

6

Polity, Economy and Society: Structural Contradictions and the Dynamics of History

History sees the 'world' in a different way than the 'world' sees itself. What is 'seen' is generally in the 'present', isolated, unrelated and almost as sufficient-unto-itself. The historian, even of the 'present', cannot see things in that way. For him, the so-called 'polities' are forming and re-forming, the boundaries and the 'names' changing all the time. What can he really talk about, when that which he is telling about is always changing? Yet, he has to talk and, in talking 'create' the illusion of stability and permanence when there is none. The history of the 'world' from, say, the end of the First World War is an evidence. Name the country and you will see the problem. There are exceptions but, then, one would have to go a little more, a little backward into the past to see the contours melting, the boundaries getting fuzzier and hazier, and thus realize that the realm of the political has perhaps to be understood in a different way than the historian has tried to understand it, particularly since the so-called 'nation-states' came into being. China seems an obvious exception but, for the moment, we shall treat it as that, only wondering whether something would happen to it that, say, happened to the USSR or earlier to India.

The essential contingency of the unit of study which history deals with has been sought to be bypassed by

treating history as the study of 'civilizations' rather than polities. But this is to forget that 'civilizations' not only were preceded by distinctive political formations, but cannot even be conceived without them. Cultures are not civilizations, just as societies are not polities. The latter cannot be thought of without the former, but both cultures and societies can exist and have existed without the latter. One may, if one so likes, see the 'seed', the 'elements', the 'potentialities' of the latter in the former, but that would be a 'retrospective' look, and the 'insistence' most probably based on the view that nothing 'new' can ever come into being as whatever happens must already have been there in an 'implicit' or 'potential' form as otherwise how could it have come into being.

But even if socio-cultural formations can be there without explicit political or civilizational formation, can they be without the activity called 'economic' without which neither society nor culture can be conceived to 'exist'. What is this activity and what is its relation to society and culture, and how is it affected by the mutational eruption of political formations on the one hand and civilizational creations or constructions on the other, is the question without answering which we shall scarcely understand what goes on in history.

Economic activity may be seen at the human level as the transformation of 'nature' or rather that which is 'given' into something which is 'usable' or 'consumable' in the context of 'needs' which are primarily biological and, secondarily, cultural in nature. This transformational activity involves both knowledge and action which keep continually changing and growing, and have to be preserved and passed on from generation to generation. The closest term conveying this transformation of nature into that which is used for life's purposes in the Indian tradition is '*anna*' or 'food' which has been considered as the first level at which *Brahman* or the ultimate reality 'appears' or becomes 'real'

to man. The 'world' is the 'food' for 'life' or *prāṇa* as the *Upaniṣad* says, but in order to become that it requires human activity which itself requires energy, both physical and mental, which in turn is sustained by the world transformed into food once again.

This is the cycle known in economics as the one obtaining between 'production' and 'consumption'. The distance between them may be as small as one likes, but the 'distance' has to be there, and though it can increase and be 'larger' it can never be so large as to become unbridgeable, as then the very purpose of 'production' would be nullified. The mid-way process can assume many forms, but one that has attracted the attention of the economists most is 'exchange', particularly of different kinds of 'food' where the transaction *adds* not only to the 'value' of the product concerned, but to an enhancement of its 'utility' to both the parties concerned.

This, roughly, is the way 'economic' situation may be characterized *before* the mutation in social formations dirempts and divides it and brings what we call a 'polity' into being. Whatever the reasons for this, a new and far-reaching distinction is introduced in the 'body social' between those who are 'ruled' and those who 'rule'. The relation is, and has to be, asymmetrical, but the political asymmetry brings a new asymmetry into being that is primarily 'economic'. The first one relates to 'power', while the second relates to 'wealth', but that is not the whole story. The dichotomy and the division create a class of those who do not perform any function in the 'production processes' of the economy, unless the exercise of the political function itself is supposed to contribute to the functioning of the economy. This, at least theoretically, has to be seen as purely contingent even if in actual fact it happens to be different, as in the pre-political stage, the economy functioned without it. There arises thus a new class of 'pure consumers' who do not create any 'economic

value' in the system. They may be said to create 'political value' but then the key problem would become the relation between 'political' and 'economic' values for the theoretical understanding of a functioning social system.

The economy of the society concerned has now to support the 'ruling class' and the administrative structure it slowly builds to exercise its function, institutions and structures which just did not happen to be there before, as they were not necessary. The 'political costs' to the society thus have not to be seen only in terms of the new distinction brought into being by asymmetries of power, but also in terms of the economic costs that it entails which, though more invisible, happen to be as 'real' as the former.

The most visible sign of this is the imposition of 'tax', the very idea of which was totally absent earlier, and the drawing of a formal boundary dividing the internal exchange relations from those that are 'external'. The political boundary thus becomes also an economic boundary across which exchanges are controlled and regulated not by those who are involved in the transaction, but by someone else who has the final 'say' in the matter.

The 'economic' boundary is, however, different from the 'political' boundary as the exchange relations that occur across it are 'necessary' while those across the political boundary, that is, those that are political in nature are contingent in a sense that derives from the very nature of the polity itself. Trade is a necessity, as no society can be economically self-sufficient, and also because it is one way, and perhaps the simplest way, of creating, augmenting and enhancing wealth as in its case, it is 'demand' that creates the 'supply' or at least helps in creating it.

Trade thus has to be encouraged and fostered, just as the 'demand' created by the political system has to be internally met by an increase in the 'supply' leading to the creation of wealth because of the differentiation of the polity from the society which now begins to be seen in

more positive terms. This, however, brings into being the 'trading class', the so-called *vaiśyas*, who, strangely, are seen as the 'creators of wealth' instead of the primary producers who really produce the goods they trade with.

But the trader likes no frontiers, or at least does not want them. There is thus an in-built conflict between the way the trading class sees the world and the way those who exercise the ruling function see it. For the latter, the other polities are really the 'other', potentially dangerous, even when friendly. The former travel far and wide, discover routes, take risks and have a daring, entrepreneurial side which the latter generally tend to avoid as, for them, it primarily means war, aggrandisement, conquest. These have an economic side too, but so are its 'costs' which generally have been underplayed by those who have written on the subject. Yet, politics and war go together and till very recently it was considered the proud privilege and a 'duty' to do so, for what else was the army supposed to do on which so much was being spent out of the wealth of those who created and produced it. Periodic wars were an economic necessity, justified by the maxim, 'offence is the best means of defence'. Yet, as that applied to every polity, one can understand that 'drama of the absurd' whose enactment is documented in what is known as 'history'.

Wars, though an 'economic necessity', have 'economic costs' also and whether the 'gains' outweigh the 'costs' is not always clear. In the short run, presumably, it must be so, as somebody's 'loss' must be someone else's 'gain'. But in case it results in a real 'empire-building' activity where that which is conquered has to be 'administered' and 'governed', and 'responsibility' taken for its welfare, growth and development, it is difficult to say what the balance-sheet will be in the long run. The 'loot and plunder' is one thing, 'settled conquest' another. Still another is the case when the conquerors come from 'outside', but settle in the land they have conquered as the Turko-Afghan and

Mughal rulers did in India. The Mughal empire was not an 'empire' in the sense in which the Ottoman empire was one, or the Roman or the British empires which may be regarded as the classic examples of what an 'empire' is supposed to be.

The expansion and consolidation increase the 'costs' particularly as there is a 'time-lag' for the 'gains' to accrue and accumulate, necessitating the 'expansion' even further, resulting in a repetition of the cycle once again. Polities 'live' on 'borrowed credit', and empires do it even on a grander, more spectacular scale, dazzling the onlooker who does not see the yawning gap behind and beneath it all. This they can do, as they provide the environment for economy to flourish and wealth to be created through an expanding internal and external trade. Merchants become bankers and money-lenders to the State and finance even its military enterprises in order to keep the credit-worthiness of the State afloat and, of course, get a share of the 'spoils' when the victory is won.

The interrelationships of the economies of the conquering State with those of the places that are conquered and the inter-meshing of political and administrative structures are a story that is seldom told, particularly in the context of the conflicts they generate. But it is clear that the political hegemony is seldom accepted and arouses 'resistance' as it affects the deep identifications and self-respect of a people more than economic relationships which take a longer time to be seen as essentially adverse in character and, in many cases, this may not even be actually so. The Marxian analysis, based as it primarily is on the capitalist mode of production and the uneven interrelationships between States with unequal development in that mode in what has been called the 'imperial' relationship with the colonies, has so intermeshed the 'political' with the 'economic' that it has failed to see the relative autonomy and independence of

the two. The very differentiation of the political function and its institutionalization creates a dynamics of its own, bringing into being 'new' forces that radically affect and alter all previously functioning aspects of societies, including its culture and economy. In fact, the differentiation and institutionalization of the political function brings gradually into being a differentiation and institutionalization of other aspects also which earlier were unified in a whole so invisibly that they were hardly perceived or felt to be there at all. The relative autonomy, independence and internal causality of these fields become manifest only *after* they have become so differentiated and institutionalized. But, so does the conflict and the ambivalent relationship they have with the polity, as also with one another. The claim of each on the polity and of the polity on them creates a situation where no one is satisfied, and yet the dynamics and dialectic of dissatisfaction, if carefully handled, lead the polity and the society forward.

The differentiations, however, lead to a division, both horizontal and vertical, which create new asymmetries of rank, status, prestige and power besides those of the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', and thus increasingly bring into being the problem of the relationships between them. The State plays, and has to play, a mediating and integrating role but, increasingly, it is seen as partisan tilting the balance in favour of those who provide the economic foundation for it and those who legitimize its function and practice, something which it always needs. The creators of wealth have generally been known, but not so the 'legitimizers' of those who exercise the ruling function in the polity. The problem of 'legitimacy' is always there, but there is the added problem of 'justification' as what those who rule do, is not exactly acceptable or palatable to many even if it be in their 'real' interest or the interest of the society and polity as a whole.

The real problem of a polity which represents 'self-consciousness' at a collective level, is to ensure the maintenance, continuance and growth of *all* that society consists of as constituted, through its increasingly differentiated and differentiating structures, and embodied in institutions with their own divergent values for the realization of which they have been formed and which is the *raison d'être* of their existence. But while seeing to all this and taking responsibility for it, it also has to see about itself, its continuity and the way it is discharging its function. Its relation to society from which it got differentiated, thus, is strange and ambiguous as the latter never forgets that the differentiation and the institutionalization of the political function occurred for certain purposes, and if those purposes were not being achieved, something must have gone wrong and needs to be rectified to set things right. The history of man's experimentation with forms of polity has to be seen in this perspective to realize that it just is not the case as may appear at first sight that once the ruling function has become autonomous nothing can be done about it. The delusion of 'omnipotence' may infect those who rule but, sooner or later, it is corrected by forces generated from within and without.

But even in normal circumstances, the question remains as to how those who are to rule shall be appointed, the succession ensured and in case the necessity so arises, removed. The political centre tries to ensure this for all other institutions in a society, but the fact that it has to ensure this for itself as well creates that 'insoluble' problem which the history of 'political experimentation' has been trying to solve over the ages. How to avoid a situation where the ruler becomes a 'tyrant' and cannot be removed, is the central question whose answer in the western tradition has been given by what is called 'democracy' and which perhaps was first tried in the history of Greece by

Athens as described and documented in *The Athenian Constitution*, a work ascribed to Aristotle, recording the history of the experiment for more than two hundred years since the time of Solon till his own times.

The problem relates to the relation between the ruler/s and the 'ruled', and how the latter can exercise 'control' over the former, as it is in their interest that the former are supposed to govern. The problem thus is of 'appointment', 'tenure of office' and ensuring that those who are appointed do step down when their tenure is over, unless they are re-appointed. There is also the problem of the 'process of appointment' and who are the persons entitled to take part in it. This gave rise to the notion of 'citizen' in the western tradition of thought about polity and of Aristotle's definition of man as a 'political animal'. The other definition, also attributed to Aristotle, which defines man as a 'rational animal' is wider in nature but, when combined with the narrower one restricting it to the realm of the 'political', opens the door to an understanding of western thought regarding the 'understanding' of man as perhaps nothing else could. Aristotle's teacher had already shown the way to this type of understanding, but Plato was ambivalent, as his understanding of 'reason' was different and, in any case, he did not seem to understand the problem to which the seeking for the 'democratic' form of political organization was the answer. Plato seems never to have seen the perennial problem from which all polity *qua* 'polity' seems to suffer. The asymmetrical relations of power which the formation of a polity legitimizes may, at any time, turn, by the very nature of the structural situation into those which are exploitative, oppressive and tyrannical. Aristotle too did not seem to have seen this, even though he seemed to have engaged in a comparative study of the constitutions of the 'city-states' of Greece in general and of Athens in particular, as evidenced in *The Athenian Constitution*. In fact,

both he and Plato seemed to have had an adverse opinion regarding the functioning of 'democracy' in the Athenian 'City-State', particularly after the way it treated Socrates as documented in *The Trial and Death of Socrates* by Plato, his pupil and one of the greatest philosophers the world has ever seen. The reflection on justice in *The Republic*, it has been argued by some, should be seen in this perspective. Plato seems to have felt that a 'democracy' could perhaps be as tyrannical as any other form of polity, or perhaps even more so.

The Macedonian conquest of Athens, first by Phillip and then by Alexander, put an end to the experiment in democracy described in *The Athenian Constitution* but the Aristotelian definition of man as a being who was both 'rational' and 'political' at the same time haunted and influenced Western thought and practice, just as did Plato's vision of a 'utopia', or an 'ideal polity' in which alone perhaps a fully 'rational' life could be lived, a life that included for him the contemplation of 'ideas' or rather the 'Real' which coincided with the Idea of Good.

The realization of 'Reason' in the realm of the political and the definition of man in its terms introduced a perennially active dimension in the nature of man to make him 'concerned' with the other at an impersonal and institutional level which was different from the personal and individual level in terms of which the problem of morality was generally conceived and defined. Being a 'human being' meant to be a member of this public domain and actively participate in it for the realization of the public good, and not just to live in the world of 'private' personal relations which, at least in one Greek sense, was said to be 'privative' in character, that is, 'something' which 'deprived' you of being fully human, particularly as this world was essentially non-rational or irrational, constituted as it was by feelings and emotions and valued in terms of them.

It was now being seen in the context of the 'public good' and involved a 'participative', 'deliberative' inter-individual and inter-institutional character where each thought is in a 'representative' capacity, and not as an individual person. This was not exactly that 'universality' of reason which philosophers have talked about whose locus continues to be the individual, nor is its 'good' the same which is talked about in the context of ethics which remains individual-centred as it is enmeshed and stuck in the issues of praise and blame and freedom. Nor is this the reason which thrives on the distinction between 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' rationality or *zweck-rationalitat* and *wert-rationalitat* so dear to social scientists since Weber, as they still remain bound to the individual whose apprehension of 'value' remains central in the analysis.

These notions of 'rationality' and 'value' derive not so much from the way the Athenian Greek saw it, but rather from the Christian formulation which put the individual at the centre, but as a member of the Church, rather than of the polis as Aristotle had perhaps seen it. This, however was the Catholic, and perhaps the Byzantine, view of the matter, not shared by the Lutheran break which seems to have provided the basis for the way both Kant and the utilitarians thought on the subject, even though there was a crucial difference between them as the latter's formulation, though still rooted in the individual subject, provided the possibility of a return to the Greek notion *via* the idea of the 'greatest good' (happiness) of the 'greatest number'. That this, though enormously effective in the socio-political realm, was essentially accidental is shown by the developments in ethical thought in England after Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick. But, the return of the realm of reason to the public sphere and to the 'thinking' about the 'public good' was taken over in the 'policy-oriented' sciences such as economics, politics, law, etc., though the success of Rawls and the enormous reputation

of Habermas suggest that philosophers have not entirely given up the way Aristotle tried to think about man and understood and defined him.

The application of rationality in the public sphere has, however, been confined mainly to economics and as for politics it has almost exclusively concerned itself with the polity within the boundaries which constitute and define it. The political perspective cannot but 'see' the world as defined by itself, and this has boundaries without which it cannot be considered a polity. Economics, as we said earlier, does not have those boundaries, though when seen in the political perspective, it generally tends to have one. The point is that 'reason' in the public domain functions differentially in the realm of politics and economics. It is easier for it to transcend and transgress national boundaries in the economic than in the political realm where the distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer', the 'we' and the 'they' is insurmountable because of the structural limits themselves.

Polity, it should be remembered, is defined differentially in respect of those for whom it is 'responsible', that is, its own citizens, and all the rest, that is, other polities and peoples are alien to it. The twin values of power and welfare that define the realm are related in such a way that while the former is subordinated to the latter at least to some extent in the context of its own citizens, there is nothing of this sort in relation to those which constitute the 'other' to the polity outside itself. There, pure considerations of power prevail and if these are ever tempered it is only by considerations of power that are relevant to it.

The two values that define the realm of the political are intrinsically at odds even in the internal domain, but there, in spite of this, the welfare-dimension has to be taken into account as it is that for which the polity is supposed to be there. The regulative and the integrative function that this involves in respect of all aspects of society includes the

economic aspect as well, and it is this which leads to that strange and paradoxical situation where everything that is intrinsically 'universal' has to be parochialized and seen from the perspective of the state to which one belongs, and in terms of its interests alone.

The enormous harm that it has done to the 'universal' interests of mankind has seldom been noticed or emphasized, but it is equally true that humanity could not have engaged in its various enterprises and built what we call 'civilizations' without the protection, patronage and over-arching umbrella of polities without which this would have been inconceivable. The role of empires in this regard is well known, but the contribution of smaller states should not be forgotten. It is not only the small city-states of ancient Greece or of Renaissance Italy or of those which arose in Post-Mughal India in the sub-Himalayan region and elsewhere as in Rajasthan, but also the innumerable unknown ones which kept the flame alive and the civilizational enterprises 'going', as without them they would have died long ago.

It is perhaps this interplay between the centralizing, overarching, unifying, consolidatory periods of the Great Empires and the decentralized, scattered, separate political centres that nourished creativity and brought into being what we call 'civilizations' in history. Seen from the civilizational point of view, the two are not opposed as the story centred on the rise and fall of empires has tended to paint. The polity certainly becomes 'visible' in that which we see as 'Empires', but the empires pre-supposed long periods when creativity was fostered in diverse fields at various places under different polities which continue even in the period when imperial unity and authority is superimposed on them and which recedes when the imperial sway gets loosened over them. This is as true of the Mauryan and the Gupta empires in India, as of Alexander's in Greece and later of the Romans on large

parts of what they had conquered in Asia. The role that empires have played in the history of culture and civilizations has yet to be examined, but it can be safely said that Toynbee seems to be definitely wrong when he sees them exclusively in terms of the universal religions that they fostered. Religions, he forgot, have the same history as other areas of cultural creativity; they too had been there *before* the empires were born and outlasted them when they disappeared.

The function of the polity is to continue to do at a self-conscious level what society does almost naturally as the latter not only pre-dates the former, but continues to perform its functions even when the polity gets institutionalized and differentiated, though in a radically modified form. The polity, in fact, differentiates and formally separates through institutionalization many of these functions, and tries then to unify and integrate them, creating more institutions in this process and thus increasing the 'costs' of 'running' the society which hardly were there before.

The differentiation of political forms and their evolution, or rather the changes in them over time and the effect these have had on society have hardly been studied, but many of the so-called 'social formations' have been the direct or indirect result of the polity's, or rather the political state's vaster interest in perpetuating itself and enhancing its power and power-bases in the society. There is, however, always an 'external' aspect of the polity's relation to other polities which the purely society-centred analysis misses, and which becomes visible even to the blindest eye when a polity assumes the form of an 'empire'.

'Empire', by definition, is expansionist, constituted as it is by those who have been conquered and whose societies and cultures are, by this very fact, 'inferior' even if they are in certain exceptional cases acknowledged as superior, as is said to be the case in the relation between Rome and

Greece. The incorporation of that which is conquered, thus creates not only the empire but also that asymmetry within it which impels it to a course involving further and further expansion till it results in an economic bankruptcy and political disaster and the external discontent results in increasing resistance and the costs of maintaining control become so high that the centre not only cannot meet them, but cannot keep itself from breaking and collapsing.

The 'collapse', however is only a 'return-back' to an earlier situation when the empire had not arisen and the enormous complications, differentiations and institutionalizations had not taken place with only one difference of course, and the difference consists in the 'memory' of that which was achieved during the days of the empire when everything was 'staged' and 'played' to be seen and chronicled and recorded and remembered. These included not only the political events about which the historians write, but also the intellectual and cultural creations which the post-imperial decentralized societies and polities try to preserve and develop in their own ways, 'freed' as they are of the centrally imposed standards and norms of the imperial metropolis where everything was concentrated.

The decentralization reduces the wastage and the costs and thus releases funds for a more economical use giving rise to results which, though less spectacular and glamorous, are equally important as it is through them that the enterprises of a civilization are carried forward.

The economic base and the political superstructure are always in a tension and the interplay between them provides that dynamics which Marx saw but did not clearly understand. The dynamics, however, is not determined by these two alone, as the polity's relations with other polities, provides that third dimension which determines the inner development not only of the polity, but of its relation to its own 'economy' as well.

These, however, are 'internal' factors in the story of a civilization which is centred in its intellectual and cultural enterprises which include the life of the imagination and what is called 'spirit'.

The unasked question that this raises, however, is what happens to 'man' who is the centre of all this drama and whether history with all the changes in polity, economy and society leave his 'essence' 'untouched', or transform and transmute him in a sense that is difficult to grasp as the very activity of thinking and understanding seems to be structured in such a way as to determine and give form to itself by conceiving of everything, including itself, as constituted by the differences that distinguish and define them as 'this' rather than 'that'. The retrospective look at the evidence provided by history seems to suggest that there is little change in man since he became self-conscious and reflected on himself and the world around him and his 'relation' with it. But even if all this is admitted, it does not follow that 'something' that is defined in terms of a property or set of properties, cannot lose them and cease to be either as an individual or a class or species, as that would then imply that any 'object' defined in this way would never 'cease to be', as it cannot do so by definition. Such a conclusion would be unpalatable and hence unacceptable as it would confer 'immortality' on everything that could be defined as having a *svarūpa* or *svabhāva* or essence.

The attempt to save the situation by opting for the immortality of the species alone and sacrificing that of the individual would not help unless one were to assume that *all* the species have existed *all* the time since they came into being and that no 'new' species can ever arise because of the eternal fixity in them imposed by one's definition. But if once it is accepted that there could have been a time when the species called 'man' was not there, then there can be no reason to think that it will always be there

or that it will not give rise to some other species which would be related to man, as he is said to be related to those from which man is said to have arisen. The relation of this new species to man would be similar to the one that seems to obtain between man and other animals, no matter if the differentiating characteristic is described in terms of 'rationality' or 'citizenship' or *dharma*, that is, the sense of 'rightness' or 'wrongness' in respect of anything that is apprehended by his consciousness.

Thinkers like Sri Aurobindo and Chardin, and even Nietzsche, have struggled with this question, but none of them could have seen the far-reaching fundamental changes in the very structure of the human condition that are being introduced by what goes under the name of genetic engineering, information technology, transmutation of elements and the transformation of mass into energy, all actually around us in different degrees of maturation. Chardin did talk of a 'Noo-sphere' on the analogy of 'Bio-sphere' which man's mind was gradually creating for his 'mental living' just as life had earlier created the biosphere for its sustenance, survival and growth of life on this planet.

But the thought of all of them is 'consciousness-centred', while what is happening is almost the opposite. Consciousness is being ambushed, threatened, overwhelmed by something that is its 'opposite' and we seem to have reached a stage where the very 'reality' of consciousness is in question. Any thinking about consciousness now will have to take into account, at least at the human level, the political, the economic and the socio-cultural matrix in which it is embedded and through which it has to function and achieve its ends. But, if we are to understand its 'history' and learn from it we will have to get rid of the illusion which its apparent transparency projects and makes us believe that it always *was* as it 'appears' to be. A 'look' at the 'animal world'

around, as Sri Aurobindo did, should be sufficient to dispel the illusoriness which, in his own words used in a different context, may be characterized as 'illusion of the obvious'.

The 'self-centredness' of consciousness and life, and perhaps of all 'being', gets a little less at the human level because of the 'other-centredness' imposed on it by those dimensions in which it has necessarily to live, and which helps it in attaining an impersonality and universality which the meditative consciousness seems to provide at the other end of the spectrum. What is the relationship between these two radically opposed directions of consciousness, is the unanswered question of the future. But the fact that Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* besides *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*, witnesses the challenge of this awareness in modern times, just as Gandhi's 'experiments' in the political, social and economic fields do in a different way. But these are just the 'beginning', the faint awareness of something that is needed and we have to go beyond them, each in his or her own way. The path is untraversed, the temptation of 'turning away' too great, and yet if humanity is to move forward, the 'double denial' has to be replaced by a 'double affirmation' and the trail that Gandhi blazed has to be followed, though not in *his* way. It is the vision that should matter and not the 'accidentalities' in which all pioneering efforts are inevitably enmeshed. The value-consciousness has to be operationalized, brought to work in the fields of polity, society and economy which seem most recalcitrant and resistant. Gandhi saw this as perhaps no one else did, but he turned away from the real challenges posed by modern technologies which are now infiltrating and shaping every aspect of life. The Gandhians stand helpless as they are 'wedded' to the wording of *Hind Swaraj* and oblivious of the message contained in his life which was never bound by what he said or did, as he 'knew' what he was doing and was prepared to accept mistakes when he

realized that they were such. As for Aurobindians and Aurovilleites, they seem to believe more in the supermind doing things for them, rather than do things on their own in fields which really challenge the higher mind and the intuitive mind, to use Sri Aurobindo's terminology, to shape them nearer the values that human consciousness vaguely apprehends at present. The lessons from the 'masters' have to be learnt, but the path one has to find for oneself and traverse the way one can. The emerging realities of society, polity, economy and technology can only be ignored at costs which are unimaginable at the historical juncture man finds himself today. The awareness of this along with the great traditions of experimentation with consciousness in the past may help in restoring and redressing the balance in the thought and action that is needed today.

Index

- a-bhāva* 236
abhyudaya 211
 Act of Creation 132
 'act on himself' 163
 actualization 235
 Advaitic school of Vedānta 232
 Advaitins 232
 aesthetic 123
 aesthetic consciousness 178
 aesthetic sensibility 100
alaṅkāra 221
 Al-Biruni 204
 Alexander 276
 alternative illusions 76
anādi vāsanā 41
ānanda 132, 180
 ancient Greece 276
 Anthropology 93
 Anthropologists 245
aṣavarga 211
 architecture 11, 136, 147, 150-1
 Aristotle 128, 150, 228, 253, 272
 Aristotelian rationality 197
 art forms 237
artha 68, 201
Arthaśāstra 206
 artificial insemination 33
 Asia 53
āśrama 236
 astronomical observatories 65
 'ātman' 83
 'ātman-centric knowledge 113
ātmatuṣṭi 217
 Athens 253
 Aurobindo, Sri 199, 278, 281
avidyā 41, 236
 Auschwitz 240
 Aztecs 90
 Bakhtiar Khilji 203
 'behavior' 106
 being 238
 Belsem 240
 Bengal 108
bhakti 108
 Bharat 146, 222
bhāṣās 218
bhāvanā 40
bhikṣus 8
 Bible 170
 Big Bang 132
 biological 65
 biological being 235
 biological-cum-transcendental
 structure 200
 biological cycles 8-9, 142
 biological evolution 58
 biological survival 66
 biological temporality 12
 birth and death 236

- brahmacārins* 8
 Braudel 115-6
 British rule 14
 Buddha 71-2, 74, 86, 123, 167, 170, 188, 207, 220
buddhi 223
 Buddhism 53, 67, 167, 176, 201-3, 220
 Buddhist 74-5, 98, 199
 Buddhist deconstruction 232
 Buddhist theory of civilization 83
 Buddhist tradition 8, 78
 'business of living' 235
- Caitanya 108
cakravartiva 241
 Cambridge 105
 capitalism 58, 256
 Cartesian framework 120
 causal dimensions 3
 'change thyself' 163
 Chardin, Teilhard de 199, 280
 China 53, 200, 203-4
 Chinese civilization 55, 81, 84, 92
 Chinese culture 53
 Christ 86, 188
 Christ on the Cross 240
 Christian civilization 54-5
 Christian dichotomy 119
 Christianity 7, 52-3, 197, 199, 202
 Chronological dimensions of succession 4
 Church in Constantinople 252
 Church of Rome 252
 'citta vṛtti nirodha' 259
cit 132
 civil and juridical structure 247
 Civilizational amnesia 29
 Civilizational identity 46, 172, 199
 Civilizational construction 198
- Civilizational memory 188
 Civilizational parochiality 204
 Civilizational products 203
 Civilizational roots 205
 Class consciousness 116
 Classical Indian civilization 54
 Classical Indian thought 211
 'cogito ergo sum' 73
 cognitive enterprise 117, 139
 Communism 52
 Configurations of cultural growth 58
 Confucian 199
 Confucius 170
 Consciousness 178, 217-33
 Criminal law 141
Critiques 121
 'cultural' 123
 'cultural' activity 231
 cultural anthropology 5, 18, 92, 95
 cultural-civilizational 198
 cultural cycle 7-9
 cultural fact 3
 cultural object 3, 4
 cultural space 12
 cultural temporality 12
 cultural tradition of India, 14
 culture 1, 2, 13, 212, 217-33, 265
 cybernetics 110
 cyclical time-processes 6
- decentralization 278
 dance 150-1
 de-identification 176, 184-6, 191
 denial of identity 176
 demand and supply 267
 Derrida, Jacques 227-31
 Descartes, Rene 119-20

- desire 1-86
 determinate forms 177
 'determinateness' 177
dharma 68, 206-7, 211, 280
Dharmakoṣa 27-8
dhuna 214-15
dhuna culture 213
dhvani school of literature 221
 discoveries of man 256
dilemmas 182
 dilemmas of historians 243
 Dionysian festivals 39
 discoveries of man 256
 'disinterested pleasure' 125
 diversity 198
 diversity of language 172
 divine mind 131
 'doing' 22
 'domination' 192-3
dr̥ṣṭa 88
 dream 40
dr̥ṣṭi 88
 dynamics of history 264-5
- ecological-cum-cultural environment 167
 economic boundary 267
 economics 266, 275
 'ego' 259
 élite group 218
 encounter between civilizations 48, 50, 55
 'enjoying' 173
 'epistemology' 159, 161
 Euclidean 6
 European civilization 52, 84, 155
 European plays 150
 'event' 237
 existential consciousness 43
 expansion of civilization 51
- external environment 111-12
 'falsity' 77, 168
 family resemblance 82
 'feel himself' 163
 'feel thyself' 164
 'figure' 177
 Fisher, H.A.L. 126-7
 First World War 264
 forced labour camps 240
 Foucault, Michel 229
 foundational scepticism 227
 Fraser 18
 'freedom' 192
 French revolution 71
 French standards 106
 Freud, Sigmund 229, 257
 Freudian superego 224
- Galilean-Newtonian framework 228
 Gandhi 210, 253-54, 281
 Geertz, Clifford 17, 18
 genetic engineering 33
 geographical space 12
 German standards 106
 Gestalt psychology 177
 'ghost in the machine' 73
 Gibbon, Edward 18
Gītā 88
 globalization of polity and economy 62
The Golden Bough 18
 Graeco-Roman civilization 81, 244
 Graeco-Roman history 90-1, 244
 Greek art 197
 Greek civilization 219
 Greek heritage 197
 Greeks 90, 170

- 'ground' 177
 Gupta empire 276
- Hegel, G.W.F. 18-20, 58-9, 94, 228
 'hegemony' 192-3
 'here' 122
 hidden archaeology 130
 Hindu 199
 historical imagination 17
 historical writing 17
 historiography 237
 history of consciousness 262
History of Europe 126-7
 Hitler's Germany 240
 Huien Tsang 201
 human consciousness 124
 human environment 112-13
 human reality 129
 human self-consciousness 209
 humanities 109
 Hume, David 74
- 'I' 104, 122, 238
The Ideal of Human Unity 199
 'idealistic' 200
 'ideational' 200
 identification 185-6, 191
 'identity' 159-216, 234, 242
 identity of civilization 175, 187, 192
 'idolization' 195
 individual cycle 8
 'infinite progress' 189
 illusion 236
 illusion of continuity 32
 illusory nature 117
 illusory stability 237
 imagination 17, 37, 39
 imaginative apprehensions 77-9
 imaginative creations 134-6, 147, 153-4
 imaginative enterprises 139
 imaginative vision 136
 'immorality' of conquest 30
 India 200, 203, 306
 India, history of, 13, 14
 Indian civilization 14, 43, 81, 84, 92, 176, 202
 Indian context 90
 Indian musical tradition 214
 Indian philosophical tradition 75
 Indian spirituality 210
 Indian thought 74
 Indian tradition 21, 23, 40, 88, 108, 160, 207, 217, 226
 Indian tradition of thought 160
 Information technology 110-11
 'inner dimension' 74
 institutionalizations 278
 inter-subjective objectivity 116
 imposition of 'tax' 267
 Islam 52, 123, 202
 Islamic art 152
 Islamic civilization 54-5
 Islamic phase 204
 Italian 90
- Jain 199
 Jain theory of knowledge 177
 Jain tradition 8, 78
 Jainism 53, 67, 202-3
 Jains 190
 Jama Masjid 140
 Japanese garden 148
Jāti-purāṇas 244
 Jayarāsi 227, 230
 Jewish civilization 54-5
jīvanamukti 260
 Judaeo-Christian-Islamic religions 200

- Kālidāsa* 241
Kāma 40, 68
Kāmanā 40
Kāma-Sūtra 146, 222
 Kant, Immanuel 10, 95, 117-21, 126-7, 189-90, 226, 247
 Kantian ethic 249
 Kantian framework 117-18, 125
 Kantian scholars 119
 Kant's formulation 11
Kāvya Śāstra 24
 Keats, John 73
 'know thyself' 162-4
 'knowing' 22, 162, 208
 knowledge, world of 41-2
 'knowness' 160
Koṅārka 65
 Koran 170
 Korea 53
 Kroeber, Alfred 58
- labour 257
 labour theory of value 256
 Language 217
 Lao-Tse 170
 Larger 'self' 193
 Lath, Mukund 88, 213-14, 216, 250
 Levi-Strauss, C. 93-4
 Life cycle 7
The Life Divine 199
 linear progression 7
 linear succession 5
 linear temporality 6
 literary composition 51
 literary creation 37
 literary evidence 101-2, 107
 literature 134, 136
 'living' 66
 Locke, John 74
 Lockean distinction 74
- macro-enterprise 61
 macro-history 59
 macro-theories 61
 Madhva 232
Mahābhārata 241, 253
Mahābhāṣya 106
 Mahāvīrā 71-2, 86, 170, 190, 207
mantra 213
 Marcuse, Herbert 193
 Marx, Karl 18, 58-9, 72, 220, 229, 256
 Marxian idea 193
 Marxian perspective 110
 Marxism 220
 Marx's formulation 256
 Marxists 240
 Mauryan empire 276
 material nature 235
 mathematics 124
 'me' 238
 'meaningfulness' 184
 'mediated' relation 170
The Meeting of East and West 200
 'memory' 187
 memory transplantation 34
 mental pleasure 182
 Mesopotamia 90
metaphysical impulse 138
 methodology of knowing 208
 micro-enterprise of understanding 59
 micro-economics 60
 micro-history 59
 micro versus macro studies 60
 Mīmāṃsā 23
 Mithilā 108
 Mohammed 86
mokṣa 68, 207

- Mommsen 18
 Mughal architecture 149, 152
 Mughal empire 269
 Mughal rulers 269
 multi-civilizational identity 172
 music 151
 Muslim 199
 mythic dimension 138
 myths of a civilization 174
- Nāgārjuna 226-7, 230-1
 Nālandā 203
 Natural environment 111, 140
 Nāṭya Śūtra 222
 Navya-Nyāya tradition 108
 'nation-states' 264
 Nation-States of Europe 244
 'negative capability' 178
 'new civilization' 72
 Newstrack 73
 Nietzsche 280
 Nihsaṅga Bhakta 88
 nihsaṅg bhoga 89
 niḥśreyasa 211
 niṣkāma karma 89
 nissatava 98
 Nixon syndrome 73
 non-Advaitic school of Vedānta 232
 non-élite 218
 non-Euclidean 6
 non-human history 26
 non-linguistic communication 106
 non-literary evidence 101
 non-literate cultures 151
 Northrop, F.S.C. 56, 200
 Nyāya 23, 108, 160, 232
- 'objects' 173, 176
 'objecthood' 160
- 'omnipotence' 271
 'opacity' 162
 'oral' traditions 237, 246
 'otherness', of civilization 82
 Ottoman empire 269
 Oxford 105
- pain 186
 painting 150-1
 Pāṇini 146
 Pāṇinian linguistics 231
 paramārtha 88, 232
 paramārthic foundation 232
 Patañjali 106, 222
 Persian 205
The Phenomenon of Man 199
 perpetual repetition 237
 physical pleasure 182
 Pilgrimage 188-9
 Plato 228, 272
Plato's Pharmacy 197
 pleasure 179-87
 plurality 198
 plurality of civilizations 159-216
 political expansion 51-2
 political experimentation 271
 politico-military considerations 218
 'polities' 264
 polity 272
 Post-Mughal India 276
 pottery 96-7, 99, 151
 'power' 193
 prajñā 250
 pramāṇa 160
 pramāṇa prameya vyāpāra 161
 pramāṇa śāstra 159, 161
 prayer 191
 Prayoga Śāstra 222
 pre-historic culture 99

- problematics of a civilization 173
 process of production 256
 'projects' 194-5
 Prussian State 59
puruṣārtha 14, 21-2, 24-5, 28, 38-9, 68, 98, 102-3, 114-15, 201-2, 206, 219, 254
- rāga 215
 rāga culture 213
 rājadharmā 206
 rājanīti 206
 rājasika 253
 Ramakrishna 210
 Ramana, Maharishi 210
 Rāmānuja 232
 Rāmāyaṇa 241
 'Rashomon' 90
 'rational' variety 197
 'real' 120
 'realise thyself' 164
 'reality' 120
 'reality' of pleasure and pain 179
 'reflection' 223
 Rehman's Bibliography 205
 religions 242
 religious 196
 religious expansion 51
 Renaissance Italy 276
 're-reflection' 223
 retire 235
 'return of the repressed' 29, 206
 Ricoeur, Paul 71-2, 121-2, 125, 222
 ritual-and-living practices 237
 Romans 90, 219
 Rorty, Richard 227-31
 Russian revolution 71
- Ryle, Gilbert 181-2
- śabdānuṣṭhāna 213
 'sacred' 10, 189
 sadācāra 217
 'sādhanā' 254
 'sādhaka' 254
 sālokya 255
 sāmīpya 255
 sāmīkhyā 176
 sampradāya 51
 saṃskāra kāṇḍa 27
 Sanskrit 105, 203, 205
 Sanskrit grammarians 106
 Sanskrit language 146
 sannyaṣi 8
 Sartre, Jean Paul 94, 195
 śāstra 22, 28, 38, 98, 101-3, 114, 223
 śāstras 22-5, 218, 221, 222, 225
 śāstric enterprises 231-2
 śāstric form 224
 śāstric form of knowledge 146
 śāstric forms 225
 śāstric formulations 219, 221-3
 śāstric knowledge 114
 śāstric learning 24
 śāstric products 224
 śāstric shape 116
 śāstric structures 232
 'sāruṣyā' 255
 'sāyujya' 255
 Sat 132
 sattā 97
 sattva 176
 sātत्वika 253
 'second coming' 196
 secular pilgrimage 189
 seeking of man 217-233
 'self' 173

- self-consciousness 246
 self-consciousness of man 255
 self-centric knowledge 113
 self-conscious knowledge 22
 self-consciousness 103-4, 165,
 178, 185, 217-33
 self-perpetuating institutions 237
 self-understanding 163-4
 'sensate' cultures 200
 Shah Jahan 149
 'siddha' 254
 'significance' 184
śilpa 22, 24-5, 28, 38, 98, 102,
 114, 217
 Smithsonian Institute 94
Smṛti 31, 38, 98, 216-17
Social and Cultural Dynamics 57
 social anthropology 5
 social sciences 109
 social relations 256
 society 267
 socio-cultural anthropologists
 120-1
 socio-cultural environment 140
 socio-cultural formations 265
 socio-cultural reality 121
 socio-politico-economic system
 66
 Socrates 273
 Sorokin, Pitrim 56-9, 200
 South-East Asia 53
 Soviet experiment 209
 Soviet Union 111, 240
 'space' 1-86, 120
 Spengler, Oswald 56-9, 138, 199
 Śri Harṣa 226-7, 230-1
 St. Peters in Rome 64
 structural contradictions 264-5
 Structural illusion 117-18, 128-9
 Structural temptations 128-9
 Sub-civilizations 63
 sub-Himalayan region 276
 Sundara Rajan, R. 122-3, 125
śūnya 236
 'surplus repression' 194
 surplus value 193
 'svabhāva' 279
svapna 40
 'svarūpa' 279
swarānupūrvi 213
 'syād' 177
 Sydney 72
 Symbols 2, 174
 Symbolization 122
 Taj Mahal, The 149
tāmasika 253
 Taoist 199
 technical rationality 251
 technological dimensions 3, 4
 technological transformation 27
 technologies 109
 'temptations' 87-158
 test-tube babies 33
 textual archaeology 131
 theories of Marx 256
 'there' 122
 'they' 104
 'time' 1-86, 120
*Towards a Critique of Cultural
 Reason* 121
 Toynbee, Arnold 7, 55-7, 59,
 195, 198
 trade 267
 Trans-biological 65
 trans-biological pursuits 66
 'transcendent' 10
 'transcendent principle' 191
 transcendent conditions 117-18
 transcendental enterprise 156-7

- transcendental form 119
 transcendental knowledge 190
 transcendental seeking 1-86, 156
 transcendental unity 199
 trans-civilizational goal 201
 trans-civilizational projects 200
 trans-economic goals 64
 transformational activity 155
 transformational enterprise 154
 transmission of culture 106
 'transparency' 162
 transparent intelligibility 38
 trans-political goals 64
 Treveleyan, Charles 18
 'truth' 77, 168, 243
 Turko-Afghan 268
 U.K. 89
 Ultimate reality 177
 'understanding' 163
 understanding of civilization 1-
 86
 unendingness 190
 Upaniṣadic question 161
 U.S.A. 89
 'useless passions' 195
 U.S.S.R. 264
Vaiśeṣika sūtras 211
vaiśyas 268
 value apprehension 30-4, 144
 valuational dimensions 3, 4
varānupūrvi 213
Varṇas 98
Vāsanā 40
 Vātsyāyana 146, 222
 Vedāntic formulation 132
 Vedāntic theory 83
 Vedic civilization 53
 Vedic hymns 213
 Vedicization of India 53
 Vedic recitation 213
 Vedic texts 71
 Vedic tradition 78
 Vedic Upaniṣadic tradition 203
 Vedas 170, 246
viraha bhakti 254
 'virtual' 120
viśayātā 160
vyākaraṇa 23
vyavahāra 88, 232
vyavahāric reality 232
 Warren Commission 73
 'We' 238
 Webb, Beatrice 72
 Weber, Max 19, 155
weltanschauung 84, 87, 122, 137,
 204-5, 212
 West Asia 204
 West Asian 205
 West Asian civilization 84, 204
 West German foundation 94
 western civilization 81, 205, 210,
 244
 Western project 198
 Western tradition 74
 'The White man's burden' 53
 'will himself' 163
 Wittgenstein 61, 82-3, 96, 228-9
 works of Sorokin 261
 works of Spengler 261
 'worlds' 43-4
 Yājñavalkya 161
Yoga sūtras 222
 'You' 104, 122, 238
 Zeno 230

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