

REPUBLIC : 2

PROLOGUE

Sorry Plato : but you should have seen it coming. What with every hollywood superhit being followed by at least one (if not two or three) sequels, you couldn't have expected your classic work to go unsequelled. And if you saw how sharply the quality dropped from the original movie to the sequel, you wouldn't froth quite so much in the mouth just because I've borrowed a title you've used first. It wasn't my doing that the country of which I'm a citizen took the title of 'Republic'. Since I'm writing about my country, what better heading could I choose ?

This 'dialogue' has obvious advantages in dealing with matters which have no simple solutions and where differing points of view can be argued with almost equal force. Though the approach favoured by the writer does get preferential treatment, the dialectical process gives the reader freedom to pursue independently, terms of the argument that may have received inadequate attention in the exposition.

This dialogue deals with some of the psycho-social impediments to India's economic growth. It broadly remains within the boundaries of the concepts and categories that emerged in the NIAS lecture programme held in January-February 1989, but lest the propositions and ideas appear too fanciful or wayward, several of them have been linked to the bibliography appended at the end of the dialogue (from where they have, in

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fact, been shamelessly plagiarised almost verbatim). The list of references is short, considering the breadth of topics covered. This is because the references have been mainly confined to books accessed in the first three weeks of the lecture series; the challenge being to extract the most out of the reading time available to a NIAS participant and to write it up before the course ended.

The problems facing India require multilateral thinking. It is, therefore, inevitable that a discussion on any of these problems should range across several disciplines. Not only is this in keeping with the spirit of NIAS, there is a presumptuous hope that some of the interdisciplinary issues left unresolved in this paper will provide subject-matter for a few of the future projects of the Institute.

Appropriately enough, the participants in the dialogue are supposed to be from the group attending the NIAS lecture course. Equally appropriately, they are not meant to characterise a particular participant but the Platonic 'universal ideas' of different points of view. Naturally, then, the errors or excesses of the participants in the dialogue should not be attributed to any lecturer or participant of NIAS programme.

The names of those participating in the dialogue are (in order of speaking) :

DEV, KIRAN, RAHIM, CHUBBLES, ADLER & WENDY

Abbr : (D) (K) (R) (C) (A) (W)

The argument is divided into Books, each of which is intended to have an internal unity. Those, who find the length of the full dialogue forbidding, could choose to read one or more Books without too much loss of continuity.

“Come, then, let us create a city, from the beginning, in our theory. Its real creator, as it appears, will be our need.”¹

BOOK I

DEV : So, Kiran, have the Economics lectures put you in the proper frame of mind to understand the Annual Central Government Budget ?

KIRAN : Who's bothered ? These budgets are full of populist twaddle at the best of times and in an election year, everyone will fall over themselves in giving handouts. You can't blame them either. The economy has far more going wrong with it than a budget can cure. It's like giving Crocin for cancer. Let me tell you something : unless we achieve a solid economic growth over a sustained period, we're in deep trouble. And we have a 2000 year history of political decline caused by overstressing the collection of revenue without extending the activities leading to revenue.²

D : That's exactly the trap our planners walk into. Right from the time of Mahalanobis, the planners have been busy drawing up pretty mathematical models which just don't fit the untidy reality of this country.

RAHIM : Come, come, aren't you being a little unfair ? Granted a few of the assumptions made by the planners were unrealistic, they have given the country an infra-structural base which is the envy of our neighbours.

D : Instead of sounding like an Onida TV advertisement, suppose you list out the 'few' assumptions that went wrong. I'm sure it will take you an hour if you are honest about it.

R : Not really. In fact, the only real thing that didn't come up to expectations was the output from investments we had made.

D : And he calls it 'only'. My friend, that's an omnibus phrase which wraps up all the failings of our economy.

CHUBBLES : Hold on a minute. There were a couple of other things that didn't pan out the way they were expected to in the early years of planning. Firstly, we added to our population faster than was anticipated; secondly, no one had quite thought 'leakages' would claim such a hefty share of the nation's earnings.

ADLER : So we have three great impediments to economic growth already listed. Why don't we analyse them and see if they're as remedyless as they seem? For instance, why has corruption become so endemic in our system?

D : There's nothing new about it. Do you know what Cornwallis, who was Governor General 200 years back, wrote : 'Every native of India, I verily believe, is corrupt.'⁹

C : Less corrupt than his countrymen who were busy bleeding the country white at that time - and afterwards too.

K : Be that as it may. Today the level of corruption in our country is so high that someone has estimated it would be enough to wipe out the massive deficit in the central and state budgets.

A : What worries me is that it's not just corruption in the monetary sense. We seem to have more than our share of 'Kamchors' too.

C : But that really takes us back to Rahim's initial point about our dismal capital : output ratio. The poor productivity Adler mentioned is the root cause of this ratio continuing to drag our economic performance down. Linked to it, of course, is the enormous waste of resources and pervasive lack of accountability. Topping everything is a lack of concern for time : as if we had all eternity to do things. It's difficult to visualise how these attitudes will change.

WENDY : It's very simple, pal. Send them for a course on motivation : there are any number of consultants who can arrange it.

C : Aren't you being a little simplistic Wendy ? If the answer were so easy, wouldn't we all be sitting in the clover already ?

D : In fact, it's not just that there's no easy answer. There's no answer at all. Not unless our climate changes, that is. All our problems, including the stifling caste system, the reluctance to change and, above all, our bone laziness, are because of the climate in our country.⁴ And short of airconditioning it from end to end, there's nothing we can do.

R : I hope you were not serious about that argument, Dev. It's the nature of the race and not the climate that makes all the difference. As Herder pointed out : if different kinds of men are placed in the same environment, they will exploit the resources of that environment in different ways and thus create different kinds of civilisation.⁵

A : You know of course, Rahim, that this patently absurd primacy given to race has caused wars and untold

misery to humankind. I won't have you raise it even for putting down Dev's claptrap about climate

W : You're all getting needlessly excited. If you want to hear something funny, I'll tell you what some journalist once wrote : It's because so many Indians are vegetarians that they don't really exert themselves.

D : I don't know about the vegetarian part but I do think this 'ahimsā' business has sapped our fibre. Even the great Emperor Ashoka's empire crumbled because 'ahimsā' had emasculated his army.

C : Sorry to have to correct you, Dev, but that's a bit of historical distortion, isn't it? Ashoka's non-violence was not of such an unrealistic nature and he didn't weaken his army.⁶ If we are going to come up with any worthwhile answers, we will have to dig a little deeper into the Indian mind.

D : Oh, come now. Surely you're not going to blitz us with some Hegelian concept of historical events emerging from thought?⁷

C : No, but I do believe that ideas and sentiments that are elaborated by a collectivity, have an ascendancy and an authority that cause the particular individuals who think them and believe in them to represent them in the form of moral forces that dominate them and sustain them. Such collective representations becomes autonomous and have the power to attract and repel each other and to form various syntheses among themselves.⁸

W : Look guys, it's getting late. Chubbles, I suggest you put forward your depiction of the Indian mind tomorrow.

BOOK II

- K : Well, Chubbles, we know what you're going to say : that the concept of '*māyā*' is what makes us all feel it's no use pursuing any worldly affairs since all is in any case illusory.
- R : If indeed he was planning to say that, he should give it another thought. In his recent paper, Dr. Raja Ramanna has suggested that since *māyā* comes from the root '*mā*', meaning measurement, instead of translating it as 'illusion' it could alternatively be translated as 'immeasurable'.⁹
- D : Which meaning, of course, could be a pointer to the shoddiness of India goods, since quality is so greatly dependent on measurement.
- A : I think you're jumping to an unwarranted conclusion. In its origin '*Māyā*' had an almost exact parallel with the English word 'craft'. That's not going to lead to poor quality.
- D : Yes, but we all know that by the time of the Upaniṣads the ancient wisdom – action complex depicted by '*māyā*' had been degraded and the word stood close to '*avidyā*' in contract to '*jñāna*' or genuine knowledge.¹¹
- C : Let us not spend too much time on a metaphysical concept like *māyā*. I think '*Karma*' has more relevance in establishing a source for our day-to-day behaviour. When people say things like : 'Indians are more intelligent but less result-oriented than people from Hong Kong', it's not because Indians don't have goals. Rather, to reach their avowed goals, they

must enlarge the inner world rather than act on the outer one. The injunction inherent in the *Karma* doctrine is to accept and use outer reality for inner development rather than to strive to alter worldly realities. Hence, the indifferent respect given to scientists and professionals compared to the unequivocal reverence for spiritual 'gurus'.¹² Hence also, the fact that time for us, does not have the impersonal and objective (to the point of being coercive and driving) quality it has for the average Weserner.¹³ And, of course *Karma* is also a convenient alibi for actions which would otherwise come in for social censure. Thus, instead of acknowledging and working through conflicting emotions and thoughts and actions which contravene moral norms, the tendency is to attribute them to the 'saṁskars', the innate constitutional dispositions.¹⁴

R : I think the *Gītā* effectively rebuts the charge of 'inaction' which you are attempting to build up against Indians. The *Gītā* postulates that it is impossible to stop action which must in fact be performed with *śradhā* and skill. You are only asked to act without anticipating pleasure or pain.

C : I have a sneaking suspicion the *Gītā* attempted to insist on action because the tradition of thought till then seemed to lead to absolute inactivity - and looking around us one can't be too certain the *Gītā* succeeded in reversing the trend. In a sense one can understand why it would be difficult for the layman to practice the *Gītā* philosophy. By eliminating considerations of pleasure and pain, it removes what are the mainsprings of action for the bulk of humankind.

Similarly, in the *Yoga* scheme of things, the tantalising possibility of *Siddhis* is perhaps intended to attract ordinary men. The Catch-22 comes in the formal injunction prohibiting the practitioner from desiring such powers or ever using them. Thus, there is created a dichotomy between what is actually necessary to get a man to act and what is considered an acceptable goal of action : One cannot openly admit or benefit from the fruits of power.

A : Given the *Sāṃkhya* underpinning to *Yoga*, it is not surprising action is at a discount. After all, highest ideal is *Puruṣa* : an inactive observer who gives meaning to things (is that why we like to go on talking without doing anything ?) There is a subtle downgradation of the active/female principle of *Prakṛti* and *Rajas*, which is its moving component, must be stilled. The eternal reality is timeless (why worry about a deadline here or there in the world of sensation ?) and one is accountable only to oneself for the process for self-realisation which is the ultimate goal. Perhaps a demanding external God has given a sense of accountability to a larger proportion of the population in the West than we have here.

K : You have built a huge castle without taking into account the injunction to action implicit in the *āśramadharma* cycle of *brahmacharya*, *gṛhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa*.¹⁴ *Gṛhasthya* is an integral part of the scheme.

A : But don't you see, the end goal is still withdrawal from the social process and everything else has to be a preparation for withdrawal ? The very fact that there

was a short circuit to renunciation possible without going through the householder stage implied that withdrawal was the supervening goal. And over the years, withdrawal has become our 'society-defence-mechanism' number one. Withdrawal from the unpleasant hurly-burly of life goes a long way to explaining current-day phenomena like the brain-drain.

D : You may have a point there. The emphasis is on *svadharama* (autonomy) and it's only a pious hope that since you are in tune with the whole universe (*anukampā*), the action will be in keeping with the cosmic will. The individual has no responsibility for social cohesion. Socially speaking, the thrust for realisation is passive. In fact, it was the Christian missionaries who reactivated us into active philanthropy.¹⁶ The basic selfishness of the desire for self-realisation perhaps underlies the success of the green revolution and the failure of the industrial revolution in India.

K : What is the point of talking to you? All of you have missed the essential dynamism of Indian philosophy. You need a much deeper understanding before you can analyse its impact.

A : Perhaps that's true, Kiran, but we're not really speaking of the effect of Hindu thought on the minority of intellectuals who have understood its essence. Our interest lies in tracing its impact on the population of the country at large: population in which intellectuals who truly understand Hindu Philosophy forms very, very small part.

K : You keep talking about Hindu philosophy. India is not only full of Hindus. What about Muslims, what about Buddhists ?

R : I don't know about Buddhists but I'm afraid Muslim thought as it evolved was no more conducive to modern economic enterprise than Hindu thinking. It directed the conduct of life into paths whose effect was plainly opposite to the methodical control of life found among Puritans, who were among the most successful in managing business affairs¹⁷ What is more, Muslims too fell prey to the constricting effects of caste, which further depressed the economic capability of the society.

K : That's the second time someone has denigrated the caste system. Aren't we accepting without question someone else's conclusion about the pernicious effects of caste ? Let's go into it ourselves.

W : By all means, but not right now. We need some rest before we enter that labyrinth.

BOOK III

K : Sometimes I find it difficult to understand all the uproar over caste. People should be grateful for the division of labour that has been worked out, with each man expected to specialise in his own occupation. How is it any different from the Protestant concept of 'calling' which man has to accept as a divine ordinance, and to which he must adapt himself ?⁸ If it could lead Protestants to economic prosperity, why won't it do the same for us ?

C : 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing...' In the first place, it was not the Lutheran concept of 'calling' alone that was responsible for the Puritan attitude to work. It was the Calvinistic view that one had an absolute duty to consider oneself chosen and to combat all doubts as temptations of the devil, since lack of self-confidence was thought to be the result of imperfect faith and hence of imperfect grace.¹⁹ In order to attain that self-confidence, intense worldly activity was recommended as the most suitable means. It and it alone was thought capable of dispersing religious doubts and giving the certainty of grace.²⁰ In this sense, good works became the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation.²¹ Nor is this the only way in which the Puritan ethic differs from our caste system. From the viewpoint of economic organisation, a very important difference is the attitude to changes in occupations. Puritanism replies affirmatively to the question of one person combining several callings, if it is for the common good or one's own, and not injurious to anyone. Even a change of calling is by no means regarded as objectionable, if it is not thoughtless and is made for the purpose of pursuing a calling more pleasing to God, which means, according to them, more useful.²² The contrasts with our caste system and the implications for industrial organisation (where flexibility and deployability are crucial) and restructuring (say in the context of 'sunset' industries) are obvious. In fact, the rigidity of our 'jātis' impede not just economic growth but the solidarity of society as a whole. After all, the

division of labour only produces solidarity when and insofar as it is spontaneous. It supposes not only that individuals are not relegated by force to determinate functions, but also that no obstacle, of whatever nature, prevents them from occupying the place in the social framework that is compatible with their faculties.²³ It is no wonder then that *Karma*, fatalism and caste rigidities build on each other. After all, fatalism (which is really the converse of anomie) comes from an excess of regulation or the unavoidable and inflexible character of a rule over which one is powerless.²⁴ The degree of permanency enjoyed by this manner of structuring society was because these inequalities not only existed in fact but were also accepted as legitimate.²⁵ In fact, the definitive *Arthaśāstra* treatise specifies maintenance of social order, which included making the castes stick to their occupations, as the chief function of the king.²⁶

A : That's quite a forceful statement you've made, Chubbles, but you've not included a very important point. The reason the caste system throttles economic progress is because of the very low esteem in which it holds all economic activity. Even before Ashoka's time, the vaiśyas, though theoretically included among the dvija or twice born, were in practice generally treated contemptuously.²⁷ And it is not as if they were politically downgraded alone. They were made to feel low. Remember, the hierarchical caste system is built around the opposition of purity and pollution.²⁸ And one must not forget that the skilled craftsmen's śrenī was put into the śūdra varṇa :²⁹ still closer to the polluted end of the continuum.

It is no surprise then that even today 'profit' is treated as a dirty word and industry is considered a relatively tainted calling. Contrast this with the Puritan view that the acquisition of wealth is not only morally permissible but actually enjoined.³⁰ The Puritan attitude created an atmosphere where a businessman felt absolutely clear in his conscience about making money, so long as it took place legally.³¹ Apart from the obvious conclusions, God knows how much the overt denigration of money has led to covert money-making and contributed to corruption in our country. Not only was the brāhmaṇa who dealt openly in money-matters looked down upon, there was a time when investment and saving were discouraged, since they implied a reduction in the outlays on rituals which the brahmins benefited from.³² A society which looks down on saving and investment can place severe limitations on the creation and maintenance of an economically healthy state.³³

K : Your theories are really meant for the dustbin. If all was as dreary as you have mentioned, how did India have its 'Golden ages', for instance under Ashoka and Akbar?

A : Whatever Golden ages we had, if indeed one can use that term, were not known for any great economic advancement of the general masses. And the two specific emperors you have mentioned were known for the inroads they had made in derating the caste system. In fact, Ashoka gave considerable support to the Budhists, who along with the Jainas made it possible and socially acceptable for businessmen to use their wealth for non-ritual purposes.³⁴ The Budhists

endorsed the status of the financier and did not disapprove usury.³⁵ They provided an ethic in support of simple living and the investment of wealth.³⁶ To push the argument further, one may even venture to state that relatively low caste-feeling, characterises states which are economically prosperous today. While states with a history of wet rice cultivation, e.g. in the South and East, have been typified by a relatively tall caste hierarchy, Punjab and Haryana have had relatively simple caste hierarchies.³⁷ One could also imagine that it was the influence of the Jainas that created an atmosphere conducive to trading and business in Gujarat.³⁹

R : To take your hypotheses about the unorthodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism further, do you think we would have been more dynamic in economic terms if Ashoka had been successful in establishing Buddhism permanently as the majority religion in India ?

A : I'm afraid my prognosis wouldn't be as optimistic as that. While Buddhism provided a more palatable alternative for the businessman compared to the demeanment that was in store for him in the Brahmanical caste system, Buddhism itself was not totally attuned to the values of worldly business. For instance, Buddhism continued to encourage, perhaps with a view to containing dissent, the tradition of renunciation.³⁹ All rational, purposive activity was regarded as leading away from salvation, except of course the subjective activity of concentrated contemplation, which empties the soul of the passion for

life and every connection with worldly interests. There is no path leading from this consistent position of world-flight to any economic ethic or any rational social ethic.⁴⁰ Thus, once again we see a beautiful superstructure erected in Indian philosophy on a base that cannot and is not meant to take the load of intense social intercourse needed for organised economic activity. Eliminating desires is like removing the mainspring from a watch: the parts may still fit perfectly and the whole appear attractive – but there will be nothing to make it run. As Rousseau wrote: “What then constitutes human wisdom or the path true happiness? It is precisely not to diminish our desires, for if they were less than our powers, a part of our faculties would remain idle and we would not be in enjoyment of all our being ... Only ... with all his forces in play, will man’s mind still be at peace and will he be well regulated.”⁴¹

C : In any case, Brahmanism exercised Buddhism by a twin attack. It wielded very astutely its capability for legitimising rulers.⁴² More importantly, it enveloped Buddhism itself in its fold.

D : Sounds like cellular evolution with cells proceeding to absorb mitochondria along the way.

C : Well, I don’t know if I can accept the parallel with serial endosymbiosis. Buddhism, of course, continued as an independent sect, though with a truly Indian capacity for intellectual compromise, it too tried to gain support where it could. By associating itself with magical cults, much of its original ethical thinking was further submerged in ritual.⁴³

D : Boy ! The guys at Coca-Cola should have learned from this the danger of positioning your product too close to the competitor's. They wouldn't then have goofed into changing and making the coke formula so close to Pepsi. Come on, all this talk must have made you thirsty, let's order something cool to drink.

BOOK IV

R ; I've been thinking a lot over what we've spoken and it's really helped me get a better perspective on our situation. But one thing worries me. I can't flaw the logic of our analysis but it does strike me that our progress through history can't have been all that different compared to societies that are today economically advanced.

K : You have a good point there, Rahim. It appears to me that till approximately the end of the Moghul period, the economic condition of Indian society was no better or worse than anywhere else in the world. If we were to focus on what went wrong after that, we would be in a better position to understand our problems.

D : I agree fully. Enough of these 2000-year-old philosophies and castes.

C : Well, I'm not sure the last 300 years can be understood without reference to the past. But, Kiran, I think the answer to your query is fairly straightforward. The gap between us and the advanced European nations started widening with the increasing momentum of their industrial revolution which just seemed to pass us by.

K : You mean it was made to pass us by because it suited the British to have a raw-material-source and a market-sink for their produce without the possibility of competition which industrialisation would have brought. And they planted enough disunity to make sure nothing of the kind of effervescence which, for instance, galvanised the whole French nation under Napoleon, ever took place here. Perhaps the most lasting damage they did to our prospective industrialisation was the legacy of labour legislation they left behind. It's small consolation that the same type of legislation put them for many years at the end of the field among the industrially advanced nations.

C : There's much in what you say, Kiran, but would you not agree that we share at least part of the blame for our slow industrial progress?

D : I've been reading a book on the heroes of the industrial revolution in various countries. It appears to me that every one of them is characterised by a strong combination of entrepreneurial drive and down-to-earth technical innovativeness invariably accompanied by the ability to tinker and build with their own hands. The development of the steam engine, the revolutionary improvements in textile machinery or farm equipment, all came from men like these. Even in this century, we've had giants like Henry Ford and Soichiro Honda, who didn't hesitate to dirty their hands in building and improving products which they divined were needed. Now I wonder how this, compared with our attitudes which, right since the emergence of the leisured class in the post-vedic society, looks upon manual labour as slavish the mark of the

Śūdra.⁴⁴ Even the rural rich have always tended to avoid manual work; ⁴⁵ the actual work of cultivation was done by the peasant who was generally of the śūdra caste.⁴⁶ This was so in feudal Europe too, but our system was more entrenched in the values of the people themselves and hence more lasting.⁴⁷ According to some commentaries on Manu, mechanical work was a minor sin.⁴⁸ The typical brahmanical education denigrated technical knowledge.⁴⁹ Partly this was done to keep those with technical knowledge and skills relatively powerless.⁵⁰ Whatever be the reason, when castes were arranged from the purest to the most polluting, those not actually involved in production would always claim higher status.⁵¹ It would appear, then that our society was not too favourably inclined to the inventor-entrepreneur who was lionised in Western society and who contributed (along with others similarly inclined to manual work and innovation, though perhaps not equal in genius) to the industrial revolution.

W : Looking at it another way, could one say that by the 17th century the pattern of both Brahmin and Muslim education had become inward-looking and the sweep of Renaissance thinking passed them by.

D : The trouble was we thought ourselves so perfect that no one could teach us anything. What Alberuni observed so long ago is still an impediment to the process of education in our country; "... The Indians believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no king like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are by nature niggardly in communicating what they know, and they take the

greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people."⁵²

W : May be I'm getting a little fanciful but could it be that withdrawal of the senses involved in most Indian paths to realisation led to an essentially anti-empirical set which retarded the type of thinking needed for technology to grow. The Baconian revolution passed us by. May be that is why some of our engineers even today are more comfortable dealing with analytical concepts and find it a strain relating them to empirical reality.

C : That's what we ourselves seem to be doing, isn't it? But while we are being fanciful, let me come out with another line of reasoning. We have always prided ourselves on the marriage between thought and practice in Indian philosophising. Could this have proved to be our Achilles' heel? When the educational system bogged down thought, as Wendy has been pointing out, even the practicalities of technology could not progress. By contrast, the empiricist tradition in the west was not restrained by the yoking of thought and practice and could let one or the other go ahead as occasion demanded. For instance, take Hume, who, despite his brilliantly reasoned skepticism, could advise (and live himself) a successful practical life.⁵³ And then, of course, there's Ryle's more recent assertion that knowing how to do things is independent of and more fundamental than knowing certain things are the case.⁵⁴

W : What's with you, Adler? You've been keeping unusually quiet for some time.

A : I've just been mulling over the problem Rahim and Kiran have defined : of understanding how and why we started diverging from industrialised societies. But my thoughts are not yet clear : may be we could meet again tomorrow.

BOOK V

A : Since our talk yesterday, I've been trying to analyse why the knowledge explosion since the Renaissance did not rejuvenate thinking in India. And I've come to the conclusion such knowledge didn't really pass us by.

D : Are you suggesting our technology kept pace with that in Europe ?

A : No, I've not become bold enough to take such liberties with historical facts.

In the first place, of course, it's true that we were not as favourably placed as any European country to experience the cross-currents of fresh thought sweeping across their continent. But what is perhaps more important is the fact that we simply absorbed whatever little currents came our way.

K : But isn't that what assimilation of knowledge and technology are all about ?

A , I'm afraid I didn't mean 'absorb' in quite that sense. Let me give a parallel. When two people have differing points of view, they can either reason them out so that there is one conclusion which has the best of both arguments or they can pretend that there is really no fundamental difference. In the latter case, some fancy footwork may be required for rewording

the terms or making minor adjustments; but then that is always possible in subjects which are complex enough to deal with real-world issues. If I may be excused for using dialectical terms, I would say that our infinite spirit of compromise just didn't allow an anti-thesis to develop – we merged it into the thesis immediately. There was, therefore, never a question of genuine synthesis emerging between our thought and the new traditions from the West. Because we feel uncomfortable with confrontation, we just chopped and changed enough to get a merger or absorption. Unfortunately, even between people, brushing conflicts under the table doesn't always give the best results (though compromise is genuinely valuable there) – in the world of ideas it can be fatal.

D : That's true you know. Like Chubbles gave the example a while back, of the Brahmanical religion converting the Buddha, who headed an antithetical sect, into a manifestation of Viṣṇu himself. In the process, it even converted itself to vegetarianism.⁵⁵ And why go so far back : even today, if you enter a Philosophy class in India, you will find the students hard at work in fitting every single concept of modern philosophy into the 2000-year-old but continually cobbled and still absorbent structure of Indian Philosophy.

C : What happens in our Philosophy classes doesn't worry me. But what Adler has said can have enormous implications for the development of Indian thinking. If I reinterpret it in Kuhnian terms, it implies that we are just unable to discard a paradigm that has outlived its usefulness and go through the

intellectual turmoil of a scientific revolution.⁵⁶ It speaks volumes, of course, for the subtlety of the Indian intellect, both in explaining away the anomalies and in keeping track of the intensely complicated system that resulted. To put it differently, if we were put in charge of astronomical developments, we would still be running the Ptolemaic system. We would have chipped it and touched it up and added riders and qualifications till hardly a handful of living men could have waded through its intricacies; the Copernican system would have had its own small place as a rider or as a manifestation of something else – the teeth of its incommensurability with the vast body of the main theory would have been painlessly extracted; there would have been peace all round and Galileo would have retired as a prosperous purohita. Forgive me for getting carried away; but this really is a very important point.

K : And how, pray, does it relate to the economic problems we are discussing ?

C ; Don't you see – it's all very well to conceptualise away contradictions when nothing more important than the prize in a disputation depends on the outcome. There is no test one way or another. But the real world of science, technology and industry doesn't respond to wishes and empty constructs – especially not those which have their contradictions woven into them. Our supple minds can help us explain away the contradictions, but the productivity of our science and of our industries will not improve until we overcome our single-paradigm-fixation.

A : Peculiarly enough, this same tolerance of contradiction which is so fatal to intellectual activity also has a correspondence in social life : it permits castes of differing habits to survive in the same society. Where the West would approve or exclude, we assign a rank in the hierarchy.⁵⁷

K : So you admit that because of the caste system, rivals are not forced to eliminate one another, but can co-exist. Thus, it permits the survival of a greater number of individuals who, in more homogeneous societies, would be condemned to disappear.⁵⁸

A : What I meant was ...

K : Don't interrupt me please. I'm tired of hearing constant criticism of our past. Are you all too blind to see the fantastic opportunity that awaits India with the coming of the New Post-Industrial age ?⁵⁹ And in the explosion of the knowledge-industries lies our chance to exploit the very white-collar, non-manual-work attitudes you have been criticising. If we play our cards well, there's no reason we can't start catching up with countries like Japan and US. See what Japan has done in the last 40 years. All it needs is a little more national pride and a little less 'small-nation-syndrome'.

C : Easy, Kiran. We're all equally proud of our country but if we're to examine the psychosocial impediments to our economic growth, we can't remain self-adulatory throughout.⁶⁰ None of us has any argument with your proposal that we should exploit the increasing importance of the knowledge industries. Speaking for myself, however, I would like to ques-

tion whether this alone can cure our ills. Quite apart from the economic feasibility of a country like ours opting out of the manufacturing sector, we should see whether any of the problems that have afflicted manufacturing industries would dog us when we turn to the service sector. Maybe we should all give a thought to what really sets us apart from the Americans and Japanese whom Kiran rightly held up as benchmarks. Let's sleep over it and meet tomorrow.

BOOK VI

W : It's nice seeing everyone look so rested. Let's hope you remain calm throughout the discussion. So who's got bright new insights ?

R : Before we get on with our comments on Japanese, American and Indian societies, I'd like to suggest a scheme of categorisation which is slightly different from the usual bipolar classification. I think we should look at the attitudes each of these societies have to the individual (I), the small collective (S) which would range from the family and clan upto the immediately perceived caste or tribe, and finally the large collective (L) best typified perhaps by the nation-state and extending down to the large corporations where a substantial number of members are not known to any one person.

D : Seems an interesting approach. Maybe comparisons would be eased if we gave each society 10 points to distribute among the 3 categories suggested by Rahim. We could then judge the relative importance they attach to (I), (S) and (L), depending on the

- points each receives. Maybe someone could draw bars representing our judgement in each case.
- W : I'll do that on the board. Let me start with the Japanese. Half their life at least is devoted to country and corporation, so 5 out of their 10 points should be allotted to (L). They're fairly committed to their immediate social groups, so we could give them 3 points for (S). Their own individuality they seem to emphasize least, so only the last 2 out of the 10 points should go to (I).
- A : There's no quarrel with your prioritisation. Lest we get carried away by the pseudo-commensurality numbers can inspire, we should take note of some interesting attitudes the Japanese have to each of these categories. The relatively low score we've put against (I) shouldn't hide the fact that in fact the Japanese are highly competitive from a very young age.⁶¹ However, they are also capable of transferring this feeling of competitiveness from an individual basis to the level of the large institutions of which they are members. Compared to us, of course, it's a little easier for them to think of the whole nation rather than one particular race or tribe. This is because racially and culturally they are the most homogeneous of the world's major nations.⁶²
- C : Don't get carried away by the racial homogeneity, Adler. What is more to our purpose is that Japanese society is not horizontally stratified by class or caste as much as it is stratified vertically by institution or group of institutions.⁶³ Each of these institutions is a relatively independent economic entity — unlike a jāti, which is an occupational group dependent on

other occupational groups for completing an economically meaningful task.⁶⁴ Thus, when a Japanese transfers his competitive impulse to the institution it is translated into a powerful thrust for economic progress.⁶⁵ Very obviously, these characteristics assist the development of the feeling for the state as a whole and were an essential basis for Japan's industrialisation.⁶⁶ That's as far as the large collectivity is concerned. Interestingly enough, while the Japanese have strong cohesive ties with the small groups to which they belong, these do not extend to a clan, caste or community outside their immediate sphere of interaction.⁶⁷ As a result of what one may call the principles of 'localism' and 'tangibility', which govern Japanese behaviour, clan/caste, ties which could have diverted loyalty from the large economic or state institutions are weakened.

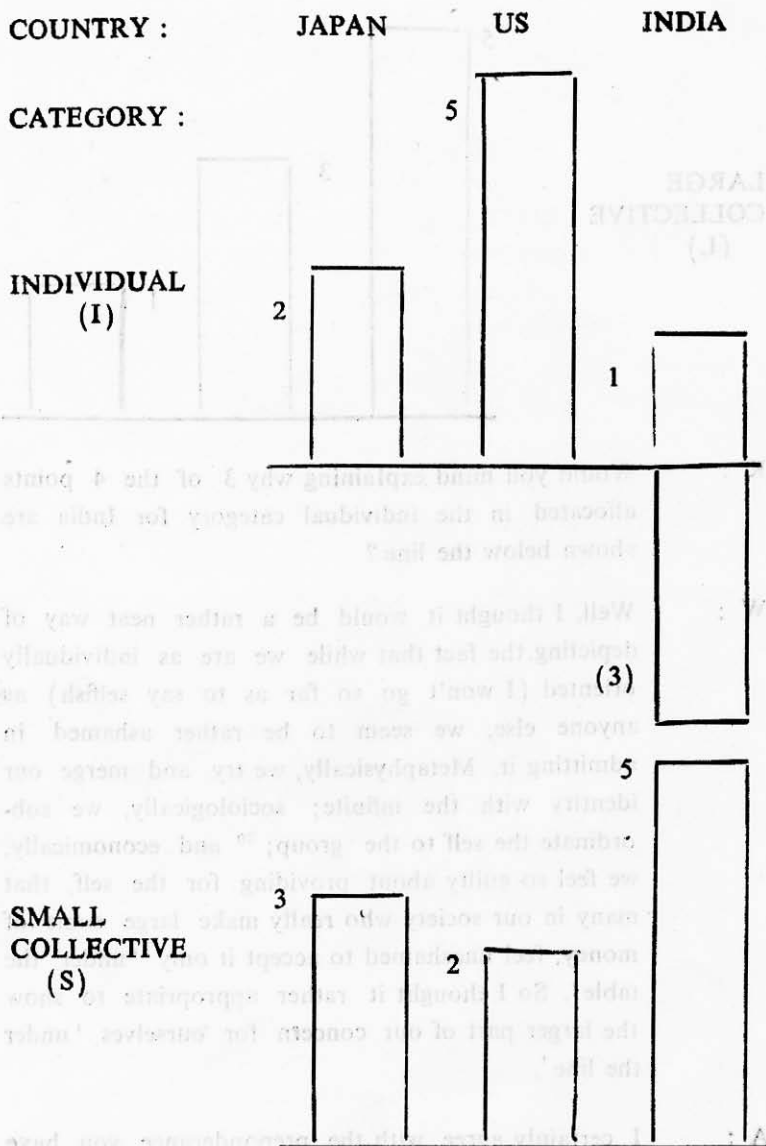
D I Enough about the Japanese. Wendy, will you note my point allocation for the Americans. They're strongly conscious of their individuality, so I'll give 5 points to (I). They also seem to have a fair degree of loyalty to country, but not so much to the corporations to which they belong – so a score of 3 in category (L) may be a fair compromise. They couldn't care less for almost anything else, so we'll leave 2 for (S).

K : All these point games are fine, but they gloss over the fact that the Americans today are almost as far as can be from the Protestant Ethic virtues of thrift, hard work and non-indebtedness. What then has happened to all the precepts enunciated by Benjamin Franklin,

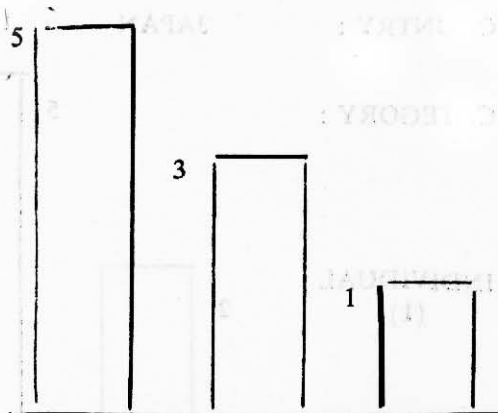
which were considered so quintessential of the Spirit of Capitalism.⁶⁸

D : Obviously enough, that's the reason why countries like Japan and Korea are giving the Americans a good run for their money. Unfortunately, there's not much for us to gloat about. If the average American worker has come far from the Puritan ethic, I'm afraid the average Indian worker has never even come so close. Not his fault of course. The traditionalist attitude of which the caste system is a continuing reminder is inimical to the possibility of rationalising the method of production, which is basic to all modern national technology, or the possibility of systematically organising a commercial enterprise along the lines of a rational business economy.⁶⁹ More importantly for the future, perhaps as a result of emphasizing individualism, the US seems to enjoy a creativity edge in technology over most other nations. This will stand it in very good stand as the knowledge industries come into their own. Since you were suggesting a major share for India in these industries, Kiran, perhaps you will now understand the concern we were expressing about our being caught in a stultifying paradigm. Hey, Wendy, what have you done?

(She has finished making the entries for India, and the blackboard now has a chart on the lines shown below).



LARGE
COLLECTIVE
(L)



K : Would you mind explaining why 3 of the 4 points allocated in the individual category for India are shown below the line ?

W : Well, I thought it would be a rather neat way of depicting the fact that while we are as individually oriented (I won't go so far as to say selfish) as anyone else, we seem to be rather ashamed in admitting it. Metaphysically, we try and merge our identity with the infinite; sociologically, we subordinate the self to the group;⁷⁰ and economically, we feel so guilty about providing for the self, that many in our society who really make large sums of money, feel unashamed to accept it only 'under the table'. So I thought it rather appropriate to show the larger part of our concern for ourselves 'under the line'.

A : I certainly agree with the preponderance you have shown for the small collectivity. The psychological reality of the Indian family extends well beyond an

Individual lifetime and jāti is second only to the extended family as a pervasive social dimension of ideality in India.⁷¹

In fact, one can picture the evolution of societies in terms of the diffusion of the energies which are initially totally self-centered. Evolution, of course, ensures that only those societies survive where the energies of self-preservation extend to cover the small group or clan. At the next stage of diffusion of energy, say from the clan to the state, evolution is not so ruthless. Of course, it exacts an economic penalty from societies which cannot redirect energies from the immediate group to the impersonal institution. Right from the time political ideas developed in India, the loyalty, which in most other cultures is given to the state, was given to the social order.⁷² Inevitably, we have paid a price for this fixation (to an earlier stage of societal evolution) both in political and in economic terms.

K : That's all very well. But I'd like to go back to the fact that we were no worse off than any other country till around the 17th century. If our 'small-collective-fixation' is really as great an impediment as you make it out to be, why did it wait till 300 years ago to make itself felt ?

A : A very pertinent observation indeed. The answer, I think, lies in the fact that it's only the modern nation-state and the technology of the industrial age that demand the type of organisation which our small-collective orientation does not encourage. Till the 17th

century, it didn't matter whether social structure could support modern industrial organisation or not. Afterwards, of course, it determined which societies would industrialise and how fast.

C : At the same time, let's not forget, Adler, that this same profile gave our civilisation its stability over millenia. Whether through the conscious design of those who were supposedly responsible for the social order or through a process of natural selectivity for the most stable order, we acquired a structure which ideally suited the objective of longevity for the civilisation with which it was linked. After all, our type of a world-view and caste hierarchy provides an unobtrusive mechanism for defusing energy which could have otherwise led to revolution and turbulence. Even if it meant underutilising the potential of the vast majority of the population it didn't matter - as long as all other societies also didn't have the means to or the technology requiring better organisation. It was only when they could start tapping a larger proportion of the energies available in the population that our approach of spiritual withdrawal and watertight social fragmentation started being a handicap. Prior to this, the only other times when inability to draw on the energy of the masses would have hurt us, would have been at the time of foreign invasions. Our relative inability to resist these is perhaps an indication this hypothesis is not totally baseless.

K : You're right. Even with hindsight, it's difficult to devise a psycho-social system better adapted to ensure stability with prosperity for the elite and quiescence from the rest. It was aesthetically pleasing, logically

consistent and gave psychologically satisfying answers to some of the eternally recurring questions of mankind. It reduced stress in the social structure by bleeding it of energy rather than through coercive controls.

D : It was also unfalsifiable in its essence and therefore, scientifically meaningless.⁷³ Relying on this sterling quality the elite ensured its own perpetuation with ruthless disregard for the bulk of the populace as if the whole of society was meant only for propelling and advancing the cause of these select few.⁷⁴ If we want mass progress, all this old luggage must go. How long can we remain chained to the Hindu growth rate ?

K : Dev, I sometimes wonder which side of sanity you stand on. Do you not understand that the constancy of the Hindu growth rate is only one of the external indicators of a critical homeostatic mechanism in our society. You are closer to the truth than you realise, when you say our psychosocial set conditions this mechanism and thus predetermines economic growth. It is also true that, our social beliefs contain contradiction (and don't contradictions arise in much simpler social systems too ?)⁷⁵. But if you sincerely believe that destroying this mental set will push up the growth rate, you must have lost several children with the bathwater by now. If the homeostatic mechanism breaks down (which, thank God, can't happen just by your wishing it), there will be disorder of such magnitude that what is left at the end of it will not be worth saving.

W : Whew ! Where there is heat I hope, sometime, will emerge Light. I think we've all reached the end of our patience. Let's have cool-off period. When we meet again, we must take up something practical instead of this empty word-play which has been getting everyone hot and bothered.

BOOK VII

W : Let's go easy on the pyrotechnics this time, shall we? The reason we're all getting carried away by emotions is because we haven't got down to dealing with practical realities. Why don't we get down to some pragmatic solutions straight-away.

R : Wendy seems to be harbouring an impression that this is the National Institute for Accelerated Solutions. Don't you realise Advanced Studies automatically rules out quick fixes.

W : Granted. But we have not even started focusing on the agenda we set for ourselves when we commenced these deliberations. If all the concepts we have thrown around are indeed of some use, surely we should have been able to bring them to bear by now on the three practical issues we had identified.

K : Okay. Why not finish off 'corruption' first?

D : I wish we could. But seriously speaking, corruption in our society remains a bit of an enigma to me. I know, Wendy, you made a passing reference to our being ashamed to make money above-board causing us to resort to underhand deals (sorry for the mixed metaphor). But it just doesn't make sense to me.

The other day, some of us were discussing why Indians lack the 'killer instinct' - which apparently is the most important ingredient in sports victories nowadays. A psychology student listening to the discussion proposed an interesting explanation. He said some psychologist had theorised that the motivation to do something depended on how much you exerting to do that thing really made it happen and, once the thing happened, how likely it was to bring you a reward: obviously, it also mattered how much you wanted that reward. Moreover, since the relationship between the three is multiplicative, if any of these factors is missing, the action would not take place.⁷⁶ Now if our ethical tradition tells us to eliminate desires, there's no question of wanting any rewards. Since *Karma* tells us that whatever rewards come our way are the result of previous deeds, there can be no link between present action and reward. Taking advantage of the fact that Kiran has not exploded yet, I am tempted to add that in the all-embracing mist of *Mayā* one can't even assign a probability to something really happening, regardless of how much you exert to make it happen. So, with all three factors approximating zero, how can the action of corruption take place?

C : Well, I must say you've made an amusing, if somewhat hamhanded, effort to explain the general lethargy and inaction, of which we Indians are accused. But I don't see corruption getting explained away so easily. Let's try another tack : you are all familiar with Freud's constructs of id, ego and superego ?

R : I see what you're driving at. Since Indians believe desires have been eliminated, they posit id as non-existent. Hence, they see no need for superego or the control of conscience. So the ego has a field day guiding the id (which obviously is very much there) in the absence of any moral checks.

C : A valiant attempt, Rahim, but psychoanalytic interpretation is a little more complex than that. It is the conflicts generated by the second birth and the model Hindu resolution of the Oedipus complex that lead to a relatively weaker differentiation and idealisation of the Indian superego. Much of the individual behaviour and adaptation to the environment that in Westerners is regulated or coerced by the demands of the superego, is taken care of in Indians by a communal conscience (including family and jāti norms). The greater authority of the codes of the communal conscience, as opposed to the internalised rules of the individual superego, creates a situation in which infringements of moral standards become likely in situations 'when no one is looking'.⁷⁷ Because there is relatively little tension between the ego and superego, the inner life of most Indians is not crippled by the constant judgement of all thoughts and actions into 'good' or 'bad'. There is thus much less pressure and guilt on the ego to appease the superego by means of productive activity and achievement in the outside world. An Indian can sit for hours doing nothing, without an inner voice condemning him a 'do-nothing.'⁷⁸ So you see, Adler, a 'kam-chor' doesn't see himself as such. The values stressed by the communal conscience are thus in conformity with the

social order rather than honesty, productivity and the rightness of political action.⁷⁹ In this situation, 'right' and 'wrong' are relative: and individual's occupational activity and social acts are 'right' or 'good' if they conform to the traditional pattern prevalent in his kinship or caste groups.⁸⁰ Thus, among the vast majority of tradition-minded Indians, dishonesty, nepotism and corruption are merely abstract concepts. These negative constructions are irrelevant to Indian psychosocial experience, which, from childhood on, nurtures one standard of responsible adult action, and one only, namely, an individual's lifelong obligation to his kith and kin. Allegiance to impersonal institutions and abstract moral concepts is without precedent in individual developmental experience. Guilt and its attendant inner anxiety are aroused only when individual actions go against the primacy of relationships, not when foreign ethical standards of justice and efficiency are breached.⁸¹ In such a system, socially disapproved actions generally require expiation rather than punishment.⁸²

D : A very scholarly exposition, Chubbles, and it's very obvious that some parts of this framework must change if we are to progress towards reducing the corruption which we all agreed was eating into the vitals of the nation.

K : That change is necessary no one doubts, but it must be handled very carefully. If the change incorporates mandates of rational individual deliberation and decision-making, regard for objectivity and empirical fact, and loss of the warmth and connectedness pro-

vided by the primary groups of family and jāti, it may be experienced as injurious to self-esteem and may indeed evoke a 'regressive' employment of the full repertoire of psychological defences acquired in a Hindu childhood. There could be outbreaks of violence or withdrawal into alcoholism, drug addiction and pursuit of mystical cults. Then there could be a frantic search for and an uncritical submission to charismatic leaders without regard for the political contents of their cause or ideology. Polarisation could take place between 'traditionalists' and 'modernists' – both resorting to irrational arguments and violence. In some ways, I think these tendencies are already visible.⁸³

D : Help us, Chubbles, otherwise Kiran is going to frighten us to death with his forebodings of doom. Or have you yet to recover your breath after your long peroration?

C : Sorry, Dev, but I do think there is a lot of sense in the warning Kiran has given. Not that I feel nothing can be done. But perhaps a psychological revolutionary situation can come in India only if large sections of our society question the usefulness of 'ultimate reality', bring up to awareness its origins in infancy and firmly reject many of its social and cultural manifestations as vestiges of an archaic personal and historical past.⁸⁴ This process must be led with great sincerity and sensitivity, so that we save as much as possible of the warmth and tolerance that has made our heritage unique. No one person can take up this task. Perhaps an institute like NIAS

could one day activate enough like-thinking intellectuals throughout the country to begin making a contribution for India's tryst with reality.

BOOK VIII

W : It's been pretty heavy going trying to keep pace with Chubbles. Can't we deal with the population problem now ? Surely, that can't have a psycho-analytical angle.

C : Want to bet ?

W : No, really. Can't we think of some radical, new approaches to the country's family-planning programme ? It would be such a break-through for NIAS if it came up with something like that.

A : Don't get too carried away in your enthusiasm, Wendy. A lot of very clever people have been breaking their heads on just this for many, many years. Don't forget we're up against mankind's strongest urge : the strength of which has, at some stage of his evolution, made the difference between survival and extinction of man as a species. It's moored so strongly in the mind, with thongs of culture and tradition, that it appears well-nigh impossible to shake it.

W : I didn't expect you to sing such a defeatist tune, Adler. Surely, no mental construct is so permanently embedded that it will never budge. Take caste, for instance. Everyone said this is one thing which will never change in India. Now I'm not saying we've eliminated caste but its foundations are certainly not

so strong as they were a hundred years ago. And who made the first major breakthrough? Gandhiji.

K : Surely, you're not under the impression that we have today a leader who enjoys almost the blind kind of mass support Gandhiji did.

W : I guess not. What I wanted to suggest was that instead of just hammering home a blunt family-planning message, a subtle campaign should be worked out. Family planning should become part of a greater goal which retains, on other counts, appeals to those emotions and drives which have traditionally been closest to the heart of the common man. I know it sounds a bit confused, but I feel it was just such a combination of radically new social practice covered in the comforting envelope of age-old concepts that Gandhiji struck upon in his fight against untouchability.⁸⁵

D : Just suppose you get a little more specific and let us have details of this master-psychological campaign you have in mind.

W : I have no details to offer but a group of psychologists, sociologists, theologians and advertising professionals (with TV experience) working together could come up with some innovative options, though perhaps not with the brilliant intuitive understanding of the psyche of the common man which Gandhiji possessed.⁸⁶ Don't you think this is just the kind of intellectually sophisticated multidisciplinary problem for which NIAS could get the right group together.

A : You have a point, but perhaps some of us have suggestions within the overall direction you have depicted.

R : Yes. I'd like to say something about our policy on Family Planning incentives. To me, it appears all the money we are spending on incentives is going down the drain. We're tackling the wrong end of the problem. As long as there a niche for a certain population at a particular socio-economic level, a set of families practising birth control will not make much of a difference.⁸⁷ Families not practising birth control at that economic level or the levels adjacent to it will fill up the niche. The problem facing us must, therefore, be redefined in terms of identifying factors which reduce the size of the niche itself. Let me give an example which is intuitively self-evident. Economic advancement is a factor that influences niche space by making smaller families more appropriate as a strategy for specie survival and propagation. As someone put it a little facetiously : "The rich get richer, while the poor get children."

D : Isn't that a bit of *petitio principii*, Rahim ? After all, we're discussing the problem of economic prosperity — we can't make it a precondition to finding a solution.

R : I was only giving an example. Let me give another : Studies have shown that the curve relating economic prosperity with optimal family size for a particular niche shifts downwards with progressive increases in female literacy. Studies like these could give us clues to leverage points where incentives could really deliver results without generating the type of resistance

our present approach is bound to evoke. To continue my example, incentives for female education would never bring out the kind of emotion—changed hostility a sterilisation campaign engenders.

D : Don't be too sure of that. Improving the status of women, which would result from greater literacy, may bring out unexpectedly high levels of resistance. After all, don't forget, Aryan Brahmanism, in its struggle to acquire cultural supremacy over the matriarchially organised indigenous civilisation, purposefully depressed the status of women in our society. Which is why the honoured position accorded to women in the early Vedas is replaced by hostility and degradation in subsequent centuries.⁸⁸

K : I think you're exaggerating the resistance Hindu society will have to progressive measures. The facts speak differently. My concern would be directed to ever-increasing numbers of those who are already economically and socially disadvantaged. How do we make it in their interest to push a thing like female literacy ?

W : I have an idea. These are the very groups who have considerable job reservation and 'seat' reservation going for them. Suppose most if not all of the reservation was kept only for women of that community, there would be an automatic incentive to educate women. And obviously it would also serve the purpose of uplifting the more depressed half of the depressed class. Isn't that what social justice is all about ?

- A :** A most innovative, if somewhat eccentric solution. Let's hope no one misinterprets it to mean an increase in the overall percentage of reservation.
- C :** And Wendy, the whole process of equalisation can be retarded if the men feel insecure and threatened by the upliftment of women. The Indian male finds mature women sexually threatening.⁸⁹ The process of creating acceptance for mature womanhood must be handled cautiously and gradually. It is complex enough for NIAS to set up a special research project around it.
- K :** Once again Chubbles has fallen prey to Freudian abstraction. Why don't we treat the upliftment of women as a straight supply - demand problem? Reduce the supply and the 'price' will go up.
- W :** And how, pray, do you intend to carry out this massacre of womankind?
- K :** Not really a massacre, though I don't suppose you'll find my solution much better. To my way of thinking, the least painful way of making women more wanted in our society would be to legalise and encourage foeticide. We should encourage research which helps detect the sex of the unborn child at an early stage in a manner not injurious to the health of the mother or the child. Such testing should be offered free and the parents should be at liberty to terminate the pregnancy thereafter. In a short time, the number of boys will so outnumber the girls that the market will ensure an increase in the worth of women. Dowries will disappear as will every other practice that demeans Indian womanhood.

- W : Why, you unthinking, murdering monster. I could...
- R : Khamosh. We have all got too carried away with just one possibility for making a smaller family the optimal survival strategy in the various niches our society provides. Let's leave it to the NIAS brains-trust to identify other even more promising avenues.

BOOK IX

- R : Well, we have examined individual and social issues from a fairly large number of angles and several of these have obvious implications for economic productivity. In this context, shouldn't we look, in passing at least, at the broader policy issues that can outweigh all the social engineering we have been debating?
- K : I guess we can talk about it for a bit, but so much has already been said or written on the subject that I don't know if we really have something to add.
- A : Only a few stray points I'm sure. But here's one that could be of some relevance. During the last few days, I've been making a rough and ready survey of Indian history to see if the periods of relative economic stability - 'prosperity' would be too strong a word - share any features. At first glance, a curious kind of correlation appears: the better off periods have all enjoyed comparatively strong central rule. I wonder if it's worth pursuing this chain of thought in case the economic genius of the Indian people only realises its full potential when assured of the stability and unidirectional purpose a single strong central ruler provides.

W : Couldn't we get a little specific ?

K : Sure I could. Some of the instances Adler would have come across are Ashoka, the Gupta kings, or Akbar. Why, even the British empire in India remained relatively shaky till, after Hastings, it came under a central command.⁹⁰

R : Are you suggesting there were no provinces in these kingdoms ? I don't think that's correct.

K : No, no. The provinces existed. But the autonomy they got, especially in political matters, was carefully moderated, if not extremely restricted. For instance, in the Mauryan empire, not only did the emperor appoint a member of the royal family as provincial administrator, but placed under the administrator, ministers who were in direct contact with the king.⁹¹ In addition, of course, were the well-known systems of inspectors and spies appointed by Ashoka.⁹²

I think Adler has a valuable insight to offer. We created our constitution with memories of British rule fresh in our minds and enshrined in it centre-state relations more appropriate for wresting power from an alien central authority than for a newly formed nation where all the parts must pull together if progress is to be achieved. This, of course, is not surprising since the 1935 Government of India Act was used as a working model and, in fact, long passages from its text are inserted in our constitution.⁹³ It appears to me we overdid the Federalism a bit and it is hampering the country from taking bold and rapid united action until it faces external threat. At this rate, we will never be able to galvanise our energies

for economic action which can help bridge the gap between us and more prosperous countries.

D : To read the papers and the complaints of the State Chief Ministers, one would believe the actual state of affairs is quite the converse of what you're stating.

K : That's because they're comparing the situation with what is in the constitution — and it's true there is less federalism in practice than specified in the constitution. But the more fundamental question is whether the level of federalism the constitution specified was appropriate. And even if it was appropriate when the constitution was framed, is it still appropriate today? After all, structure must follow strategy;⁹¹ and our strategic need seems to be to pull in unison towards the superordinate goal of nation-building. Perhaps there is too much federalism in the constitutional structure for a period when we need to squeeze the maximum efficiency out of the system in the quickest time.

W : Look, if Nehru could manage to run the country for so many years with the constitution respected, why only after him should erosion start?

K : My dear Wendy, Panditji did not have to contend with states of different political hues pulling in different directions. And his stature discouraged dissidence. Surely it can't be a coincidence that even when the Janata came to power in the Centre, the process of eroding federalism did not cease. It happened because every pragmatic PM realises that if the country is managed strictly by the book, there is a good chance it will all go to pieces. And since you

are quoting the example of Nehru, please remember that at the time the Constitution was framed, he had to operate within the envelope of a certain choice-set. Within that envelope he did opt for the extreme closer to centralisation rather than federalisation. Historical evidence seems to show that he was willing to pay the price of partition rather than have a loose federation, which would lead to the type of Balkanisation the British wanted in the sub-continent. He obtained as centralised a structure as he could. At that stage, a constitution with more central emphasis could have been self-defeating. Even so, I'm sure, after actually running the country for a few years, he wished the constitution had not made the task so difficult.

D : I can see our young fascist friend is yearning for a re-imposition of the emergency.

K : Don't be silly, Dev. The emergency took place because there's no constitutionally approved mechanism for steering the ship of state as one vessel rather than as bunch of life-boats strung together. The economic state of the country requires concerted action but short of misusing emergency power, the PM can't do a thing about getting cohesive action. And because emergency is meant to be a specific short-term instrument, it fails miserably when used for the wrong purpose. Look, there's no need to suspend individual rights or freedom of the press or anything like that in the slightest. But you can't go on having a state within a state without impairing the function of the totality.

R : At the same time, Kiran, the closer the political structure is to where the action takes place, the more meaningful and effective it is likely to be. You can't run a country of our size just from the centre.

K : I'm not suggesting we do. Have panchayats or district-level units where the men in charge are really close to the action. At the state level understanding of local problems is scarcely better than at the centre, while the loss of efficiency in having an additional intermediate level is horrendous. The quality of our bureaucracy and the communication technology now available remove the last justification for perpetuating this age-old concept of 'satrapies'.

R : Kiran, you don't seem to understand. In the interest of efficiency, you will sacrifice the unity of the whole country. Don't you realise this is precisely what happened in East Pakistan and Northern Sri Lanka?

K : That was because one group was favoured over another. Here, it will be only one tier, which in any case causes only confusion, being uniformly excised. All other judicial and constitutional checks on the executive remain. Rather than inciting secession in reality, there will be much reduced focus for regionalism and other such fissipareous tendencies.

A : Admittedly, Kiran, you've put up a powerful case and I'm sure the government would be happy to hear it. But no one really expects the NIAS to come with suggestions for changing the constitution. So why don't we turn and give a thought to economic policy.

K : Well, the writing has been on the wall for years and admittedly the government has started moving in the right direction by enhancing competition, reducing controls and easing taxation. All of these have already started paying results and, if more such measures are taken, they could really root out corruption and hike the productivity of all resources.

D : Provided the inertia of the administrative machinery lets things happen.

W : And provided the second nation is willing to wait.

K : Which second nation ?

W : The nation of India's poor, which stands a dumb spectator while, among the elite (who often masquerade as champions of the poor), ideologies and parties battle it out for occupying seats of power and payment.⁹⁵ Yes, I know you'll tell me the poor are where they are because of their own sloth and traditionalism and that they must pull themselves out of it. But what are we offering them in return ? The consciousness of how poor they are ? Or theories with tall names like federalism and liberalism ? We've taken turns in criticising ever so many things. What do we plan to leave in the place of all these beliefs which have solaced Indians through generations and which we now plan to exercise ? The last time the world saw the destruction of an Aryan myth it was followed by the Marshall Plan, lest Europe fell prey to an ideology the Americans detested.⁹⁶ Let us pause before we crumple up centuries of comfort till we have something warm and yet real to offer in its place.

BOOK X

W : Sorry, folks. I didn't mean to get so emotional last time. We have done a fair amount of hard thinking and it was mean of me to denigrate it so utterly. I apologise.

A : There's no need to. What you said may have been overstated, but it did get us to think some more. I, for one, have been reviewing how some of the previous reformers of Indian society have dealt with the problem of the psychosocial vacuum which you pointed out. You'll be happy to hear, Wendy, that they never allowed the vacuum to take place : They built before they destroyed. They sought to establish a belief-set which they hoped would better suit their society's need. It was the new set of beliefs which was intended to ease out the old.

D ; All going above my head. I'm afraid. Why don't you just quote the specific instances of the reformers you have in mind and leave the generalisations to us ?

A : All right, let's start with my favourite example, Ashoka. The central control of the ruler, which Kiran had rightly emphasized a while back, could have been maintained through force. Instead of this 'sledge-hammer' route, Ashoka adopted the more subtle approach of disseminating an eclectic collection of views, stressing the virtues of tolerance, ahimsā and mutual adjustment, which he considered essential for welding divergent groups in a cohesive whole. He hoped consequently that the dominance of divergent groups, including those subscribing to the orthodoxy, could be undermined and the central authority could

increase its power. The interesting thing is that essentially the same policy, though different in form, was adopted by Akbar, eighteen centuries after Ashoka.⁹⁷ Akbar too founded an eclectic cult much influenced by Zoroastrianism and centred on himself.⁹⁸ Here again, the aim was to weld unity between normally opposed communities and Akbar tried creating it by establishing a cult of the monarch, whom it was a religious duty to obey and a sacrilege to oppose.⁹⁹

D : Sound the trumpets, beat the drums ; Here the founder of 'Din Adleri' comes.

C : Don't be perfectly idiotic, Dev. There's no question of our attempting an alternative religion the way Ashoka and Akbar did. But isn't the process Adler has been describing, in substance the same as the one the Mahātmā used to galvanise the nation not so long back.¹⁰⁰ Wasn't Nehru attempting a similar feat when he tried building up science and industry as an answer to the laws of Manu? Surely, you don't imagine they were trying to create new religions. We have already a diversity of profound religions which leave on space for another.

R : That's right. All that Wendy and Adler have been saying is that it is not enough to cut out; we must replace. And we must only discover the rational substrates for those religious nations that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas. It is necessary to discern the moral rules and ideals latent in and appropriate to the contemporary social situation.¹⁰¹

- D :** Hang on, hang on, before your fervour pushes you over the precipice of the naturalistic fallacy. ¹⁰² Surely, you don't expect a study of society as it is, to yield you answers about the moral ideals we ought to follow.
- C :** Forgive him his enthusiasm, Dev - God knows it's a rare enough virtue of which we could do with a lot more. Yes, we cannot expect science to relieve us of our task of positing our basic values. I would like to suggest integrity, both intellectual and inter-personal, as the cornerstone of our value-structure, while rationality delineates the boundaries within which we must stay. For, to be free is not to do as one pleases; it is to be master of oneself, it is the ability to act rationally and do one's duty. ¹⁰³ And, therefore, discipline performs an important function in forming character and personality in general. ¹⁰⁴
- W :** I think you have perpetuated our old tradition of thinking of virtues on an individual basis. The welfare of society at large, the commitment to industriousness and respect for the rights and aspirations of others, which is the true basis of team work, must also find a place in the fabric we are creating.
- A :** At the same time, Wendy, I believe our social concerns should not outweigh our respect for the individual and his development. As all the other beliefs and all the other practices take on an increasingly less religious character, the individual must become the object of a sort of religion. There would be a cult of personal dignity which derives its force from society but attaches itself to the individual. ¹⁰⁵ In

fact, individualism provides the only system of beliefs which can ensure the sustained moral unity of a modern country. A citizenry as heterogeneous as ours has only its humanity in common. The idea of the human person is therefore the only idea that can survive, immutable and impersonal, above the changing tides of particular opinions.¹⁰⁶

C : I don't think there can be much dispute about the basic values we are proposing. Some clarity also seems to have emerged during these dialogues we have had about the beliefs which need to be de-emphasized. But the new value-framework can never ease out the old unless it is blended into a mutually supportive whole, and is fleshed out with the mythology, literature and art, which are necessary to make it acceptable and accessible to various segments of the population.

D : Goodness, Chubbles, do you realise the magnitude of the task you are proposing. It will be decades before we even see the first signs of change.

A : I wouldn't be quite as pessimistic as that, but I accept the whole thing will be very gradual. I will also require the goodwill and commitment of numerous intellectuals at the forefront of a variety of fields, working together to achieve a synchronicity of the social sciences, the natural sciences and the arts.

C : What better goal could there be to provide NIAS with an unending source of socially meaningful, interdisciplinary projects ?

W : That's great, let's go and tell the Director of NIAS all about it.

- R : Wait a moment. Telling him the bald conclusion will leave him thinking we're a bunch of megalomaniacs masquerading as participants. We have to give him the full background and the train of our reasoning.
- D : That's no problem, since the ubiquitous tape-recorder was switched on through all our discussions.
- A : And in the highly-productive pattern of society we are planning, I am sure everyone will work as one team to transcribe the tapes. Where's everyone gone ?

EPILOGUE

And that's how this dialogue came to be written. I hope it has not caused too much anguish to you, Plato. Though I have kept to the number of books you put in your dialogue, you won't find a Glaucon or an Adimantus in 'Republic : 2'. It will also take you quite some guessing to find out whether the role of Socrates has been inherited by one or more of my participants. I suggest you don't even try. The world has changed since you knew it. You will not find it worth your while to snatch yourself away from the realm of permanent 'Forms' where you are now ensconced to tangle with the sensation-confined world in which we operate. Thank you all the same for the use of the Idea of 'Republic'. "A man of the right sort, I think, when he comes in the course of his narrative to some word or act of a good man will be willing to impersonate the other in reporting it, and will feel no shame at that kind of mimicry, by preference imitating the good man when he acts steadfastly and sensibly..."¹⁰⁷ "You have received a better and more complete education than the others,

and you are more capable of sharing both ways of life. Down you must go then, each in his turn, to the habitation of the others and accustom yourselves to the observation of the obscure things there. For once habituated you will discern them infinitely better than the dwellers there, and you will know what each of the 'idols' is and whereof it is a semblance, because you have seen the reality of the beautiful, the just and the good. So our city will be governed by us and you with waking minds, and not, as most cities now, which are inhabited and ruled darkly as in a dream by men who fight one another for shadows and wrangle for office as if that were a great good, when the truth is that the city in which those who are to rule are least eager to hold office must needs be best administered and most free from dissension, and the state that gets the contrary type of ruler will be the opposite of this."¹⁰⁸

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