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INDIA VERSUS THE REST

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The Inner Reality

The 'West versus the Rest' starts on the wrong premise by defining Eastern culture in terms of Asian values of strong family, strong state and strong nationalism which it certainly espouses but which fails to capture the essence of many an Eastern, specially Indian, thought and civilisation. The central difference between the West and the East relates to the purpose of man's life on earth. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and even Catholic Christianity conceive of man as having been sent by God to fulfil his purpose. The objective of man is to align his life with God's will. Indian culture further defines that every human, nay living being, is born in the world with some inner tendencies (sanskaras). The objective is to 'work out' or exhaust these sanskaras, to break as under their inner pull and become 'free'. The basic orientation of India is inward. Carl Jung has rendered a yeoman's service to the Indian civilisation by pointing out that we inherit deep patterns from our past history which exert an irrepressible influence on our contemporary actions and reactions. Hinduism may disagree with Jung on the nature of these patterns or the mechanism of their transmission, but the existence of these patterns is fully endorsed. The objective of life then becomes to align one's life with these patterns, inner

tendencies, sanskaras or the will of God. West, on the other hand, had been much influenced by John Locke's concept of tabula rasa. Every human being is born with a clean slate on which the society writes as it pleases. The objective of the Western man is to write as much as possible on the slate. Such unending writing on the slate was referred to as 'ever-walking without reaching' by Tagore:

"It is not the objective to keep on adding wood to the fire. Its meaning arises in the food that is cooked. The European tradition does not establish the aim at some point where the work can lead the person naturally. European people want to accumulate money, they may happily do so. But there is no limit to accumulation of money. Civilisation is there called 'progress'. But 'progress' has come to mean ever-walking without reaching". (Tagore 1906:32-33)

When, therefore, Buzan and Segal assert that the Western modes of social organisation have "enabled people to 'make more of their human potential than had ever been possible before," they are speaking a limited truth. Their statement is true in that the Western modes have indeed enabled man to write much more on the clean slate. But such writing is not necessarily development of human potential. The 'human potential' has to be defined as something that pre-exists and awaits to unfold itself. 'Walking', as Tagore would say, is unfolding of human potential only if it is aligned with one's inner tendencies. Such 'walking' which is contra inner tendencies is not unfolding of human potential but its smothering with unwanted and unnecessary noise. Tabula Rasa does not concede such inner tendencies.

It is the negation of this inner self that leads to discordant existence of the Western people. Buzan and Segal hope that the West 'may learn how to achieve a better balance amongst self, family, career and society', but leave it there. This balance between the self, i.e., inner tendencies, and career and society, i.e., the outer world is precisely the starting point of Indian culture. The West has

barely recognised the problem that Indian (and other Eastern cultures) have solved and built their long standing civilisations upon. This is not to say that Indian culture is either non-materialistic or non-individualistic. The empires of the Indus Valley civilisation five thousand years ago and the Classical India of two thousand years ago were materially grandiose, while the West -- including the Greek pioneers -- were petty city states. These materialistic achievements were scarcely possible without a materialistic or individualistic cultural orientation. Indian culture relegates such materialism to the second level -- valid for those who have not yet learnt the techniques of directly exhausting their inner tendencies. The West has placed this lowly objective on the grand pedestal. This balance between internal and external is best explained in the Gita. The solution is to become materialist in the direction of one's inner tendencies. Instead of making individualism and materialism instruments of ever writing new stories on the slate, they should be aligned with one's inner tendencies. Thus, Indian culture puts together materialism and spiritualism in one holistic system. Material pursuits in line with inner tendencies are simultaneously Indian as well as Western. Indian culture therefore subsumes the Western. The cultural diversity of the West eulogised by Buzan and Segal is shallow in that all cultures negate this inwardness. The Western package and diversity is that which can exist within the package of material consumption period. The American openness to science, rationality and economic logic is entirely restricted to the external world. These cultures and logic fail to comprehend the inner tendencies and unify the inner and outer worlds of man. Individualism is not the contribution of the West as Buzan and Segal contend. Kautilya says that one should abandon the individual for the family, the family for the village, the village for the society, and the entire world for self-realisation. If abandoning the world for the self is not individualism, then what is? But this individualism is inward looking. Its externalisation is certainly the contribution of the West. Indian individualism is inward looking while Western individualism is outward looking. This is not to say that India has not had her

failures. The basic error of India has been that the value of inwardness, though based on sound premises, has got ossified or, in Gordon Childe's words, exists presently in a state of suspended animation. The West rightly was critical of this ossified Indian culture, but made the mistake of jettisoning it lock, stock and barrel. It threw the baby of inwardness with the bath water of ossification. Thus, it has now no solutions to the creation of a 'better balance amongst self, family, career and society'. The term 'East' is problematic in this context. Russia, Japan, China, and East Asia, though very much part of the pan-Eastern civilisation, have lost their Eastern soul. The only resistance now comes from the Islamic or Indian or the fringes of Buddhist cultures. In this sense, Buzan and Segal are right that Huntington flunked in East Asia. But, not because the 'Eastern' civilisation proved to be non-existent. Rather, because the cultures which flunked were those that had already mortgaged their soul to the Western ideology of outwardness.

The return traffic in ideas from Japan -- just-in-time production, management systems, miniaturisation and the manufacture of high quality mass-production goods -- only supports our contention that Japan has directed its energies in the outward domain. Buzan and Segal are right that these indicate that Japan has become a part of the 'Westernistic' civilisation. But in doing so, it has only cancelled itself out to represent the 'East'. It is not surprising, therefore, that the inner problems afflicting the West are making inroads into the Japanese society. If they have not manifested as fully as in the West, it is only due to the gestation period in social transition being longer than in technological and economic spheres.

Stratification

Buzan and Segal claim that Western democracy '...is still the worst system of governance that we know of, except for all others'. The near uninterrupted survival of the Indian civilisation appears to have escaped their attention in considering the 'others'. The key to the Indian riddle lies in the linking of inner tendencies

with governance. Those who had transcended their tendencies of wealth and power -- the brahmins -- acted as custodians of society as a whole and checked the excesses of the rulers.

Historian A. L. Basham writes:

"A strong king was always a check on brahmanic pretensions, just as the brahmins were a check on the pretensions of the king", (1954:142).

And, Romila Thapar says similarly:

"The gradual politicisation of the office of purohita can also be seen in the 'purohita becoming a check on the monarch", (1978:136).

It was this separation of the functions; and the consequent establishment of check-on-governance that is the 'other' alternative to Western style democracy. The check-on-governance through Western democracy is inadequate. Welfare economist E. J. Mishan has this to say about the 'people':

"...to speak of resources being organised to meet the desires of the community is somewhat fanciful in view of the opinion that in advanced economies, at least, consumers may be persuaded to desire almost anything if enough resources are devoted to the task of persuasion" (1964:157).

Mishan says that people can be persuaded to vote in a particular way. The way voters vote is therefore determined by the 'persuasion' by the ruling elite. Only he can check the rulers who cannot be 'persuaded'. The voters cannot, therefore, be relied upon to check bad governance. Western democracy is not, truly speaking, as 'deeply rooted' as Buzan and Segal make it out to be. No wonder that Hitler too was a product of the same Western style democracy as Sukarno was. The Brahmin wins over Western democracy because, having transcended his desire for wealth and power -- which are the anchor of such persuasion -- he can maintain his independence. He is able to resist the persuaders because his inner tendency is that of self-realisation and he closes himself to the external persuaders.

This recognition of the inner tendencies is the kingpin of Indian system of governance. It should not be forgotten that India has experimented with Western-style democracy. Democracy is considered to be 'inefficient' in the Indian world-view. In Mahabharata, Bhishma rejects adult franchise because 'people cannot agree with each other' in such a set up. The republics during the time of Buddha were jettisoned in favour of monarchies, presumably with the check of the brahmin. Democracy in the West should have collapsed under the weight of this inefficiency. That such has not yet happened owes itself to the extraction of wealth from the developing countries. In 1882, when such democracy was well-established in Britain, Engels wrote to Kautsky:

"You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeois think. There is no workers' party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world markets and the colonies" (1882:423).

Presently, the same 'feast' is being financed through 'technology rent' to which we would revert shortly. It suffices here to say that Buzan and Segal fail to recognise the link between material deprivation of the people of developing countries and survival of democracy in the industrial countries. They are correct, however, in pointing out that East Asia tried to combine autocracy, and crony -- and mafia -- capitalism with the market. They are indeed incompatible as contended. But, autocracy will only degenerate Easternism. That does not negate the Indian model. Nor does it establish that 'rule of law' is a preserve of Western civilisation. The king may have doubled as a judge, but there were checks upon his exercise of that prerogative. That is the 'rule of law'. Similarly, market, pluralism and progress are not Western inventions. These ideas are very much compatible with a brahmin-as-a-check system of governance. The dharma of vaisya is to make money. The vaisya makes money only in the market. But, that is still not materialism. Making money as a duty, or as method of exhaustion of one's inner

tendencies of money-making, is both spiritual and market friendly simultaneously. Neither has the West lived with capitalism 'longer than any other civilisation'. Markets have flourished in India ever since the Indus valley civilisation.

Political Economy of West

Buzan and Segal contend that the present Western civilisation is 'both powerful and highly constrained' which makes it eligible to lead the world. Its power is not disputed. The question to be asked is the source and sustainability of this power; and the depth of the so-called 'constrained' exercise of the same. Most, though not all, empires in the history of mankind have arisen on the base of some decisive technological advantage. Egyptians, Sumeric and Indus civilisation arose on the base of their pioneering use of copper weapons. The Greeks and Romans on the strength of iron. The Chinese expansion in mid-second millennium was predicated on gunpowder. The British Empire was propelled by the canon which, in turn, was made possible by the cheap coal lifted by the steam engine. The present Western -- mainly American -- civilisation is based on the technological advances of computers, etc. If past human experience is any guide, these technological advances have a tendency to plateau off -- followed by decline of the pioneers. There is no reason to believe that the fate of the present American civilisation will be different. The West is today consuming a disproportionate share of world's natural resources. This consumption has been made possible in a free market economy in a large measure because of the 'technology rent' secured on its pioneering technologies. As these technologies spread, as they have done throughout human history, this ability of the West to consume world resources will come under strain. The present superiority of the West is delicately balanced between these two opposing tendencies: (1) its strengthening due to the innovation of new technologies; and (2) weakening due to the spread of those very technologies. The concern of the West with Intellectual Property regimes is an indication of this concern. The quick advance of India in IT-related technologies indicates that the ability of the United States to

maintain its lead and to prevent their 'spread' may be much shortening. The second weakness in the Western armour is internal. The lack of balance between the 'self, family, career and society' can nullify the present superiority much as the 'advanced' Roman civilisation fell to the 'primitive' barbarians. The unwillingness of the United States to engage in direct action and take casualties is a pointer in this direction. The superiority of the Western civilisation is therefore under attack from three sources: (1) the spread of technologies such as the nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan; (2) the weakening lead of Western countries in the evolution of new technologies; and (3) the absence of internal balance of the Western people. The present power of the West may not be as secure as it may appear to be. The 'constrained' nature of the Western civilisation is a by-product of this present technological lead. Since technology rent is securing the resources of the world 'efficiently', there is no need to resort to direct military action. The real test will come when, and if, the technology rent eases and the West begins to be deprived of the world resources that it has got used to consuming. Buzan and Segal mention three 'strengths' of the West -- military power, deep rooted democracies and economic and social advance. Military power is suspect because the spread of technology may erode the lead of the West; and the inner imbalance may incapacitate the West at a decisive moment. Political power of democracy is contingent on buying out the votes with income secured from technology rent extraction. Economic power too depends on the technological innovations. There is little social power to boast about. Thus, the power of the West reduces itself to one single strength, which too is suspect, of continued technological innovations and one major weakness of inner numbness. This hardly augurs for giving it the role of global leader.

Social Cohesion

The outward individualism of the West places consumption, even if it be that of 'wilderness', at the centre of human endeavour. 'Sacrifice' of any type is fundamentally contra-ideology. Every individual is expected to grab as much of consumption as possible

for himself. This outward individualism leads to smothering of the inner self and manifests in the increasing prevalence of psychosomatic diseases like obesity, diabetes and cardiac problems in the West. These are symptoms of the increasing level of inner insecurity and emptiness in the West. The inward individualism of India is altogether different. The objective is not a never-ending expansion of consumption, but an exhaustion or transcendence of the desire of consumption. The person, as he evolves, is taught to sacrifice consumption. This makes it possible for synergy between the 'haves' and 'have nots' to be established. The 'haves' give up consumption for which their inner self no longer has any use. This enables the society to be held together. The common man is not alienated from the system. The share of the lowest 20 per cent population in national income in India is 8.1 per cent against 5.9 per cent in China and 5.2 per cent in the United States. It is one indication of the more cohesive society of the Indian culture (World Development Report 2000/01). The Westernistic ideology of individualism does not make possible such a social cohesion to be secured. The result has been the collapse of Rome in the past; and the same may occur soon in the modern West.

Overweening State

The Indian idea of primacy of the social good has yet another element that the identity of 'society' is considered to be separate from that of the State. It is useful to quote at some length from Tagore:

"Today, the thoughts of the Bengali people have been separated from the villages. Today, the responsibility of providing water is that of the government. The burden of health provision is upon the government. For learning also one has to knock at the door of the government. The tree that flowered itself today begs the sky for a rain of flowers with its naked branches."

"The Indian equivalent of the Western 'state' is kingship. But there is a great difference between the two. The West has left all

tasks to the State. We had done so very partially. Knowledge was propagated without the assistance of the kingship. The king definitely honoured the learned. But, the learned were not dependent upon him. If the king suspended all assistance, even then knowledge would continue to be propagated. The village tank did not dry up if the king became insolent. The king may do what he liked. But the people were not dependent upon him for their welfare. Social responsibilities had been divided in an amazing way" (1904:55).

The institutions of family, clan, tribe and caste discharge this crucial role in the Indian culture. Indeed, we should welcome the breaking down of their 'excesses' as Buzan and Segal contend. But that does not mean that these institutions, in the process, necessarily 'blocked the possibilities of individual development'; or that what is required instead is 'more individualism' of the outward Western variety. The West is in deep social trouble precisely because it has dismantled all such institutions and replaced them all with one single state. If the State does turn tyrannous then the individual has no fall back support mechanism left to appeal for support. That is the story of Nazi Germany. What is, therefore, presented as a decadent leftover of the Eastern civilisation by Buzan and Segal is actually its strength which the West should emulate. Of course, this is not to defend the ossified structures of many of these Indian institutions. It is inadequate for Buzan and Segal to make a blank statement that 'Western societies have now learned that individuals also require a supportive society'. It was imperative for them to outline the contours of such society. It is precisely such a supportive society that family, clan, tribe and caste discharged and thankfully continue to do so.

The resurgence of India under Rajiv Gandhi was made possible only because these institutions -- separated from the demeaning influence of the overweening British state -- continued to support the Indian people. Even today, the family and caste structures are India's answer -- a much more efficient and non-exploitative one--

to the Western welfare state. The refusal of the Indian society to deprive the woman in the share of her father's property at the time of marriage is reflected in the continuation of the dowry system. The conduit provided for the poor of Bihar to migrate to the megacities by their caste and village brotherhood is yet another example of these non-state structures in operation. The 'langars' run in the Gurdwaras are a social system to take care of the destitutes. This non-state social dynamism is not merely a theoretical nicety, but a living reality.

Buzan and Segal make the mistake of throwing the baby of 'family, clan, tribe and caste' along with the bath water of their excesses. They do not realise that the West has not even started thinking of creating such non-state support structures and has not dealt with the problem of managing individualism along with.

Civil Society and Human Rights

The Western notion of civil society is 'purchasable'. He who pays the piper calls the tune. There are numerous unscrupulous NGOs which pedal the vested interests of their masters. The theoretical problem is that it is presumed in this notion that mere formal structure would make an institution 'civil'. There is no understanding of the inner tendencies or motivations which cause an individual to form an NGO. There are numerous examples of the so-called rule of law and civil society collapsing before a State. General Musharraf, for example, simply shunted out those judges of the Supreme Court who refuse to toe his line. Unless the civil society is rooted independently in society it cannot resist the tyranny of the State. Unless it is manned by the Brahmins who have transcended their 'lower' desires of money and power, they can be made willing accomplices of the State in perpetuation of state tyranny. The civil society in World War Germany would be one example. It is not recognised that the securing of human rights of the people of the West often is a reflection of their denial elsewhere. The United States has a not-so-clean record of wheeling and dealing with 'violinist' China. The inflow of US investments

makes it possible for the Chinese government to finance that same repression. Similarly, democracy flourished in England while her government actively suppressed democracy in the colonies.

East Asian Growth

There is nothing 'Westernistic' about the IMF conditionalities, imposed upon East Asia. Their only speciality is that they give precedence to the rights of capital over those of human beings. The fundamental contradiction of IMF-sponsored globalisation is that it seeks free movement of capital without at the same time enabling free movement of labour. The result can well be, as it has been in many a country, that the capital -- both foreign and domestic -- can flow out while the labour is forcibly bound within the national boundaries. It is by no means established that global capital will flow to every nook and corner of the globe if 'macro-economic stability' prevails there. The result has been, though not yet fully visible, that East Asia may have lost its own capital to the global market place. Africa had followed much the same foreign investment -- led growth policy in the sixties, and many countries had attracted higher per capita foreign investment than East Asia in its heyday. Yet, those countries languish today. The reason is that initial inflow of foreign capital can become an instrument of long-term outflow of the same. The idea of free global movement of capital along with a restricted movement of human beings emanates from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The economic rights, such as the right to migrate in search of work, or access to public services enshrined in the Declaration, are restricted to be operative within the national borders. The political rights which enable the Security Council to intervene in the internal affairs of the developing countries, on the other hand, are universal in operation. This selectivity makes it possible for Human Rights to be converted into an instrument of deprivation of the developing countries. The industrial countries can intervene to prevent an alleged violations of political human rights in a developing country; but the deprived people of that country cannot claim the economic human rights from the intervenors. Other components of the IMF package are not

Westernistic at all. The reduction of fiscal deficit and limited role of the State in economic activity, for example, are well-enshrined in the Manu Smriti and appear to have been actually implemented in long periods of Indian history.

Indian Vision

The one statement that one would agree with Buzan and Segal is that 'there is not much in the way of wide political vision in Asia'. This is unfortunately true. But that does not establish that the Western vision is either correct or sustainable. The weakness of another need not be a strength of one's own. This task now falls to India. China and Japan have, as already said, sold their souls to the Westernistic civilisation. Communist China was essentially Westernistic. Jawaharlal Nehru started the process of this Westernisation in India, but met with stiff social resistance and had to backtrack. There are two components of this Indian vision that may be briefly stated here. The objective of human life will be inward individualism-with-outward sacrifice. This would remove the conflict of heart and mind that is the cause of much individual discord in the West. It would also make it possible to establish social cohesion by instituting outward sacrifice-for-inner growth. Yet, it would simultaneously enable to build a materially prosperous society. Secondly, the political economy would have to be that of globally free movement of labour along with capital. The people of the developing and developed countries alike will then be able to benefit from globalisation. This is the vision that India must come up with. It is not so much a question of Asians losing 'their chance of playing a major role in the process of remaking the West' as it is a question of Asia, may be India, establishing a role model of individual happiness and social cohesion along with market economy and material prosperity for the West to follow.

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