

Indian Polity – 4

A RIGHT knowledge of the facts and a right understanding of the character and principle of the Indian socio-political system disposes at once of the contention of occidental critics that the Indian mind, even if remarkable in metaphysics, religion, art and literature was inapt for the organisation of life, inferior in the works of the practical intelligence and, especially, that it was sterile in political experiment and its record empty of sound political construction, thinking and action. On the contrary, Indian civilisation evolved an admirable political system, built solidly and with an enduring soundness, combined with a remarkable skill the monarchical, democratic and other principles and tendencies to which the mind of man has leaned in its efforts of civic construction and escaped at the same time the excess of the mechanising turn which is the defect of the modern European State. I shall consider afterwards the objections that can be made to it from the evolutionary standpoint of the West and its idea of progress.

But there is another side of politics on which it may be said that the Indian political mind has registered nothing but failure. The organisation it developed may have been admirable for stability and effective administration and the securing of communal order and liberties and the well-being of the people under ancient conditions, but even if its many peoples were each of them separately self-governed, well governed and prosperous and the country at large assured in the steady functioning of a highly developed civilisation and culture, yet that organisation failed to serve for the national and political unification of India and failed in the end to secure it against foreign invasion, the disruption of its institutions and an agelong servitude. The political system of a society has to be judged, no doubt first and foremost by the stability, prosperity, internal freedom and order

it ensures to the people, but also it must be judged by the security it erects against other States, its unity and power of defence and aggression against external rivals and enemies. It is not perhaps altogether to the credit of humanity that it should be so and a nation or people that is inferior in this kind of political strength, as were the ancient Greeks and mediaeval Italians, may be spiritually and culturally far superior to its conquerors and may well have contributed more to a true human progress than successful military States, aggressive communities, predatory empires. But the life of man is still predominatingly vital and moved therefore by the tendencies of expansion, possession, aggression, mutual struggle for absorption and dominant survival which are the first law of life, and a collective mind and consciousness that gives a constant proof of incapacity for aggression and defence and does not organise the centralised and efficient unity necessary to its own safety, is clearly one that in the political field falls far short of the first order. India has never been nationally and politically one. India was for close on a thousand years swept by barbaric invasions and for almost another thousand years in servitude to successive foreign masters. It is clear therefore that judgment of political incapacity must be passed against the Indian people.

Here again the first necessity is to get rid of exaggerations, to form a clear idea of the actual facts and their significance and understand the tendencies and principles involved in the problem that admittedly throughout the long history of India escaped a right solution. And first if the greatness of a people and a civilisation is to be reckoned by its military aggressiveness, its scale of foreign conquest, its success in warfare against other nations and the triumph of its organised acquisitive and predatory instincts, its irresistible push towards annexation and exploitation, it must be confessed that India ranks perhaps the lowest in the list of the world's great peoples. At no time does India seem to have been moved towards an aggressive military and political expansion beyond her own borders; no epic of world dominion, no great tale of far-borne invasion or expanding colonial empire has ever been written in the tale of Indian achievement. The sole great

endeavour of expansion, of conquest, of invasion she attempted was the expansion of her culture, the invasion and conquest of the Eastern world by the Buddhistic idea and the penetration of her spirituality, art and thought-forces. And this was an invasion of peace and not of war, for to spread a spiritual civilisation by force and physical conquest, the vaunt or the excuse of modern imperialism, would have been uncongenial to the ancient cast of her mind and temperament and the idea underlying her Dharma. A series of colonising expeditions carried indeed Indian blood and Indian culture to the islands of the archipelago, but the ships that set out from both the eastern and western coast were not fleets of invaders missioned to annex those outlying countries to an Indian empire but of exiles or adventurers carrying with them to yet uncultured peoples Indian religion, architecture, art, poetry, thought, life, manners. The idea of empire and even of world-empire was not absent from the Indian mind, but its world was the Indian world and the object the founding of the imperial unity of its peoples.

This idea, the sense of this necessity, a constant urge towards its realisation is evident throughout the whole course of Indian history from earlier Vedic times through the heroic period represented by the traditions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and the effort of the imperial Mauryas and Guptas up to the Mogul unification and the last ambition of the Peshwas, until there came the final failure and the levelling of all the conflicting forces under a foreign yoke, a uniform subjection in place of the free unity of a free people. The question then is whether the tardiness, the difficulty, the fluctuating movements of the process and the collapse of the long effort were due to a fundamental incapacity in the civilisation or in the political consciousness and ability of the people or to other forces. A great deal has been said and written about the inability of Indians to unite, the want of a common patriotism — now only being created, it is said, by the influence of Western culture — and the divisions imposed by religion and caste. Admitting even in their full degree the force of these strictures, — all of them are not altogether true or rightly stated or vitally applicable to the matter, — they are only

symptoms and we have still to seek for the deeper causes.

The reply made for the defence is usually that India is practically a continent almost as large as Europe containing a great number of peoples and the difficulties of the problem have been as great or at least almost as considerable. And if then it is no proof of the insufficiency of Western civilisation or of the political incapacity of the European peoples that the idea of European unity should still remain an ineffective phantasm on the ideal plane and to this day impossible to realise in practice, it is not just to apply a different system of values to the much more clear ideal of unity or at least of unification, the persistent attempt at its realisation and the frequent near approach to success that marked the history of the Indian peoples. There is some force in the contention, but it is not in the form entirely apposite, for the analogy is far from perfect and the conditions were not quite of the same order. The peoples of Europe are nations very sharply divided from each other in their collective personality, and their spiritual unity in the Christian religion or even their cultural unity in a common European civilisation, never so real and complete as the ancient spiritual and cultural unity of India, was also not the very centre of their life, not its basis or firm ground of existence, not its supporting earth but only its general air or circumambient atmosphere. Their base of existence lay in the political and economic life which was strongly separate in each country, and it was the very strength of the political consciousness in the Western mind that kept Europe a mass of divided and constantly warring nations. It is only the increasing community of political movements and the now total economic interdependence of the whole of Europe that has at last created not any unity, but a nascent and still ineffective League of Nations struggling vainly to apply the mentality born of an agelong separatism to the common interests of the European peoples. But in India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas. The peoples of ancient India were never so much distinct nations sharply divided from each other by a separate political

and economic life as sub-peoples of a great spiritual and cultural nation itself firmly separated, physically, from other countries by the seas and the mountains and from other nations by its strong sense of difference, its peculiar common religion and culture. The creation of a political unity, however vast the area and however many the practical difficulties, ought therefore to have been effected more easily than could possibly be the unity of Europe. The cause of the failure must be sought deeper down and we shall find that it lay in a dissidence between the manner in which the problem was or ought to have been envisaged and the actual turn given to the endeavour and in the latter a contradiction of the peculiar mentality of the people.

The whole basis of the Indian mind is its spiritual and inward turn, its propensity to seek the things of the spirit and the inner being first and foremost and to look at all else as secondary, dependent, to be handled and determined in the light of the higher knowledge and as an expression, a preliminary, field or aid or at least a pendent to the deeper spiritual aim, — a tendency therefore to create whatever it had to create first on the inner plane and afterwards in its other aspects. This mentality and this consequent tendency to create from within outwards being given, it was inevitable that the unity India first created for herself should be the spiritual and cultural oneness. It could not be, to begin with, a political unification effected by an external rule centralised, imposed or constructed, as was done in Rome or ancient Persia, by a conquering kingdom or the genius of a military and organising people. It cannot, I think, justly be said that this was a mistake or a proof of the unpractical turn of the Indian mind and that the single political body should have been created first and afterwards the spiritual unity could have securely grown up in the vast body of an Indian national empire. The problem that presented itself at the beginning was that of a huge area containing more than a hundred kingdoms, clans, peoples, tribes, races, in this respect another Greece, but a Greece on an enormous scale, almost as large as modern Europe. As in Greece a cultural Hellenic unity was necessary to create a fundamental feeling of oneness, here too and much more imperatively

a conscious spiritual and cultural unity of all these peoples was the first, the indispensable condition without which no enduring unity could be possible. The instinct of the Indian mind and of its great Rishis and founders of its culture was sound in this matter. And even if we suppose that an outward imperial unity like that of the Roman world could have been founded among the peoples of early India by military and political means, we must not forget that the Roman unity did not endure, that even the unity of ancient Italy founded by the Roman conquest and organisation did not endure, and it is not likely that a similar attempt in the vast reaches of India without the previous spiritual and cultural basis would have been of an enduring character. It cannot be said either, even if the emphasis on spiritual and cultural unity be pronounced to have been too engrossing or excessive and the insistence on political and external unity too feeble, that the effect of this precedence has been merely disastrous and without any advantage. It is due to this original peculiarity, to this indelible spiritual stamp, to this underlying oneness amidst all diversities that if India is not yet a single organised political nation, she still survives and is still India.

After all the spiritual and cultural is the only enduring unity and it is by a persistent mind and spirit much more than by an enduring physical body and outward organisation that the soul of a people survives. This is a truth the positive Western mind may be unwilling to understand or concede, and yet its proofs are written across the whole story of the ages. The ancient nations, contemporaries of India, and many younger born than she are dead and only their monuments left behind them. Greece and Egypt exist only on the map and in name, for it is not the soul of Hellas or the deeper nation-soul that built Memphis which we now find at Athens or at Cairo. Rome imposed a political and a purely outward cultural unity on the Mediterranean peoples, but their living spiritual and cultural oneness she could not create, and therefore the east broke away from the west, Africa kept no impress of the Roman interlude, and even the western nations still called Latin could offer no living resistance to barbarian invaders and had to be reborn

by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France. But India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and the British system, the enormous pressure of the Occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slayable, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the south, throwing up under the pressure of Islam Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day of her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and the inner mind and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?

But spiritual unity is a large and flexible thing and does not insist like the political and external on centralisation and uniformity; rather it lives diffused in the system and permits readily a great diversity and freedom of life. Here we touch on the secret of the difficulty in the problem of unifying ancient India. It could not be done by the ordinary means of a centralised uniform imperial State crushing out all that made for free divergence, local autonomies, established communal liberties,

and each time that an attempt was made in this direction, it has failed after however long a term of apparent success, and we might even say that the guardians of India's destiny wisely compelled it to fail that her inner spirit might not perish and her soul barter for an engine of temporary security the deep sources of its life. The ancient mind of India had the intuition of its need; its idea of empire was a uniting rule that respected every existing regional and communal liberty, that unnecessarily crushed out no living autonomy, that effected a synthesis of her life and not a mechanical oneness. Afterwards the conditions under which such a solution might securely have evolved and found its true means and form and basis, disappeared and there was instead an attempt to establish a single administrative empire. That endeavour, dictated by the pressure of an immediate and external necessity, failed to achieve a complete success in spite of its greatness and splendour. It could not do so because it followed a trend that was not eventually compatible with the true turn of the Indian spirit. It has been seen that the underlying principle of the Indian politico-social system was a synthesis of communal autonomies, the autonomy of the village, of the town and capital city, of the caste, guild, family, *kula*, religious community, regional unit. The state or kingdom or confederated republic was a means of holding together and synthetising in a free and living organic system these autonomies. The imperial problem was to synthetise again these states, peoples, nations, effecting their unity but respecting their autonomy, into a larger free and living organism. A system had to be found that would maintain peace and oneness among its members, secure safety against external attack and totalise the free play and evolution, in its unity and diversity, in the uncoerced and active life of all its constituent communal and regional units, of the soul and body of Indian civilisation and culture, the functioning on a grand and total scale of the Dharma.

This was the sense in which the earlier mind of India understood the problem. The administrative empire of later times accepted it only partially, but its trend was, very slowly and almost subconsciously, what the centralising tendency must always be,

if not actively to destroy, still to wear down and weaken the vigour of the subordinated autonomies. The consequence was that whenever the central authority was weak, the persistent principle of regional autonomy essential to the life of India reasserted itself to the detriment of the artificial unity established and not, as it should have done, for the harmonious intensification and freer but still united functioning of the total life. The imperial monarchy tended also to wear down the vigour of the free assemblies, and the result was that the communal units instead of being elements of a united strength became isolated and dividing factors. The village community preserved something of its vigour, but had no living connection with the supreme authority and, losing the larger national sense, was willing to accept any indigenous or foreign rule that respected its own self-sufficient narrow life. The religious communities came to be imbued with the same spirit. The castes, multiplying themselves without any true necessity or true relation to the spiritual or the economic need of the country, became mere sacrosanct conventional divisions, a power for isolation and not, as they originally were, factors of a harmonious functioning of the total life-synthesis. It is not true that the caste divisions were in ancient India an obstacle to the united life of the people or that they were even in later times an active power for political strife and disunion, — except indeed at the end, in the final decline, and especially during the later history of the Mahratta confederation; but they did become a passive force of social division and of a stagnant compartmentalism obstructive to the reconstitution of a free and actively united life.

The evils that attended the system did not all manifest themselves with any power before the Mahomedan invasions, but they must have been already there in their beginning and they increased rapidly under the conditions created by the Pathan and the Mogul empires. These later imperial systems however brilliant and powerful, suffered still more than their predecessors from the evils of centralisation owing to their autocratic character and were constantly breaking down from the same tendency of the regional life of India to assert itself against an artificial

unitarian regime, while, because they had no true, living and free relation with the life of the people, they proved unable to create the common patriotism which would have effectively secured them against the foreign invader. And in the end there has come a mechanical Western rule that has crushed out all the still existing communal or regional autonomies and substituted the dead unity of a machine. But again in the reaction against it we see the same ancient tendencies reviving, the tendency towards a reconstitution of the regional life of the Indian peoples, the demand for a provincial autonomy founded on true subdivisions of race and language, a harking back of the Indian mind to the ideal of the lost village community as a living unit necessary to the natural life of the national body and, not yet reborn but dimly beginning to dawn on the more advanced minds, a truer idea of the communal basis proper to Indian life and the renovation and reconstruction of Indian society and politics on a spiritual foundation.

The failure to achieve Indian unity of which the invasions and the final subjection to the foreigner were the consequence, arose therefore at once from the magnitude and from the peculiarity of the task, because the easy method of a centralised empire could not truly succeed in India, while yet it seemed the only device possible and was attempted again and again with a partial success that seemed for the time and a long time to justify it, but always with an eventual failure. I have suggested that the early mind of India better understood the essential character of the problem. The Vedic Rishis and their successors made it their chief work to found a spiritual basis of Indian life and to effect the spiritual and cultural unity of the many races and peoples of the peninsula. But they were not blind to the necessity of a political unification. Observing the constant tendency of the clan life of the Aryan peoples to consolidate under confederacies and hegemonies of varying proportions, *vairājya*, *sāmrajya*, they saw that to follow this line to its full conclusion was the right way and evolved therefore the ideal of the Chakravarti, a uniting imperial rule, uniting without destroying the autonomy of India's many kingdoms and peoples, from sea to sea. This

ideal they supported, like everything else in Indian life, with a spiritual and religious sanction, set up as its outward symbol the Aswamedha and Rajasuya sacrifices, and made it the dharma of a powerful King, his royal and religious duty, to attempt the fulfilment of the ideal. He was not allowed by the Dharma to destroy the liberties of the peoples who came under his sway nor to dethrone or annihilate their royal houses or replace their archons by his officials and governors. His function was to establish a suzerain power possessed of sufficient military strength to preserve internal peace and to combine at need the full forces of the country. And to this elementary function came to be added the ideal of the fulfilment and maintenance under a strong uniting hand of the Indian dharma, the right functioning of the spiritual, religious, ethical and social culture of India.

The full flowering of the ideal is seen in the great epics. The Mahabharata is the record of a legendary or, it may be, a historic attempt to establish such an empire, a *dharmarājya* or kingdom of the Dharma. There the ideal is pictured as so imperative and widely acknowledged that even the turbulent Shishupala is represented as motivating his submission and attendance at the Rajasuya sacrifice on the ground that Yudhisthira was carrying out an action demanded by the Dharma. And in the Ramayana we have an idealised picture of such a Dharmarajya, a settled universal empire. Here too it is not an autocratic despotism but a universal monarchy supported by a free assembly of the city and provinces and of all the classes that is held up as the ideal, an enlargement of the monarchical state synthetising the communal autonomies of the Indian system and maintaining the law and constitution of the Dharma. The ideal of conquest held up is not a destructive and predatory invasion annihilating the organic freedom and the political and social institutions and exploiting the economic resources of the conquered peoples, but a sacrificial progression bringing with it a trial of military strength of which the result was easily accepted because defeat entailed neither humiliation nor servitude and suffering but merely a strengthening adhesion to a suzerain power concerned only with establishing the visible unity of the nation and the Dharma. The

ideal of the ancient Rishis is clear and their purpose: it is evident that they saw the military and political utility and necessity of a unification of the divided and warring peoples of the land, but they saw also that it ought not to be secured at the expense of the free life of the regional peoples or of the communal liberties and not therefore by a centralised monarchy or a rigidly unitarian imperial State. A hegemony or confederacy under an imperial head would be the nearest Western analogy to the conception they sought to impose on the minds of the people.

There is no historical evidence that this ideal was ever successfully carried into execution, although the epic tradition speaks of several such empires preceding the Dharmarajya of Yudhisthira. At the time of Buddha and later when Chandragupta and Chanakya were building the first historic Indian empire, the country was still covered with free kingdoms and republics and there was no united empire to meet the great raid of Alexander. It is evident that if any hegemony had previously existed, it had failed to discover a means or system of enduring permanence. This might however have evolved if time had been given, but a serious change had meanwhile taken place which made it urgently necessary to find an immediate solution. The historic weakness of the Indian peninsula has always been until modern times its vulnerability through the north-western passes. This weakness did not exist so long as ancient India extended northward far beyond the Indus and the powerful kingdoms of Gandhara and Vahlka presented a firm bulwark against foreign invasion. But they had now gone down before the organised Persian empire and from this time forward the trans-Indus countries, ceasing to be part of India, ceased also to be its protection and became instead the secure base for every successive invader. The inroad of Alexander brought home the magnitude of the danger to the political mind of India and from this time we see poets, writers, political thinkers constantly upholding the imperial ideal or thinking out the means of its realisation. The immediate practical result was the rise of the empire founded with remarkable swiftness by the statesmanship of Chanakya and constantly maintained or restored through

eight or nine centuries, in spite of periods of weakness and incipient disintegration, successively by the Maurya, Sunga, Kanwa, Andhra and Gupta dynasties. The history of this empire, its remarkable organisation, administration, public works, opulence, magnificent culture and the vigour, the brilliance, the splendid fruitfulness of the life of the peninsula under its shelter emerges only from scattered insufficient records, but even so it ranks among the greatest constructed and maintained by the genius of the earth's great peoples. India has no reason, from this point of view, to be anything but proud of her ancient achievement in empire-building or to submit to the hasty verdict that denies to her antique civilisation a strong practical genius or high political virtue.

At the same time this empire suffered by the inevitable haste, violence and artificiality of its first construction to meet a pressing need, because that prevented it from being the deliberate, natural and steady evolution in the old solid Indian manner of the truth of her deepest ideal. The attempt to establish a centralised imperial monarchy brought with it not a free synthesis but a breaking down of regional autonomies. Although according to the Indian principle their institutes and customs were respected and at first even their political institutions not wholly annulled, at any rate in many cases, but brought within the imperial system, these could not really flourish under the shadow of the imperial centralisation. The free peoples of the ancient Indian world began to disappear, their broken materials serving afterwards to create the now existing Indian races. And I think it can be concluded on the whole that although for a long time the great popular assemblies continued to remain in vigour, their function in the end tended to become more mechanical and their vitality to decline and suffer. The urban republics too tended to become more and more mere municipalities of the organised kingdom or empire. The habits of mind created by the imperial centralisation and the weakening or disappearance of the more dignified free popular institutions of the past created a sort of spiritual gap, on one side of which were the administered content with any government that gave them security and

did not interfere too much with their religion, life and customs and on the other the imperial administration beneficent and splendid, no doubt, but no longer that living head of a free and living people contemplated by the earlier and the true political mind of India. These results became prominent and were final only with the decline, but they were there in seed and rendered almost inevitable by the adoption of a mechanical method of unification. The advantages gained were those of a stronger and more coherent military action and a more regularised and uniform administration, but these could not compensate in the end for the impairment of the free organic diversified life which was the true expression of the mind and temperament of the people.

A worse result was a certain fall from the high ideal of the Dharma. In the struggle of kingdom with kingdom for supremacy a habit of Machiavellian statecraft replaced the nobler ethical ideals of the past, aggressive ambition was left without any sufficient spiritual or moral check and there was a coarsening of the national mind in the ethics of politics and government already evidenced in the draconic penal legislation of the Maurya times and in Asoka's sanguinary conquest of Orissa. The deterioration, held in abeyance by a religious spirit and high intelligence, did not come to a head till more than a thousand years afterwards and we only see it in its full force in the worst period of the decline when unrestrained mutual aggression, the unbridled egoism of princes and leaders, a total lack of political principle and capacity for effective union, the want of a common patriotism and the traditional indifference of the common people to a change of rulers gave the whole of the vast peninsula into the grasp of a handful of merchants from across the seas. But however tardy the worst results in their coming and however redeemed and held in check at first by the political greatness of the empire and a splendid intellectual and artistic culture and by frequent spiritual revivals, India had already lost by the time of the later Guptas the chance of a natural and perfect flowering of her true mind and inmost spirit in the political life of her peoples.

Meanwhile the empire served well enough, although not perfectly, the end for which it was created, the saving of Indian soil and Indian civilisation from that immense flood of barbarian unrest which threatened all the ancient stabilised cultures and finally proved too strong for the highly developed Graeco-Roman civilisation and the vast and powerful Roman empire. That unrest throwing great masses of Teutons, Slavs, Huns and Scythians to west and east and south battered at the gates of India for many centuries, effected certain inroads, but, when it sank, left the great edifice of Indian civilisation standing and still firm, great and secure. The irruptions took place whenever the empire grew weak and this seems to have happened whenever the country was left for some time secure. The empire was weakened by the suspension of the need which created it, for then the regional spirit reawoke in separatist movements disintegrating its unity or breaking down its large extension over all the North. A fresh peril brought about the renewal of its strength under a new dynasty, but the phenomenon continued to repeat itself until, the peril ceasing for a considerable time, the empire called into existence to meet it passed away not to revive. It left behind it a certain number of great kingdoms in the east, south and centre and a more confused mass of peoples in the northwest, the weak point at which the Mussulmans broke in and in a brief period rebuilt in the north, but in another, a Central Asiatic type, the ancient empire.

These earlier foreign invasions and their effects have to be seen in their true proportions, which are often disturbed by the exaggerated theories of oriental scholars. The invasion of Alexander was an eastward impulsion of Hellenism that had a work to do in western and central Asia, but no future in India. Immediately ejected by Chandragupta, it left no traces. The entrance of the Graeco-Bactrians which took place during the weakness of the later Mauryas and was annulled by the reviving strength of the empire, was that of a Hellenised people already profoundly influenced by Indian culture. The later Parthian, Hun and Scythian invasions were of a more serious character and for a time seemed dangerous to the integrity of India. In the

end however they affected powerfully only the Punjab, although they threw their waves farther south along the western coast and dynasties of a foreign extraction may have been established for a time far down towards the south. To what degree the racial character of these parts was affected, is far from certain. Oriental scholars and ethnologists have imagined that the Punjab was Scythianised, that the Rajputs are of the same stock and that even farther south the race was changed by the intrusion. These speculations are founded upon scanty or no evidence and are contradicted by other theories, and it is highly doubtful whether the barbarian invaders could have come in such numbers as to produce so considerable a consequence. It is farther rendered improbable by the fact that in one or two or three generations the invaders were entirely Indianised, assumed completely the Indian religion, manners, customs, culture and melted into the mass of the Indian peoples. No such phenomenon took place as in the countries of the Roman empire, of barbarian tribes imposing on a superior civilisation their laws, political system, barbaric customs, alien rule. This is the common significant fact of these irruptions and it must have been due to one or all of three factors. The invaders may have been armies rather than peoples: the occupation was not a continuous external rule which had time to stiffen in its foreign character, for each was followed by a revival of the strength of the Indian empire and its return upon the conquered provinces: and finally the powerfully vital and absorbing character of Indian culture was too strong to allow of any mental resistance to assimilation in the intruders. At any rate if these irruptions were of a very considerable character, Indian civilisation must be considered to have proved itself much more sound, more vital and more solid than the younger Graeco-Roman which went down before the Teuton and the Arab or survived only underneath and in a debased form heavily barbarised, broken and unrecognisable. And the Indian empire too must be pronounced to have proved after all more efficacious than was the Roman with all its vaunt of solidity and greatness, for it succeeded, even if pierced in the west, in preserving the security of the great mass of the peninsula.

It is a later downfall, the Mussulman conquest failing in the hands of the Arabs but successfully reattempted after a long interval, and all that followed it which serves to justify the doubt thrown on the capacity of the Indian peoples. But first let us put aside certain misconceptions which cloud the real issue. This conquest took place at a time when the vitality of ancient Indian life and culture after two thousand years of activity and creation was already exhausted for a time or very near exhaustion and needed a breathing space to rejuvenate itself by transference from the Sanskrit to the popular tongues and the newly forming regional peoples. The conquest was effected rapidly enough in the north, although not entirely complete there for several centuries, but the south long preserved its freedom as of old against the earlier indigenous empire and there was not so long a distance of time between the extinction of the kingdom of Vijayanagara and the rise of the Mahrattas. The Rajputs maintained their independence until the time of Akbar and his successors and it was in the end partly with the aid of Rajput princes acting as their generals and ministers that the Moguls completed their sway over the east and the south. And this was again possible because — a fact too often forgotten — the Mussulman domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule. The vast mass of the Mussulmans in the country were and are Indians by race, only a very small admixture of Pathan, Turkish and Mogul blood took place, and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest. If the race had really like certain European countries remained for many centuries passive, acquiescent and impotent under an alien sway, that would indeed have been a proof of a great inherent weakness; but the British is the first really continuous foreign rule that has dominated India. The ancient civilisation underwent indeed an eclipse and decline under the weight of a Central Asiatic religion and culture with which it failed to coalesce, but it survived its pressure, put its impact on it in many directions and remained to our own day alive even in decadence and capable of recovery, thus giving a proof of strength and soundness rare in the history of human cultures.

And in the political field it never ceased to throw up great rulers, statesmen, soldiers, administrators. Its political genius was not in the decadence sufficient, not coherent enough or swift in vision and action, to withstand the Pathan, Mogul and European, but it was strong to survive and await every opportunity of revival, made a bid for empire under Rana Sanga, created the great kingdom of Vijayanagara, held its own for centuries against Islam in the hills of Rajputana, and in its worst days still built and maintained against the whole power of the ablest of the Moguls the kingdom of Shivaji, formed the Mahratta confederacy and the Sikh Khalsa, undermined the great Mogul structure and again made a last attempt at empire. On the brink of the final and almost fatal collapse in the midst of unspeakable darkness, disunion and confusion it could still produce Ranjit Singh and Nana Fadnavis and Madhoji Scindia and oppose the inevitable march of England's destiny. These facts do not diminish the weight of the charge that can be made of an incapacity to see and solve the central problem and answer the one persistent question of Fate, but considered as the phenomena of a decadence they make a sufficiently remarkable record not easily paralleled under similar circumstances and certainly put a different complexion on the total question than the crude statement that India has been always subject and politically incapable.

The real problem introduced by the Mussulman conquest was not that of subjection to a foreign rule and the ability to recover freedom, but the struggle between two civilisations, one ancient and indigenous, the other mediaeval and brought in from outside. That which rendered the problem insoluble was the attachment of each to a powerful religion, the one militant and aggressive, the other spiritually tolerant indeed and flexible, but obstinately faithful in its discipline to its own principle and standing on the defence behind a barrier of social forms. There were two conceivable solutions, the rise of a greater spiritual principle and formation which could reconcile the two or a political patriotism surmounting the religious struggle and uniting the two communities. The first was impossible in that age. Akbar attempted it on the Mussulman side, but his religion

was an intellectual and political rather than a spiritual creation and had never any chance of assent from the strongly religious mind of the two communities. Nanak attempted it from the Hindu side, but his religion, universal in principle, became a sect in practice. Akbar attempted also to create a common political patriotism, but this endeavour too was foredoomed to failure. An autocratic empire built on the Central Asian principle could not create the desired spirit by calling in the administrative ability of the two communities in the person of great men and princes and nobles to a common service in the creation of a united imperial India: the living assent of the people was needed and that remained passive for want of awakening political ideals and institutions. The Mogul empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any mediaeval or contemporary European kingdom or empire and India under its rule stood high in military and political strength, economic opulence and the brilliance of its art and culture. But it failed like the empires before it, more disastrously even, and in the same way, crumbling not by external attack but by internal disintegration. A military and administrative centralised empire could not effect India's living political unity. And although a new life seemed about to rise in the regional peoples, the chance was cut short by the intrusion of the European nations and their seizure of the opportunity created by the failure of the Peshwas and the desperate confusion of the succeeding anarchy and decadence.

Two remarkable creations embodied in the period of disintegration the last effort of the Indian political mind to form the foundations of a new life under the old conditions, but neither proved to be of a kind that could solve the problem. The Mahratta revival inspired by Ramdas's conception of the Maharashtra Dharma and cast into shape by Shivaji was an attempt to restore what could still be understood or remembered of the ancient form and spirit, but it failed, as all attempts to

revive the past must fail, in spite of the spiritual impetus and the democratic forces that assisted its inception. The Peshwas for all their genius lacked the vision of the founder and could only establish a military and political confederacy. And their endeavour to found an empire could not succeed because it was inspired by a regional patriotism that failed to enlarge itself beyond its own limits and awaken to the living ideal of a united India. The Sikh Khalsa on the other hand was an astonishingly original and novel creation and its face was turned not to the past but the future. Apart and singular in its theocratic head and democratic soul and structure, its profound spiritual beginning, its first attempt to combine the deepest elements of Islam and Vedanta, it was a premature drive towards an entrance into the third or spiritual stage of human society, but it could not create between the spirit and the external life the transmitting medium of a rich creative thought and culture. And thus hampered and deficient it began and ended within narrow local limits, achieved intensity but no power of expansion. The conditions were not then in existence that could have made possible a successful endeavour.

Afterwards came the night and a temporary end of all political initiative and creation. The lifeless attempt of the last generation to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the West has been no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people. But again amid all the mist of confusion there is still the possibility of a new twilight, not of an evening but a morning Yuga-sandhya. India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the Occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.