fashioned values exalting selflessness and the cosmic sentiment. It does not need religion or patriotism, or any other chauvinistic sentiment: it needs universalism. The pressing need of the world today is a spiritual uplift; hence the new movement arising in response to this need will also be spiritual. Its emphasis will be on altruism and selfless community service, so that one can advance into the realm of spirit in addition to that of mind and matter. And since progress in the realm of spirit is impossible without purging oneself of self-conceit and narrow ideas, the new spiritual movement will call for world unity and an egalitarian distribution of wealth among nations. It will declare that humility and self-denial are more important for mental health and tranquillity than occasionally visiting temples and uttering the name of God; it will declare that the love for God is none other than love for exploited humanity, and that this love ought to be concretely reflected in not only making sacrifices for the poor and unemployed masses of the world, but also in opposing the entrenched media of exploitation; it will declare that the solution of the world's problems lies not in amassing material wealth, but in amassing spiritual wealth.

The Renaissance and its culmination, the Protestant Reformation, gave birth to a philosophy that eventually swept aside the ideological pillars of the medieval Church and the feudal order. It was an epochal movement that preceded and then accompanied the genesis of a new social cycle in the West. Today the West as well as India is ripe for moving into yet another social cycle. The new spiritual ideology that is now in the making will also eventually dilute the current stress on materialism, self-interest and individualism. But today, thanks to science, the world has considerably shrunk; the speedy means of transportation and communications have made it much smaller than the medieval world. No dynamic ideology that meets the exigencies of the times stays limited to its own quarters; no cosmopolitan idea that comes with the epochal message can today remain confined to just a few regions of the world, even if they try to block its advance. Just as rays of the rising sun pierce through the darkness of night, the radiance of the spiritual sentiment will eventually pierce through the roadblocks thrown in its way by any nation: it will eventually pierce through the iron cur-

tain as well. Therefore the new movement, which I may call Spiritual Renaissance, will not only exterminate the materialistic neoclassical ideology of capitalism, but will also eventually destroy the materialistic Marxian basis of totalitarian communism. Verily, then, it will be responsible for the downfall of both capitalism and communism.

Is all this my dream? Maybe! But remember that every humanitarian institution today was yesterday's dream; and today's dream reflecting the world's present needs will become tomorrow's reality.

My discussion so far raises many questions that beg for answers. Given that the eternal rhythm of the law of social cycle cannot be broken, is humanity foredoomed to undergo the agony of ups and downs, of momentary benevolence and prolonged persecution? Are we predestined to be trampled, as in the past, under the grinding wheels of oppression perpetrated in turns by the three classes of Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas? My answer is a definite no. The Evolutionary Principle is inviolable, but by no means does it confine us to the way things have evolved over the aeons. While natural laws cannot be defied, we can work within their bounds to generate a better environment – a better society. Certainly, water by its nature flows downward. But does it mean that the life-giving river flowing down the mountain to the plains cannot be dammed and harnessed to our advantage? The law of social cycle only delineates the limits which society cannot exceed, but in no way does it doom us to the long, downhill phases of social repression. We have been able to go to the moon – we certainly can devise a social order in which we all get the chance to maximise our physical, mental and spiritual potential. All this, however, takes me beyond the present volume; but I intend to return with another.

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