

Muslim
civilization
and the
crisis in
IRAN

Ravi Batra

ABOUT THE BOOK

On December 5, 1978, the author declared before an audience of 300 students and professors at the University of Oklahoma at Norman that the Shah of Iran would be replaced by priests in 1979. This is precisely what happened in February 1979. Later in Fall 1979, the author told his class of 40 students, studying Self and Society at Southern Methodist University, that there would be a war between Iran and Iraq in 1980-81, an event that occurred in September 1980. The author claims that his conclusions derived not from astrology or psychic ability but from a scientific study of history, based on a theory of social cycle written by a profound Indian scholar, P. R. Sarkar.

This book, a sequel to the author's previous work, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: A New Study of History*, deals with the reasoning that led Dr. Batra to his conclusions about the future of Iran and Iraq. It finds that, as with other societies, ancient Persia and Muslim Civilization also evolved in tune with Sarkar's theory of history. The book ends with the argument that while the forthcoming turmoil of Islam is likely to bring about the Downfall of Capitalism, and even Communism, in the next two decades (beginning with 1985-86), new ideas of universalism originating from India are likely to generate a new world society.

\$8.00

"When Ravi Batra talks, people listen.

Batra, a professor of economics at Vanderbilt University, predicted the Iran-Iraq war two weeks before it started, and on December 5, 1978, he predicted the Shah of Iran would lose his throne—which happened January 16, 1979."

THE TENNESSEAN, October 14, 1980

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Raveendra (Ravi) Batra is Professor of Economics at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., having previously taught at Hindu College, Delhi, Southern Illinois University and the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of *Studies in the Pure Theory of International Trade*, *The Pure Theory of International Trade Under Uncertainty*, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: A New Study of History*, and *Prout: The Alternative to Capitalism and Marxism*. He has also authored numerous articles on world economic problems in learned journals. An article in *Economic Inquiry*, October 1978, ranks him as one of the top five economist "superstars" in universities in North America. For 1980-81, he is a Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

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**MUSLIM CIVILIZATION
AND THE CRISIS IN
IRAN**

Ravi Batra

From the Same Author

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To all those unsung martyrs who
died fighting tyranny in Iran and
Afghanistan

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND PRINTING

The first printing of this book occurred in July, 1980. The second printing was done in U.S.A. even as a bloody war raged between Iran and Iraq, an event that I had predicted in Fall 1979 before a class of 40 students studying Self and Society (Course No. 1301) at Southern Methodist University, Dallas. In Fall 1980, I moved to Nashville to spend a year as a Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University. There, on September 3rd, in my third lecture to a class of 82 students, studying International Economics (Course No. 260), I repeated my prediction about the possibility of a war between Iran and Iraq in 1980-81. Barely three weeks later, war did break out between the two nations, something that electrified my students as they had been forewarned about it. Many questions were raised in my class, giving me a chance to explain my reasoning contained in this book. Among those who enthusiastically participated in the discussion were the following. I am thankful to them for letting me cite their names in this work.

Munir Abu Ghazeleh, Ann Marie Benatar
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October, 1980

Ravi Batra

PREFACE

This book, a sequel to my earlier work, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: A New Study of History*, presents a new interpretation of Muslim Civilization. It throws unconventional light on the conflict and cohesion that is now occurring in the world of Islam. Muslim lands are slowly gaining importance in the world. The revival of Islam is a subject of frequent discussion among many scholars. The present work explains this revival in a historical context, not in terms of the standard text-book listing of important events, but in terms of an analysis of society which is shown to follow a certain pattern in its evolution. Islam today is on the rise because of the inevitable law of reverse justice explained in chapter 8. It is coming back to haunt the West which ruthlessly exploited it from the 19th century to the middle of the 20th. Many of my conclusions will surprise the reader, but then any new approach leads to novel arguments.

The present book, as with much of my recent work, centers around Sarkar's philosophy of history. As a result, I owe a great intellectual debt to P. R. Sarkar whose prodigious work lies at the heart of my investigation. I am also grateful to my friend and student, Muhammad Ghanayem, who initiated and then sustained my interest in Islamic history. Thanks are also due to Mr. Munir Bayoud, Director of the Arab Information Center in Dallas, for lending me several volumes dealing with contemporary Muslim society. Wahab Khandekar and Kashi Nath Tiwari were quite generous with their time in reading the final draft. Finally speedy and accurate typing by Sheryl St. Germain, Elaine Brack, Alice McCaulley and Arlene Underwood deserves credit for the appearance of this work in time.

Dallas, Texas
June, 1980

Ravi Batra

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SARKAR'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CYCLE	5
Characteristics of Human Mind	5
Theory of Social Cycle	11
3. CLASS ATTITUDES AND HUMAN EXPLOITATION	17
The Shudran Era	17
The Khatrian Era	21
The Vipran Era	26
The Vashyan Era	33
Process of Social Change	37
Conflict Among Societies	42
The Testing Procedure	43
4. CIVILIZATION OF PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN	45
Early Aryans and the Khatrian Age	47
Prophet Zoroaster	51
Magian Priesthood and the Vipran Age	57
Parthian Feudalism and the Vashyan Age	68
Ardashir and the Shudran Revolution	79
Sasanid Period and the New Khatrian Age	81
5. MUSLIM CIVILIZATION	91
The Imperial Khatrian Age	94
Wazirs and the Vipran Age	104
Mongol Domination and the Khatrian Age	120
The Second Vipran Era (16th to 19th Century)	131
Western Influence and the Vashyan Era	138

6. CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETY	147
Political Developments during the 20th Century	150
Saudi Arabia	152
United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Kuwait	159
Centralized Governments	161
Conclusion	169
7. CRISIS IN IRAN	171
Reza Shah	172
Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi	174
Ayatullah Khomeini	185
8. ISLAM, CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM	191
The International Role of Islam	195
Islam and Communism	201
The Role of India	203
What is Prout?	205
<i>Index</i>	212

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On December 5, 1978, in a lecture at the University of Oklahoma at Norman, I declared before an audience of 300 students and professors that the Shah of Iran would be overthrown in 1979 and that the priests would take over the reins of government. Since then I have been surprised not by the events in Iran, only by their timing. I had expected the fall of the Shah around the middle of 1979; it occurred five months earlier instead.

How is it that I was able to foresee the upheaval in Iran with some accuracy? I am no astrologer, no psychic, nor even a palmist. But I am a student of history. I had been fascinated by a new philosophy of history authored by an Indian scholar, P.R. Sarkar. My interest in history began in earnest in 1976 when I chanced to read Sarkar's theory of social cycle, a theory that appeared so realistic and general that I decided to see for myself if in fact it had been validated by the pattern of events in various civilizations. I studied the history of four different societies--Egyptian, Western, Russian and Indo-Aryan--and came to the conclusion that each one of them had indeed evolved in accordance with the pattern described by Sarkar's philosophy. My research into the human past had by then become all but obsessive. A by-product of that obsession was my book, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: A New Study of History*, which was completed towards the end of 1977. The book explained the theory of social cycle, argued that it was more general than the views of Marx and Toynbee combined, and then showed that the history of the four societies mentioned above fit neatly into Sarkar's pattern. The book was to be released by Macmillan, London, on March 1, 1979. It dealt only with four civilizations and predicted the future of Western, Russian and

Indo-Aryan societies. The predictions indicated turmoil, upheavals and revolutions by the year 2000, unless something was done in time.

In 1978, after completing the book, I turned to the study of other civilizations, notably the Chinese and the Muslim. I am an economist by training and profession. The word had gotten around about my sudden foray into history and the unusual nature of my conclusions. In November 1978, I received an invitation from Dr. Eden Yu of the economics department and from Mr. Muhammad Waziri, the secretary of Omicron Delta Epsilon, to visit the University of Oklahoma and give two lectures. They insisted that, among other things, I speak on the downfall of capitalism and communism. So it was that on the 5th of December I found myself facing a sizable audience of students and professors at Norman.

I talked about Sarkar's philosophy of history and its application to Western society. I claimed that the theory could explain current, past and future events all over the world. A student asked me a question about the events in Iran which had then been in turmoil for about six months. I had by then studied Persian history and Muslim civilization. A careful application of Sarkar's philosophy to Muslim history had led me to conclude that the Shah was soon going to be replaced by priests. Similiar events had been repeated so often in other civilizations before, and I expected them to be repeated in Iran as well. My reply astonished many who were present, for no one, in his right mind, could imagine the rise of Iranian theologians in the near future. Some political pundits indeed were at the time predicting a possible realignment of forces in Iran, but not as drastic an upheaval as I contemplated.

Following my lecture, I had lengthy discussion with another Iranian student, Mr. Mahmoud Motavasseli, who was opposed to the Shah's regime and quite sympathetic to the protesters in Iran. He was anxious to know if the new government would last a long time. Of this I was not so sure. In any case our discussion was inconclusive. Mr. Motavasseli argued that the new regime would endure forever, whereas I was evasive, insisting that nothing in the world was permanent. I am more certain of my conclusions now, for I have had a chance to carefully analyze the Iranian revolution since then. My views about the future of Muslim and other countries are presented in Chapters 7 and 8. The reader may be surprised by them just as much as my audience at Norman.

The present volume, a sequel to my previous work on history, deals with the reasoning that led me to my conclusion that the Shah would be replaced by the priests. It explores the application of the theory of social cycle to Muslim civilization, analyzes the recent upheaval in Iran in that light, and then examines the future of the Muslim world. How that future is likely to shape international events and then be shaped by them in turn is also examined in detail.

Sarkar's philosophy, in some respects, is a generalization of the theory of history by Ibn Khaldun who wrote a masterly work on society as early as the 14th century. The reader will be able to see, as in chapter 5, that the drama of history captured by Khaldun's words is fully explained by the law of social cycle.

The organization of the book is as follows: Chapters 2 and 3 deal with Sarkar's theory of history. Chapters 4 and 5 show how this theory applies to ancient Persia and to Muslim

civilization. Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with the 20th century society in the Arab countries and Iran. Finally, chapter 8 examines how the world of Islam and India are likely to affect international events in the next 2 to 3 decades. It ends with the conclusion that while Islam is likely to bring about the downfall of capitalism, and even communism, new ideas originating from India are likely to bring about a reconstruction of society in the aftermath of international conflict. All this emerges from an application of the law of social cycle with which the next chapter begins.

Chapter 2

SARKAR'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CYCLE

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar is a man of great knowledge and a leading Indian philosopher. He has written several books and articles concerning spiritual philosophy, history, and current economic and social problems. His approach to all subjects is novel and original. This chapter examines his theory of social cycle which argues that the history of every society follows a definite pattern. In generality and breadth, Sarkar's hypothesis excels those written before, including the contributions by such well known authors as Marx, Toynbee and Spengler. In a short, simple but profound work, it finally answers the heated criticism that has generally greeted the previous theories of historical determinism.

Characteristics of Human Mind

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

Sarkar begins with the characteristics of human mind. He argues that even though most people in society have similar goals and ambitions, their methods of achieving their objectives may differ from person to person, depending on the inner mentality. Most of us, for instance, want living comforts and social prestige. But some of us try to attain them through mental skills, some through physical skills, and some through accumulating wealth. Finally, some people have little ambition in life and they form a class by themselves. Thus, according to Sarkar basically society is composed

of four types of people, each with a different frame of mind. People have common objectives, but their methods of attaining those objectives differ because of differences in their mental characteristics. Some by nature are warriors (or soldiers), some intellectuals; some are capitalists, and some laborers. This way there are four broad groups or classes in a community. Thus Sarkar differs sharply from Marx and other socialists who define classes on economic grounds-- on the basis of income and wealth. Sarkar, of course, does not neglect the economic aspect, but to him it is only one of the four aspects describing the totality of society. Class divisions, in his view, exist, and have existed ever since the birth of Civilization, because of inherent differences in human nature.

The four types of people mentioned above do not, of course, cover the full range of society. There are many variations among the stated groups. Among laborers, for instance, some are highly skilled and some unskilled. Similarly, capitalists did not exist in the past in several societies. In order to provide class definitions independent of time and space, Sarkar goes deep into human behavior and starts with the fundamentals -- with characteristics of the mind which he divides into four distinct areas. That is why every society basically comprises only four types of people which he groups into *Shudras*, *Khatris*, *Vipras*, and *Vashyas*.

To a scholar of Indo-Aryan civilization, these groups relate either to the caste system still lingering in India, or, as in ancient times, to one's occupation. But to Sarkar they convey an altogether different meaning and significance: they simply reflect four types of mind, each manifesting itself in nothing else but one's actions, thinking,

and outlook towards life. Of course, given the freedom of choice, the mental make-up is also reflected in one's occupation. Therefore in the case of society's privileged classes, which are usually free to make such choice, the profession is a true gauge of their mentality.

A Shudra-mind is one that is completely dominated by the environment surrounding it. It is passive, and unintelligent relative to the other types, and those whose actions and behavior reveal such mentality are the ones called Shudras. The Shudran mind fails to do anything subtle or intellectual, for it is ruled by materialistic thoughts which run parallel to the crude waves of matter. Sarkar believes that every entity in this universe emits certain waves and vibrations which the naked eye cannot perceive. The waves of the Shudran mind are similar to those of inert matter, and therefore a Shudra cannot control material forces or the physical environment in which he or she lives. Unskilled workers, peasants, serfs generally belong, or have in the past belonged, to this class.

Exceptions, of course, may be found in all these occupations. Some peasants or farm workers may be persons of keen intelligence, or there may be other physical workers who perform hard labor not by choice but under social oppression. Such persons are not, of course, Shudras. Similarly, in virtually all societies in the past slavery was a common institution and slaves were forced to do the servile, physical work. But in no way does it mean that the slaves were Shudras. A Shudra is simply one who performs physical labor either by choice, or because he or she is unable to acquire technical skills. Even though possessing some physical strength, Shudras lack the initiative, ambition and drive to succeed in the world: seldom do they

shine in society.

The mind that is moved by the spirit of controlling matter is the Khatrian mind. "To make a slave of matter," says Sarkar, "is the wont of a Khatri." [2, p. 14]. Thus, a Khatri is one who loves adventure, is full of courage and high-spiritedness, has natural curiosity to learn new ways, and applies his physical strength and skills to solve his problems. Since the Khatrian intellect is subtler (more intelligent) than the Shudran intellect, the Khatri makes the Shudra do a considerable amount of his work. The Khatrian class is usually composed of army officers, policemen, fire-fighters, skilled workers, adventurers, professional athletes, etc.--anyone who struggles to solve problems directly and by taking physical risks.

A Vipran mind is one that is more prone to intellectual pursuits than the Khatrian mind. A Vipra is as ambitious as a Khatri, but unlike the Khatri whose occupation requires physical strength and risks, the Vipra uses his intellectual ability to attain the comforts of life. Vipras are basically intellectuals. The Vipran mind is more intelligent than the Khatrian mind; hence in social interactions as well as in politics, the Vipra eventually comes to prevail over the Khatri. Thus the ambitious Vipras, lacking in Khatrian courage and fearlessness, try to dominate society by controlling the Khatrian mind and through it the Shudra. In Sarkar's words, "The Khatri wants to bring matter under his subjection by a direct fight and the Vipra wants to keep the Khatri, the conqueror of matter, under his own subjection through the battle of wits." [2, p. 36]. Thus, a Khatri's behavior is straight and simple, not difficult to read, but Vipras usually approach a problem in a roundabout way. They devise theories,

cults and dogmas to confuse the Khatri and take advantage of his intellectual poverty.

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

Finally, we come to the Vashyan mind. Most people want enjoyment from material things, but the Vashyan mind also has a craving for their accumulation. In fact, Vashyas, according to Sarkar, "are more partial to possession than to the enjoyment from material objects--want to feel peace in the mind thinking of them or feasting on them with their eyes." [2, p. 101]. Of the three intervals of time, the Vashyan mind worries constantly about the future and seeks to amass wealth for a rainy day. At some point in time, the rich Vashya comes to dominate the other three groups by purchasing their services with his wealth. In other words, accumulation of wealth is the lever through which the Vashya seeks not only the comforts of life and the security of future, but also prestige and power in society. Not all Vashyas, of course, are interested in politics, but those who are, usually rise in society by hiring the Vipras. However, before this, Khatri were working for Vipras, and Shudras for the Khatri. So at some point in time all non-Vashyan sections work for men of fortune--for those having acquisitive mentality.

Let me illustrate the difference in the four

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

Looking at any society, we find that national defense and law and order are generally in the hands of Khatri, education and religion in the hands of Vipras, commerce, industry and land-ownership in the hands of Vashyas, whereas physical labor in factories and farms is generally performed by Shudras.

Wherever civilization developed, in Africa, Asia, Europe or anywhere else, a careful examination of history reveals this four-pronged division of the social order. Sarkar calls it the "quadri-divisional social system." His categories of mind are broad enough to cover the full range of a mature society. Thus every civilization, which is what we call a mature society, is composed of four sections, each comprising people reflecting the predominance of a certain type of mind. Ordinarily, individual behavior displays two, or even all, of the four attitudes, but, for the most part and especially under duress, only one mentality shows its true colors. There is a bit of Vashya or acquisitive instinct in each and every one of us, but only a few constantly long for money and make it the summum bonum of life. We are all after a

comfortable living standard and social prestige, but some of us attempt to attain them through physical strength and skills, some through intellectual pursuits and excellence, and some by ceaselessly saving money or making more money with money already at hand. In this order, we are Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas. Those of us with little ambition or drive, lacking basic education and skills of the time are the Shudras.

It is worth noting that Sarkar's division of society into four different groups is very flexible. Social mobility among the groups may occur if an individual's mental characteristics change over time. Through concerted effort or through prolonged contact with others, a person may move into the realm of the other class. For example, a Shudra, under the command of a warrior may become a genuine Khatri, or through vigorous education he or she may become a Vipra, and so on. Similarly the Vipran intellect, through contact with money, may turn into the acquisitive intellect of a Vashya, or a Vashya may turn into a Shudra. Thus even though class distinctions in society, according to Sarkar, derive from differences in human nature, they may or may not be hereditary.

The Theory of Social Cycle

Having described the four types of people in society, I am now in a position to present Sarkar's theory of social cycle. In accordance with his quadri-divisional social system, Sarkar argues that a society evolves over time in terms of four distinct eras. Sometimes Khatris, sometimes Vipras and sometimes Vashyas dominate the social and political system. Shudras never hold the reigns, but at times the ruling class becomes so selfish that for a while society may have to move through the disorder of Shudran times. Thus no single group

can exercise social supremacy and power forever. What is more interesting is that the movements of society from one era to another follows a clear-cut pattern. Specifically, in the development of every civilization, ancient or modern, oriental or occidental,

the Shudran era is to be followed by the Khatrian era, the Khatrian era by the Vipran era and the Vipran era by the Vashyan era, culminating in a social revolution--such a social evolution is the infallible Law of Nature. [2, p. 40].

This is Sarkar's law of social cycle. Note the word "evolution." This law of nature is "infallible," because it is based on evolutionary principles. Just as human evolution is indisputable, just as the onward march of humanity along the evolutionary ladder cannot be arrested, so is this movement of social cycle an inevitable natural phenomenon, whereby social power shifts from one section of society to another. Thus underneath the seemingly haphazard change in society lies the invisible but unmistakable imprint of certain laws of Nature: Social evolution goes hand in hand with human evolution.

It is in such definite terms that Sarkar conveys his message. To him society is a dynamic entity, and constant change is its essence. A civilization emerges with the rise of warriors, and, after considerable ups and downs through the eras of intellectuals, acquirers, and physical laborers, it goes back to the warrior age, only to resume its evolutionary march in tune with the same old rhythm. This, in short, is Sarkar's social cycle.

How do we recognize the Shudran era or the era of laborers? The society of Shudras is one that suffers from complete lack of guidance, leadership and authority; one where the so called leaders become so egocentric that the majority of people, following in their footsteps, display Shudran mentality, a mentality ruled by instinctive behavior, greed and pure self-concern. The Shudran era is then characterized by near anarchy, by a lack of social order. There the family ties are not binding, people laugh at higher values and finer things of life, morals are extremely loose, crime is rampant, and materialism permeates society to the core. People of Shudra-like propensities exist at all places and in all civilizations, but it is only when society lacks all purpose and the oppression of the masses by the class of acquirers is at the maximum that the Shudran era begins. The state or government may exist in the Shudran era, but its authority is not respected. And in any case the Shudras, despite their majority, do not control the government. The important point is that the Shudran era arises because of the selfishness of the dominant groups who care nothing for how their actions affect others. For instance, India and many Western countries today are passing through the Shudran age.

The Khatrian era, or the era of warriors, in terms of the political and social structure, is totally opposite to the Shudran era where, as stated above, laborers are in the majority but the government, if any, is controlled by a different group of people. In the Khatrian age, the Khatri-minded persons, though not necessarily in the majority, dominate society as well as the government. There the political authority is extremely centralized in the form of an absolute government, people are highly disciplined, family ties are morally binding, social prestige through physical

feats is earnestly sought, women are well respected in society and so on. Vipras and Vashyas enjoy some respect in the Khatrian era, although they have little say in governance. But Shudras perform physical labor for the Khatri, and in the closing stage of this period, as in that of every other era, they are mercilessly exploited. However, at the dawn of the Khatrian era, the ruler respects their contribution and treats them with care and compassion.

The Vipran era is marked by the rise of priests or other intellectuals, though here again the ruling class does not have to have a majority. Many new theories dealing with various aspects of life are then born. Intellectuals always rule by controlling warriors who alone can maintain law and order in society. Hence the Vipran age is the age of indirect rule. Looking back at various civilizations, we find that at times Vipras ruled as priests, and at others as prime ministers. But in all cases, they ruled in the name of the apparent ruler, the king, who was overshadowed by his advisers. This the intellectuals were able to do by confusing the mind of the warrior with the help of their complex theories. In order to block independent thinking by others, the intellectuals devised catchy but illogical dogmas. One such dogma, popular in all civilizations at one time or another, was, and is, that woman is inherently inferior to man [1, Ch. 2]. As a result, social respect for women went down in Vipran eras.

The Vashyan era bears close resemblance to the final stages of the Vipran era where Khatri and Shudras undergo exploitation which is intellectual in nature. The Vipras, however, are no longer at the top, rather they work for the class of the rich. It is in this era that the practical value

of things is reduced literally to zero. Everything is valued in terms of dollars and pennies. Human values begin to disappear. Art, music, religion, sports, everything is commercialized. Crime flourishes, family ties again become loose, and gradually the Vashyan age heads toward the lawlessness of the Shudran age. At the end of a Vashyan era, all non-Vashyan groups are economically exploited by the greed of the Vashyas. Society then passes through a period, which may be very brief, of the Shudran age, only to end in a social revolution, following which it resumes its march in terms of another Khatrian era, and so on.

Note that in every age other than the Vashyan era, the transfer of government may come about through social evolution or revolution of the Shudras, but the Vashyan era always ends in a revolution. This rotation of social power along the hub of Khatris, Vipras and Vashyas culminating in the Shudran revolution is Sarkar's law of social cycle. In his view some countries today are in the last phase of the Khatrian age; at places the Vipran era is about to be established, whereas in Muslim and democratic countries, the Vashyan or the Shudran period is in vogue.

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1. Batra, R., *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: A New Study of History*, Macmillan, London, and Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1978.
2. Sarkar, P. R., *The Human Society, Part II*, Ananda Marga Press, 854 Pearl Street, Denver, Colorado, 1967.

Chapter 3

CLASS ATTITUDES AND HUMAN EXPLOITATION

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

The Shudran Era

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

What distinguishes a civilization from a primitive community has for some time been a matter of controversy among historians. Sarkar's division of society into four classes in accordance with their mental characteristics, however, suggests a straightforward definition. Using his concepts, a primitive society is one where all its members display Shudran mentality, so that it has little chance of growing out of ignorant and savage existence. The rise of civilizations may then be ascribed to the rise of persons with non-Shudran mentality, especially those endowed with Khatrian qualities.

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

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

At the embryonic stage of the human race,
when human bearing or Man-ness had first

moulded itself out of animality, the then people also, like the people of today, had found only two paths open to them-- the path of Shudrahood, and the path of triumphing over matter and mind through the thought of subtlety, i.e., the path of Khatrihood. In those days they had to be so preoccupied with material thoughts due to their being in the midst of hostile environments of nature that they all had to remain involved with the Shudra-like thoughts. [4, p. 10].

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Khatrian Era

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

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

Going back to ancient times, it may be seen

that the Khatrian era began with the Neolithic period or the New Stone Age, which seems to have been established by 3000 B.C., although in Egypt it had settled by as early as 5000 B.C. The Neolithic age is marked by the beginning of agriculture and by the domestication of animals. This is the period when men and women began to live out of caves to attain a better mastery over environment than their forefathers. What else but a Khatrian spirit could have inspired them to go out and look for dependable sources of food? In the words of Burns and Ralph, "whereas all the men who had lived heretofore were mere food-gatherers, Neolithic man was a food-producer." [2, p. 13].

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

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

According to Sarkar, however, the sovereign state can be traced mainly to the rise of some powerful men, endowed with Khatrian disposition and superior physical force, who chose not to be cowed by nature. Those who fought their environment with some success must have inspired Shudras with awe and admiration. In the Shudran epoch of yore, there were no institutions of family, state and property. Khatris emerged from what Sarkar calls

"the socio-psychic transmutation" of Shudras under the stress of physical and mental clash generated by the hostility of natural surroundings. When the Shudras organized under the emblem of a Khatri, social evolution, in Sarkar's view, occurred in human history for the first time. In this way, several groups and tribes, each led and commanded by a Khatri, came into being.

Although traces of Neolithic culture can be observed in places even today, it is supposed to have ended when metal was discovered. In Egypt it terminated as early as 4000 B.C., and in Europe by 2000 B.C. [2]. In most other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and Persia, where primitive societies were replaced by ancient civilizations, the Neolithic epoch came to an end around 3000 B.C. However, the Khatrian era seems to have continued with few interruptions, although, in accordance with general human evolution, it underwent drastic changes. In order to distinguish the earliest Khatrian epoch of a society from the later ones, a distinction important to ancient civilizations, the Neolithic period may be called the tribal Khatrian age.

In the immediate post-Neolithic age, the Khatrian era is represented by the supremacy of royalties--kings, emperors, monarchs, dictators. The ancient Egypt, the Rig-Vedic age in India, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and ancient Persia are prime examples of societies where a distinction needs to be made between tribal Khatrian era and the subsequent imperial Khatrian age.

In the Khatrian age, the sense of discipline, first in the family and then in society, is extremely strong and for this reason women enjoy a high social status, at least higher than their stature in other eras. In the Neolithic period, many different tribes were led by warlike Khatrias. Being

constantly at war with each other, they soon discovered the importance of numerical strength. Fast growth of population thus became their common objective, an objective in which women were at least equal partners. On this account, and to maintain the purity of blood, brave and daring women were honored as Group Mothers in the Neolithic times. Thus the early Khatrian society was governed by a matriarch who provided lineal identity to every man and woman belonging to a particular clan.

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

The Khatrian art also reflected a certain type of mind. A Khatri by nature is courageous and fearless. This mentality found expression in the deification of lions and elephants, animals that are masters of jungles, and embody fearlessness and might. The lion and elephant heads that one finds on human torsos of stone in ancient Egypt and India

are simply manifestations of Khatrian manliness and valor. Phallus worship that prevailed in many Khatrian societies of yore also reflects their need for growth of population, a need arising from incessant tribal warfare.

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

During Paleolithic times also, there were frequent fights among the Shudras, but they were initiated solely by self-preservation. In the Khatrian era, however, Khatri, and their soldiers recruited from the ranks of the Shudras, warred for their own survival as well as that of others. Whereas Shudras had fought for food and shelter, the Khatri fought for dignity and self-esteem as well. In due time, however, the Khatrian rulers became more authoritarian; they lost much of their early benevolence, and as a result the Shudran soldiers and laborers were mercilessly exploited. Their domains also expanded manifold; many tribes were unified after lengthy warfare into vast kingdoms headed by monarchs and emperors. In the holocausts that the Khatri unleashed on each other, Shudras were the helpless participants. And for what? For the momentary ego gratification of the megalomaniac warrior who craved supremacy over the entire world. In most Khatrian societies, the

bloody wars of conquests portended the end of Khatrian domination and the birth of Vipran influence. At the end of the Khatrian era, Vipras in the guise of priests or prime ministers came to power in every civilization.

The Vipran Era

The despotic governments of the Khatrias were fundamentally unstable, for nothing based on fire and sword can command obedience from the people for long. The absolute rulers had felt the need for theories that could justify their arbitrary rule. In this they were ably assisted by those endowed with superior intellect--the Vipras. To pursue their own careers, the intellectuals volunteered theories that justified the ruler's absolute authority over his people. Thus were born such concepts as the infallibility of monarchs and the divine right of kings. That is why, in the heyday of Khatrian age Vipras enjoyed a social status second only to Khatrias. Therefore when the Khatrian influence declined as a result of their wars, the power and leadership vacuum could be filled only by the Vipras who alone commanded enough respect and authority at the time. Everywhere do we find that Vipras came to power in the aftermath of the bloodshed caused by the Khatrian warfare. In the West, for instance, the Catholic Church rose to primacy after the fall of the Khatrian Roman empire.

The Vipran mind has been defined as one that lacks the gallantry of the Khatrias but abounds in foresight and keenness of intellect. In general a Vipra is cautious and pragmatic; he or she relishes comfort but not the physical labor that it requires. Actually his physique is not built for this purpose. Consequently, the Vipras attain power only by defeating the Khatrias in the intellectual arena. They rule indirectly--through

their control over the apparent Khatrian ruler who alone has the physical and mental aptitude to keep order in society. Whenever, and wherever, the Vipras perceived that the time for their rule had come, they devised new cults and dogmas rationalizing their hold on the people. First they managed to convince the Khatri of the possibility of his perdition after death, and then concocted rituals so complex that the confused Khatri earnestly sought their religious service. This the Vipras were more than glad to provide in exchange, of course, for political power and all the creature comforts.

After outwitting the Khatri, the Vipras set out to inject baseless fears and prejudices in other classes as well. Once the apparent Khatrian ruler was won over, it was just a matter of time before the rest of society yielded to their self-serving doctrines. Thus we find that in every civilization all non-Vipran groups were once caught in the stranglehold of theories by priests, theologians and other scholars.

One of the most remarkable features of the Vipran age, as mentioned earlier, is the indirect rule of the Vipran class. The apparent or direct ruler is a mere puppet in the hands of Vipras who pull all the strings. For this reason, the Vipran groups enjoy the best of all worlds: in case of victory, the glory is theirs; in case of defeat, the blemish falls on the Khatri. The structure of government and administrative machinery in the Vipran era changes little from that prevailing in the Khatrian age, except that now, because of the weakness of the apparent ruler, the real authority is exercised by someone behind the scenes. Yet Vipras need the Khatri to maintain their control over the general public, and, therefore, the Vipran society is somewhat decentralized in comparison to the Khatrian regime: The apparent ruler is no

longer absolute, nor is the indirect ruler.

Digging deep into the pages of history, one discovers that at times Vipras ruled as priests, at others as elected representatives of the people. In any case their rule was indirect, in the name of a figurehead--the King. At times the Vipran primacy can be ascribed to their control over the church, at others to their gifts of oratory and scholarship. During the Middle Ages, for instance, many kings and princes were overshadowed by the Pope heading the Catholic Church. In Muslim society, the Caliph was at times controlled by his wazir. Similarly, in England, following the Glorious Revolution of 1689, the King had to play second fiddle to his prime minister. History abounds in such examples. Thus, according to Sarkar, whenever the intellectual assets of a group enable it to dominate society, usually in the name of an apparent ruler, the Vipran era prevails.

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

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

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

This fundamental anomaly can be appreciated only by a superior intellect, which the Vipras alone are fortunate to have. That penetrating faculty which can see reality behind limited

existence belongs only to the Vipran mind. Therefore some Vipras, through intense longing and search for truth, come to attain illumination in their hearts. To be sure, very few persons have ever attained these dizzying heights, but such sages have emerged in the past and will emerge in the future. Indeed, without them the cosmic ideas of universalism and brotherly love would never have been born.

The most important legacy of Vipran eras to humanity then lies in spreading the cosmopolitan ideas of these prophets who proclaimed spiritual ideals without compromising with narrowness and bigotry. However, some of their followers subsequently contrived rituals merely to perpetuate their own control over society. The prophets had donated invaluable pearls, the charlatans reduced these pearls to dogmas; the sages had preached the sermon of God's love and mercy, the imposters proceeded to spread it through fire and sword. And this happened not just at one place, not just in one country, but in all civilizations. The history of Khattris was written by the pen of blood. There were chivalry and valor in it, but no wisdom and sagacity. The Vipran age, on the other hand, was marked by hypocrisy as well as gruesome warfare which--unlike the Khattrian period where wars gave vent to personal ambition--was rooted mainly in fanaticism.

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

Acknowledging the priest as a messenger of some sage, the common people held him in high regard. They readily handed over their labor, daughters and wealth to the quacks who were always the "reluctant" beneficiaries. And in case any greedy heretic wanted to withhold his donations or question their conduct, the priests were ever ready to put a curse on the gullible man. The irony of it all is that the masses trusted them, and in places continue to trust them today.

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

In the Vipran era, however, woman came to be regarded as inherently inferior to man. In the Khatrian era, at least in its first half, the Khatri's manliness enabled him to treat woman, despite her physical weakness, on a more or less equal footing with man. A Vipra, however, lacks the Khatrian courage, and consequently is always afraid of insubordination by other groups. He has to be, lest the muscular Khatri and Shudras see through his shaky dogmas and cast him aside. Thus a Vipra, in order to rule, will always try to subjugate other groups, much less allow them equal rights. It is therefore ironical, and pitiable, that, with his probing intellect, a Vipra can either soar to dizzying heights of enlightenment, or stoop low enough to keep his fellow beings choked in the noose of superstitions.

After beating the Khatri in the intellectual

arena, the Vipran men proceeded to bind women as well in the web of theories; and in this case, the web was even tighter than that binding non-Vipran males. Women were denied access to scriptures as well as education in many countries. At some places their subservience to men came close to slavery, whereas at others they were diminished to the state of housewives: The husband was, and in places is, God Almighty to his wife. Today, we find it hard to believe that even in the West which had supposedly shaken off dogmatic irrationalism after the Middle Ages, women were deprived of voting rights as late as the 20th century.

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

Prostitution as a profession came into being in the Vipran era for the first time. In the Shudran as well as Khatrian times, especially towards the end of the Khatrian age when men had many wives, some amount of lechery did exist in society. Khatri even went to war over women, but prostitution as an institution had not yet been born. The credit for its birth goes solely to Vipran men, to the priests who made women totally dependent on men. Without a husband, woman economically became a cripple; prostitution presumably began when widows or some other women could not find husbands, and there was no other recourse. More important, however, were the priestly coaxing and pressures on virgins to dedicate themselves in the service of

temple-gods. This is how the so-called temple-prostitution developed in the ancient communities of Egypt, Greece and India among others. In Lacroix's vivid words:

As soon as religions had been born from the fear inspired in the heart of man by sight of the great commotions of nature, as soon as the volcano, the tempest, the thunderbolt, the earthquake and the angry sea had led him to invent gods, prostitution offered herself to those same terrible and implacable deities, and the priest took for himself an offering from which the gods represented would have been unable to profit.... Prostitution became, from then on, the essence of certain cults of gods and goddesses who ordained, tolerated or encouraged it. Hence sprang the mysteries of Lampascus, of Babylon, of Paphos and of Memphis; hence the infamous traffic which was carried on at the gates of temples; hence those monstrous idols with which the virgins of India prostituted themselves; hence the obscene dictatorship which the priests arrogated to themselves under the auspices of their impure divinities. [3, pp. 6-7].

The Vashyan Era

Nothing irrational or illogical can endure forever. The web in which the Vipras had caught the rest of society began to loosen as other sections slowly saw through their theories. Quite fittingly, and perhaps ironically, some elements within the intellectual class itself began to question the priest's intentions. Not only the elaborate rituals but also the luxury and lifestyle of the priestly class came under fire. Among Vipras themselves there had occurred a good deal of

argumentation and doctrinal battles, and those who were thus defeated started accumulating wealth to compensate for their intellectual weakness. Similarly, some Khatris also followed that route. In this way, another mentality evolved in human beings; another class, one obsessed with money--the Vashyan mind.

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

In all civilizations, the Vashyan class consisted of the rich belonging to such diverse groups as landlords, capitalists and merchants. No longer was it enough to have a keen intellect to attain comforts and political power. Instead, social prominence passed into the hands of the wealthy.

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

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

Of all forms of government, the one loved by Vashyas is that where the central authority is the weakest. In the Khatrian era this is impossible. In the Vipran era the central power is not so strong, but the rigid social codes that Vipras contrive to control people keep a tight rein on acquisitive minds. That is why one finds that the Vashyan era, especially as it matured, was accompanied by a high degree of decentralized political authority in every civilization. A centralized system can, if it suits its purpose, force the rich to share their wealth with the poor, and no other class is more aware of this risk than the Vashyas. Therefore, whenever the wealthy hold the reins, the system of government as well as the administrative apparatus are decentralized over time.

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

Crime also begins to flourish. A general disregard for the rule of law developed in all Vashyan periods: under the coercion of ultra-selfish acquisitive mentality, all sorts of crimes--murders, thefts, muggings, rape--came into vogue in every civilization. Family ties too become loose. At some places, this was reflected in repugnant harems of the noblemen, at others in increased frequency and social tolerance of divorce.

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

The Vashyan exploitation of society is the most difficult to see through, for in their rule they are actively assisted by the Vipras, who continue to excel in government and administration. Some intellectuals, of course, see through the shaky dogmas justifying Vashyan control over the means of production; but their feeble protests are drowned in the noble maxims offered by the bulk of Vipras. In early stages of the Vashyan epoch, the rich have some humanity left in them, and the common mass, including women, inhales a fresh breath as the Vipran rigid hold becomes loose. But at later stages, the semblance of benevolence evaporates like misty vapor.

Prostitution, which was born in the Vipran era,

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

As time passes, increasing amounts of wealth end up in the hands of the rich, and the Vashyan era gradually drifts towards the lawlessness of the Shudran age. Eventually, things become so wretched that some angry Khatris and Vipras rise in rebellion and help bring an end to the Vashyan, or more properly the Vashya-cum-Shudran, age. Soon afterwards, the rebellious Khatris take over and the civilization moves afresh on the track of social cycle.

Process of Social Change

Sarkar's law of social cycle states that power and influence shift from one group to another in accordance with a certain pattern. Several questions come to mind at this point. First, is the change from one era to another smooth and peaceful, or is it violent and marked by bloodshed? Second, how do stages of rise and fall of a group behave within each era? Is this rise or fall straight or subject to cycles as well?

It should be noted at the start that every entity, no matter how small or large, is subject to cycles. Everything in this universe, no matter how short or long its life is, moves with ups or downs. Nothing moves in a straight line. Everybody can see this in his own life. One day a person is

happy, another day he is unhappy. Things are going well today, they may go sour tomorrow. Everything in this world is therefore subject to ups and downs.

The shift in power and prestige from one group to another itself represents cyclical movement of society. But within each era also the dominating class is subject to cyclical behavior. The group in power may be temporarily dethroned, but if its mentality continues to prevail among people, then the group representing that mentality will soon come back to power. For example, suppose society is passing through the Vashyan age. Suddenly there is a military coup and the Khattris take over the government. If acquisitive mentality continues to dominate people, soon the Vashyas will return to prominence. Thus, within each era also, the ruling group's fortunes are subject to cycles. But in any age, named according to the ruling mentality, the ruling group stays in power much longer than it stays out of power. A close analysis of civilizations reveals that during any age the dominant class remains on top for at least two-thirds of that period. For instance, if a Vipran era lasted for 300 years, one would find that Vipras during that period ruled for at least 200 years and other groups for at most 100 years.

All this suggests that at times one may not be able to recognize the particular era of any society. The fact that nothing moves in a straight line does present difficulties. But a serious student of history should be able to see where a society stands at any moment of time. The following points should be borne in mind in the study of history:

1. In any society spread over several regions, one should first identify the most important region. For instance, in Western civilization,

spread among many nations, America today is the most influential country. Since the U.S. is now passing through the Shudran age which is marked by high crime, extreme materialism, extremely loose morals, excessive individualism, we will say that the entire Western society is in the Shudran age. It is possible that some individual members of a society may not reflect the same mentality dominant in the most important member. But that does not count. What counts is the dominant mentality in the dominant region of society. For instance, Canada, another member of Western civilization, is in the Vashyan age. It does not suffer from high crime. However, today, the character of Western society as a whole is determined not by the ruling mentality in Canada, but by that in the U.S.

2. There may be more than one important region in a civilization at any moment of time. Then the dominant mentality in the majority of such regions determines the character of that society.

3. Once the dominant regions in a society have been identified, the next step is to see which group is in power in those regions. Normally one should be able to point out the class dominating the government either directly or indirectly. That is to say, one should be able to see if Khatris, Vipras or Vashyas control the political power. For instance, a centralized government with absolute authority usually means that either Khatris or Vipras control the government.

However, if it is not clear which group dominates politics, one should examine the dominant ideology in society. What do the theories say? Do they favor a Khatrian attitude of adventure and fearlessness, or do they favor Vipran interest in otherworldliness and in ideas for the sake of ideas, or do they favor Vashyan materialism over the intellectual or adventurous pursuits of mind?

4. Another way to identify an era in society is to observe what an average person wants to become, what career he wants to choose. Does he seek a career in the army, or does he want to become a scholarly theologian, priest or an intellectual, or does he want to be a big landlord, banker, merchant or a capitalist? In any society the profession of the ruling class is the profession most sought by the general public. In the Khatrian age, an average man generally dreams of becoming an army officer. In the Vipran age, an average man likes to become an influential scholar, a high-priest or an adviser to the apparent but nominal ruler. In the Vashyan age, by contrast, an average person seeks to become a merchant, feudal landlord or a financier. In the Shudran age, people usually become lazy, extremely materialistic and greedy. They then like to become wealthy without working hard.

Each era moves through five stages--infancy, youth, maturity, senility and death. During infancy and senility, the ruling group faces many challenges and may be temporarily thrown out of power. But during youth and maturity, there is a good deal of social and political stability. The ruling group is then relatively benevolent, and society evolves at a fast pace. However, successive generations of the ruling class, having been raised in luxury, turn oppressive and tyrannical. They care nothing for the rights and feelings of their people. That is when new conflicts develop in society and the fortunes of the ruling class begin a long-term decline. Old age sets in, and the era meets its end usually in violence but at times in a peaceful manner.

Those opposing the establishment then come to power and start another age, with a new ideology and new attitudes.

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

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

The label Shudran revolution reflects not the fact that it is engineered by Shudras, who are generally unable to lead, but the fact that it is masterminded by those reduced, under the pressure of Vashyan greed, to the Shudran level of poverty. The last phase of the Vashyan age may be called the Shudran age or the Vashya-cum-Shudran age, because Shudras are then in stark majority with Vashyas still at the top. Few Khatris and Vipras then remain, for, forced by the Vashyan rapacity to devote all their time to make a living, they have little time for activities of adventure and art, activities that interest Khatrian and Vipran minds. It is at such times that the Shudran revolution occurs, and Vashyas are swept aside: The limitless Vashyan greed ultimately becomes its own nemesis. In the ensuing polity, which may arise immediately or after a brief interlude of adjustment, power reverts to the Khatris.

Conflict Among Societies

Quite often societies come in conflict with each other. How does this fit with the law of social cycle? Sarkar's hypothesis has a common-sense answer to this question. When two societies come into conflict, then the victor imposes its own social cycle on the loser, except when

(i) the victor leaves the loser alone and does not interfere with its social and political institutions, or

(ii) the initial victor gets quickly absorbed by the superior culture of the loser.

Suppose the Vipra-dominated society is conquered and thoroughly colonized by a Khatri-dominated society. Then the Vipran society will move back into the Khatrian age, and start again in terms of

the social cycle. However, if the victorious Khatrian society is content to exact tribute from the losing Vipran society and does not intervene in its internal affairs, then the loser will stay along its own social cycle and will next move into the Vashyan age. On the other hand, if the Khatrian society is overwhelmed by the superior ideas of the Vipran society, then the initial winner will move into the era of the initial loser.

Consider, for instance, the historical effects of the Mongols who in the 13th century came in violent conflict with many societies. Wherever they went, they destroyed property and massacred opposing armies and innocent people by hundreds and thousands. They were fierce warriors and should have normally imposed Khatrian eras in societies they defeated. But their impact was different from place to place.

On Muslim society, which was then in the Vipran age, the Mongols did indeed impose their own Khatrian age. For they not only destroyed the Muslim kingdoms of their times, but also settled and colonized them. Their impact on Russian society, which they destroyed about the same time, was, however, different. Russia was also then in the Vipran age. The Mongols chose not to colonize and settle Russia, so that the Russian society continued to remain in the Vipran era, and after another century moved into the Vashyan age. Thus while both Russian and Muslim lands were invaded by the same people at the same time, they were affected in different ways. While the Russians stayed along their own course, the Muslims had to start with the social cycle all over again.

The Testing Procedure

Before concluding this chapter, let me say a few words concerning the way I intend to test the

theory of social cycle in the context of Muslim civilization. My procedure here is the same as that used in my earlier work [1]. In the next chapter, I analyze the history of ancient Persia and see if it can be divided roughly into the four eras in accordance with the pattern of social cycle. In other words, if Sarkar's hypothesis is to apply to ancient Iran, or for that matter to any society, then its history should reveal that it was first ruled by Khattris, then by Vipras and finally by Vashyas. It should also show that its Vashyan period slowly drifted into the anarchy of the Shudran age and ended in a social revolution, following which Khattris or the Khatrian mentality came to power again, and so on.

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Chapter 4

THE CIVILIZATION OF PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN

Iran, known as Persia until 1935, is an ancient land--more ancient than the world of Islam with which it came into violent conflict in the seventh century. When the Arabs, the forebears of Islam, invaded Persia, the latter had already experienced advanced culture and civilization for almost two thousand years. The word Iran is derived from *Aryanam*, which means the land of the Aryans. This suggests that the Iranian civilization is at least as old as the Aryans, a nomadic people who are believed to have migrated from central Asia to Persia and then on to India sometime between the 15th and the 11th century B.C.

Iran lies to the east of the Arabian peninsula in southwest Asia. It is surrounded by Afghanistan and Pakistan on the east, by the Soviet Union on the north, and by Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia on the west. It takes up the western half of the Iranian plateau, which extends from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf and from the Tigris Valley to as far east as the Indus river.

Most ancient societies were affected by the geography of their land, and Iran was no exception. Much of the country is desert, which is flanked by two vast mountain ranges. Throughout history the Iranians had to face the challenge of their harsh environs. And their spirited response occasionally produced mighty empires and blossoming of great culture. Their heritage is as brilliant as that of ancient Egyptians, Chinese and Indo-Aryans.

Iran is, and was, a bridge between the East and the West. Its strategic location has made it a confluence of many cultures. Historians are fond

of saying that the West ends and the East begins in Iran. Indeed many warriors through the ages have trodden across its land on their way to the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, Iran sits at the center of the land routes over which flowed much of the commerce between the West and the East in ancient times.

Iran's early history, as of most ancient societies, is somewhat sketchy. But scholars have been able to decipher its old inscriptions, coins and scripture, and these sources give us a reasonably good account of its pre-Islamic system of government, religion, and social institutions. The basic sources for our analysis are the writings in various Persian scripts. The oldest period enters the limelight of history through the trilingual inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, Darius and Xerxes, and through a religious book, the Avesta. The Parthian period has left few written records, but the subsequent Sasanian kings do furnish imperial inscriptions.

The inscriptive literature as our data source is supplemented by predominantly religious writings of the Zoroastrians commonly referred to as Pahlavi. Much of this literature, however, appeared after the Islamic tide swamped Persia. Then there are the non-Persian but historical writings of Herodotus and Xenophon among others. In addition, there is evidence from archaeology and coins which at times become rich sources of information.

While all these data sources combined are certainly not overwhelming, they have elicited many contributions on ancient Iranian history from modern scholars. These contributions furnish sufficient evidence to see that the pre-Islamic Iranian society evolved in tune with the pattern of Sarkar's law of social cycle.

Early Aryans and the Khatrian Age

Credit for the birth of Persian, as with Indian, civilization may be given to the Aryans who seem to have invaded the Iranian plateau around the fifteenth century B.C. It is not known how they penetrated the region or where exactly they came from. Most accounts put their home in central Asia or Southern Russia which became inhospitable to their nomadic way of life. As with most nomadic peoples the Aryans first infiltrated the plateau in small groups which were assimilated by the local Iranians, who, for want of information, are simply called Asianics.

There seems to have been a great wave of migration of the Aryans sometime between the 15th to the 11th century B.C. Some of them went to Europe, while others moved to Iran and then to India. Because of their settlements in these three areas, the migrant Aryans are often referred to as Indo-Europeans or Indo-Iranians.

While early Aryan groups were absorbed by the natives of Iran, subsequent groups succeeded in imposing their own language, religion, culture and political organization. Of the various bands penetrating the Iranian plateau, two, the Medes and the Persians, have left their imprint on history. Our knowledge of these people springs from the cuneiform inscriptions of an Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, who in 837 B.C. led an expedition against the territory of Parsua and of Amadai. The Parsua, who can be identified as Persians, lived in the mountains of Kurdistan, whereas the Amadai or the Medes inhabited the plains.

Both peoples spoke an Indo-European language with slight variations. A study of their religion and social institutions suggests that they were organized under the tutelage of warlike Khatris.

Theirs was a pastoral society, one divided into independent clans, which, however, were able to unite against common peril.

At the times of Amadai and Parsua, Iran was evolving through a tribal Khatrian age, with each tribe headed by a strong, sinewy warrior whose office was at times elective and at times hereditary. As with many early Khatrian societies, the early Aryans were nature worshippers. Their various gods represented the powerful forces of Nature, such as sun-light, fire, rain, and the like.

The Khatrian intellect, as mentioned in chapter 2, is not subtle enough to go beyond the domain of sense perception and appreciate the fact that there exists a singular transcendental entity controlling the manifold manifestations of Nature. Only a Vipran intellect can attain to such heights. Therefore the nature worship of early Aryans simply reveals that their society was headed by Khatri, who adored valor and strength. The ancient Khatri looked upon natural forces as controllers of the world and to them he prayed for physical strength and for victory in war. It is not until the advent of a great sage, a prophet, that the ancient societies began to believe in the existence of a singular entity as the source of all phenomena, known or unknown. The prophet preached the existence of one God, underwent untold sufferings for this idea, but was accepted as the Messiah or the Saviour by succeeding generations. Such a phenomenon of initial persecution and later veneration of a sage by his society has occurred so often in all civilizations that it ought to be accepted as an infallible law of social evolution. Iran certainly was no exception to this rule. Its Prophet was Zarathushtra or Zoroaster who, most scholars believe, lived in Iran around the seventh century B.C. I will have more to say on this matter a

little later; but for now I suggest that the early Aryan society of Iran was a Khatrian society organized as warlike clans believing in the existence of many Nature gods.

As stated earlier, the ancient peoples of Iran, Medes and Persians, were brought into the limelight of history by the inscriptions of the kings of Assyria. The Assyrians made frequent campaigns against the Iranians and exacted tribute from them. The various Iranian tribes were no match for the might of Assyrian emperors. It was not until the eighth century B.C. that Iran began to move from the tribal age to the imperial Khatrian age. The first moves for unification occurred among the Medes, also called the Medeans. This is how ground was laid for the Median empire of the seventh century, which later in the sixth century gave way to the Persian empire.

Towards the end of the eighth century, the Medeans were united under one chief named Dayakku whom Herodotus called Deioces. This is how the first Median dynasty was established. Deioces, elected as king by the clans of Medea, maintained cordial relations with the Assyrians by continuing to pay them tribute.

Deioces was succeeded by his son Phraortes or Khshathrita who, according to Herodotus, was the first to subjugate the Persians. Emboldened by his Persian success, Phraortes later invaded the Assyrians, but was defeated and killed in the battle. The mantle of kingship then fell on the rugged shoulders of his son, Cyaxares, who was a great military genius. During his long reign, Cyaxares had to fight many wars which produced their ups and downs. But eventually he trounced all his enemies including the Assyrians and the Scythians, a terrifying horde of nomadic warriors who pounced on Medea from the north and held it

captive for a quarter century. Cyaxares thus was a founder of a vast Medean empire. By 612 B.C. he had destroyed the power of Assyria and extended his domain on the plateau to as far as Phages, which borders on the present-day Tehran. Around 590 he conquered Armenia and extended his authority to parts of what today is known as Turkey.

The Medean empire, however, did not last long. Following Cyaxares' death, the Medeans did add a bit to their extensive domains, but since the State was built on conquest, power became more and more centralized in the hands of the king and his army. It seems that this centralization produced great unrest among the Medeans as well as the Persians, an unrest that eventually invited revolt from a Persian prince named Cyrus who around 550 overthrew the Medean king, thereby founding the first Persian empire.

The dynasty that Cyrus established is known as the Achaemenid dynasty. Cyrus was a great warrior and a benevolent ruler. After his deposition of the Medean king, Astyages, he broke ranks from tradition and spared the life of the king. He repeated this humanitarian gesture again and again in his subsequent conquests of Lydia, Asia Minor, Babylonia, Syria and Palestine. Some historians say that Cyrus, crowned as Cyrus the Great, was the first world conqueror, founding the first world empire. His title of the Great seems to be well-merited. Not only was he generous to the defeated kings, he also initiated the policy of religious tolerance. To some extent, it was good politics, as it pleased powerful bodies of priests in subject nations. Nonetheless, Cyrus made no attempts to impose Persian gods on non-Persian peoples.

Cyrus died in 529 and was succeeded by his son Cambyses whose chief claim to renown in history is

his conquest of Egypt. Cambyses died during a revolt by a priest named Gaumata who, claiming to be his brother, usurped the throne. Gaumata was eventually eliminated by Darius I who came from another branch of the Achaemenid family. In his extermination of Gaumata, Darius had been assisted by six prominent families who elected him as their king in 521 B.C. With his accession, let us take a brief pause, for, as I will presently argue, the rise of Darius marks the beginning of a new era in ancient annals of Iran.

The Prophet Zoroaster

So far I have focused mainly on political developments in ancient Iran. Let us now analyze its religious developments. As stated before, the Aryans, at the time of their migration to Iran and India, were organized as various tribes led by Khatris who worshipped the great forces of Nature. According to Herodotus, the Persians were "in the habit of ascending the highest mountains and offering sacrifices to Zeus--they give the name Zeus to the whole celestial circle. Moreover, they sacrifice to the sun, moon, earth, fire, water and winds." (Quoted in Sykes [14, p. 102]). The ancient religion of Iran had much in common with that of the northwestern part of India. This is not surprising, because both these regions were overwhelmed around the fifteenth century B.C by Aryan tribes with similar religious practices. The names of gods in the Iranian Avesta and Indian Vedas reveal a good deal of affinity. The *asura*, signifying the Lord, of the Vedas is the *ahura* of the Avesta. Another Sanscrit name was *deva*, which is close to *daeva* of the Avesta.

Even during the Vedic period, the loyalty of the Aryan tribes was divided between ahuras and daevas. In India, devas were venerated, and asuras became the demons in the later Vedas. In Iran, by

contrast, an opposite development took place. There ahuras were worshipped and in time the daevas were cast as demons. But in both regions, the Aryans had a pantheon of Nature gods. Their intellect had not yet become subtle enough to rise above the multitude of natural phenomena and appreciate the presence of an all-pervading entity transcending the mental plane.

In Iran, the credit for introducing monotheism, as opposed to the Aryan paganism, goes to Zarathushtra, known to the Greeks as Zoroaster, whose life, teachings and self-denial reveal the marks of a Prophet. Like all great prophets in history, he spent several years in search for the truth and enlightenment, fearlessly preached the existence and magnificence of only one God, and was first persecuted and later venerated by his society.

Zoroaster's time and place of birth is a subject of unending controversy. Modern historians believe that he was born in the seventh century B.C. and died in the sixth. He was born in the western part of Iran, but the repression of the established priesthood forced him to move to the eastern part, where a king named Vishtasp became his ardent follower. It is after the conversion of a king to his teachings that Zoroaster's religion began to spread among the elites.

Zoroaster was an avid writer. The authorship of hymns in earlier portions of the Avesta, called *Gathas*, goes solely to him. In his days, it was common to worship a multitude of ahuras. Zoroaster displaced this multitude by one God, Ahura, who to him was Mazda or wise. Thus Zoroaster called God Ahura Mazda. The Gathic conception of God is strictly monotheistic. True, Ahura Mazda has many virtues such as innate goodness, righteousness, power, piety, health and immortality. But these

are virtues not of different personalities, but of one and the same Being. Later, however, these six attributes became personified in the minds of Zoroastrians and were worshipped as holy but distinct entities.

Zoroaster taught that the world is a battleground for fight between Good and Evil. While Ahura Mazda is the source of goodness, evil springs from another eternal entity called Angra Mainya or Ahriman. In the inevitable combat between the Good and the Evil, the Good eventually triumphs but it may suffer temporary reverses. Thus every person is cast in the role of a warrior either of Ahura Mazda or of Ahriman. Everyone has to be a part of this eternal struggle between the noble and the wicked.

When the world is pictured as the scene of struggle between good and evil, it follows that every person faces two paths in his evolution--the path of light and the path of darkness. Human beings are not mere pawns in the great cosmic war. They are free to choose between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. Upon their choice rests their reward in the present as well as in the afterlife.

Zoroaster's philosophy is, therefore, a powerful sanction for ethics and morality. The human soul, like the universe, is torn between noble and evil spirits. By leading a pious life, the person follows the Light; otherwise he follows the Lie, for Ahriman is basically nothing else but the Lie.

There is no doubt that Zoroaster was a Prophet with a lofty religion. His fervor, intensity, and the longing for truth is revealed in the following hymn which undoubtedly has lost a little lustre in translation:

*This do I ask Thee, Oh Lord, tell me truly;
 Who is the creator, the first father of
 Righteousness?
 Who laid down the path of the sun and stars?
 Who is it through whom the moon now waxes now
 waned?
 All this and more do I wish to know, Oh Wise
 One.*

Such words, revealing the yearning of a longing heart, abound in the Gathas. They reveal the pangs of a seeker of truth. They reveal the contrition with which Zoroaster's burning soul approached his God, Ahura Mazda.

As with all other prophets, Zoroaster's lofty message fell into the hands of charlatans. His followers later raised him to the pedestal of Godhead without adopting the essence of his teachings in their lives. Within a few years after Zoroaster's death in the sixth century, his religion was monopolized by the Magi, a priestly tribe or caste who in fact had stood for all that he was against. But priests, in all religions, are a hardy and resilient class. They have the superior Vipran intellect and with its help they are able to confuse the straight-thinking minds of Khatris and Shudras. One needs a penetrating intellect to see through the priestly theories which render the priests indispensable intermediaries between a person and his God. Only a Vipra can comprehend the duplicity and hypocrisy of a priestly Vipra, but it takes a prophet to vanquish, at least temporarily, the parasitic stranglehold of the established priesthood over society. But after the prophet is gone, the priesthood, in one guise or another, strikes back and becomes even more powerful than before by abusing the subtle and therefore highly persuasive ideas that the prophet himself had introduced.

That such was to be the fate of Zoroastrian religion as well should not come as a surprise to the reader. The priesthood, opposed and partially dislodged by Zoroaster, was back in the saddle following his demise. The evidence for this comes from the Avestan texts which are distinct from Zoroaster's Gathas. The generic name for priest in these texts is *atharvan*, meaning the fire-priest. The cult of fire or *atar* was predominant prior to the rise of Zoroastrianism. While Zoroaster deprecated the established priesthood, he gave fire, or light, the highest position in his faith. He exalted the station of *atar*, for to him Ahura Mazda was eternal light. His very being was light.

Zoroaster's enthusiasm for light enabled the later priests to declare him as the *atharvan*, i.e., a fire-priest. Zoroaster became the first and the foremost of the *atharvans*. Like the Vedas, the Avestan texts also divide society into four professional groups and the *atharvans*, of course, are placed at the top of social hierarchy. Zoroaster, however, did not recognize the four-pronged professional order of priests, warriors, husband-men and artisans in his Gathas. It is, therefore, clear that right after the Prophet's demise, priests rose to unprecedented social prominence in the name of the very Prophet who had taken pains to castigate the institution of priesthood. It is significant that in the Gathas there is no mention at all of the word *atharvan*, which seems to be a deliberate exclusion.

With the return of the fire-priest, the Indo-Iranian gods also made a return. They, of course, were no match for the effulgence of Ahura Mazda but they could co-exist and prosper with his blessings. There was no sign of the Magi yet, but the main cults of the old nature-worship were back again with few modifications. The priests only had to subordinate them to the supreme deity, Ahura

Mazda, and call them his angels instead of gods, and everything went on as before.

The initial stronghold of Zoroaster's religion was eastern Iran where the king Vishtasp had been among his first followers. Following the king's death, the political pendulum swung to the western side of Iran where, as we have seen before, the Medes were in prominence, ruling over the Assyrians and the Persians. With the shift of the political influence, the center of religious authority also moved towards the west. There the religion of Zoroaster came into contact with the Magi who formed the priestly class among the Medo-Persians. According to Herodotus, the Magi were one of the six Medean tribes and constituted their sacerdotal caste. The Magi have been compared by scholars with brahmins who for ages have formed the hereditary priesthood in India. The comparison is very apt, because the two sacerdotal castes have much in common. They, for instance, are the ones responsible for the proliferation of ritual in respective religions--the Magi in Zoroastrianism and brahmins in Hinduism.

Zoroaster's teachings had already been somewhat compromised by his followers in eastern Iran. But when the Magi adopted the new religion, the religious degeneration proceeded apace. One by one the pre-Zoroastrian divinities of western Iran, such as Mithra and Anahita among others, found their way into Zoroaster's teachings in a powerful syncretic blending of the new and the old religions. With them came the ancient rituals, sacrifices, offerings and libations--all that the Prophet had vehemently denounced. Various Magian writers ascribed their complex ritual to Zoroaster himself. The Prophet, who could perhaps grant boons to others, was himself shown as begging for boons from various deities.

The Magian Priesthood and the Vipran Age

Such adulteration of Zoroaster's message, while leading to religious degeneration, resulted in a great rise of power for the Magi. The Magian priesthood became prominent as never before. This is how the first Vipran age was born in ancient Iran.

The Vipran era begins in society when the Khattris are vanquished by Vipras in the battle of wits. The apparent ruler, whether a king or military dictator, his army and the rest of society then come under the sway of intellectuals who rule indirectly by expounding theories too complex to be understood by common people. That this is what happened in ancient Iran following Zoroaster's death is supported by many pieces of evidence. In the words of Will Durant, after the death of the Prophet,

The old priesthood of "Wise Men" or Magi conquered him as priesthoods conquer in the end every vigorous rebel or heretic--by adopting and absorbing him into their theology. They numbered him among the Magi and forgot him. By an austere and monogamous life, by a thousand precise observances of sacred ritual and ceremonial cleanliness, by abstention from flesh food and by a simple and unpretentious dress, the Magi acquired, even among the Greeks, a high reputation for wisdom, and among their own people an almost boundless influence. *The Persian kings themselves became their pupils, and took no steps of consequence without consulting them.* The higher ranks among them were sages, the lower were diviners and sorcerers, readers of stars and interpreters of dreams; the very word magic is taken from their name. (Italics mine.) [8, p. 372].

The same scenario was repeated verbatim in all

other civilizations. In ancient Egypt, in ancient India, and in medieval Europe and Russia among so many other societies, the priesthood had come to dominate all other classes following the fall of the warriors.

Priests are basically Vipras, because they try to do well in society with the help of their intellect rather than physical skills or wealth. They attain prominence by confusing the simple-minded warriors (Khatris) through their illogical dogmas. And once the apparent Khatrian ruler, the king or a military commander is under their sway, other classes of Vashyas and Shudras readily come under their influence. Vipras, therefore, rule indirectly--in the name of a Khatrian ruler or a Khatrian group, which alone can maintain law and order in society.

When exactly the Vipran age started in Iran will perhaps never be clear. Much of ancient Persia, especially Zoroaster, is hidden in the mist of history. But one thing is clear. The Persian Vipran age most likely began after Zoroaster's death. For, in the Prophet's Gathas, there is no mention of the Magi or even atharvan, the fire-priests. Zoroaster was apparently against the institution of priesthood. The Magi and their incantations appear only in the later Avesta. Now Zoroaster's birth could have occurred anytime between 1000 to 600 B.C. If we accept the arguments of modern historians such as Richard Frye [9, p. 28] or the traditional view of medieval Persian writers, then the Prophet was born sometime in the seventh century and died in the sixth. And since the atharvan and the Magian priesthood rose to prominence not long after Zoroaster's death, we may place the rise of the Vipran age in the sixth century at the latest. It could have begun earlier, perhaps as early as the rise of the Medean empire in the eighth century, but certainly by the time

the Persian empire came into being in the sixth century B.C.

Some scholars date the Magian prominence in ancient Iran to the fifth century. According to James Moulton, for instance, "it was in the fifth century that the Magi, after failing to win political power, gradually worked themselves into an indispensable position in religion." [12, p. 13]. But the Magi had become prominent much earlier. In Frye's words, for instance, ". . . the Magi were a 'tribe' of the Medes who exercised sacerdotal functions. During the supremacy of the Medes they expanded over the Medean empire as a priesthood since the priestly trade was kept, so to speak, 'in the family.'" [9, p. 73]. And when, in 550 B.C., as described earlier, the Persians led by Cyrus overthrew Astyages, the last Medean king, they defeated the Medes but were captured by the Medean religion. "The Persians," writes M. N. Dhalla, "thus conquered the earthly possessions of the Medes and the Magi, their priests; but they were in turn conquered by the latter in spirit. The Magian victory in the spiritual domain more than made amends for the loss of their temporal power." [7, p. 134].

The Magians did suffer a temporary reverse afterwards. They tried to win political power by throwing their support behind Gaumata who revolted against the Achaemenian king. And when Gaumata was eliminated by Darius, the Magi were indeed in a difficult position, to which mention has been made above in the quote from Moulton. But this reverse can be easily explained. Nothing in this world moves in a straight line. Everything is cyclical and follows the law of cyclical motion. During an era when a certain mentality rules society, the ruling class may also suffer a decline, but when the time is ripe for the rule of that mentality, the same class soon comes back to prominence. Thus

during the Viproan age in Persia, while the Magi fell in disgrace following Darius' accession to the throne, they recovered soon and returned not just as the priests of Medes but as the priests of all of Iran. "With the lapse of time," writes Dhalla, "the Medes and the Persians became more reconciled to each other. The Magi were the priests of the Medes; they now became the priests of the Persians. This strengthened their position." [7, p. 135].

It is possible that Darius was under the sway not of the Magi but of the atharvan, the fire-priests, who had claimed social prominence for their class immediately following Zoroaster's death. The atharvan had been later replaced by the Magi, but the fact that Darius was under the influence of some priesthood adoring Ahura Mazda is crystal clear from his inscriptions that have furnished invaluable information to scholars of ancient Iran.

In the old Persian inscriptions, Darius ascribes his every success and act of nobility to Ahuramazda, who is adored as the greatest of deities. An inscription at Persepolis, for instance says, "A great God is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created favor for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many." An inscription at Nagrh-i-Rustam says, "A great god is Ahuramazda, who gave this beautiful work, who gave favor to man, who gave wisdom and friendliness to Darius the king." Thus Darius reveals great love and fervor for Zoroaster's God who had been later made to coexist with other gods first by the atharvan and later by the fire priest. Darius' devotion to Ahuramazda overflows in every inscription. It is the will of Ahuramazda that guides the actions of the king, his victories in battle, his piety towards his subjects. Ahuramazda's grace shines through Darius' very

being.

How are we to interpret Darius ascribing his every great act to his God? To me, it appears that he was under the powerful influence of a priest or a group of priests most likely belonging to the fire cult. For the Magi had supported his adversary, Gaumata. By temperament, Darius was a first-rate Khatri. While Cyrus had founded the Persian empire, Darius had consolidated and considerably added to it. He was an astute commander and a military genius. After exterminating Gaumata, he had to contend with a series of revolts which he put down with great courage and speed. Now a superlative Khatri of the type of Darius is full of bravery and strength. He abounds in high-spiritedness and the sense of adventure. But he lacks the superior intellect that can go beyond the forces of Nature and appreciate on its own the presence of a transcendental entity. This is not to say that a Khatri is always a Nature worshipper; only that for him to have an ardent faith in God, he usually needs a teacher, a Vipra to instruct him in theological matters.

Darius shows an ardent faith and devotion for Ahuramazda. Each and every accomplishment and glory he ascribes to his god. This only reveals that Darius took instructions from a great and noble teacher who taught him humility, and imbibed in him tolerance and generosity. A Khatrian mind is unable to appreciate the grace of God, especially the way Darius does. But under the guidance of a teacher, it can attain great heights.

In his religion, Darius is not strictly monotheistic. For Darius is seen as seeking protection from gods other than Ahuramazda, although he does not use their name. This suggests that Darius was influenced by an atharvan who admitted the existence of gods besides Ahuramazda.

Curiously enough, nowhere in his inscriptions does Darius mention Zoroaster. This suggests that the Prophet had long been dead, maybe for many centuries, and that the people had almost forgotten him but not his God, Ahuramazda, who by Darius' times had been reduced to the first among various divinities. But Zoroaster's influence on Darius is unmistakably there. The monarch's interpretation of the Lie accords well with that of the Prophet. To them both, Lie represents Evil.

Another angle through which the Vipran influence is perceptible during the reign of Darius is his conception of law. The Achaemenian monarchs have been regarded by historians as autocrats with unlimited power. Actually, the limitlessness of their power was more theoretical than real. First of all, there was the council of those six aristocratic families which had helped Darius eliminate Gaumata. And this council, which existed throughout the Achaemenian empire, had many constraints on the monarch's authority. Secondly, all laws were formulated by the priests, and once the monarch had promulgated a law, he could not recant it. He was bound by it just like his subjects.

It may be remembered that the form of government and administration in the Vipran era closely resembles that of the Khatrian age. The only visible difference is that in the Vipran age, the apparent ruler, though possessing absolute power in theory, is considered subordinate to a sacred authority, which may be God or a Constitution representing the power of the people. In theory, the apparent ruler remains absolute, but his absolutism is tempered by the Vipras acting behind the scene.

Darius has been recognized in history as a great lawgiver. Prior to him, the death penalty

was very common. Even for crimes as small as thefts or accepting a bribe, the convict could be sentenced to death. Darius changed all that. He recognized that in assigning punishment, a criminal's good actions of the past had to be weighed against his evil deed. Consequently, the death sentence was not as frequent as before, something that was a great advance in view of the practices of that age. Herodotus, for instance, writes, "On account of one crime not even the king himself may slay anyone, nor may any of the other Persians inflict upon his own slaves a fatal punishment for a single crime. Rather, not until he has reckoned them up and has found that the unjust deeds are more numerous and greater than his services may he give rein to his wrath." (Quoted in Olmstead [12, p. 129]).

Darius' law was not whimsical. It was not subject to the king's caprice. It had a reputation for constancy and fairness. In the words of J. H. Iliffe:

Although to the Greek popular mind the Persian monarch was. . . supreme example of autocracy, his power was, in fact, very much limited by custom and tradition. The decrees which held together such vast and diverse territories were those of the "king in Council"; not those of an irresponsible tyrant. [11, p. 8].

It is clear from the account so far in this section that even though theoretically Darius was an absolute ruler, his authority was in fact somewhat limited. At the same time he was also influenced by a Zoroastrian priest who instructed him to devoutly submit to Ahuramazda, the greatest god of the time. It then appears that the Vivan age of

indirect rule of intellect over Khatrian brawn had been established by the time of Darius the Great.

This conception of limits over the ruler's authority stands in sharp contrast to that discernible during the Medean empire where the kingship was absolute in theory as well as in practice. There is little evidence to suggest that the king's power was under any moral restraint prior to the Achaemenids. All this suggests that the Iranian civilization began with the tribal Khatrian age of the Aryans, evolved to the imperial Khatrian era of the Medeans and then, with the accession of Darius, moved into the Vipran age, where Vipras, in the guise of first the atharvan and then the Magi stood atop the social hierarchy.

The Magi indeed had lost much of their power following the accession of Darius, but it appears that not all Magians had fallen in disgrace. True, the Persians celebrated Gaumata's extermination in a festival called magophonia, but, as Frye observes, "the *Magophonia* could not have been directed against all Magians since we find them shortly after Darius' accession to the throne busy in Persepolis, as attested in Elamite tablets." [9, p. 89].

Whether or not the Magi were fully reconciled with Darius, there is no doubt that after he was gone they attained unprecedented power in the reigns of his successors. The first of these successors was Xerxes, who ascended the throne in 486 B.C. With his accession, the power of the Magi reached a new high. Dhalla observes that

No sacrifices were offered without them [the Magi]. They accompanied the armies with the sacred fire, kept it burning on the battle field, and invoked divine help for the victory of the king. Herodotus

tells us that the *holy chariot* drawn by eight white horses followed the armies of Xerxes. The Magi made sacrificial offerings at various stages in the March and prayed for the triumph of the Persian arms. [7,p. 135] (My italics.)

It is at the time of Xerxes, that the Magi attained the status of indispensable intermediaries between people and gods. Citing Dhalla again, we find that

They [the Magi] were held in great esteem, and their exalted position at the court of the kings ensured them a considerable influence over the people. They were looked upon as the wise mediators between man and God. They officiated at the ceremonies, chanted the hymns, sacrificed at the altar, explained omens, practiced divination, expounded dreams, and ministered to the various religious wants of the people. [7, p.135].

There is as yet no clear-cut mention of gods other than Ahura Mazda, and Xerxes, like his father, is seen in inscriptions ascribing his noble deeds and achievements to him. Yet other gods are frequently invoked for protection. It appears that while Darius was more or less monotheistic with tolerance for other gods, his succeeding son, although devoted to Ahura Mazda, increasingly looked towards other gods as well for favors. This is an unmistakable sign of the rising hold of the Magi over him and the people. Citing Herodotus, Dhalla [7, p. 133] tells us of an expedition by Xerxes in which "he sacrificed a thousand oxen to Athene of Ilium." This Athene is presumably god Anahita. The Magian influence over Xerxes also comes out clearly in these words of Zaehner:

In spirit Xerxes is further removed from Zoroaster than was his father, but he seems to have consciously adhered to the later and admittedly distorted form of the Prophet's religion as interpreted to him by the Magi. [15, p. 161].

The clear-cut mention of the other gods, Mithra and Anahita, in the Achaemenian empire first occurs during the reign of Artaxerxes who succeeded Xerxes. "It is Artaxerxes," says Dhalla, "who speaks of Mithra and Anahita." [7, p. 132]. Moulton also sees the new king "grouping Ahuramazda, Anahita, and Mithra." [12, p. 86].

Mithra and Anahita were among the pre-Zoroastrian divinities belonging to western Iran where for centuries the sacerdotal functions had belonged to the hereditary priesthood of Magi. While Darius and Xerxes had recognized and tolerated other gods, Ahuramazda was still the supreme divinity, towering over the others. The grouping of Ahuramazda with the Magian gods Mithra and Anahita indicates that by the time of Artaxerxes the Magian stranglehold over the king and society had reached its culmination. This was the high point of the priesthood and hence the Vipran age. Indeed, the later Avesta, which is the handiwork of the Magi, not atharvan, at times depicts Ahuramazda as worshipping his own angels, seeking favors and protection from them. Mithra is frequently shown to be outshining his creator, who is none other than Zoroaster's singular entity Ahura Mazda.

The Achaeminian empire lasted till 330 B.C. when Darius III, the last of the Achaemenid monarchs, was defeated and slain by Alexander the Great, a Greek warrior who turned out to be a world conqueror. Following Artaxerxes, the Achaemenid empire lasted for another century, but this period,

for my purposes, reveals much the same. Of course, it is marked by ever increasing rebellions from the subject peoples and by constant conflicts between Persians and the Greeks. Yet the social supremacy in this period continues to belong to the Vipras. The pre-Zoroastrian god Mithra outshines Ahuramazda more and more, with the Magi continuing to play the role of intermediaries between people and gods through their rituals which keep growing in complexity.

The decline of the Vipran age began after Alexander trounced the Achaemenid armies. While their empire was shattered to pieces, the spiritual loss to the Iranians was incalculable. For the Avesta was burnt to ashes in a fire that Alexander's forces set to the palace of the slain king. For such wanton acts of destruction, Alexander deservedly earned the nick names of "accursed," "Evil," and an "envoy of Ahriman" from later Persian writers.

Iran remained under the Greek yoke for about a century and a quarter. But the Greek cultural influence over Persia was no more than minimal. Alexander's premature death put an end to his dream of Hellenizing Iran, which shortly thereafter became one of the satrapies in a large empire under the Seleucids, a dynasty founded by one of Alexander's generals, Seleucus Nicator. Persia, though under the foreign yoke, was in effect ruled by local Persian rulers who paid tribute to the Seleucids but otherwise enjoyed considerable autonomy.

The fall of the Achaemenid dynasty meant the decline of the Vipran priests who had been patronized by the Persian monarchs. Not much is known of Iranian religion during the century of Greek rule. But it is certain that the Magi gradually lost their monopoly over the Persian mind.

Instead, the Persians came under the sway of many cults that preached new heretical theories. This would explain the great variety of views ascribed to the Magi by the contemporary Greek and Latin writings. Some Persians worshipped the *daevas* who had been excommunicated by the Prophet. Xerxes himself had proscribed their worship, but he or one like him was there no more during the Greek rule.

Parthian Feudalism and the Vashyan Age

In less than a century after his death, much of Alexander's empire in Iran slipped from the hands of his Seleucid successors. The destiny of Persia was then to be shaped by a semi-nomadic people of Scythian origin who had invaded the budding empire of Medea in the seventh century B.C., but who, after ruling Iran for a quarter century, were defeated and absorbed by the Persians. Following that they had settled down in the Achaemenid province of Parthua and later became known in history as the Parthians. They are also known as Arsacids, because their dynasty was founded by a king named Arsaces, who eliminated the Greek dominion over Iran around 238 B.C.

The Parthians have left few written records, and some scholars, especially the early Muslim sources, are prone to dismiss their period as a dark age with no accomplishments to speak of. But that conclusion is generally recognized today as hasty and groundless, especially in view of the fact that the Parthians ruled Iran for over four hundred years.

The Arsacid rulers traced their ancestry back to the Achaemenid monarch, Artaxerxes II. This suggests that the Parthians took pride in being of Persian rather than Greek descent. It took almost seven decades of strife with the Greeks before the Parthian kingdom grew to a large empire, which was

founded by Mithradates I who conquered Bactria, Babylonia, Medea and Iran. The Arsacid empire then extended from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. Later Mithradates II added Armenia and Seistan (Afghanistan) to the Parthian domain, which extended all the way to the western border of India.

The Arsacid territories formed the second largest empire in the annals of Ancient Iran. During the long reign of Mithradates II (123-87 B.C.), the Persians came in contact with China and Rome. It is from Chinese sources that we know something about the Parthian state, which was situated at the center of the trade routes between Greece and China.

With the rise of the Parthians, it can be seen that the Viproan era of ancient Iran came to an end and gave way to the Vashyan age where the forces of wealth are dominant in society. For the Parthian state has been described by historians as Persian feudalism. Gibbons, for instance, has pointed out that the Parthian system closely resembled the feudal setup of medieval Europe. According to Burns and Ralph, "feudalism may be defined as a structure of society in which the powers of government are exercised by private barons over *persons economically dependent on them*. [4, p. 390 (Italics mine)]. This definition pinpoints the essence of a feudal society, where political power, social prestige, and comfortable life belong to the wealthy who rule because of their control over the means of production. Under feudalism, the chief source of production and wealth is land; landlords, because of their control over vast estates, are then at the top of the social hierarchy. Hence feudalism represents the rule of wealth, of Vashyas whose acquisitive instinct is then reflected in their ever increasing accumulation of land.

Was the Parthian state feudal in the sense that the wealthy landlords were supreme in society? Many accounts of the Parthian history tend to answer this question in the affirmative. We hear of six prominent families in addition to the king, a situation not far removed from that of the Achaemenid times when Darius the Great was assisted by six aristocratic families in uprooting the usurper Gaumata. These aristocrats were originally warriors who were awarded large estates as reward for their labor. As the owners of vast areas they were called *vithpaitis*, and they outlasted many ruling dynasties. Because of their huge estates, they had always enjoyed a good deal of immunities and political power. From their families had come the members of royal councils, army nobility, higher bureaucracy and governors of many satrapies. But the Achaemenid monarchs had been able to keep them under control. The aristocrats had, for instance, been denied the right to have private armies. Burr Brundage observes:

It was the great organizer Darius who pre-eminently seems to have harnessed this aristocracy to the royal chariot. Given by Ahura Mazda, kingship was divine; and although the nobles had to provide for their own levies in the king's service, they still had to respond to his muster by command of superior power. By utilizing the *vithpaiti* in the administrative satrapal system, by divorcing the duties of governor from those of general, by maintaining a most searching espionage system, the Achaemenid kings effectively restrained his political power. While the empire was extant, the landed immunities of the *vithpaitis* continued, . . . but we hear nothing of a system of private individual agreements between the king and his nobles for division of political power. This system sets the stage for the Parthian and Sassanian periods which follow, the two

latter being inexplicable without the antecedent Achaemenian accomplishment. [3, p. 110].

However, Brundage is right only about the division of power between the Parthian king and the *vithpaitis*, and not about such division in subsequent Sasanian times, for the Sasanian state, as Brundage himself admits later, was much more autocratic than its predecessor. Some of the names of the six prominent families during Parthian times are known. One of them was the Karen family with its headquarters in Nihavend, Medea; another was the Suren family in Seistan, and the Mihran family lived near Tehran. Other families are mentioned in Arabic sources, but not much is known about them.

Besides the six families of opulent nobles, there were many other landlords owning vast areas of land and possessing a modicum of political power during the Parthian times. This occurred because the king granted land tenure to his kin and friends who became important by virtue of their possessions. Frye provides other reasons for weakened authority of the Parthian kings:

The nomadic background was still very important with the early Parthian kings, and after the state was firmly established a series of internal crises, plus a two front war with the Romans to the west and with the Kushans to the east reduced the strength of the central government in favour of the aristocracy. [9, p. 182].

Even though the feudal structure of the Parthian empire was inherited by the Arsacids from the Achaemenids, the quote from Brundage reveals that it is the Parthians themselves who were mainly responsible for feudalism. Frye confirms this view by suggesting "that the reason for the strength of

the [Parthian] nobility lay in the granting of 'feudal' domains by the great king to his relatives and followers." [9, p. 183]. What we might say is that the seed of feudalism had been sown in Achaemenid Iran, but its full bloom did not occur before Parthian times. This is not surprising because in Sarkar's theory, which deals with societal evolution, the germ of any era is planted in the preceding age. The idea is that the succeeding era simply evolves out of its predecessor.

What was the position of the monarch? This question is important, because one characteristic of the Vashyan age is that the authority of the apparent ruler declines over time and gets divided among local centers of power. It appears that the Parthian king, especially following Mithradates II, was the first among aristocratic equals. Though he had to belong to the Arsacid family, he was elected by two hereditary councils. "The first of these," writes Percy Sykes, "was the assembly of the adult members of the royal family; the second was the Senate, composed of spiritual and temporal lords . . . The monarch could be chosen only from the Arsacid dynasty, but his election had to be ratified by both assemblies." [14, p.365]. Thus the Parthian Monarch was not an absolute ruler, neither in theory nor in practice, although he assumed the Achaemenian title of king of kings. This weakening of the monarchy stands in sharp contrast to the preceding Medean and Persian empires of Iran, where the ruler's absolutism had been enjoyed by either Khatris or Vipras. But when Vashyas rule, the state structure is politically and administratively decentralized. And this is what happened during the Parthian times.

Nothing describes the Vashyan decentralized character of the Parthian period better than the structure of its army. There was no standing army on the model of the Achaemenian Sovereigns except

the royal guard. Each of the six aristocratic families had its own private army, and provided troops to the king at the time of war. This system of military was certainly unprecedented in the imperial annals of ancient Iran, and it further testifies to the position of the monarch as the first among equals. The armies were recruited from peasants and slaves owned by the landlords who were the Vashyas. This way the Vashyas were able to dominate the Khattris because of their wealth.

During the Vashyan times, owners of all forms of wealth command great respect in society. In the Parthian period, while the landed nobility ruled supreme, wealthy merchants also retained considerable influence. Parthia was situated on the trade routes between Bactria and China, and the flourishing silk trade led to the rise of merchants of vast wealth. The Parthian businessmen had extensive links with Rome as well as India. In most parts they served as middlemen between the Romans and the Chinese. The Parthian economic base was predominantly agricultural, with little industry worthy of the name.

The common people earned their living by working on land. Some were independent farmers, while others were serfs of the great landowners. There was not much manufacturing, and the Parthian merchants did not have much to offer of their own. But because of locational advantages, they served as brokers between their Roman and Chinese neighbors. This was the secret of the fabulous wealth of city merchants. We know this from the excavations at Hatra situated in a western province of the empire. According to Colledge, "Numerous sculptures from the western Parthian area testify to the wealth of these city merchants and princes, whose *well-fed forms and ample abdomens* have been preserved for all time in statuary. . . . The aristocratic and mercantile classes of society

enjoyed high standards of living derived from commerce and from exploitation of the peasantry. Flamboyant statues proclaim their superiority Parthian statuary is above all a vehicle for the display of wealth and luxurious personal adornment." [5, pp. 81 and 90. (*Italics mine*)].

As in every Vashyan age, there were extreme divisions of riches in society. Wealth was disproportionately concentrated in the hands of the aristocracy consisting of landed nobility and the merchants. They are the ones displaying a taste for jewelry and other luxuries in the Parthian statuary.

One feature of the Vashyan age is that Vipras, i.e. priests or intellectuals, serve the interests of the wealthy. Religion becomes commercialized and intellectuals preach all sorts of materialist theories. This is precisely what happened during the Parthian times.

As regards religion, the Parthian period displays materialism relative to the preceding Vashyan age encompassing the Achaemenid empire. Part of this materialism or indifference to otherworldly concerns sprang from the Persian contacts with the classical Greek philosophy exalting logic and reason. Religion rests on dogma, and where reason prevails, dogma fails. The Greek influence coupled with the materialistic life of the ruling classes must have reduced people's interest in otherworldly affairs. There is some evidence of royal and hence public indifference to Zoroastrianism of Achaemenian times. "The collapse of the first Persian empire," says Zaehner, "destroyed both the unity of the Iranian peoples and the privileged position of the Zoroastrian faith. . . . This in turn gave way to a native Iranian dynasty, the Parthian Arsacids (250 B.C.-A.D. 226) who, though good Iranians by blood,

seem to have been totally indifferent to the religion of the Iranian prophet." [16, p. 22].

The royal indifference to Zoroastrianism was the major reason why the Vīspas, the erstwhile Magi, were no longer on top of the social hierarchy. That position now belonged to the Vashyan landlords and merchants. But the Magi still retained considerable influence as advisors to the king and the aristocratic families. The religious picture of Iran at this time is highly confusing, perhaps because so many cults and sects had come to proliferate. But while Vīspas priests were still influential in Iran, they now served the interests of Vashyas, as is to be expected in a Vashyan age. The proliferation of cults, each adoring a god for worldly objects, was a cause as well as a symptom of the rising materialism in society, where religion was subordinated to commercial interests. The division of religion into different cults is also indicative of the centrifugal character of the Parthian polity. This centrifugal character was most evident in western part of the empire where Semitic beliefs and divinities were prevalent. Many of these divinities were purely local in influence. In the words of Colledge: "A notable feature of Semitic religion was the local character of many divinities. Every area had its baal and baalat, its Lord and Lady or protective deities, and many a village boasted its gny (genie) or guardian spirit. This localism is in complete contrast with the universality of Ahura Mazda." [5, p. 106].

The administration of the state still revolved around the system of satrapies as in the past, but now administratively also there was considerable amount of decentralization, indicating the rise of local centers of power. For the satrapies were divided into eparchies, which were further divided into hyparchies. Many eparchies, which were admi-

nistered by civil governors, had become the equivalent of satrapies, where local law and the system of justice prevailed. Many satrapies were ruled by the aristocratic families which formed states within a state. They were quite independent of the central government of the king.

The influence of landed nobility depended on the acreage of land under control. For this reason the nobles frequently fought with each other. The prestige and political power of a rich landlord depended on the size of his fief. And because of his acquisitive mentality, he was preoccupied with augmenting his land, which was then wealth. As a result, petty warfare among the landed nobles was common. Yet at the time of foreign menace, the nobles would forget their differences and present a united front to their enemy. That is why the Parthian kingdom was able to last for more than four centuries.

The Vashyan era begins when people of acquisitive mentality come to dominate society because of their control over wealth. All other classes then serve Vashyan interests, with Khattris fighting their wars, Vipras justifying their rule, and Shudras performing physical labor for them. Their rule is usually decentralized, with provincial and city governments retaining considerable autonomy from the center. In the early stages of the Vashyan era, the memory of the institutions of the preceding Vipran age is still alive, and the central government is able to keep the locals under some control. But as time passes, the centrifugal tendencies grow, and decentralization and eventually anarchy came to permeate the social order.

There is some evidence that such was the evolution of the Parthian state. Early Parthian monarchs such as Mithradates I and II were able to keep their nobles under control. But with the

passage of time, the monarchy lost more and more of its power and prestige. Although the monarch continued to come from the Arsacid family, in time the nobles became so powerful that they virtually became the kingmakers. The absence of any accepted law of succession in the Parthian monarchy further added to their strength. Frye tends to confirm this view in these words:

The progressive 'feudalisation' of the Parthian kingdom is revealed in many minor details such as the proliferation of coats-of-arms or insignia after Mithradates II. Indeed after the reign of Mithradates II, when the direct line of kings from the founder died out, the role of the nobility with their *syndrion* or council . . . increased in importance such that the nobles ratified the accession of, and at times even appointed, the king of kings. The lack of central authority is reflected in the apparent absence of strict rules or legal process governing the accession and succession of a monarch and the lack of precision in ranks and offices, of which there were many. [9, p. 183].

The Parthian period is mostly shrouded in the veil of history. But in many instances it yields glimpses of growing feudal anarchy, especially after 53 B.C., the fateful year when the Parthians first had to cross swords with a powerful adversary on the western frontier--the Romans. That frontier remained the battleground for over two centuries. The main bone of contention between Rome and Parthia was Armenia which was a vassal to the Arsacids but which the Romans coveted to be at vantage in their trade with China. In this long conflict, the Parthians acquitted themselves well. At times they inflicted disastrous defeats on the

Romans, especially in the early decades of this feud. But in a few decades, the Parthian power, weakened by internal strife among the nobles, began to decline. By A.D. 60, the Roman legions had occupied the whole of Armenia, which thereafter became a buffer state between the two powerful polities.

But the conflict between the two empires continued, and since much of the fighting occurred in Parthian territories, the Parthian energies were slowly exhausted. To this external turmoil must be added the ever-growing internal trauma stemming from constant dynastic struggles. The result was that an economic decline set in after the first century A.D. The whole polity was ravaged by attacks from nomadic barbarians from the north, by plague and famine, and, of course, by internal petty warfare. Little respect remained for law and order. The second-century Parthia presents a dismal picture of poverty, exhaustion, brigandage and feudal anarchy. All these are symptoms of a Shudran age, into which the Vashyan age seems to have moved sometime in the second century. About the general state of affairs of these times in Parthia, Colledge has this to say:

Indeed the signs of exhaustion and decline in the Parthian realm were multiplying. Political stability and central authority had been sadly undermined by generations of dynastic struggles. The destruction wrought by three Roman invasions of Mesopotamia and Babylonia within eighty-five years was incalculable. The spread of plague no doubt added to the ruin brought about by war. Full decadence was now all too apparent in the standard of the emissions of the central government and its dependents; in quality and design the coinage had sunk to appalling depths. [5, p. 170].

Ardashir and the Shudran Revolution

According to the law of social cycle, every Vashyan age, where general economic conditions usually improve, ends in a Vashya-cum-Shudran age, which is marked by rising crime, lawlessness and chaos. It is during the Shudran era that laborers assert themselves and run into sharp conflict with the ruling Vashyas. Eventually Vashyas are overthrown in a Shudran revolution and Khattris come back to power again, thereby starting a new social cycle. This is precisely what happened during the Parthian period.

The Parthians were Iranians by blood, but they had subjugated the two other peoples of ancient Iran-- the Medeans and Persians. As long as the state was vigorous, economy healthy, as long as there remained a semblance of law and order, the Medeans and Persians were content to be vassals to the Parthian monarch. But with growing internal turmoil and external reverses, they began to revolt against the central authority. This is precisely what happens towards the end of the Vashya-cum-Shudran age, which is where in reality Iran was in the second century. For while the living conditions had in general become horrible, political power still belonged to the Vashyan landlords.

At the beginning of the third century A.D., public discontent seems to have reached its limits. The end of Arsacid rule was fast approaching. People had gotten sick of years of Shudran age anarchy, with the peasantry seething under repressive serfdom. How exactly the Arsacid reign came to an end is not clear, although the rebellion deposing the king came from the Persians. It appears that one Ardashir, the vassal-king of Persis, revolted against the Parthian monarch, Artabanus V, in 220 A.D. In three successive

battles, the Parthian monarch was defeated and killed in 224 or 226. Thereupon Ardashir ascended the imperial throne and founded the Sasanid dynasty.

The rebellion by Ardashir may be called the Shudran revolution of ancient Iran, because, firstly, it put an end to the feudal anarchy of the Vashya-cum-Shudran age, and secondly, it had the ardent support of the Medo-Persian masses. Ardashir had won their support by invoking Zoroastrianism and pitting it against the agnosticism of the Parthian ruler. True, some of the feudal institutions were still alive, as their legacy, despite the revolutionary change in government, could not die right away. But no longer were the nobles strong enough to threaten the authority of the king. It may be recalled from chapters 2 and 3 that according to Sarkar a Shudran revolution is a drastic change in society that exterminates the influence of reigning Vashyas. This is precisely what Ardashir did by replacing the nobility-dominated Parthian monarchy by a vigorous government. Law and order were restored, and the aristocratic families came under his subjection.

So chaotic and poverty-stricken was the closing period of the Vashya-cum-Shudran age that scholars in the Sasanid period tried to forget and ignore the Parthian chapter in the Persian annals. The Parthian era was described as a dark age. Attempts were made to artificially shorten its age to half of the almost 500 years that it actually endured. There are few written records of the Parthians. But the deliberate manner in which the Sasanians tried to efface Arsacid history from their heritage is clear evidence of the extent of economic decay and chaos in the Parthian polity towards its end, of which the bitter memory was still alive. But in their zeal to denigrate

Parthia, the subsequent writers ignored even its achievements, even the fact that the Arsacids had once successfully challenged the mighty Romans and generated a flourishing economy. Soon the Parthians were all but forgotten in Iran. What survived was the account of their downfall, but not much else.

Sasanid Period and the New Khatrian Age

Let us now take a brief pause and examine the pattern through which the ancient Persian civilization had evolved thus far. With the rise of the Sasanid dynasty, Iranian society completed one social cycle which had begun with the tribal Khatrian age of the Aryans. This tribal society, it may be recalled, had evolved into the imperial Khatrian age during the Medean empire, then into the Vipran era of the Magian priesthood during the Achaemenian and Selucid periods, which were followed by the Vashyan era and the Vashya-cum-Shudran age during the Parthian feudalism. Finally the Shudran age was eclipsed by the Shudran revolution brought about by a warrior named Ardashir. With this event, the first social cycle of ancient Persia had come to an end, and another had begun, for, as we shall shortly see, the Sasanids reestablished a government reminiscent of a Khatrian age.

The main difference between the Parthian and the Sasanid regime is the degree of centralization in government. Whereas the Parthian society is marked by the decentralized rule of the feudal nobles, the Sasanian rule is marked by the absolute rule of the king. The Sasanian monarch was an autocrat in theory as well as practice. He was in general bolstered by a large, standing army. There were no religious or constitutional limits on his power. He supported Zoroastrianism and its priesthood, which in turn recognized his divine,

unimpeachable rights. According to Huart:

The special feature of the government of the Sasanids as compared with their immediate predecessors, the Arsacids, was the centralization of the powers of the State in the hands of an absolute autocrat, supported by an exclusive religion. The administration . . . had remained the same; but it was more stable, and the governors of provinces, being kept in dependence on the central power, were less often inclined to revolt; indeed for centuries no satrap rose against its king. [10, p. 166].

The Sasanian era is quite often compared with the Achaemenid empire, because the two periods have many features in common. With both the government was relatively centralized, and both regimes enjoyed the support of the Magian priesthood. How is it then that the Achaemenian period belongs to the Vipran age, whereas the Sasanian period belongs to the Khatrian age? To answer this question, let me closely examine the features of the two eras.

During the Achaemenian regime, the government indeed was centralized, and the monarch was an autocrat. But this was more in theory than in practice. The king's absolutism was in fact enjoyed by the Magi who tutored the Persian rulers. There were four classes in society, namely priests, warriors, artisans and workers, and priests were on top because they had won over the king, who controlled his governors through an elaborate system of spies. Thus with the king under their control, all other classes acknowledged the supremacy of Vipras.

During the Sasanian regime, by contrast, the Zoroastrian Church, demoralized during the Parthian

period, was itself the creation of king Ardashir, a warrior, who used religion for his political ends. Ardashir's revolt would not have been successful without support of the Medo-Persian masses who rallied to his cause because he espoused the religion of Zoroaster. It is by invoking Zoroastrianism that Ardashir had created singleness of purpose among his people. And following his own accession to the throne, he had continued the same religious policy to maintain national unity.

The Magian priesthood, therefore, owed its revival to the vigorous efforts of a warrior king who not only became the head of the State but also of religion, which is known in history as Mazdaism. Thus, even though both the Achaemenian and Sasanian regimes appear to be equal patrons of the Zoroastrian Church, there are subtle differences in this patronization. With one, the king controls the Magi; with the other he is controlled by them. Why else would Darius and Xerxes ascribe all their achievements to the Magian god, Ahuramazda? Speaking of religion in Sasanian times, Huart contends that "Mazdaism, having become the State religion, gave its ministers the highest place in the hierarchy, but the king was the supreme head of the religion, for he was endowed with divine majesty and surrounded with the luminous glory . . . which marked out his person for the respect of mortals." [10, p. 166]. The same kind of divinity had been claimed by the Egyptian pharaohs during the Khatrian age of the Old Kingdom. The Pharaoh had declared himself as God, but writings of the Sasanian times fall a bit short of that; they recognize the king merely as a representative of God on earth, but he could take the title of *bagh*, or a god. According to Zaehner, the writings of the Sasanid period exalt the king "as the mediator between God and man precisely because he is the King; for God is the universal sovereign of the two worlds and man is the sovereign of his

own little world or microcosm--his body, mind and emotions. Between them stands the King, the ruler of the whole material world by *divine right*." [16, p, 301 (*italics mine*)].

Even during the Sasanid regime, the Iranian society was divided among four classes with priests theoretically on top. But the real power belonged to the warrior kings who were supported by militaristic nobility. Aristocracy no longer belonged to big landlords, but to army-officers. Not until the latter-half of the sixth century did the priest really surpass the influence of the army. To this matter, I will come back shortly. About Persian aristocracy during the Sasanian period, Huart has this to say:

They always wore swords, even at banquets and entertainments . . . They were the best fighters in the world, cunning rather than dashing, and especially dangerous with long-distance combat, that is, with the bow. On the whole they were brave, and bore the hardship of campaigning easily. [10, p. 167]

These words from Huart confirm the fact that during the Sasanian period, Khattris or warriors were on top of the social hierarchy. The second place, of course, belonged to Vipran priests and bureaucracy, whereas the great landlords or Vashyas, who constituted aristocracy during Parthian times, were now relegated to third position in society. We continue to hear of the six families, some inherited from the Arsacid period. But they had lost their former glory and influence. Speaking of these nobles, Brundage contends that the Sasanid "central government disposed of paramount power. Our nobility is now only a minor part

of the second estate . . . The situation of the army reveals even more clearly the swelling power of the government. The army was commanded by a regularly appointed official . . . who was both commander-in-chief and minister of war. We hear nothing of private armies of knights such as the Suren had possessed in the early Parthian period." [3, p. 114]. Armajani reinforces this view by arguing that "in the early Sasanian period, toward the top of the pyramid of power there were the king and his warriors, the priests and the nobility." [1, p. 46].

The Sasanid dynasty lasted from 224 to around 650, and during this long period, Persia produced some outstanding monarchs who left their mark on Iran for centuries to come. Apart from the founder of the dynasty, the other illustrious kings were Shahpur I, Shahpur II, and above all Khosro I who is also known as *Anushiravan*, meaning "The Immortal Soul." Khosro I reigned from 531 to 579, and we find that the new Khatrian era in Persia lasted until the end of his rule. In other words, the second Khatrian age lasted from around 224 to around 579 or about 350 years. Throughout this period, the warriors or the Khatrian mind remained dominant in society, although the Khatrian supremacy had to pass through the usual ups and downs. Take, for instance, the short interlude between the death of Shahpur I in 272 and the accession of Shahpur II in 309. During these 37 years, the noble families of the Parthian times had tried to regain their power. No less than six kings came and went. But the nobles were soon subjugated when Shahpur II ascended the throne in 309, ruling vigorously for 70 long years.

Similarly, there were other short intermissions during which the priests conspired with the nobles to control the king with some success. At other times a wazir or prime minister, who was

usually an intellectual or vipra, came to control the king. But all such attempts by Vipras to attain social dominance would be soon thwarted by a vigorous Khatrian ruler. Therefore, the warrior class remained supreme, with minor interludes of a transitional character, throughout the period between the accession of Ardashir and the death of Khosro I.

Following the death of Khosro I, the pendulum of power swung clearly in favor of the priesthood, thereby leading to another Vipran age. As usual in such an era, the Vipras ruled in the name of the king by winning over the army generals. Another group of Vipras that now became powerful was the group of bureaucrats or *divans* headed by a wazir. Thus the chief priest and prime minister came to acquire a supreme status to produce another Vipran age.

The main indication of the renewed Vipran supremacy lies in the institution of royal succession. The law of succession had never been clear-cut and precise in ancient Iran. During the Sasanid times also, only Ardashir I, Shappur I and II, Kavadh and Khosro I chose their own successors. Following Khosro I, however, the monarchy became elective in the Sasanid family. "The designation of the king," says Huart, "was referred to a board composed of the Grand Mobed, the Chief of the Secretaries, and the Commander-in-Chief; and in case of disagreement the Mobed decided, after taking counsel secretly with his retinue of priests." [10, p. 166].

Who was the Grand Mobed? The Zoroastrian religion in Sasanian times was organized under a Church with a full-fledged hierarchy. In the hierarchy, the lowest priest was called *hirbad* who was in charge of the fire temples. Then came the

mobed, the priests who were headed by the Grand Mobed called *mobadan mobed*, who was the Pope of the Zoroastrian Church. It is he who became the supreme authority in the land, following the death of Khosro I. The chief priest, as pointed out by Huart, had the power to ratify the accession of a king.

It can be easily seen that the new Vipran age had evolved out of the new Khatrian age. Ardashir himself had revived the Zoroastrian Church which gained strength and became well-organized and fanatical over time. The Church had been responsible for the persecution of many new religious movements such as Manichaeism, Mazdakitic reformation, and Christianity. Along with the growth of priestly Vipras had come the growth of bureaucracy needed in the proper management of a vast empire. Many *divans* or ministries had come into being for the administration of justice, finance, military, and other aspects of society.

Following the death of Khosro I, it is the chief priest and the chief minister who reigned supreme. Their power was bolstered by the army, and they ruled in the name of their king. Some scholars suggest that the royal succession had become elective much before Khosro's time. Wilber argues that the king was elected by the time of the reign of Shahpur II, who died in 379. Prior to his death, the king would describe the qualifications of possible successors in his letters to the chief priest, prime minister, and the commander-in-chief. After his death, a new king would be elected, with *mobadan mobed* presiding over the election. If this is true, then the new Vipran age, it may be argued, started much before the death of Khosro I in 579. However, even if this is true, other features of a Vipran society were lacking in Iran until towards the end of the sixth century. For instance, the class system turned into a somewhat

hereditary caste system only during Khosro's reign. Similarly many kings, following Shahpur II, reigned with an iron hand over both nobility and priesthood alike. Khosro I, as pointed out by Bausani, was certainly one such king. However, his successors were weak, and when the apparent ruler is weak, power usually passes into the hands of his Vipran advisers and other power-brokers in society.

Whenever Vipras come to power, they tend to consolidate their positions by imposing strict rules and regulations in society. Their strength lies in intellectual superiority and they succeed in confusing the mind of other classes through novel theories. There is evidence of this process occurring during and following Khosro's reign. For the class or caste system became more rigid in this period, and the religion sanctioned the ordering of society into priests, warriors, scribes, and commoners. In this ordering, priests were on top, and while this had been theoretically recognized by the time of Shahpur I, it now became true in practice as well. While such a rigid caste system provided a degree of social stability, it worked against cooperation among various groups and weakened the system of defense against alien invaders. For the regimentation of the system meant that only the warrior class had the responsibility of fighting the enemy, something resulting in a great loss of manpower available to the army.

Chiefly because of this societal regimentation, the new Vipran era was short-lived. Constant warfare with the Romans had already sapped the Persian energy, and when in 637 Iran came in violent conflict with the rising tide of Islam, its extensive domains fell in quick succession. The Persian empire simply collapsed before the might of Arab warriors. As a result, Iran, which only a few decades before had moved into its second Vipran age, moved back into the age of Khatrian warriors.

For the victorious society usually imposes the era of its own social cycle on the vanquished society, especially when the latter is uprooted and colonized.

Thus Iran's second Viplran age turned out to be a period of transition. It never got a chance to strike firm roots because of the Arab conquest, which was to have far-reaching repercussions for the future generations of Iran. While the past continued to shape its evolution, Iran emerged with a new face, a new religion, and a new syncretic culture. But this is a story which must be postponed till the next chapter which explores Muslim civilization.

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Chapter 5

MUSLIM CIVILIZATION

The previous chapter focused on the social evolution of ancient or pre-Islamic Iran, which, as we have seen so far, was in the Vipran age of its second social cycle at the beginning of the seventh century. The Persians had by then accumulated a rich heritage acquired over the Khatrian, Vipran and Vashyan eras of their first social cycle. Their society had become mature and stable, and it perhaps would have continued to evolve along the pattern of Sarkar's philosophy, had it not been for the tidal wave of a relatively young religion called Islam which swept across the land just before the middle of the seventh century. From then onwards, Iran moved along a dramatically different path. Its evolution became one with the evolution of Muslim or Islamic Society to which its rich Persian heritage made a great contribution. In order to understand the international role of Islam today, we need to examine the annals of the Muslim world.

Almost every great civilization has been associated with a monotheistic religion. Muslim society is no exception. Its religion, Islam, was founded by a Prophet named Muhammad who was born in Mecca around 570 A.D. Mecca is a city in Saudi Arabia, which was then inhabited by nomadic tribes. The country, a part of the Arabian Peninsula, is one vast desert, and the hostile climatic conditions forced its inhabitants to move from one place to another in search of food and water. Life was generally hard, and petty feuds and raids among the tribes were common.

Mecca was a great commercial center, located on the trade routes to Syria and Yemen. It was ruled by a tribe called Quraysh, a family that had grown rich from its control over the caravan trade. Muhammad himself belonged to this family, whose

members commanded respect and authority among the people. He had lost his parents in his infancy and was raised by an uncle. As he grew up he came in contact with a well-to-do widow named Khadijah who was impressed by his honesty and sense of humility. He subsequently married her and had many children of whom four daughters survived.

At the age of forty, or a little earlier, Muhammad felt a great restlessness in his heart. He became increasingly interested in a reclusive life, and began to spend much time in a cave on Mount Hira just outside the town. He was illiterate and had no formal instruction in religion. His fellow beings practiced paganism and idol worship which he instinctively detested. But he yearned for the truth, and spent many days, and at times weeks, in seclusion at the cave.

On one of those occasions, in the year 610, Muhammad was deeply absorbed in himself when an archangel, Gabriel, appeared before him in his meditation and revealed to him the truth. Soon he realized that the angel was none other than the messenger of God, Allah, a singular entity, who had created the world. Allah had no equal, and was omnipotent and merciful. Such indeed was the message revealed to Muhammad who subsequently set out to share his divine experience with his relatives and friends.

Muhammad taught the equality of human beings and the unity of God. Such words were anathema to the aristocratic society in which he lived. And as happens with every prophet, he met with ridicule and hostility. The pagans of Mecca, with so many gods and idols, could not accept the idea that their deities were useless or subordinate to Allah, or that their slaves were equal to them in status. Every great person has challenged in his message the towering inequities of his days. And for this

reason, while his words are cosmopolitan and dear to the oppressed, his teachings at first usually fall on deaf ears. He and his few followers have to undergo severe persecutions from the establishment, before his message, unstoppable because of its selflessness, is eventually accepted by his people.

The same kind of fate awaited Muhammad when he began to preach his faith called Islam at first secretly and then openly. His teachings, which were no less than revolutionary, alarmed the ruling aristocracy which began to make his life increasingly difficult. Despite the prestige of his family and his wife, he was ridiculed and at times pelted with stones. Undaunted, Muhammad continued to preach his message fearlessly. Tensions in Mecca reached such heights that his adversaries began to plot for his death. It is at this time that Muhammad decided to leave Mecca and move to Madina, a town about three hundred miles away.

Muhammad's escape to Madina is known as *Hijra* and occurred in 622 A.D., a year that marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. The Meccan aristocrats, however, instinctively feared Muhammad's magnetism. They were afraid of his power even when he was so far away in Madina where indeed he had been received with open arms. Muhammad, therefore, was not to be left alone. The aristocrats began to incite neighboring Bedouin tribes against the Prophet and his Muslim followers. A long conflict was the result, a conflict in which the new religion, despite tremendous odds against it, won. By 630, Muhammad had not only consolidated his position in Madina but had organized an army strong enough to capture Mecca itself.

The conquest of Mecca marks another watershed in Islamic annals. It resulted in the quick accep-

tance of Islam by most of the Arabs in the Peninsula. His work having been accomplished, Muhammed died in 632, two years after his Meccan conquest.

The Imperial Khatrian Age

Within a decade after his escape to Madina, Muhammad had been able to unite the nomadic Bedouin factions under one banner--Islam. This unification was unprecedented even in Saudi Arabia, and it spelled trouble for its neighbors. For the Bedouin tribes were already known as fierce warriors, and now they were imbued with the zeal of a fresh religion which called upon its followers to expand its influence and convert others. They had been warring among themselves, and their paganism, with its materialism, lack of ideals and so many gods, was one major obstacle in their unification. But the force of Muhammad's lofty and subtle idea of one, omnipotent God had converted them into do-or-die fighters.

The most urgent task facing Muslims following the Prophet's death was to choose a Caliph, which means successor. They chose Abu Bakr who had all the requisite qualifications. He was Muhammad's first male follower and had stayed with the Prophet through thick and thin. He was widely respected for his wisdom and nobility.

Soon after his appointment, Abu Bakr was faced with a reactionary revolt against Islam. This he put down with deftness and alacrity. He, however, died in 634 and was succeeded by Umar, who was a great military genius. It was during Umar's rule that the now Islamized Arabs won major triumphs in Persia, Syria and Egypt. He was, of course, assisted by brave and mighty generals.

The Arabs had been in contact with their

neighbors long before the rise of Islam. Their soldierly qualities had gained respect among the Byzantine and Persian empires, each of which had created buffer states in the Arabian peninsula to thwart periodic raids from Bedouin tribes. The Sasanids of Persia had appointed the Lakhmids as their vassal kings in Iraq, whereas the Byzantines had established the Ghassanid dynasty as their vassal state in Syria. The sudden unification of the Arabs under Islam naturally alarmed these vassal states. In fact, minor skirmishes with them had occurred even during Muhammad's lifetime.

In 634 Arab armies simultaneously attacked Syria and Iraq. Iraq was quickly captured, but in Syria they had to cross swords with large Byzantine forces. The Arabs were badly outnumbered, but displayed superior morale and military tactics. In two major battles, the Byzantines were defeated and by 640 Syria and Palestine had fallen before the Arab armies. The same fate awaited Egypt, which was overrun just a year later.

The Muslim forces had won an important battle in Iraq in 634, but their victory over the Persians was far from complete. However they did not have to wait long for a decisive victory which came in 637 when the highly touted Persian forces were annihilated. Persians were now on the run. Within four years, major cities of the once mighty Persian empire fell before the Muslims, and in 641 the Sasanid rule came to an end. Thus, in a matter of seven years (634-641), Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Iran fell before the rising tide of Islam.

The success of relatively small Muslim forces against entrenched enemies was no less than stunning. Historians have ascribed this to various reasons. The Arab soldiers believed that, live or die, they could not lose. For victory would bring them earthly rewards, whereas death in the cause of

Islam was a short-cut to paradise. Furthermore, Persia and Byzantine had exhausted themselves over four centuries of intermittent conflict. There had been much religious persecution of minorities within their borders. And while Islam had spread much terror in their heart, the persecuted minorities did welcome the spirit of equality it preached among men converted to its faith.

But there is also a deeper reason for the quick spread of Islam. In chapter 3, I have spoken of Sarkar's law of motion, which says that every entity is subject to cycles. Every rise is followed by a fall, and if some spark remains, the fall gives way to another rise. But suppose the rise is delayed by suppression from an external force. Then if the suppressed entity refuses to die, continues to struggle, it comes back with a bang. Its subsequent expansion surpasses all expectations. Such has been the fate of all great movements. They were all first repressed by entrenched establishments unwilling to give up their privileges and means of social exploitation. However, the repressor had to yield to the repressed, which then rose to astonishing triumphs.

The reason why Islam quickly engulfed its neighbors is that its founder had been at first brutally persecuted by the ruling aristocracy. It was his force, courage and lofty message that even after his death continued to inspire Muslims to perform amazing feats in battles. The same evolutionary course had been earlier followed by the prophetic movements of Zoroaster, Buddha and Christ; and the same course has been followed by cosmopolitan movements ever since. Thus as far as cosmopolitan movements are concerned, the law of cyclical motion may be restated as the law of earlier repression and subsequent expansion.

Going back to the evolution of Islam, the

first Caliph was Abu Bakr, succeeded by Umar who died in 644. Following Umar came Uthman who ruled until 656 when he was assassinated by a Muslim rebel. Uthman was followed by Ali, who in the eyes of some Muslims was the most qualified of all companions of Prophet Muhammad including Abu Bakr. For Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, had distinguished himself in battles and the knowledge of Islam, a knowledge that was surpassed by his eloquence. Ali's rule should have lasted long. But by the time of his accession, the Prophet's followers had begun to fight over earthly spoils amassed from victories in various wars, and the strife among Muslims continued to haunt Ali's caliphate. As with Uthman, Ali too was murdered by one of his former supporters. Thus Ali, whose superior character and benevolence had been widely recognized by fellow Muslims, could rule only five years.

The first four Muslim rulers, the direct disciples of the prophet, have been regarded as the Righteous Caliphs. In their administration, they were guided by Koran, the Muslim scripture containing Muhammad's teachings. By Ali's death, the Muslim empire had spread to North-Africa.

Conflicts among Muslims had first occurred during Uthman's rule, and they continued to plague all of Ali's reign. But as yet they had not caused an open split. Following Ali's demise in 661, however, there occurred in the Islamic movement a schism that has periodically convulsed the Muslim world ever since.

During his rule, Ali had to face a revolt from a general named Muawiyah, who was Uthman's cousin and the governor of Syria. Muawiyah had ambitions of becoming a Caliph himself, but in view of Ali's popularity he had no chance of attaining his goal. Following Ali's death, Ali's son Hasan became the

Caliph. But in a few months, he decided to step down to avoid further bloodshed in battles with Muawiyah, who then ascended to the caliphate. And Damascus, the capital-city of Syria, became the capital of the Muslim world.

Until then the caliphate had been elective in families which had accepted Islam at its birth. Following Muawiyah's accession, the caliphate became hereditary, with each ruler having the right to name a successor in his own family. Muawiyah thus founded the first Arab dynasty known as the Umayyad dynasty, which ruled from 661 to 750.

In retrospect, Muslim civilization was born at the beginning of the seventh century, when Muhammad began to preach his faith. He had taken birth in a community which displayed features of a Shudran society or of tribal Khatrian age. It is his forceful personality and fearlessness that produced mighty Khatrias out of a majority of Shudras. Had there been no Muhammad, the Arabian people would have sluggishly evolved to the imperial Khatrian age. The same evolution had earlier occurred in Iran and all other ancient societies. The advent of the Prophet, however, accelerated the pace of individual and societal evolution. But since every society must evolve in terms of the pattern set by the law of social cycle, the Arabs too had to begin with the Khatrian age. So great had been the evolutionary contribution of the Prophet, however, that they quickly moved out of the tribal phase of a Khatrian society: they jumped, as it were, directly into the imperial Khatrian age.

Muhammad had helped Shudras evolve into Khatrias. And the mighty Muslim warriors, starting practically from scratch, established a vast empire at an astonishing speed. By 640 Syria, Palestine and Persia had been captured. Since the Arab armies had won all these laurels, it should not be

surprising to find the Khatrian or army mentality dominating Muslim society at its dawn. Throughout the Umayyad dynasty, the Arab generals constituted the ruling aristocracy. They had all the prestige and prominence. A career in the army was eagerly sought. Religion, of course, was an important part of life and Muslim theologians called *Ulema* were well respected. But the topmost position in terms of social influence belonged to warriors--to Khatris.

In pre-Islamic times in the Peninsula, women were treated as chattels. They had no freedoms, hardly any rights of inheritance and scarcely any role in public life. The number of wives or concubines a man could have was limited only by his means. If he was opulent, he could have as many women as he liked. But Muhammad placed several restrictions on this practice. He sanctioned a maximum of four wives. However, if a man could not provide adequate support, he could have only one wife.

In addition to restricting polygamy, Muhammad also gave women certain rights to inherit property. Although woman was not equal to man in this respect, the sanctioning of right to inheritance was a tremendous advance over the established practice in pre-Islamic times. As regards female infanticide, the Prophet strictly prohibited it.

Although man is still considered superior to woman in Koran, the Muslim scripture in general accords woman a much higher status in society than was prevalent in Muhammad's day. Remembering this is important in evaluating Muhammad's contribution to the cause of womanhood. Social mores do not change fast. It takes centuries before established customs, even though heinous, die. But there is no doubt that as compared with the pre-Islamic Shudro-Khatrian times, the social status of woman

had considerably improved in the Khatrian era of Muslim society.

The seeds of the imperial Khatrian age were sown when Muhammad was welcomed by the residents of Madina in 622. That is when a centralized Muslim state began to rise. This centralization was somewhat tempered under the reigns of the first four caliphs, for the caliphate remained elective, so that power and authority were somewhat shared by the warriors, theologians, and the Arab priests. With the rise of the Umayyad dynasty in 661, however, political centralization reached its culmination. Theologians, of course, resented this complete loss of power. Many other Muslims also detested the dynastic rule, for it violated their cherished nomadic heritage wherein a warrior would be elected as the *Sheikh* (or chief) by the clan. But there was no other choice, for the Umayyads had ascended to the throne by force of arms. Their word was supreme in theory as well as practice.

During the Umayyad reign, the Islamic religion began to experience fragmentation. A number of minority sects began to appear, although their origins can be traced back to pre-Umayyad squabbles among the Muslims.

One sect was Khawarij, which held that the caliphate should be elective and granted to the Muslim most qualified in terms of courage, knowledge, and nobility. To them, the Caliph's family or Arabic origin did not matter. Not surprisingly, they were brutally suppressed by the Umayyads.

Another school of thought in Islam was called Shia. The Shia believed that the caliphate, or *Imamate* as they called it, belonged only to Ali and his descendents, for the prophet himself had chosen him as his successor. Therefore only Ali

and his sons were entitled to be the Imam, one who leads Muslims in prayers. The Imam, according to the Shia, was infallible. He alone could truly comprehend the teachings and sayings of the prophet. The Shia, therefore, followed only their Imams in their religious practices. Their beliefs were also opposed to the interests of the ruling Umayyads, and, as with Khawarij, they too were relentlessly persecuted. The Shia have survived till this day, and in some countries such as Iran they are in the majority. Of Khawarij, however, only traces remain.

Another school of thought emerging during the Umayyad reign was called Mutazilah, who maintained that Islam and its principles should be based on rationality and reason rather than faith and authority. They addressed themselves to problems such as free will, God's nature, origin of the universe and so on. They were generally regarded as heretics.

Those who did not subscribe to any of the three schools described above were called *Sunnis* or traditionalists. They were non-political and constituted the Muslim majority. They did not bother much about who ascended to the caliphate; they limited themselves to worship and religious learning from traditional sources of Koran and the Prophet's sayings called *Hadith*. Even today they bulk large in the Muslim world.

The Umayyads, by and large, were just rulers. They added prosperity and new territories to their empire. But despite some of their outstanding achievements, they were unpopular outside Iraq. Their suppression of the Islamic minorities had won them many enemies.

From the beginning of the eighth century, there was increasing discontent among their people.

Apart from the Shia and other Islamic faiths, the non-Arab Muslims were also resentful of the privileges enjoyed by the Arabic army-generals. The non-Arab Muslims had been promised full rights upon their conversion into Islam, but in practice they were treated as second-class citizens. In 747 this rising chorus of dissension erupted into an open revolt in the Iranian province of Khurasan. The Umayyad armies were defeated and in the aftermath Abu Abbas came to power, thereby founding the Abbasid dynasty in 750.

The Abbasid revolt brought about many changes in the world of Islam. First, the capital city changed from Damascus to Baghdad which thenceforth became the center of Muslim learning and creativity. The aristocracy also shifted in complexion. The topmost positions in the army passed into the hands of non-Arab Muslims who had been in the vanguard of the Abbasid rebellion. And since the rebellion had first begun in Khurasan, Iranians gained a preponderance in Islam. However, Arabic retained its supremacy in language, and the Arab Muslims were not totally eclipsed by their Persian neighbors.

The Umayyad power had rested on the support of Arab tribes and warriors, but the Abbasid authority was broadly based. The Abbasid ruler could count on the loyalty of the Persian, Arabic and other ethnic elements.

The caliphate also emerged with a new meaning. Immediately following Muhammad's death, the caliph was called the successor of the Messenger of God or *Khalifat Rasul Allah*. During Umar's reign, a new title was adopted for the caliph, namely *Amir al-Muminin*, which means Commander of the Faithful. The Umayyad rulers had continued to assume the same title. But the Umayyads had won the allegiance and not the hearts of the majority of Muslims. The

theologians had always looked upon the caliphate as divinely inspired, and the glory of the caliph's rule, in their view, depended on whether or not it conformed with the prophet's sayings and with Koran. The Umayyads were not as irreligious as their Abbasid successors later made them out to be; they did have the support of some *ulema* who gave a religious rationale for the political reality of the day. Yet the Umayyad caliphate did not fulfill the requirements of the Muslim's cherished ideal, which held that the caliphate ought to be elective and should be run on the basis of *sharia* or the revealed law contained in Koran. Most of the Muslim thinkers believed that the Umayyad rule violated many aspects of *sharia*. Thus whatever religious justification the Umayyad dynasty had enjoyed sprang from expediency and political reality. Some theologians rationalized its existence, but it was far from their ideal.

Abu Abbas had used this religious disaffection to his own advantage. While this was not a primary factor in the change of dynasty, it did make some contribution.

In order to win general support and legitimacy for their overthrow of the Umayyad rule, the Abbasids set themselves as champions of Islam. In theory at least, they accepted *sharia* as the basis of their rule. They also used the religious sentiment to glorify their own conception of the caliphate. The caliph was now regarded as the 'shadow of God on earth.' So far he had been an absolute ruler in practice. But now he became an absolute ruler in theory as well. Later, as the power of the Caliph declined, the religious basis of the caliphate acquired increasing prominence.

It has already been mentioned that the change of dynasty meant a change in the complexion of the aristocracy from Arab Muslims to mainly the Muslims

of Iraq and Iran. Most important positions in the state now went to Iranians. In army, judiciary and other areas of administration, the highest positions were generally held by the Persians. But the Persians, unlike the Arabs, had a rich heritage. All types of people--Khatris, Vipras, Vashyas and Shudras--had over one and a half millenia contributed greatly to the ancient Persian civilization. And, as described in the previous chapter, just before the rise of Islam, Iran was in the Vipran age where Vipras, represented by the priesthood and bureaucrats, were in prominence. But the triumph of Muslim armies in 641 had sent Iran back to the Khatrian age where warriors ruled again.

When the Abbasids shifted the capital from Syria to Iraq, it was all but inevitable that the Vipra-dominated system of Persia would make a return. There was no threat from the Magi, the Persian priesthood, because most Persians had already been converted to Islam. Therefore, the old Vipran system could return only in the form of its administration. And that is what happened within a century of the Abbasid rule. The administrative system of the Abbasids eventually gave prominence to the office of the Prime Minister, who at times overshadowed the power and prestige of the Caliph himself. Thus began the Vipran era of Muslim civilization, wherein Vipras, because of intellectual superiority, came to rule the Khatris as well as the other classes.

Wazirs and the Vipran Age

In retrospect, the Khatrian age of Muslim civilization, of which Iran became a part, lasted until the end of the eighth century. The length of the first Muslim Khatrian age is hard to ascertain. Muhammad was born in a Shudro-Khatrian society, i.e. one which displayed features of a Shudran as well as a tribal Khatrian age. If the birth of the

Muslim Khatrian era is attributed to the Prophet, then the Khatrian age endured for about 200 years. However, if the Arabs were already in the Khatrian era, of the tribal variety, then the Arab Khatrian period was much longer. But how much longer, we cannot say.

The first ruler of the Abbasid dynasty was Abu-Abbas who ruled from 750-54. He was a man of ruthless character and massacred almost all members of the Umayyad dynasty he deposed. He was succeeded by Al Mansur who ruled till 775. And it is during his reign that one observes the seeds which soon led to the rise of the Vipran age.

Under Al-Mansur the vizirate, a Persian office, appears for the first time in Muslim administration. Khalid Barmak was the first to hold that high office, although he was not yet called a *wazir* (or vizier). That distinction went to Khalid's son Yahya who was appointed as the first wazir by Harun-al-Rashid, the most illustrious Caliph of the Abbasid dynasty. In Hitti's words, "Yahya, who died in 805, and his two sons al-Fadd and Jafar practically ruled the empire from 786 to 803." [3 , p.295]. A wazir is basically an intellectual; so are the bureaucrats whom he heads. Therefore, the prominence of the vizirate signalled the rise of the first Muslim Vipran age. Its seeds were sown during the reign of Al-Mansur; but it began towards the end of the eighth century during the reign of Harun Rashid.

The Barmakids, as the members of the Barmak family are called, distinguished themselves in many ways. In theory the Caliph represented the highest office in Muslim society. In reality, the administrative faculties and superior intellect of the Barmakids enabled them to be the real sovereigns. They gave such dignity to the office of the wazir that even when the vizirate passed into the hands

of other families, the chief administrative officer continued to make most decisions on his own. He would consult the Caliph in important matters, but the latter generally accepted his advice.

In the first hundred years of the Abbasid dynasty, the caliphs themselves were strong warriors. But despite that, following Al-Mansur's rule, they were overshadowed by their wazirs who excelled in the administration of various departments. Historians have usually filled pages after pages about the exploits of kings, and said little about the people who were the real intellect behind the throne. Perhaps because of this general tendency of scholars, Harun Rashid is much more famous than his advisers, but the fact remains that much of the financial and administrative efficiency of his empire is attributable to the skills of his wazirs.

In the case of Muslim society, though, the wazir at one time had become so influential that a Muslim historian, Hilal as-Sabi, devoted a book entirely to the "*History of Wazirs.*" Many wazirs, and the families connected with them, became fabulously rich, a practice that started with Barmakids themselves, who lived in luxurious palaces in Baghdad. In Hitti's words:

Fabulous fortunes were amassed by members of the Barmakid family. Even what they saw fit to bestow on their clients, panegyrist and partisans, was enough to make such proteges wealthy. [3 , p. 295].

While the governmental control towards the end of the eighth century passed into the hands of Vīpras, in general also the social supremacy moved into their hands. It has been mentioned earlier that the Abbasids had tacitly consented to base their rule on *sharia* which holds that the government

should be run on the basis of Koranic principles. This tacit consent of the Abbasid rulers led to the rise of what Watt calls a "religious institution," which came to acquire considerable influence in society. The process through which this institution came about is not entirely clear, but Watt has this explanation:

If judges were to be taken from men "trained" in the various "schools" of law, the "training" had to become more formal. Just how this happened is not altogether clear, but some men came to be recognized as authorities in one or other of the specialized religious disciplines which were developing. Those who had been adequately "trained" under recognized masters may be said to have entered the corps of ulema or "scholars" from whom judges and similar officials were selected. This corps of ulema was the religious institution, and it claimed that it alone (acting through those of its senior members who were recognized as authorities) could formulate the application of Sharia to particular cases. In other words, the ulema and they alone had the right to formulate the rules and regulations stating how the divinely given law implicit in the Quran and Traditions was to be applied in actual governmental and judicial practice. Ideally the Caliph and his subordinates could operate only within the framework of these rules and regulations formulated by the ulema. [11, p. 109].

This long quote from Watt gives an explanation for the rise of "a corps of ulema" from which many administrative officials were drawn. Gradually, and about the time the vizirate became important, the

ulema came to acquire considerable sway in society. It is not clear whether the Caliph always listened to their versions of sharia, but their words did carry a good deal of weight. "The greatest successes of the ulema," says Watt, "were in creating and maintaining a social structure in which ordinary men were treated with a considerable measure of justice and fairness." [11, p. 109]. Had the ulema not been respected, they would have failed to achieve these "successes." Thus when the vizirate became important, Vipras, in the guise of ulema, rose to the top of social hierarchy. Khatris were no longer on the top, because the office of the wazir was considered superior to the office of the military commander. Some of the wazirs, while heads of the civil government, also headed the army, and took responsibility for defence.

The Vipran dominance in society meant that the views of ulema would increasingly prevail in social institutions and day-to-day affairs. The ulema had given their sanction to the Abbasids, who according to Faruki, "made all outward signs of deference to the supremacy of Islamic *sharia* and Islam. The caliph wore the mantle of the Prophet on his accession and on other ceremonial occasions; he led the public prayer; he paid outward respect to devout or learned men of religion and patronized Islamic studies." [2, p. 35]. This was contrary to what the Umayyads had done. They were more secular in thinking and had paid little regard to sharia. But the Abbasid patronization of the ulema meant a gradual rise in the latter's social prestige and influence. As a result, in the words of Faruki, "in matters of family law and ritual obligations, and to a great extent in criminal and commercial law, the administration and its judicial officials were dominated and guided by the views of Islamic scholars and its jurists." [2, p. 35]. All this is clear-cut evidence for the growing influence of intellectuals in Muslim society.

It was mentioned in chapter 3 that one contribution of Vipras to societal evolution is their insistence that the ruler ought to be kind and subject to a sacred authority such as God or people. This happened in all civilizations, and we now find that Muslim society also went through the same course, wherein the Vipras exercised influence through their advocacy of sharia.

The Vipran age began with the reign of Harun Rashid, and in due course the wazir became so powerful that the weak Caliph became a puppet in his hands. This is not surprising, for Vipras can rule only when the "direct" or the apparent ruler is weak. Rauf contends that "it is true that the Abbasid Caliphs in the first century of their long rule were powerful, but those who followed grew weak rapidly; and they became not only just figure-heads, but were subjected to all sorts of torture at the hands of their bodyguards and wazirs. The *Caliphs were deposed and appointed at the whim of the wazir.*" [9, p.44, (my italics)]. Hitti also confirms the supremacy of the vizirate in these words:

The vizir acted as the caliph's *alter ego* and grew in power as his chief indulged increasingly in the pleasures of the harem. In the diploma appointing his vizir the Caliph al-Nasir (1180-1225) has given a perfect expression to the theory of "divine right" of kingship working by proxy:

"Muhammad ibn-Barz al-Qummi is our representative throughout the land and amongst our subjects. Therefore he who obeys him obeys us; and he who obeys us obeys God, and God shall cause him who obeys Him to enter paradise. As for one who, on the other hand, disobeys our vizir, he disobeys us; and he who disobeys us disobeys

God, and God shall cause him who disobeys Him to enter hell-fire." [3, p. 318-19].

If any further confirmation is needed about the general Vipran dominance towards the end of the eighth century, it is provided by Adam Mez while explaining the effects of the dynastic change in these words: "The most noticeable change was that in the empire originally founded on a military basis, the wazir, the chief clerk, stood higher in rank than all the generals. The mighty official hierarchies of the earlier Orient were once more revived." [8, p. 89]. It should be noted that Vipras rule because of their intellectual superiority over the Khattris who can assemble and defend a large empire but are not always smart enough to administer it efficiently. For efficient administration Vipras are needed, and when they become influential enough that they effectively control the government and society while leaving the maintenance of law and order to the Khattris, the Vipran era begins. The warriors still retain some social prestige but their status is secondary to that of intellectuals. But every entity must follow the law of cyclical motion. It must move in terms of cycles of varying duration. During a particular era, the fortunes of the ruling class also wax and wane. How do we then identify the era? By comparing the duration of high periods for a group with its low period.

In Muslim society we find that the office of the wazir had become prominent by the end of the eighth century. And the vizirate gained in prominence during the ninth century as one weak Caliph after another came to the throne. But there were times even during the 9th century when the wazir was in a sorry situation. This was because the Caliph had become so weak that all effective power was exercised by his Khattrian bodyguards who cared

little for the Prime Minister. This, for instance, happened during the reign of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil who ruled from 847 to 861 and who, mostly kept a prisoner in his own palace, was eventually murdered by his son. Following the murder, the bodyguards, in collusion with the wazirs, appointed and dismissed the caliphs at will, something that resulted in reduced influence of the vizirate. So much so that the caliph al-Muqtadir (908-32) ultimately gave the authority of the wazir to the chief of bodyguards. Thus the Khatrian era returned, and the military came back to power. But this event was short-lived, and privileges of intellectual wazirs were soon restored. Vipras made a return but in a somewhat different setting.

The decline in the power and prestige of the caliphate was sure to invite rebellions in the far-off provinces. Many governors declared independence or paid only nominal homage to the Caliph. Among them were Tulunids and later on Fatimids in Egypt, Saffarids and Samanids in Persia, among many others. None of these, however, extended their control to Baghdad. One family which did extend its authority over the capital-city was the Buyid family which captured Baghdad in 946 and eliminated the bodyguards as the caliph-makers.

The Buyids were first-rate Khatriis and thoroughly controlled the caliphate. But in matters of administration they too had to turn to Vipras. The Buyids appointed their own wazir who naturally eclipsed the Caliph's wazir and effectively controlled the government. The military power, of course, belonged to the Buyid ruler who was called *Amir-ul-Umara* or Commander of Commanders, and reigned over territories large enough to be an empire. But the Commander of Commanders was not equal to the task of administration. He needed the wazir, and the vizirate assumed the same influence as it once had at the outset of the 9th century.

The Vīpran era was, however, in the phase of decline, and many wazirs were tyrannical and greedy. As a result, some of them received severe punishment from the Buyid ruler. However, the point remains that the office of the wazir was indispensable to the smooth functioning of government. In one case we know that one Buyid ruler, Muizz-ud-Dawlah, condemned his avaricious wazir, al-Muhallabi, to flagellation and imprisonment in 952, but was forced to reappoint him in the office to avert a collapse of his financial administration.

Actually the Buyids increased the importance of their wazir by assigning him not only the administrative functions but also the management of the army. Even recognized scholars, when holding the vizirate, led their army in expeditions. The most famous wazir in the 10th century was Ibn Abbad Sahib, who until his death in 995 remained in the high office. He was a great scholar and from a schoolmaster had risen to the royal position. About Sahib, Adam Mez writes that "the young prince, for whom he secured the empire, yielded to him in everything and honoured him in every conceivable manner. On his death he was mourned like a prince." [8, p. 104] The vizirate had received, as it were, a shot in the arm from Sahib, and following his death the wazirs were crowned with grandiose titles. In 1025, for instance, the wazir was given four grandiloquent titles. He was called Alam ud-Din (insignia of religion), Sad-ud-Dawlah (good fortune of the dynasty), Amin-al-Mulk (trusted one of the empire), and finally, Sharaf-al-Mulk (glory of the empire).

In areas where the governors had formed their own independent dynasties, the government was also, in reality, controlled by their own wazirs. Such, for instance, was the case with the Samanids who, as virtual masters of eastern Persia, were conten-

poraneous with the Buyids.

The Buyids' defacto control over Baghdad caliphate continued until 1055 when they were eliminated by a Turkish power, the Seljuks. But the fortunes of the Caliph continued to slide. He was now a captive of a different dynasty. The only difference was that the Buyids were Shias whereas the Seljuks were Sunnies. In other respects, life continued as before. The government and administration remained in the hands of Vipran wazirs, of whom the most distinguished was Nizam-al-Mulk, whose name translates as the organization of the kingdom. According to Bertold Spuler, Nizam-al-Mulk was "one of the greatest ministers whom the East has known." [10, p. 82]. He held the office of wazir from 1072 to 1092 during the reign of the Seljuk ruler Malikshah. In Hitti's words, he

was one of the ornaments of the political history of Islam. If we are to believe ibn Khallikan, "for the twenty years covering the reign of Malikshah, Nizam-al-Mulk had all the power concentrated in his hand, whilst the sultan [Malikshah] had nothing to do but sit on the throne or enjoy the chase." [3, p. 477].

Following Nizam-al-Mulk's death in 1092, the vizirate continued to hold sway, but none of its incumbents was as illustrious as his predecessor. Even though history is more or less silent on their achievements, the fact that wazirs had the upper hand in government throughout the reign of Buyid and Seljuk dynasties is confirmed by Ibn Khaldun, a fourteenth century historian, who is regarded as one of the most learned Muslim scholars of all times. The following quote from Khaldun's work is fascinating, for it accords with some of the arguments advanced by Sarkar. For instance, it explains why and how Vipran advisers, in time, come

to dominate the apparent ruler; how the weak apparent ruler tries to regain his authority, but is usually unsuccessful. In short, the following passage illustrates the way the Vipran advisers operate during the era of their supremacy:

When royal authority is firmly established in one particular family and branch of the tribe supporting the dynasty, and when that family claims all royal authority for itself and keeps the rest of the tribe away from it, and when the children of (that family) succeed to the royal authority in turn, by appointment, then it often happens that their wazirs and entourage gain power over the throne. This occurs most often when a little child or a weak member of the family is appointed successor by his father or made ruler by his creatures and servants. It becomes clear that he is unable to fulfill the functions of the ruler. Therefore they are fulfilled by his guardian. . . Eventually, it becomes clear that he exercises the control, and he uses the fact as a tool to achieve royal authority. . . All (exercise of the) actual executive power, and the personal handling and supervision of matters that concern the ruler, such as inspection of the army, finances and (defense of) the border regions are believed (by the child ruler) to belong to the wazir. He defers to him in all these things. Eventually the wazir definitely adopts the coloring of the leader, of the man in control. The royal authority comes to be his. He reserves it for his family and his children after him.

Such was the case with Buyids and the

Turks [Seljuks], with Kafur-al-Ikhshidi and others in the East.

. . . Once a dynasty has fallen into the hands of Wazirs and clients, it remains in that situation. Rarely is it able to escape from it, because (such control by others) is mostly the result of living in luxury and the fact that the royal princes have grown up immersed in prosperity. They have forgotten the ways of manliness and have become accustomed to the character traits of wet nurses, and they have grown up that way. They do not desire leadership. [5, pp. 377-78].

In this passage, first of all Khaldun confirms the fact that the wazir continued to reign during the rule of Buyid and Seljuk dynasties. Secondly, he points to the loss of manliness by the apparent ruler as the basic cause of his subordination to the one supposed to be only his adviser. Compare this with Sarkar's view that when Khattris lose their manliness and are outwitted by the ideas and cunning of the Vipras, the latter come to power. There is close affinity in the two views. Indeed, Khaldun proceeds to focus on the guile and manipulative ability of the wazir to perpetuate his control over the apparent ruler. He argues that the wazir cannot assume

the coloring of royal authority. Thus, in gaining control, he does not plan to appropriate royal authority for himself openly, but only to appropriate its fruits, that is, the exercise of administrative, executive, and all other power. He gives the people of the dynasty the impression that he merely acts for the ruler and executes the latter's decisions from behind the curtain. He carefully abstains from using the attributes,

emblems, or titles of royal authority. He avoids throwing any suspicion upon himself in this respect, even though he exercises full control...He disguises his exercise of control under the form of ruler's representative. [5, p. 379]

Khaldun's description of wazir's qualities fits well with the attributes that Sarkar ascribes to the Vipran mind which in general excels in hypocrisy and the art of manipulation.

A few words may now be said for Muslim society in Egypt and Spain. For at one time the rulers in these two countries also assumed the title of Caliph, with the result that Islam was once faced with the reality of three caliphs. But for my purposes, the history of these two nations can be disposed of quickly, for they followed the same pattern that evolved in most other Muslim territories.

At the beginning of the 8th century, the Muslim empire in the west had spread as far as Spain, France and Italy. When the Umayyad dynasty was overthrown by the Abbasids in 750, one of the Umayyad princes, Abdal-Rahman, escaped the bloody carnage and fled to Spain. There he founded his own kingdom and was able to defeat all Abbasid attempts aimed at his capture. The Umayyad state founded by Abdal Rahman in Spain lasted for almost 300 years.

A careful examination shows that until 961, Muslim warriors ruled in Spain, but later the rule passed into the hands of Vipran wazirs, of whom the most famous was Hajib al-Mansur. For more than a century, the Umayyad rulers of Spain were content to assume the title of Amir (commander), but in 929 the ruler assumed the title of Caliph. He certainly deserved it. For one thing, the Abbasid

caliph around that time was a puppet in the hands of his wazir and others; for another, the Umayyad ruler, Abdal Rahman III, had attained a series of brilliant military conquests. He was also a just ruler and an able administrator. With all these accomplishments, he had little difficulty in obtaining the title of Caliph from the ulema residing in his territories.

Following Abdal Rahman's death in 961, Al-Hakam came to power. He was succeeded in 976 by his minor son, Hisham. That is when the sceptre of authority passed into the hands of his regent or wazir, Hajib al-Mansur. Before his death in 1002, Hajib made his office hereditary. It is with Hajib's rise that the Muslim society in Spain came to join the Vipran era, which had started in Muslim civilization by the end of the 8th century. For in addition to the wazirs, the ulemas also came to have a strong, even fanatical, influence over Khattris who engaged in religious warfare to defend the faith.

The reader might be a little uneasy at this point. For here we find two branches of the same society ruled by different mentalities, with Khattris predominant in Spain, while Vipras had become prominent in Baghdad. This is not a contradiction of the law of social cycle. Whenever a civilization is spread out in vast territories, its off-shoots may behave differently at a point in time. In such a case, we have to examine the most important and influential off-shoot of that society. In the case of Muslim civilization, historians argue that the Baghdad caliphate, following the year 750, was the center around which various branches of Islam revolved for about 500 years. Hence the character of Muslim social evolution for that period would also be determined mainly by the pattern of events in and around Baghdad. Eventually, of course, the off-shoots of

a society usually come to join its most important member, and that is why Muslim Spain ultimately moved under Vipran dominance.

Another dynasty that also assumed the title of Caliph was started by the Fatimids, who were descendants of the Prophet's daughter Fatimah and claimed a privileged position in Islam. They were Shias and were never reconciled to the Abbasid caliphate which at first had the support of the Shia Muslims of Iran. But the Shias were soon disenchanted with the Abbasids who were Sunnis.

The Fatimid dynasty was founded by Ubayd Allah who overthrew a petty ruler in Tunis in 909 and immediately declared himself a Caliph. Sixty years later, his grandson, al-Muizz, conquered Egypt, which until the end of the 9th century had acknowledged, at times nominally, the suzerainty of Baghdad.

Just before its conquest by the Fatimids, Egypt was under the effective control of an able wazir named Kafur al-Ikhshidi, who has already been introduced to us by Ibn Khaldun. The arrival of Fatimids left the Egyptian system of administration unscathed, although at first their highest official was a Qadi or the chief justice. But in 990, a wazir was appointed by the Egyptian Caliph, and by 1021, following the death of the Caliph al-Hakim, the wazir became the most influential person in society. "After al-Hakim," says Hitti, "immature youths were made caliphs with the real power in the hands of vizirs, who later even assumed the royal title *malik*." [3, p. 621]. Thus Egypt, which was under the sway of Vipras before its capture by the Fatimids, soon came back into the Vipran hold, and the situation more or less remained the same until the very end of the Fatimid dynasty in 1171.

Before concluding this section, let us compare the social status of woman in the Vipran era to her status in the preceding Khatrian age. Sarkar argues that male Khatri, on the average, accord better treatment to women than the male Vipras. This conclusion had found credible support from the annals of Western and Hindu societies. (See [1, chs. 5 and 7]). Now I will show that Sarkar's hypothesis is validated by Muslim society as well. And this contention is supported by the following two passages from S. F. Mahmud who describes the state of womanhood in the Umayyad as well as Abbasid times. About the Umayyad times, he writes:

The women, especially among the aristocracy, enjoyed a fair amount of liberty; they patronized the arts and loved poetry and singing. Poems were even written to the beauty of the women of the Caliph's household. Atigah, the daughter of Muawiyah, was a known beauty and his grand-daughter, another Atigah, who was the wife of Caliph Malik, was known to be a lady of brains as well as charm. But the best known and most cultured ladies of those early days were two ladies of Hijaz, whose beauty, brains and wit were known far and wide. These paragons were Sukaynah, the daughter of Iman Husain, and Aisha, the daughter of Talha; they were the real arbiters of taste among the women of those days. *Kitab-ul-Aghami*, that treasure-house of the picturesque historical lore, contains many stories of the prestige enjoyed by these two ladies in al-Medina and Taif. [7, p. 91]

Now compare this passage with the following quote from the same author describing the position of

women in the late Abbasid period when the Vipran era was in full swing, and when

the position of women as a whole retrogressed. They had enjoyed a degree of freedom under the Umayyads and the early Abbasids, and then were admired for their accomplishments as much as for their prestige and status, *but they were now thrust into seclusion and began to be treated with ill-disguised contempt.* A study of *Arabian Nights* will leave nobody in doubt that something had happened to Muslim society, because most women of the *Arabian Nights* appear to know neither loyalty, nor dignity. [7, p. 122 (my italics)].

The author of the above quote seems to wonder about what had happened to Muslim society. But Sarkar has the proper answer: the Khatri-dominated society of the Umayyads evolved into the Vipra-dominated society during the Abbasid reign. And whenever male Vipras in the guise of intellectuals, scholars or the clergy reign, the social status of women declines. Myriad restrictions are then placed on their dress, movement and the range of social activities. This happened in other civilizations, and Muslim society was no exception.

Mongol Domination and the Khatrian Age

Every epoch plants the seeds that subsequently sprout into a new age. For instance, while the Khatrian era is in full swing, a Vipran group begins to gradually evolve long before the actual advent of the coming Vipran age. Similarly, when Vipras are prominent, certain institutions come into being to foreshadow the Vashyan age. Such indeed was the case with all civilizations,

and Muslim society was no exception.

During the ancient and medieval periods, the Vipran eras were reflected in the social predominance of the clergy or prime ministers, whereas the Vashyan eras were represented mostly by the social supremacy of feudal landlords. Whenever wealthy landlords rule society by purchasing the services of Vipras and Khatris, the resulting system of government is called feudalism, a system reminiscent of Sarkar's Vashyan age. A close look at history reveals that in one form or another feudalism came into being in many ancient and medieval societies following the decline of their Vipran eras. But the rise of big landlords did not occur overnight. It occurred in a slow process of unfolding, starting with the kings making land grants to army officers and bureaucrats. These land grants were called fiefs, and each fief-holder was given the right to exploit the land.

While initially the fiefs were mainly granted for military service, over the years they became hereditary. The original fief-holders were Khatrian warriors, but their descendents, nurtured in luxury and comfort, evolved into Vashyas. The progeny of the Khatrian ancestors looked upon the control over vast estates as the sure means of comfortable living and sway over those tilling the land. It was only natural for them to develop acquisitive mentality and accumulate wealth, for that is precisely what had earned them social influence. In other words, the land-owning progeny of Khatrian warriors had over centuries turned into Vashyas.

A similar chain of events began to take shape in Muslim society under the Abbasid caliphate where military fiefs were granted by the ruler. This fief was called *iqta*. At first this *iqta* was granted to the caliph's relatives and governors.

But the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, ruling from 847 to 861, began making land grants to brave soldiers to keep them involved in a standing army. The generals were also given certain administrative functions such as collecting the land revenue for the central treasury. Similar developments in other civilizations had occurred during their Vipran eras, eventually giving rise to the supremacy of Vahsyian landlords. The *iqta* system, therefore, contained the same germs that in other societies had led to the rise of feudalism over four to five hundred years. This is what, for instance, had happened in ancient Persia, beginning with the Achaemenian empire (see the previous chapter).

Once started, the *iqta* system, despite its inherent dangers, gradually spread to most regions of Muslim society, including Egypt and Spain. It came into greater use under the Buyids and by the time of the Seljuks it had become an established institution. By then it acutally stood in need of reforms. The military fief-holders had been exploiting the peasants working in their farms, while paying scant attention to agricultural productivity. It was left to the illustrious Seljuk wazir, Nizam-ul-Malik, to introduce the urgently needed reforms in the *iqta* system of his day. Thus feudalism was beginning to sprout in Muslim society during its Vipran age. Was this a premonition of the forthcoming Vashyan age?

The answer for Musim society, unlike with others, turns out to be in the negative. The reason lies in the fact that just when the *iqta* system was ready to mature into feudalism, the Islamic world was convulsed by an extraneous power of unprecedented ferocity--the Mongols. Just as the Vipran era of the defeated Persian society had to move back into the Khatrian age initiated by the victorious Arab warriors, similarly the Mongolian

onslaught in the 13th century sent the Viplan Muslim society back into the Khatrian age. This, as I have argued in chapter 3, is not a negation of the law of social cycle, but a reflection of the fact that in a duel only one party is the victor. In the duel between societies, the vanquished and colonized society usually has to accept the rule of mentality dominant in the one that triumphs. This was true with Persia in the 7th century, and by an ironic twist of history, it became true with Persia again in the 13th century, except that by now the Persian society had merged with Muslim civilization.

By the end of the 12th century, the Seljuk hegemony over the Baghdad caliphate had come to an end. The reigning caliph al-Nassir (1180-1225) was an ambitious ruler who wanted to revive the glory of the past. He was not successful in his effort, because the Seljuk ruler, deposed in 1194, was replaced by another competing Sultan named Khwarizm Shah, who was a Shia and wanted to put an end to the Sunni Abbasid caliphate. The designs of Khwarizm Shah were already thwarted by the unexpected rise of the Mongols. But the relief to the caliphate was short, as the Mongolian behemoth reached the gates of Baghdad in 1258 and destroyed everything that came across its way.

At the dawn of the 13th century when the caliphate was already gasping for breath, in distant Mongolia occurred a momentous event that a little later virtually shook the foundations of Civilization. Around 1206, the fierce Mongolian nomads dwelling on the periphery of northern China were united under the chieftainship of one Temuchin, later known as Chingis Khan (or Genghis Khan). After soon conquering North China, he set his ominous footprints on the neighboring lands and within a few years assembled the largest empire known in history. But Chingis Khan died in 1227,

before his marauding armies could reach Baghdad. This task was left to his grandson, Hulagu, who was invited by the caliph's wazir to march onto Iraq. This was a great blunder, for the Mongolian axe fell on everything with equal ferocity. In their march, the Mongols destroyed the eastern centers of Muslim learning and culture, leaving everything in a shambles. Hundreds and thousands of innocent civilians were decapitated and their properties set afire. And in 1258, the caliph along with many members of his family was slain. Thus ended the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad.

It is not clear what the Muslims could have done to block the triumphant advance of the Mongolian colossus, but the trifling squabbles right in the heart of Islam did not help either. The late Abbasid period was generally a period of discontent and strife in Islam. As Rauf remarks, "there was much terror, devastation and misery in the latter part of the reign. The rivalry between the Arabs, Persians and Turks, the disputes between factions within each of these groups, constant quarrels between sects and schools of thought, the attacks of the Mongols and the Crusaders--all brought misfortune and misery to millions and millions in the world of Islam." [9, pp. 66-67].

The collapse of the Abbasid caliphate was a momentous event in the history of Islam. It was not only a physical blow to Islamic hegemony over vast territories of Asia but also a psychological blow to Muslims all over the world. For over five hundred years, the name of the Baghdad caliph was mentioned in their Friday prayers. For millions of them in far-flung lands, the caliph had provided a unifying religious symbol. And as the caliphate had weakened, its religious aspect had gained increasing prominence. All this was now gone. Muslims felt this spiritual loss more than anything else.

Following the Mongolian conquest, the main centers of Muslim civilization, such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Transoxiana, came under the iron grip of the Mongols, whose society at the time was in the nomadic phase of the Khatrian age. Warriors were supreme in that society, and as a result the vanquished Vipran society of the Muslims had to start all over again in terms of its journey along the law of social cycle.

We have already seen how Hulagu destroyed Baghdad in 1258. But the Mongolian energies were not yet spent. The Mongolian juggernaut kept advancing westwards, until it faced the Muslim forces from Egypt which by that time had fallen in the hands of Mamluks. For once, the Mongols were defeated. The Mamluks inflicted on them a crushing blow, thereby checking the Mongolian advance in the west once and for all.

After completing the destruction, the Mongols turned to the task of reconstruction. They built their capital at Maraghah in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. For about a century, Hulagu's successors ruled in peace and patronized art and culture. At first, they were converted to Christianity. Later, they accepted Islam.

The formerly Muslim territories of Transoxiana and Afghanistan came under the control of Chaagatoy, a son of Chingis Khan. Here also the Mongolian rulers were converted to Islam. Towards the end of the 14th century, in these territories there emerged another world conqueror, Timur the Lame (or Tamerlane), who overthrew his master and swept across the lands of Hulagu's descendents. He also conquered the Ottomans who later became prominent in the Muslim world.

Throughout the Muslim territories, the Mongols were eventually won over to Islam. The states they

founded were purely militaristic in character. The ruler, supported by powerful generals and army was absolute in theory and practice. The Muslim ideology of sharia was now replaced by the Mongolian ideal of what is known as *Yasa*. While sharia preached the rule of law in accordance with Koranic principles and the Prophet's sayings, *Yasa* derived sanctity from the prestige of Chingis Khan as a world conquerer. *Yasa* tended to legitimize dynastic and absolutist rule in the families of the great Khan. As Hodgson points out, *Yasa* had three purposes: "First, a legitimation of independent dyanstic law; second, the conception of the whole state as a single military force; third the attempt to exploit all economic and high-cultural resources as appanages of the chief military families." [4, pp. 405-406].

With *Yasa* competing with sharia, the influence of Ulema, the Vipran scholars, also went down. Army emerged with the greatest honor. The civilian bureaucracy in terms of rank and remuneration was also organized on military basis. In short, as Hodgson remarks, "the whole upper realm of society was to be subject to military discipline." [4, p. 407].

Chingis Khan was an amalgam of virtue as well as vice. While he was ruthless and tyrannical, he was also a military genius and a great lawgiver. He was the author of *Yasa* which was the fundamental law designed to govern the Mongol states. Being a great Khatri, Chingis Khan respected women, so that when the Vipran era of Muslim society was forced back into the Khatrian era of the Mongols, the social status of woman could not but rise. Bertold Spuler supports this view in these words.

Besides military regulations, the *Yasa* contained provisions governing civilian life. . . Family life was also regulated;

women enjoyed ample independence and high respect, in complete contrast (generally speaking) with the position accorded to them over the centuries by Islamic law. Women also distinguished themselves as auxiliaries on military campaigns; they not only took charge of household management and the upbringing of children, but accompanied the army on its campaigns and looked after the needs of the fighting men. During battles, the women were kept hidden in wagons at the encampment, but in emergencies they frequently joined in combat. This high status of women explains why female portraits first made their appearance in oriental art during the Mongol period. [10, P. 6-7]

The one Muslim power that had blocked the Mongolian tide was the Egyptian government under the Mamluks. The Fatimids had earlier been replaced by the Ayyubids who in turn were overthrown by their military slaves (Mamluks). The Egyptian government acquired unprecedented prestige after it defeated the Mongols. It gained further legitimacy by providing sanctuary to Ahmad Abu Asim, who belonged to the deposed Abbasid family and had somehow escaped the massacre at Baghdad. The young Abbasid prince was installed as Caliph in 1261, and the Mamluk sultan Baybars and the ulema took an oath of allegiance to him. The Caliph's name was printed on the coins and recited in Friday sermons.

This, however, was a last ditch effort to revive the caliphate, which remained a mere phantom of its glorious past. The new caliphate had, of course, little temporal authority, but even its religious authority was limited to Egypt. Other Muslim states knew it better. For the caliphs at Cairo were mere puppets in the hands of Mamluk sultans.

As with Mongol states, the military aspect dominated the Egyptian society as well. The real power belonged to an oligarchy of military commanders who built their power with the support of slaves imported from the north. This was perhaps the only time in history when slaves outshone their masters because of their fighting qualities. The Egyptian sultanate was, with a few exceptions, not hereditary. On the death of a ruler, his relative would be provisionally appointed a sultan, who would rule as long as he enjoyed the loyalty of the commanders. If not, which was usually the case, he would be removed by the victor among the feuding generals. In such an atmosphere, succession to the sultanate was frequently marked by bloodshed. This was the rule of force, not intellect. In other words, as with the Mongol states, the Khatrian mentality ruled in Egypt as well.

Another bastion of Muslim society during the 13th century was India, which until then had been inhabited mainly by Aryans in the north and Drawidians in the south. The Muslim contact with Indo-Aryans had actually occurred as early as the 8th century when the Arabs conquered the Sind, but it was not until the 11th century that a long conflict between the two sides had occurred. By the beginning of the 13th century, a sultanate had been established at Delhi. As with the Mamluks, the Delhi sultanate also grew out of slave soldiers.

During the 11th century, the Indo-Aryan society was in the Vahsyan age. When the Muslims established their sultanate at Delhi, India, for a while, passed through the anarchy of Shudran age; but in 1296, a warrior named Alaudinn Khilgi subdued the Vashyan princelings and Rajas and established a centralized state over major parts of India (See Ch. 7 in [1]). Thus by the end of the 13th century, the Indo-Aryan society came to join

the Khatrian era of Muslim civilization. From then onwards, the destinies of Muslims, Hindus and other inhabitants of India began to move together, as the people in Asia, from Syria all the way to the Indian subcontinent, came under the rule of the Khatrian mentality.

The new Khatrian era of Muslim society lasted until the middle of the 16th century. By that time great political and administrative changes had occurred in the world of Islam. The bulk of the Muslim lands including Egypt had come under the control of Turkish Ottomans, with Iran under the Safavids and India under the Mughals.

The Ottoman dynasty was founded by a certain Uthman around the end of the 13th century in Asia Minor which was later renamed as Turkey. Uthman was a mighty Khatri. Starting from a mere soldier in 1289, he established a miniature kingdom by his death in 1326, when his son Orhan ascended the throne. Orhan and his successors maintained Uthman's triumphant tradition and by the end of the 14th century many more domains were added to the Ottoman state, which was beginning to grow into a vast empire. In 1402, the Ottomans suffered a temporary reverse at the hand of Timur the Lame who defeated and imprisoned their sultan Bayzid I.

This was a lethal blow to the prestige of the Ottoman dynasty, but its effect did not last long. Timur died in 1405 and the Ottomans quickly regained their prominence. By the time of Murad II, who ruled from 1421 to 1451, most, if not all, of their earlier domains were reunited with their empire. It is during Murad's reign that the Janissary corps, an arm of the Turkish army, gained ascendancy in society. This military corps was to play an important role in the evolution of Muslim civilization.

The Janissaries did not come from Turkey but from subjected Christian lands. Each year the Turkish recruits would visit the Christian communities, select muscular youths, convert them to Islam and then subject them to rigorous military discipline. The Janissary corps was a fierce fighting machine, and its members acquired top army positions. We will hear more about the Janissaries later.

Murad II was succeeded by his son Mehmed II in 1451. Mehmed is most known for his destruction of the age-old Byzantine empire, and for establishing an enduring foothold in Europe. He is the one who in 1453 conquered Constantinople, which is known in Turkish as Istanbul. Mehmed was an autocrat--cruel and ruthless. Immediately upon his accession, he had his brother killed, a precedent that virtually became an unwritten law in the state, where every successor ordered the liquidation of possible claimants to the throne. It is only after 1595 that this heinous practice was partially discontinued.

Early in the 16th century, the already vast Ottoman empire was expanded further by the addition of Egypt. The Mamluks were defeated in 1517 and were forced to accept the status of a vassal. This way the foremost Muslim power of the time came under the control of the Ottoman ruler Selim, who also usurped the title of Caliph which hitherto had remained with the Qurayshite family. With the conquest of Egypt, the Ottoman empire became the principal champion of the Sunni faith and clearly the foremost Muslim power, a position it retained until the end of the 19th century.

Following Selim's death in 1520, the throne passed into the hands of his son Suleyman, who by some is regarded as the greatest Ottoman sultan. In Europe, he came to be called the "Magnificent."

Suleyman's long reign of 46 years constitutes another watershed in the history of Islam. For during his rule, one discerns the beginning of another Vipran age.

The Second Vipran Era (16th to 19th Century)

Until Suleyman, the Ottoman state displayed all the features of a Khatri-dominated society. It was a successor to the disintegrating Mongol state, and constant warfare among petty dynasts continued to keep the Khatri on top. Warfare at the front preempted concerns for good administration. As the Ottoman state expanded in size, so that central parts of the empire enjoyed a modicum of peace, the warrior sultans turned their attention to cultural and artistic revival. By Suleyman's times, the vast Ottoman empire had, by and large, reached its territorial limits. Its military might had won world-wide recognition, and time was ripe for the ruler to attend to reforms in administration, which so far had suffered from neglect.

It has been frequently observed that when the state switches from territorial expansion to the task of efficient administration, effective political power gradually passes into the hands of the bureaucracy and its chief and his supporters, unless, of course, the warrior monarch responsible for assembling the empire is a keen administrator himself. At times, great warriors were also great administrators, and in those Khatrian times, society attained its golden age. But such times were rare. Soon afterwards, weak rulers would come to the throne, and power would converge to their advisers. This was the main reason for the rise of Vipran eras in all societies. This is precisely what happened during the Abbasid caliphate, and the same process was repeated verbatim following the death of Suleyman.

The chief legacy of the Mongal dominance to successor empires was absolutism. Until Suleyman, the Ottoman sultan did not share much authority with his wazir, who at times came from the army. While some wazirs had indeed distinguished themselves in the conduct of government, most had had little say in crucial matters. However, Suleyman believed in a "constitutional" form of government. He brought about a revival of sharia, and granted extensive authority to the vizirate, which until then had played a somewhat circumscribed role. Hodgson remarks that the wazir "had been given highest precedence under Mehmed II, but received comprehensive authority, to be shared with no one under Suleyman. He stood at the head of the whole apparatus: effective commander-in-chief in war and the master of the fiscal and even judicial services in peace." [4, p. 102].

To be sure, the Ottoman monarch, called *padishah*, was still the absolute ruler, and, in theory, above the wazir. Some successors of Suleyman put their wazir to death, but the point is that they could not do without another wazir. Nor did they have the interest and intellect to be an effective ruler. With the result, real power, for a long time, remained in the office of the vizirate. At times, the wazir successfully conspired to kill his padishah.

Thus we find that the second Khatrian era of Muslim society ended by the death of Suleyman in 1566 and gave way to its second Vipran age during which the vizirate came back in the seat of power. With the vizirate, the Vipran ulema also made a return. They had been earlier ignored under the Mongols who preferred Yasa to sharia. They had also been neglected by the early Ottoman sultans who mostly patronized a new Muslim faith called the order of *dervish*. Many Ottoman rulers, starting with the dynasty's founder, had favored this order,

much to the suspicion and disapproval of the orthodox Sunni ulema whose fate was connected with the respect for sharia. Many scholars had insisted that ulema alone were entitled to interpreting sharia from Koran and the prophet's sayings. Therefore the rulers sanction for sharia meant increased political role and influence for the Vipran class of theologians.

When suleyman acknowledged the supremacy of sharia, the social prominence of the ulema was inevitable. An influential scholar in the early 16th century was al-Dawwani who raised the ruler's absolutism to a lofty pedestal but sought to subordinate him to the rule of law as interpreted by the Vipras. Faruki remarks that "in al-Dawwani, the class-stratification taken from Greek and Persian thought and curiously reminiscent of the Hindu caste system persists--the first being the men of knowledge (*ilm*) comprising doctors of theology and law, judges, secretaries, officials, geometers, astronomers, physicians and poets, then the warriors or defenders, then the traders and artisans, and finally, the farmers." [2, p. 75]. On the same page, Faruki goes on to suggest that al-Dawwani's work "enjoyed a wide vogue and had, it appears, an important influence on the manner in which the Ottoman state organized itself and in later Ottoman writings."

The Vipras rule precisely by praising the Khattris and trapping them unawares in the web of their theories. They support the absolutism of the ruler, and in reality enjoy its fruits. This is precisely what Dawwani did while justifying the absolute monarchy as true caliphate but granting soldiers the secondary position. It is not surprising that his views were popular in the royal court.

Quite clearly, Vipras were atop the social

hierarchy either during or immediately following Suleyman's reign. Suleyman went as far as appointing a supreme religious authority called Shaykh al-Islam, who was authorized, if necessary to depose the Sultan. Bernard Lewis remarks that "the actual role of this authority...was of course determined in the main by the play of politics and personalities. The significant thing from our viewpoint is that such an authority, with such a jurisdiction, should have existed at all and have been recognized." [6, p. 14]. Further confirmation for the social supremacy of Vipras following the acceptance of sharia comes from Hodgson in these clear-cut words:

The ulama had great prestige and came to have great authority and even great power. Lengthy training, officially supervised and tested, was required for entry into their official ranks; as qadis [judges] and muftis [jurists] they had a position of considerable impunity and were well organized. The chief mufti of the realm (called shaykh-al-Islam) was recognized as competent to authorize deposition of the padishah for unfitness, *and on occasion he did so* (where a powerful faction enabled him) [4, p. 108(my italics)].

During the 16th century, Muslim society was organized into three distinct states--Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal--of which the Ottoman empire was the most influential. Therefore, the ruling mentality in Istanbul will determine the character of Muslim society at the time. Since the Ottoman subjects were then under the sway of Vipras, Muslim society around the middle of the 16th century moved into the Vipran age.

The Vipran character of Muslim society was

reinforced at the beginning of the 17th century when the Mughal empire in India also came under the influence of Vipras. I have argued earlier that the Indo-Aryan and Muslim societies began to evolve together at the dawn of the 13th century. Both were then ruled by the Khatrian mentality, and as a result the influence of ulema had declined. At the beginning of the 16th century Muslim lands in India came under the control of the Mughal dynasty, of which Akbar the Great was the most illustrious ruler. Akbar (1556-1605) had followed the policy of religious toleration towards the Hindus, a policy that aroused discontent among the orthodox ulema. But the Mughal emperor was powerful enough to ignore their criticism and disaffection.

Following Akbar's death in 1625, his son Jahangir came under the sway of his queen, Nur Jahan, who effectively ruled with the help of her brother Asaf Khan whom she appointed the wazir. The real power in Jahangir's reign was, therefore, exercised by his advisers, and it is here that one discerns the seeds that were to sprout as the fullfledged Vipran era in the times of Jahangir's grandson, Aurangzeb, who ruled from 1658 to 1707. That is when the affairs of state were positively subordinated to the wishes of the Sunni ulema. With the result, there was much persecution of Hindus and Shia Muslims alike. (For further details, see [1, ch. 7]). Thus, we find that during the 17th century, both the Ottoman and the Mughal empire were under the sway of Muslim Vipras ruling either in the guise of wazirs or of the ulema or both.

The third contemporary pillar of Muslim society, namely the Safavid empire, presents a somewhat murky picture. There the social dominion, even after the 16th century, alternated between Khatris and Vipras. The reason is that the Safavid state, established in Iran and professing the Shia

faith of Islam, was sandwiched between the Ottoman and Mughal states, which were avowed Sunnis. As a result, Iran invited the hostilities from all sides, especially from the side of the mighty Ottomans. Years of peace in the Safavid empire were exceeded by years of wars. In the peace times, power would slowly gravitate towards the Shia clergy and ulema, whereas during wars, the military commanders, the Amirs, would come to the forefront.

The Safavid dynasty was founded by one Ismail in the year 1500 at the city of Tabriz. Ismail belonged to the family of Shaykh Junayad, who during the 15th century was the head of a religious order, which, like other mystical fraternities, was called *Sufi*. Shaykh Junayad claimed descent from the family of Ali, who it may be recalled, was prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. The Shaykh, in other words, was the head of a mystical order professing the Shia branch of Islam.

When Ismail founded the Safavid dynasty in 1500, he took the title of Shah and renounced the title of Shaykh. As a counter to the mighty Ottoman state, which was Sunni, he declared Shiism as the official religion of his empire, a decision that was welcomed by seven powerful tribes called Kizilbash or "Red Heads" after the color of their turbans. Islam was again confronted with an anomaly, for not since the Fatimid dynasty had there existed a Shia state in the Muslim world. On his part, Ismail not only professed Shiism, he also established an office charged with the conversion of his subjects to his religion. As a result, in a short time, the Shias of Iran moved from a position of minority to one of majority, something that had seldom occurred in an Islamic state before.

Ismail had founded a militaristic state, but his ardent championship of the Shia faith sowed the

seeds of subsequent ascendancy of the Shia scholars. During much of the 16th century, the Safavid empire was ruled by the Khatrian mind. The Shah was the autocratic ruler in theory and in practice, with the social prestige belonging to the army.

In 1588, Iran came under the reign of Shah Abbas who turned out to be the most illustrious ruler of the Safavid dynasty. He gave Iran another Golden Age comparable to the times of Cyrus the Great and Darius. During his long reign of 41 years, Persia basked in such legendary splendor as had characterized the glorious days of ancient Persian empire. Shah Abbas was an absolute but just ruler. Although his administration was patterned along the now familiar lines wherein the wazir headed the bureaucracy, there is no evidence that the Shah was controlled by his advisers. But following his death in 1629, things changed drastically. The Safavid princes were usually raised in luxuries of the harem life and did not have the qualities needed by a strong ruler. As a result, the civilian bureaucracy, which was well-entrenched by the time of the death of Shah Abbas, came to dominate society. The office of the wazir acquired great power, with the social influence belonging to the Shia ulema.

The upshot of this discussion is that following the death of Shah Abbas in 1629, Iran moved into the Vipran age and joined the Vipran societies of the Ottomans and the Mughals. The students of law among the ulema were called *mujtahids*, and in Iran, as in other Muslim states of the time, these jurists exalted the Sharia, which meant the subordination of the ruler to the rule of Koranic law. At the end of the 17th century, while the chief wazir had become the effective ruler, the *mujtahids* commanded supreme social influence. According to Hodgson, for instance, "at the end of the century,

under Shah Sultan-Husayn, the supremacy of the mujtahids reached its peak in the labours of the great mujtahid, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, a dogmatic and bigoted scholar who achieved great power in the state." [4, p. 53]. Elsewhere, Hodgson remarks that by the end of the 17th century, "the state, already threatened with doubts of its Shii legitimacy, ceased to be independent of the ulama." [4, p. 57].

Western Influence and the Vashyan Era

The second Vashyan age of Muslim civilization had started in the second half of the 16th century and lasted till the dawn of the 20th. Throughout this period, Vashyan wazirs in administration and ulema in society at large were, with inevitable vicissitudes, on top of the social hierarchy in most Muslim lands. They ruled with the help of sharia which came handy in controlling the Khattris. However, in the first half of the 20th century, owing to increasing contacts with the West, Muslim society gradually moved into the Vashyan age, where political power and social prestige belong to the rich possessing great wealth and an acquisitive mentality.

The Vashyan era of Muslim society is still in infancy; but of its existence there can be little doubt. For seldom before in the world of Islam have the wealthy had as much influence and prestige in society as they have today. Through the bulk of Muslim history, power and authority have rested with either men of sword or of scholarship, but not of acquisitive mentality. However, the Muslim contact with the West proved a bit infectious to the Islamic culture and thinking. Secular and relatively materialistic ideas of Western society began to penetrate the largely religious and otherworldly thinking of the Islamic world. As a consequence, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, the

social influence has been shifting away from the Vipran clergy and the ulema, who for a long time were influential by claiming to be the sole authorities on Koran. A series of violent events during the 19th century destroyed the power-base of the ulema in many Muslim countries. As a result, the predominantly religious thinking gradually gave way to relatively secular ideas regarding government and social institutions. And the acquisitive mentality also began to make a dent in the public mind.

The chief characteristic of the Vashyan age is that the ruling class comes to power because of its great wealth and not because of its innate qualities of Khatrian courage or Vipran intellectual brilliance. Now it is true that those in power, whether Khatris, Vipras or Vashyas, usually become wealthy and enjoy the highest living standard in society. But the question in Sarkar's theory of social cycle is this: is it inherited wealth that brought prestige and power to the aristocracy, or its own scholastic and martial attainments? Obviously, whoever comes to power usually ends up with luxuries and living comforts. But one has to look at the initial source of the authority of the ruling class. Wealth does not bring a person or a group to power during the Khatrian and Vipran eras. Only in the Vashyan era does wealth in the form of land, money or anything else become the source of social influence. In other words, while the rulers are usually rich, the rich become the rulers only during the era dominated by acquisitive mentality.

Muslims in India were the first to move into the Vashyan era, for the Indo-Aryan society evolved into the age of the acquisitive mentality at the dawn of the 19th century (see [1], ch. 7). By 1803, the Mughal emperor had become a puppet of the British East India Company, a trading enterprise which had initially entered India just for commerce

but which had eventually become the paramount military power on the Indian subcontinent. But since the rest of Muslim civilization, of which the Indian branch was, and is, only a minor part, remained under the influence of Vipras, Muslim society as a whole continued to evolve under the Vipran age.

I have already mentioned that during the 19th century the powerbase of the Vipras, the ulema, was destroyed by a series of violent episodes beyond their control. Let us see how all this gave birth to the age of the wealthy in many Muslim countries, especially those which came in early contact with West-European powers.

The hub of Muslim society during the 18th and 19th centuries was still the Ottoman state. Under the influence of the ulema, who were supported by the military elite of the once-dreaded Janissary corps, the Ottoman military strength had declined relative to that of the European powers. This is because the ulema, whose hegemony derived from their monopoly over ideas, resisted new ideas leading to any change in the status-quo. While the neighboring countries had made great strides in military equipment by utilizing new technology, the ulema and the Janissaries fought every state effort towards economic and militaristic modernization. The ulema were apprehensive of the corrupting influence of Western innovations and ideas, while the Janissaries feared the loss of their elitist status in the Ottoman army. The first thorough-going attempt at military reform was made by the Ottoman sultan, Selim III, in 1807. In response, the chief ulema and religious authority, Shaykh-al-Islam, ordered the deposition of the sultan, who gave way to a new figure-head ruler, named Mustafa IV.

In 1808, however, Mustafa was overthrown by a

powerful sultan named Mahmud II, who was determined to control the ulema and the Janissaries. Through a number of events, he was able to create a rift between the adversary groups, a rift that eventually weakened both the ulema and the Janissaries. The sultan was now in a position to carry out military reforms that were attempted in 1807 but had proved abortive. This time the ulema were on his side, so that when the Janissaries revolted as expected, another army corps was able to surround them and crush their rebellion. So it was that first the Janissaries and then the power-base of the ulema were destroyed by the Ottoman sultan, leading to state absolutism. Thus the Khatrian era came back, but since the absolutism of the ruler was short-lived, the return to the Khatrian age was temporary. For right after Mahmud's death in 1829, the succeeding sultan was weak and the real power converged to the grand wazirs, Mustafa Rashid Pasha, Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha. Thus the Vipran era of rule by the advisors of the apparent or nominal ruler made a comeback following Mahmud's death. Although the ulema continued to lose ground, another group of intellectuals, those acquainted with Western ideas and educated in Western ways, steadily gained a foothold in the bureaucracy.

Despite military reforms, the Ottoman empire kept shrinking because of the reverses it continued to suffer at the hands of better-equipped European armies. As a result, there occurred a general loss of morale and tension among the people, especially the youth. To this may be added the additional problems of agricultural and financial crises. Those adopting Western ways and culture attributed this general-malaise to the absence of individualism and other liberal ideas in Muslim society. They also blamed it on the lack of public representation in government which had revolved around absolute monarchy ever since the birth of Islamic

society. Regardless of whether Khattris or Vipras ruled, the nerve center of the Muslim culture, its flowering, its inspiration had all along been the monarchical form of government.

The West appeared to provide an alternative--a constitutional form of government with popular representation. To some alienated youth of the Ottoman state, this alternative provided a ray of hope in the midst of growing internal tensions and economic dilemmas. With this in mind, an organization named the Patriotic Alliance of the Young Ottomans came into being in 1865. The Young Ottomans sought to change the absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy subordinate to a parliament. There was a role for the sultan in their thinking, but he could exercise arbitrary powers only under emergency.

The first attempt towards a constitutional government in the Ottoman state occurred in 1876. The Constitution adopted by the state provided for a parliament, but in nature it still was more absolutist than representative. Thus the cabinet ministers were accountable not to the parliament but to the sultan who was given arbitrary powers including the right to rule by decree. Not surprisingly, this early attempt at constitutional government was a dismal failure. The parliament was prorogued in 1878, and was not to meet again for 30 years.

Following the dissolution of the Parliament, the sultan took harsh measures to crush opposition to his autocratic regime. Despite the influx of constitutionalist ideas from the West, the Ottoman scholars had not yet felt the need for abolishing the sultanate which, as a symbol of religious unity, had acquired a nearly divine status among the Muslims. Most constitutional writings of the 19th century in Turkey accepted the concept of the

divine right of kings. It is because of such thinking that the sultan had been given wide powers in the first Turkish experiment at constitutional government. But even such a limited experiment at representative government was not acceptable to the autocratic instincts of the sultan, who, as mentioned above, prorogued the parliament in 1878, thereby putting an end to the Young Ottoman's movement.

However, the repressive measures of the sultan were bound to arouse questions that had been unthinkable thus far. For the sultan, without any provocation, had resorted to massive abuse of his powers. No longer did the sultanate appear indispensable for the public well-being. Some Muslim scholars quietly began to question the need for the office of the sultan.

The oppression by the regime eventually sparked a Young Turk movement, which sought to meet the sultan's use of force with force. After some initial setbacks, the sultan was deposed in 1908 by a group of army officers. Following this coup, the first Constitution was restored, but the government in Istanbul passed into the hands of dictatorial Pashas who occasionally turned out to be more autocratic than the deposed monarch. There occurred in the Ottoman territories a great deal of confusion which was further confounded by the outbreak of the first world war in 1914.

The Ottoman people under the Young Turks found themselves on the losing side of the war which ended in 1918. The victorious allied powers appointed a puppet sultan to rule over the defeated state which had now shrunk to the area of Turkey. By this time the Ottoman empire had disappeared, and even Turkey was virtually under the foreign dominance. In response to this humiliation, a nationalist movement began to rise under the

leadership of one Mustafa Kemal-Attaturk. The nationalist movement steadily gained strength and Kemal won a string of victories over the Allied powers, thereby freeing the area of what today constitutes Turkey. The sultan was deposed in 1922 and Turkey was declared a republic the next year.

The Kemalist movement thus began to cut the Turkish ties with the past. But the biggest change was yet to come. In 1923, Turkey abolished the monarchical sultanate, but the role of the sultan as the Caliph or religious head of all Muslims was still retained. In 1926, even the caliphate was abolished. Thus ended the last remaining vestige of the ancient regime which, one way or another, had unified the discordant fibers of Islam for more than 13 centuries. True, following the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols, the caliphate was never able to regain its former glory, authority and splendor. Yet it continued to be the symbol of religious, though not political, unity to all Muslims. And with internal decay and increasing military setbacks inflicted by Western powers on the Ottoman empire, the religious aspect of the sultan as the Caliph of all Muslims was increasingly emphasized. To some extent, this claim was productive, as it tended to strengthen the sultan's bargaining position with the exceedingly assertive Western nations.

The abolition of the caliphate was a momentous event in Islam. It opened up a new chapter in the history of Muslim society. It symbolized the decreasing influence of the ulema and the steadily increasing influence of secular ideas along with materialism that had been infiltrating the tightly-knit Muslim social fiber for some time. It gave birth to a new era in which the intellectuals, the former ruling class, became subordinate to men of acquisitive mentality possessing vast amounts of wealth. Ever since then, most Muslim nations have

been steadily coming under the sway of the rich who rule because of their control over wealth and the means of production. In other words, Muslim society is currently moving through the Vashyan age.

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CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETY

I have argued towards the end of the previous chapter that Muslim society is now evolving through a Vashyan age where Vashyas or people of acquisitive mentality possessing vast wealth rise to the top of social hierarchy. The ruling group does not then display the adventurous spirit of a Khatri or the intellectual brilliance of a Vipra; rather, it displays its penchant for the acquisition of more and more wealth. It is during a Vashyan period that political and administrative systems get decentralized, secular ideas and materialism gain at the expense of preceding religious ideas and otherworldliness, society becomes disunited, economic standard of living rises, income and wealth inequities grow, and Khatri, Vipras and Shudras, i.e., the non-ruling groups, serve the interests of a multitude of wealthy persons displaying the acquisitive mentality. The status of women in society changes in two ways. On the one hand, the restrictions that male Vipras had previously imposed on women's freedom gradually ease. Female participation in social affairs increases. On the other hand, men, under the influence of the ruling class of acquirers, begin to regard women as property born solely for their enjoyment. As a result, women suffer a humiliation in male literature, and prostitution and pornography eventually soar in society.

A close examination shows that Muslim society currently reveals many features of the Vashyan age mentioned above. But it does not display all these features. This is because the Muslim Vashyan era is still in infancy. It was born in the first quarter of the 20th century, beginning with 1923 when the Caliphate, the last remaining bastion of religious unity, so much championed by the ulema, was abolished. The Caliph was a religious symbol eliciting respect from a vast majority of Muslims.

Abolition of the Caliphate was therefore a momentous event in history. It marked an event when the new broke away from the past. It symbolized the declining force of religious thought and the rising strength of secular ideas. It did not signify the declining strength of Islam, as has been commonly interpreted by others, but the declining strength of the ulema, the interpreters of Islam.

Islam remains as vigorous today as at any time in its history. Religion continues to be the base of Muslim society. There have been times when certain Western and even Muslim scholars have criticized Islam for being an obstacle to economic development and so-called modernization. Gunnar Myrdal, a Nobel prize winning economist, for instance, chastizes Islam for hindering competition in business [4, 104]. Alan Gruchy chastizes it for being illogical, thereby retarding economic progress in economically underdeveloped countries [3, p. 655]. Such criticism is unfair and unjustified, because religion and logic do not mix together. There is no religion in the world that encourages a logical way of thinking. Yet it is essential for individual happiness and social progress. Religion thrives on faith and preaches contentment. And no one can assert that happiness can be obtained without contentment.

Christianity preaches monotheism; so does Islam. They both exalt faith in God and the virtues of selfless action. None encourages a probing or a questioning attitude. Christianity has not impeded economic growth; why should Islam?

The fault is not with religion, but with the interpreters of religion. The West was also economically backward during the first-half of the Medieval period when Christian Vipras gave Christianity a purely otherworldly interpretation. They denounced an individual's interest in the pre-

sent world, and exalted life in heaven. With such attitudes to life so dominant, Western society languished in poverty for more than four centuries. Today the West is in the advanced stage of its second Vashyan age during which secular ideas are predominant, and no wonder the Western society has experienced unprecedented prosperity in the 19th and 20th centuries. (For further details on these points, see my [1, pp. 86-146.]

Muslim society has never been in a Vashyan age before. Its current Vashyan era is also very young. Hence it has lagged behind the West in terms of economic growth and advanced technology. But now new winds are blowing, and in a matter of 25 years, the Islamic society should experience unprecedented prosperity. And this prosperity will come not at the expense of religion, but at the expense of previous interpretations of religion. I will have more to say on this subject a little later.

Relative to the Ottoman sultanate, which presided over the previous Khatrian and Vipran eras, Muslim society today is decentralized and disunited. Gone are the days when a central monarch could command the allegiance of an entire people. As late as the turn of the 20th century, most Muslim regions were knit, even though loosely, in the fabric of a vast empire. The Ottoman state provided the background for Muslim literature and theology. Narrow nationalistic thinking was not yet popular. Muslims would mainly think of themselves as Osmanis or as members of a large confederation of various regions. But today the dominant ideology is nationalism. Muslims today mainly think of themselves as Turks, Arabs, Egyptians, Iranians, and so on. True, religion still provides a common bond among them. But the virus of nationalism has destroyed several links in that common bond. Compared to the Ottoman

sultanate, Muslim society today is disunited and decentralized. And this is one hallmark of the Vashyan age.

Let us now see how and why nationalism has come to dominate the present-day world of Islam.

Political Developments During the 20th Century

Let us begin with Turkey, which, as late as the end of the 19th century, was the nerve-center of Ottoman empire and hence of Muslim civilization. We have already seen how Mustafa Kemal Attaturk had in 1922 defeated the Ottoman sultan who was under virtual bondage of the allied powers, how, in the aftermath of that defeat, first the sultanate and eventually the Caliphate were abolished.

Initially, nationalism in Muslim lands had developed as a reaction to the growing internal decay of the Ottoman sultanate and to the gradual loss of territory to European powers. Post-Medieval Europe itself was rife with nationalistic ideas which flourished as the influence of the Catholic Church and religion linking diverse regions went down. These currents began to penetrate the Muslim lands as the latter came into contact with the West. And when European powers gradually captured the lands of the Ottoman empire, nationalism began to rise at the expense of other thought relating to Pan-Islamic or Pan-Arab movement. Eminent scholars such as Ziya Gokalp exalted patriotism over other sentiments.

The patriotic fervor among Muslims reached its climax when Attaturk defeated Allied powers in 1922. The prestige of the new leader among his people rose so high that, despite reservations by the conservatives, Attaturk was able to abolish first the sultanate and then the Caliphate itself. Turkey was then declared a republic, severing once

and for all its link with its monarchical past.

The foundation of the Ottoman state had been initially militaristic and subsequently religious. The Turkish republic, while no match for the area and diversity of its predecessor, symbolised a secular beginning and an end of the religious basis of political institutions. A new experiment had begun in Muslim history, an experiment that is still continuing in the Islamic world. For, following the proclamation of the Turkish republic, many other Muslim lands, formerly part of the Ottoman empire, have declared themselves to be republics to stress their essentially secular and not religious foundation. Yet some kind of monarchy persists in a few Muslim countries today. Hence the trend towards republicanism, though well advanced, is not yet complete.

Following the formation of the republic in 1923, Attaturk was appointed its President, a position he occupied until his death in 1938. As President, the Turkish hero had absolute power. He was determined to give Turkey a new face that would resemble the face of Europe, of especially England and France. In a matter of 15 years, he and his supporters introduced a series of sweeping measures which were perhaps more revolutionary in nature than even the abolition of the Caliphate. Laws were passed to abolish the Islamic religious establishment associated with the ulema, the religious schools, and the powerful dervish orders. The system of justice was also overhauled. Sharia and its courts gave way to Western legal codes which were administered by new secular courts.

Attaturk issued decrees proscribing the traditional style of clothing, discouraging polygamy and encouraging men and women to wear Western style clothes. He opened schools for girls and made them eligible for business careers. They were also

given the right to vote in elections.

Equally significant was Attaturk's adoption of the Latin alphabet, forbidding the Arabic script for the writing of Turkish. This reform expedited the spread of education, but it also served to cut off the younger generation from the rich Ottoman and Islamic heritage. In short, Attaturk succeeded in transforming Turkey into an Islamic country with European attitudes and institutions.

Following Attaturk's death, Turkey slowly moved from benevolent dictatorship to a democratic republic, which, of course, as with any emerging institution, had its ups and downs. Today, Turkey is still a democratic country with an elected parliament, political parties, a prime minister and a President. And as with all other democracies, those with money are able to control the election process and the government in Turkey as well. Thus, the land, which for over four centuries was the hub of Islamic civilization, is now ruled by the class of acquirers. Secular ideas and materialism now dominate the ideas supplied by the Ulema, the Vipras who ruled in the preceding period. Turkey is now clearly passing through a Vashyan age.

Saudi Arabia

While the importance of Turkey to Muslim civilization lies in the fact that as late as the 20th century it was the nerve-center of Islamic literature and culture, another country, Saudi Arabia, has currently assumed significance for an altogether different reason. In fact, Saudi Arabia is now the most influential nation in the world of Islam. And what is its secret of influence? None other than wealth! Saudi Arabia, because of its oil resources, is the richest country among Muslim nations. And today times are such that its wealth

has enabled it to become dominant in the Muslim world.

It may be remembered that the last time Saudi Arabia had attained a similar position of dominance was some 1400 years ago. Just after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632, the Arabian armies had marched on to the neighboring lands, establishing a vast empire. Saudi Arabia was then influential because of its military strength. In striking contrast, its influence today derives from its wealth. Times have certainly changed.

History reveals that a person or a group may rise to power for any or all of three reasons. The sources of power are military force, ideological strength, and money. When a group rises to power because of its military strength, we say that society is in the Khatrian age; when the control over ideas is the main source of a group's rule, then society is in the Vipran age; and finally when a group is predominant purely because of its control over wealth, then society is in the Vashyan age. The fact that the wealthiest nation in the world of Islam is also, because of a certain twist of circumstances, the most influential among Muslim countries suggests that Muslim civilization as a whole is currently moving through the Vashyan age. It is remarkable that many Muslim countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey are militarily much stronger than Saudi Arabia. Yet they are not as influential as the Saudis. This is because time is now on the side of the men of wealth. The law of social cycle has been operating in all civilizations. And in accordance with its dictum, Vashyas have recently risen to become the most powerful group in the Islamic world.

Let us now examine Saudi Arabia's recent history and see which mentality there reigns supreme.

Saudi Arabia, even though the birth-place of Islam, was not much affected by the great flowering of Islamic civilization that subsequently took place in Syria, Iraq and Egypt. For centuries, its claim to prominence remained in the fact that the holy cities of Mecca and Madina were located there. Otherwise, it did not offer anything else that could be noticed by other powers. It had been ruled by various tribes before Muhammad, and, but for a brief interlude of early Caliphs, they continued to rule it afterwards, while paying homage to one Muslim dynasty after another. The affairs changed little even after the country was won over by the Ottoman sultan in 1517.

Early in the 18th century, Saudi Arabia saw the rise of a religious uprising called the Wahabi movement, which sought to purify Islam by removing from it all the interpretations that Iranian, Indian and other non-Arabic scholars had given to Koran and Hadith (traditions). The Wahabis emphasized the fundamentals of Islam and are therefore called Islamic Fundamentalists. They called themselves *muwahhidin* (monetheists), and opposed mysticism (Sufism), magical beliefs, ostentations and veneration of saints and holy places. In short, they favored a puritan way of life.

The Wahabi movement and its religious fervor, though starting with a handful of followers, quickly spread in the Arabian peninsula. By the end of the 18th century, it had won the loyalty of some tribal chiefs who subsequently even captured Mecca. There, however, it had to contend with the Ottoman power which crushed it by 1818, thereby ending the first phase of the movement.

The second phase of the Wahabi movement began in 1902 when one of its ardent supporters, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, attacked and captured Riyadh. Thus began a new kingdom which has lasted till this day.

After capturing Riyadh, Ibn Saud began to consolidate his position. His religious zeal and the Wahabi following enabled him to win over the loyalty of many Bedouin tribes. By the end of the first world war, he had become the master of a large area called the kingdom of Nejd. Side by side existed another large kingdom of Hijaz containing the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. In 1926, Ibn Saud defeated the Hijaz king, unified the two kingdoms and in 1932 named his domain Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia began as a theocratic state. The king was, and is, not only the ruler of a large territory but also an Imam or the head of the Wahabi religious movement. Ibn Saud considered it his mission to spread the true interpretations of Islam. He was not an autocrat because he had to rely on the continued loyalty of the tribal sheikhs. His laws and decrees were based on Koran and Sharia.

In 1953, Ibn Saud was succeeded by his son bearing the same name. Saudi Arabia then moved into what may be loosely called constitutional monarchy. A Council of Ministers was established to head the administration. "The decree," as Don Peretz notes, "was the first effort to define authority in terms other than the traditional system in which the monarch arbitrarily makes all important decisions. Now the king is more like a constitutional monarch; his decisions are based on consultation with the Council of Ministers." [5, p. 437].

Since 1953, many more ministries have been added to administer the country and its economy. Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Health, Commerce, etc., have been gradually formed. The administrative system is beginning to resemble Western structure and organization. But the Saudis

lack the expertise and technical personnel needed for an efficient administration. Most ministries are headed by relatives of the royal family. Many of them are ambitious merchants with few administrative skills. They frequently abuse their positions to enrich themselves or further their own commercial enterprises. In other words, men of wealth possessing acquisitive mentality are currently dominant in Saudi Arabia. (See George Lipsky [3], p. 120).

The rise of acquirers in Saudi society can be attributed first to the discovery of oil in 1930s and second to the tremendous surge in oil prices since 1973. Until the discovery of oil, the Saudi economy was one of the most primitive and technologically backward. It relied on the oasis, the village and the Bedouin tribe, with each unit self-sufficient in itself and operating independently of others. The country suffered from poverty, illiteracy, disease and the shortage of capital. Its economy, predominantly agricultural, was on the verge of financial collapse because of declining world demand for its exports.

The reigning king, Ibn Saud, had the prudence to invite Western companies to explore for oil, which, as mentioned before, was discovered in the 1930s. The oil companies were so successful that soon the country was transformed from the desert to an oasis of oil. Millions of dollars began to pour into the royal treasury every year. Ever since the 30s, petroleum has become the mainstay of the Saudi economy, providing more than 85% of its national income.

Without the oil revenues, the Saudi kingdom would perhaps have remained the tribal economy it had inherited from its predecessor. But oil has changed all that. It has enabled the country to import Western technology and luxuries on a vast

scale. Automobiles, airplanes, televisions, and electrical appliances, which were never even seen before, have found widespread use in the country.

But the oil royalties, while transforming Saudi economy, have also transformed the mentality of the ruling family, which became the chief beneficiary of the surging incomes. The royal family is a rather large group of about 5000 people, including the king, his children, their cousins, spouses, relatives by marriage, and so on. The easy availability of luxuries and money has converted their former religious zeal into a zeal for material possessions. Describing such a transformation of the royal family that began with the discovery of oil, Peretz remarks:

No longer were the Saudis austere Wahabi desert sheiks. They now lived in oriental splendor surrounded by every conceivable luxury. Scores of royal princes purchased several high-priced American automobiles each and went on sprees of building palaces equipped with such modern amenities as air conditioning and swimming pools. [5, p. 440].

In the past, the Saudis obtained allegiance from tribal chiefs because of their religious fervor. They controlled society because of their control over ideas. All this has changed since the 1930s. In the 50s and 60s loyalties were won by money, not ideas. In Peretz's words:

Subsidies exacted by tribal leaders and allies throughout the peninsula drained off much of the oil income. These payments helped lessen the complaints against the high style of living and strengthened ties with the central authorities. They were necessary if the

Sauds were to retain the loyalty of numerous tribal leaders. [5, p. 440].

Thus oil is mainly responsible for moving Saudi Arabia from the Vipran age to the current Vashyan age where the Vashyas or acqisiters dominate society because of their control over wealth.

In spite of its tremendous oil resource, Saudi Arabia was not the most important Muslim country for a long time. It had a small population and one-sided economic base, which is now fast changing from agriculture to industry. Until recently, Egypt, under President Nasser, was perhaps the most influential country among Islamic lands. However, in 1973, Saudi Arabia, along with some other members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), imposed an oil embargo over the world. Soon the oil prices rose fivefold from 2 dollars per barrel to about 10 dollars per barrel. Since then the flow of oil revenues to Saudi economy has risen beyond all imagination. In 1976, the country launched a five year economic plan involving an expenditure of 142 billion dollars.

The world has suddenly discovered a new power whose strength lies not in military, nor in ideas, but in control over wealth. Governments of all hues and complexions, from Left to Right, have been trying to court the Saudi government for economic assistance or loans. The financial stability of the whole world depends on the economic policies of a small group of people. On them depends the international price of the once mighty dollar. On them rests the fate of all Western economies which have unquenchable thirst for oil. Today, Saudi Arabia has indeed become a wealthy giant and a financial superpower.

United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Kuwait

Besides Saudi Arabia, the Arabian peninsula contains two other countries which are immensely rich because of the oil wealth--United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Kuwait. UAE was established in 1971 when the British decided to withdraw from the Persian Gulf region. It consisted of seven principalities, namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujaira, Ras-al-Khaima, Umm al-Kuwait and Ajman. Of these Abu Dhabi was, and is, the richest and most populous territory, followed by Dubai. The remaining five are not as well endowed in mineral and human resources as the first two. The U.A.E. is a federation of which the Presidency has gone to the sheikh of Abu-Dhabi and Vice-Presidency to that of Dubai. The country is governed by the Supreme Council in which the Cabinet seats are allocated according to the size of the members. The National Federal Assembly, which has 40 seats, is also formed in the same manner.

The President of the UAE has been Sheikh Zayid and its Vice-President has been Sheikh Rashid. Each of the seven ruling sheikhs determines local affairs in his emirate, whereas foreign affairs, defense, development projects and education are in the hands of the Council.

The UAE is a replica of Saudi Arabia on a miniature scale. Its oil wealth and sparse population of less than a million give it perhaps the highest per-capita income in the world. As with Saudi Arabia, the UAE's wealth has earned it international prestige and influence, especially when the Abu Dhabi Fund for Arab Economic Development has extended loans worth billions of dollars to some Arab and Third World countries. Similarly, as with Saudi Arabia, key government posts in the UAE are held by members of the ruling families. Human nature is such that, unless a person believes in a

cosmopolitan cause or an ideal, the availability of wealth actually increases his appetite for wealth. In the absence of a selfless ideology, the rich want to get richer. The mind that seeks to acquire money for the sake of money is called the acquisitive mind. The ruling group in the UAE, as with its Saudi counterpart, comes from the class of rich merchants. Hence there also Vashyan era prevails.

Let us now come to Kuwait which is another oil-rich Muslim state. In terms of society, government and wealth, Kuwait is also a mini Saudi Arabia, except that democratic institutions such as a free press, National Assembly etc., are somewhat more advanced here than in any other Arab nation. Until 1961 Kuwait was a protectorate of England. When the British withdrew, the nation gained independence and adopted a constitutional monarchy with the ruling family, al-Sabah, holding important positions in the army, administration and government. The ruling sheikh was to be advised by a National Assembly. Over the years, the Assembly has grown increasingly independent and assertive. It has been critical of the monopoly of power held by rich merchants belonging to the ruling family. Similarly, the relatively free press has done the same.

In 1975, new elections took place, leading to a great change in the composition of the Assembly. The elections introduced many young and educated men into the political scene. About a third of the Assembly members were either Leftists or those belonging to the wealthy rivals of the ruling group. As a result there was open conflict between the ruling family and the National Assembly, especially on the Lebanon crisis. In addition there were some terrorist incidents involving arson and bombing at public places. In view of the mounting internal conflict, the National Assembly was dissolved in 1976, and restrictions were imposed on

the press. The out-going prime minister, Sheikh Jabir, was asked to form a new cabinet and rule the country by decrees. Several measures previously opposed by the National Assembly were now introduced. Although there is little immediate prospect of the return of the National Assembly, Kuwait is still somewhat more democratic than its giant neighbor, Saudi Arabia. Its press still enjoys more freedom than its neighboring counterpart. However, in Kuwait also the ruling class possesses acquisitive mentality. The government is run by rich merchants either directly or indirectly. This is precisely what happens in the Vashyan age where acquirers or their hired intellectuals manage the administration in the interests of the Vashyas.

Centralized Governments

Muslim society is currently divided into more than 25 nations. Of these, the four analyzed above are clearly in the Vashyan age. Their administrations are run by acquirers, while the merchants there face few constraints on their behavior. This is not true with the rest of society, which is still under severe restrictions imposed by the Ulema over several centuries. With society under the rule of acquirers, it is not surprising that merchants have greater freedoms than other classes.

So far I have focussed on the Muslim lands where the Vashyan era has been clearly established. Let me now turn to those Muslim countries where some sort of centralized rule prevails. This category includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, Libya, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Sudan and Algeria among others. Of these, Pakistan and Bangladesh were until 1947 parts of the Indo-Aryan society, as the two countries were politically unified with the Indian sub-continent. The Indo-Aryan society, as argued in the previous chapter, has been in the Vashyan

age ever since 1800. And even though today Bangladesh and Pakistan are being ruled by military officers, the essentially Vashyan characteristic of their societies has not changed. There, as elsewhere, the rich have the highest prestige in society. Most people want to be wealthy rather than be intellectuals or join a career in the army. Similarly, governmental policies serve the interests of the opulent. Thus, wealthy families continue to dominate society in Bangladesh as well as Pakistan. These two countries, despite their military rule, are still in the Vashyan age.

As regards Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Libya, the features of society are not so clear. But they are also in the Vashyan age, although at present they display some characteristics of Khatrian societies where the government rests on the support of the army. True, the military is the mainstay of the governing regimes in the nations under discussion. Their present structure of administration and government came into being because of military coups against monarchies or constitutional democracies. Yet, all of them have had a colonial past during which they were heavily influenced by England and France. Their intellectuals acquired Western education and secular ideas, which led to their partial break from the traditional interpretations of their religion. In fact, some of these intellectuals mistakenly considered Islam to be a hinderance to modernization and progress. But Islam, at its birth, was a dynamic religion exalting monotheism, international brotherhood and selfless action. And its inherent dynamism remains. There is no reason why its fundamental principles should impede modernization, women's freedoms and economic development.

Because of their long contact with European powers, Western ideas of secularism and materialism have penetrated deep into the societies of Egypt,

Syria, Iraq, Libya and Algeria. Some of them have even changed their names to separate themselves from their monarchic past. They call themselves republics to emphasize their commitment to socialist ideas of equality and public welfare. Thus Egypt is now Arab Republic of Egypt; similarly, Sudan is now the democratic Republic of Sudan. In this context, Yemen is the Yemen Arab Republic, and so on. Such names should not mislead to the fact that democracy prevails in these countries; only that they have gone out of their way to deemphasize the centralized basis of their regimes.

Some Islamic countries have, for political or other reasons, leaned towards the Left. Syria, Libya and Iraq have cordial relations with the communist giant, Russia, even though Russia has essentially outlawed religion. This, in a remarkable way, reveals the declining influence of the Ulema or other Islamic theologians in charge of the interpretations of Koran in Muslim lands.

Yet there is no denying the fact that military is supreme in at least Libya, Syria and Iraq; and in Egypt, Sudan and Algeria, the army has a voice in succession to the Chief of the State. Therefore, the question is: how can the army wield so much political influence in a Vashyan age?

The question can be best answered by remembering that Muslim Vashyan era is still an infant. It has securely established itself in places that are the most influential in the world of Islam. In some others, it is struggling to emerge; while in still others it appeared at one time in this century but was thrown out by forces dominant in the past.

Muslim society comprises almost a billion people on earth. It is spread out in more than

twenty-five countries. In the best of times, it is unlikely to present a homogeneous picture. But at the end of one era and the beginning of another, it is likely to be more heterogeneous than ever before. The Muslim world, in terms of the law of social cycle, is trying to break away from its Khatrian and Vipran past. Some Muslim areas are currently in the Vashyan age, some were there during the colonial times in the 20th century, but then moved back into Khatrian eras shortly after independence, and some, notably Iran, have just moved back into the Vipran age. (I will discuss Iran at length in the next chapter.)

The backward movement of the social cycle is called counter evolution, and is short-lived. Muslim civilization as a whole is still in the Vashyan age, even though some of its members have moved back into Khatrian or Vipran eras. This is because firstly Turkey, the nerve-center of Islamic culture until as recently as 1920s, is currently dominated by the wealthy, and secondly the source of power of Saudi Arabia, the most influential country in the Islamic world today, is neither military might, nor the force of ideas, but the glitter of vast wealth. Of course, Saudi Arabia itself is under the dominance of rich merchants.

Let us now examine the colonial period in recent Arab history. Almost all the Muslim territories that fell in the British, French and Italian hands were parts of the Ottoman empire. The first territory to fall was Algeria which was occupied by France in 1830. Next came Tunisia which was again seized by the French. In 1875, Egypt was on the verge of financial bankruptcy and sold its shares in the Suez Canal to England, which in 1882 occupied the Egyptian land in order to protect its investment. By the turn of the 20th century, Sudan was also added to the British empire. In 1911, Italy occupied Libya, whereas Morocco became a

French protectorate in 1912. By 1916, Syria and Lebanon fell to France, and Iraq, Palestine and Jordan to England. Thus by the first world war, almost all of the Arab world had come under the clutches of European powers. The West itself was then in the Vashyan age, and the Vashyan greed for markets and raw materials found expression in its colonization of much of Asia and Africa.

Both England and France claimed to bring light, modernity and civilization to what they regarded as primitive and backward areas of the world. They extended their educational and administrative systems to exploit colonial economies as best as possible. No European power, however, granted human rights to colonial subjects, rights that were enjoyed by its people at home.

Because of their British or French connections, many Muslim lands made experiments with constitutional government or democracy. Egypt did this as early as 1882, when under the Organic Law imposed by England a two chamber parliament was introduced. This parliament merely had advisory powers. At that time the country was ruled by a king named Tewfik who formally acknowledged the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan. But the real power rested with the British Consul General, a fact that aroused the nationalistic instincts of the Egyptians. Such instincts found expression through a political party called Wafd, which enjoyed mass support because of its anti-British sentiment. The party won favor with a number of groups including the middle class, merchants, students, landlords and capitalists.

Until 1922 Egypt was a British protectorate. This status was terminated that year and the country formally returned to the reigning monarchy under Sultan Ahmed Fuad. A new Constitution was introduced in 1923, giving extensive powers to the

king, who could appoint ministers, veto any legislation and dissolve the parliament at his whim. Yet the real power continued with the British High Commissioner. In the ensuing elections, the Wafd party won an overwhelming majority. It chose its president, Zaghlul, as the prime minister, who was known for his nationalistic and anti-monarchical sentiments. In view of this, a conflict among the British, the king and the Wafd was all but inevitable.

The Wafd had a chequered career. Despite its mass support, it seldom held power for a long time because the king would often force it out of the parliament. Yet the Egyptians kept on electing it back to power.

The Wafd was not a radical party interested in economic reforms such as distributing the land, monopolized by a few wealthy landlords, among the landless peasants. Its mass appeal derived from its stern anti-British outlook. Other prominent parties were also dominated by landed interests. Ever since 1922, when Britain declared Egypt's independence while continuing to meddle in its affairs, various political parties had been elected to power. But none was interested in land reforms that were so badly needed to eliminate poverty. The king was content in his own palace, while the wealthy landlords controlled the parliament. Meanwhile, the influence of the Ulema had declined, because their monopoly over thought had been successfully challenged by imported Western ideas which were basically secular and anti-religious. The Wafd, which enjoyed the mass support, itself was anti-religious and strictly nationalistic. We may thus conclude that by 1930s Egypt, along with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, had moved into the Vashyan age. It is the rich landlords, comprising 0.4 percent of population but controlling 37 percent of the arable land, who held all the levers of power.

Peretz remarks that the Egyptian landlords

led the country's principal political parties, controlled parliament, determined what legislation would be enacted, and decided upon the government's domestic and foreign policies. Political power in Egypt...was equated with land holdings, and nearly all leading politicians were among the 0.4 percent of the population who owned more than 50 acres. [5, p. 216].

It is in the wake of such Vashyan oppression of the impoverished masses that an army colonel, Gamal Abdul Nasser, staged a coup in 1952 and overthrew King Farouk. Nasser suspended the Constitution, abolished the political parties and appointed a provisional government. In 1956, the country adopted a new Constitution proclaiming Egypt an Islamic Arab state with a democratic form of government. Nasser was then elected as the President, a position he retained until his death in 1970.

In the post-revolutionary Egypt, sweeping economic and social reforms were introduced. Ceilings were placed on land-holdings, and the surplus land was widely distributed among landless peasants. At the same time, education was made compulsory for all children between the ages of 7 and 12.

Ever since the 1952 revolution, the pendulum of power has swung towards the army. Throughout Nasser's rule, army officers held many posts in the cabinet. Following Nasser's death also, another army official who had participated in overthrowing the monarchy, Anwar Sadat, was elected as President. Thus Khattris have been ruling Egypt ever since 1952, the fateful year of the revolution. But this state of affairs cannot last long, because

firstly the important parts of Muslim society are in the Vashyan age, and secondly Western ideas, institutions and materialism have penetrated Egyptian literature and intellectuals. (I will return to this subject in chapter 8.)

Let us now examine the societies of Syria and Iraq which can be analyzed very briefly, because their evolution, in terms of the law of social cycle, closely resembles that of Egypt. For both Syria and Iraq experimented with democracy and were dominated by rich landlords until the military coups that brought power to the Khatris. Both had been infiltrated with Western acquisitive and secular ideas because of their long contact with European powers. And while both have advanced economically, Iraq more than Syria because of oil, the power-base of the landed interests and the rich remain.

In the period following the second world war, both Syria and Iraq, unlike Egypt, have experienced political instability. Coup after coup has occurred, but the power has effectively remained with the army. Since the 1950s, both nations have been under Khatrian rule, a situation that cannot last long.

Other Muslim states currently under the rule of Khatris include Sudan, Libya, Algeria, Somalia and Tunisia. All of them, until their governments were overtaken by the military in the post-war period, were under the dominance of Vashyas represented either by wealthy landlords or by rich merchants and money lenders. They had all imported acquisitive ideas and institutions from the West during the colonial period. In some, especially Algeria, efforts were made to introduce democracy; but such efforts failed because of wide-spread illiteracy. These countries are today under one-party and one-man rule supported by the military. But gradually

they are going to evolve towards a multiple-party system and democratic institutions.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that Muslim society, comprising about twenty five nations, is currently moving through a Vashyan age, where political power and social prestige belong to persons of acquisitive mentality possessing great amount of wealth. This is the first Vashyan era of Muslim society, an era which is still in infancy. Its beginning may be traced back to the abolition of the Caliphate in 1923. This was a momentous event in Muslim history and marked a break from the previous Vipran age during which the Ulema, through their control over the interpretations of Islam, had dominated the social and political scene.

The Islamic Vashyan era is still very young. For this reason, the Islamic society does not currently present a unified and homogeneous picture. Some of its members such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Tunisia are under the rule of the Khattris even though prior to the army takeover they had moved into the Vashyan age. Other members such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, Pakistan, Bangladesh and even India, which has a large Muslim population, are in the Vashyan age. By contrast, Iran, under the Vashyan age until the deposition of the Shah in January 1979, is under the Vipran age where intellectuals or priests reign supreme.

In spite of its great diversity, Muslim civilization as a whole may be currently regarded as moving through the Vashyan age because its most influential member, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, derives its influence not from military power, nor from the force of ideas, but from its control over

vast amount of wealth. In most Muslim countries, materialism and the acquisitive instinct are slowly gaining ground. The rich are highly respected, much more than the intellectuals and the army officers.

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Chapter 7

CRISIS IN IRAN

Iran is one Muslim country that currently presents a completely different picture from that of any other Muslim nation. While the Islamic civilization as a whole is moving through the Vashyan era, with some of its members passing through the Khatrian era, Iran has suddenly moved into the Vipran age, where Vipras in the guise of the clergy and other intellectuals dominate the social order. In the Vipran age, the influence of the ruling class derives from its monopoly over ideas. Neither the military nor the wealthy then have much say in the governance of society. Instead, power and prestige belong to those with superior intellect, i.e., those capable of providing theories.

Whenever Vipras rise to power, social restrictions on women increase, and the economy usually declines. This is because Vipras are not as good as Vashyas in managing financial affairs. Furthermore, their interest in theories introduces so many rules and regulations that economic institutions are unable to operate freely. The system loses flexibility, and the economy cannot but decline.

Iran's sudden movement into the Vipran era occurred in February 1979, when the reigning monarch, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, was forced into exile. This was a culmination of months of violence, bloodshed and turmoil in which thousands of Iranians, protesting the tortuous regime of the Shah, were killed by the police and army. The Iranians were responding to the call of a little known mullah or clergyman named Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini who himself had been exiled by the Shah some 15 years ago. How did the Ayatullah rise to quick prominence? More importantly, how was he able to force the once mighty Shah to abdicate his

throne? What was in this man that had ignited an entire people who accepted bullets rather than tyranny, death rather than life under a corrupt and viscious regime?

Reza Shah

The revolution of Iran had a long time in the making. The Shah belonged to a dynasty that had been in power since 1921. His father, Reza Shah, had also ascended the throne in a nationalist uprising against his predecessor whose weak rule had brought national disgrace at the hands of Great Britain. The revolt had been initiated by a newspaper editor Tabatabay, but it had the support of Iranian intellectuals, students, merchants and religious leaders. Shiite *mujtahids* (doctors of divine law), dervishes, mullahs and bazar merchants resented the British dominance which the reigning monarch had meekly accepted. Reza was then a military colonel who, in the aftermath of the uprising, first became the prime minister and then the Shah.

Reza Shah's actions are comparable to those of Attaturk in Turkey. Both ruled their respective countries with an iron hand, and came to power at about the same time. Both had undying faith in the superiority of Western institutions over those prevailing in their nations, and both sought to eliminate the influence of the clergy, i.e., the Vipras.

Reza Shah attempted to unify the nation by focusing on Iran's pre-Islamic days. In order to reduce the influence of the mullahs, he proclaimed Zoroastrianism as the state religion along with the Shiite faith. The sun and the lion, symbolic of the great Achaemenid and Sasanid empires, were introduced with much publicity and fanfare. The ancient religion had few followers left, but Reza Shah glorified it any way. He called his dynasty Pahlavi, a name he borrowed from the Parthians.

Iranians were frequently reminded of the splendor of their pre-Islamic heritage, going as far back as the Prophet Zoroaster and Cyrus the Great. In short, Reza Shah tried to create a nationalist sentiment by focusing not on religion, which he regarded as a hinderance to progress, but on Iran's ancient glories.

It is not that the Shah wanted to destroy Islam in Iran. It is just that he wanted to keep the clergy under control. He wanted to erase many symbols of religious expression, rather than religion itself. For instance, dervishes (Muslim monks), part of Iranian society for centuries, were prohibited from wandering on streets and public places. Mullahs were encouraged to wear European dress. Pilgrimages to holy shrines were discouraged. All pious foundations, the rich sources of the clergy's income, were confiscated. The state also established a theological school at Tehran University to break the monopoly of mullahs over religious instruction. Thus, in various ways, Reza Shah limited the influence of Vipras, the preceding ruling class, over society.

With Reza Shah's ascension, Iran rapidly launched a program of industrialization and Westernization. Factories, communications, railroads, hospitals, schools and universities were set up in quick succession, all based on their European counterparts. State industries were built in the areas of textiles, sugar refining and chemicals. At times, such ventures failed, because they had been introduced without regard to the availability of natural resources and markets.

A law in 1929 tried to encourage the use of Western clothing; European hats were introduced in 1935, and in 1936 women were required to discard their veils.

Reza Shah, while copying Attaturk in many ways, was much more autocratic than the Turkish leader. While Attaturk had encouraged individual initiative, no such attempt was made in Iran. All changes, good or bad, were imposed by official decrees. Quite often the opponents were simply murdered. For several years, Iran remained under the reign of terror, while the Shah seized his people's property at slight excuse and amassed a huge fortune.

Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi

In the 1930s, Reza Shah, himself a dictator, entered into alliance with another dictator--Hitler. He did this in part to counteract the influence of Russia. However, he had chosen a wrong ally, as he was caught into the web of international conflict leading to the Second World War. The British and Russian forces occupied Iran in 1941, and Reza Shah was forced into exile.

After Reza Shah's abdication, the crown passed into the hands of his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who was 21 years old at the time. The new Shah was not as autocratic as his father, at least not at the time of his coronation. Later he would become as ruthless as his predecessor, but in 1941, when he ascended the throne, he had different ideas. As with his father, he championed Westernization of the economy and society; but, unlike his father, he believed in individual initiative and in sharing a modicum of power with others.

There were two lasting effects of the sixteen year rule of Reza Shah. First, the power of Vipras or the religious leaders on Iranian thought, culture and government was sharply reduced. The Western system of education, secular outlook and imported technology tended to erode the influence of mullahs, dervishes and ayatullahs at least in

big cities. Second, the Western ideas, secularism and Reza Shah's hoarding of wealth served to expand greed and acquisitive mentality among people at the expense of their otherworldly and mostly religious concerns. Industrialization gave rise to a middle class and a group of rich merchants, who, because of their wealth, began to command respect and influence in society. We may thus conclude that in the 1930s, about the time when the wealthy began to be prominent in Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Iran also moved into the Vashyan age.

The new Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, ruled from 1941 to 1979. His regime may be divided into three periods. The first, lasting from 1941 to 1953, was the most liberalized period of his rule. Many political parties flourished during these years, and the government was run somewhat on the basis of a constitutional monarchy. Although Westernization and secularization of society proceeded apace, torture and terror of the previous government largely disappeared.

The second period began in 1953 when the Shah was briefly forced into abdicating the throne but was reinstated by a military coup inspired by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The lesson of the unsuccessful revolt was not lost on the Shah. He became a changed man, ready to assert his authority and virtually unlimited powers. Constitutional rights of the Iranians were then severely curtailed, and the Shah began to take active role in political affairs.

The third period began in 1963, when the Shah introduced land reforms and confiscated many properties benefiting the *Vipras*. While the police powers were increased sharply, the land reforms were implemented only half-heartedly. This period saw the beginning of the rise of clerical opposition to the royal authority, and culminated in the

final overthrow of the Shah in 1979.

Iran had experimented with constitutional monarchy as early as 1906, when a constitution was drafted to limit the powers of the clergy as well as the monarch. The constitution established a National Consultative Assembly, or Majlis, and a Senate. The Majlis was to be composed of elected members, which numbered 162 in the first election. However, within two years of its adoption, the constitution faced trouble, because the monarch suspended the parliament. Later the parliament was revived, but it remained ineffective for all practical purposes until 1941 when Reza Shah was forced to abdicate. Thus until then there were no political parties and organized political activity in Iran.

With Reza Shah's abdication, however, several political groups quickly came into being. One was Tudeh party supported by the communists; another was Nationalist Will, which, because of charges of British support, largely disappeared within three years.

Another party, Iranian Democrats, was formed in 1946 with government's financial backing. Its leader, Ahmad Qavam was elected Prime Minister that year. But soon this party also vanished owing to its internal conflicts. In the aftermath emerged yet another party called National Front, which, under the leadership of Dr. Muhammad Mosaddeq, enjoyed stability for five years. Mosaddeq was reputed for his honesty and patriotism. He had a large following, representing a wide variety of groups such as liberal intellectuals, landowners, merchants, religious mullahs, some labor leaders, and even some Islamic fundamentalists known as Warriors of Islam. The Warriors were the most fierce of all groups, and threatened to kill anyone following Western life-style. In 1951, they mur-

dered Prime Minister Razmara, and Mosaddeq assumed that office in the aftermath.

Iran, like many other Muslim countries, is blessed with abundant quantities of oil. When Mosaddeq became the prime minister, the Iranian oil was, and had been for 40 years, produced largely by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This was a British firm which was the principal source of oil to England. The company exerted vast influence in Iran, a fact that was much resented by the nationalists of which Mosaddeq was one. Under his inspired leadership, the parliament passed a bill nationalizing the British owned firm. From then onwards, Mosaddeq's political star began to rise rapidly, culminating in the office of the prime minister.

But Mosaddeq had seriously miscalculated the might of the multinational oil companies, which, at the time, enjoyed vast bargaining power. Western nations were yet to become major importers of oil. America, currently the largest importer, was at that time self-sufficient in petroleum.

To the nationalization of the British firm, the West responded by boycotting the Iranian oil. The Iranian industry came to a halt. With oil revenues gone, the country faced massive unemployment and economic bankruptcy. Within two years, Mosaddeq's National Front began to disintegrate. Thinking that the moment was ripe, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who was opposed to nationalization, attempted to dismiss Mosaddeq in August 1953. But the Shah had underestimated the deep admiration that the Iranians had for Mosaddeq. His action produced a nation-wide wave of protest and anger. Fearing for his life, the Shah fled the country.

The nationalists, however, had failed to measure the depth of Western interests in Iran.

The United States especially feared the possibility of Iran leaning towards the Soviet Union. As a result, the CIA instigated a military coup against the prime minister, inviting the Shah back to power.

Having been exiled for six days, the Shah awoke to a new reality. He was a changed man. Gone was his relative indifference to the affairs of government. He now proceeded to consolidate his position by imposing constraints on the constitution and by sponsoring his own parties.

In 1957, the Shah sponsored a People's party to fill the role of the opposition. A few months later came the progovernment Nation party, thereby creating a two-party system. Both groups were composed of prominent merchants and landlords loyal to the Shah. Thus, political power was effectively in the hands of Vashyas.

The 1906 Constitution had provided for a popularly elected Majlis (National Assembly) as well as a sixty-man Senate of which half the members were to be appointed by the Shah. In theory, there were constitutional limits on the Shah's powers. But since all the political initiative was in the monarch's hands, full implementation of the Constitution depended on the ruler's own attitude towards a democratic government. After the abortive uprising of 1953, the Shah's attitude had visibly hardened, as he took firm command of all political activity while maintaining a facade of democracy. In addition, he began to restrict individual rights by increasing the powers of his secret police known as SAVAK. Thus, after the 1953 incident the relatively liberal government of the Shah turned into a repressive regime: SAVAK began to spy on Iranians both inside and outside the country. Its torture tactics became internationally known. Amnesty International estimated

that in 1975 there were as many as 100,000 political prisoners in Iran. But the Shah continued to enjoy the support of democratic governments, which are at least theoretically committed to the observance of human rights.

As the Shah turned repressive, the influence of his friends, relatives, merchants and landlords, who all controlled the legislatures, increased manifold. The fruits of industrialization, made possible by rising oil revenues, went mainly into the coffers of the rich Vashyas loyal to the Shah. While the peasantry and the masses remained poor, the Shah, his relatives and Vashyan supporters made big fortunes.

Rapid industrialization and the spread of education gave rise to a middle class comprising intellectuals, technicians and professionals. As their numbers grew, they began to demand freedom of expression, popular representation in government, and redistribution of land to help the landless peasants. Largely to satisfy the rising voices of protest, the Shah belatedly introduced land reforms in 1963 in the so-called "White Revolution" which proposed to "put an end to all the social inequalities and all the factors which caused injustice, tyranny and exploitation."

As expected, the reforms met with stiff opposition from the estate owners and the Vipras, the two groups that were going to be hurt most from the redistribution of land. One of the most outspoken opponents of the White Revolution was Ayatullah Khomeini who called it a fraud and was promptly exiled to Iraq.

The White Revolution, though initially supported by liberal intellectuals, met with mediocre success. About 15 percent of the landless peasants came to own land enough to live on its income.

Although the reformist legislation was sweeping, it was half-heartedly implemented by the bureaucracy which was still controlled by friends and relatives of the land-owners.

However, the White Revolution, full of catchy slogans, did become the official creed; it gave the Shah a propagandist tool justifying all his actions. To be against White Revolution was equivalent to being against the people.

The widely touted reforms did little to stop the enrichment of the rich merchants and landed nobility. While the middle class kept growing, the economic condition of workers and the peasantry improved only slightly. National income and wealth continued to be distributed with great inequalities.

These inequalities began to increase with the surge of oil prices after the 1973 oil-embargo. The oil revenues expanded manifold, and the Shah speeded up his program of industrialization and technical development. But the increased incomes continued to bypass the needy. Acquisitive Vashyas were ruling society, and they kept on amassing wealth despite their already high incomes. For this is the way the rich behave. No matter how much they have, they want more.

The rising inequities in the distribution of income and wealth, coupled with massive bureaucratic corruption that always accompanies them, began to generate resentment among intellectuals. They had been silenced by the propaganda of the White Revolution in the 60s. But the accomplishments of that revolution were nowhere close to its expectations. While incomes of the Shah's relatives and supporters had grown enormously, the masses had benefited by a trickle.

When the opponents of the Shah became vocal inside Iran and abroad, SAVAK became more ruthless than before. Thousands of Iranians were tortured behind the "chambers of horror." Some were decapitated; others were given electrical shocks; still others were regularly beaten with lashes; some were summarily executed. The result was that gradually many sections of the Iranian society became committed to overthrow the regime. The clergy had already been alienated by the land-reforms of 1963. And slowly and slowly, factory workers, liberal intellectuals, the peasantry, came to join their ranks.

To all this may be added the speedy import of Western life-style, which did not go well with the masses who still cherished their Islamic values. The show-pieces of modernization and the so called progress including casinos, prostitution houses, pornographic literature, nudity, industrial monopolies, bars were resented by a large majority of people. On top of that came a 50 percent rate of inflation caused by wasteful government spending and increased oil revenues. The Shah tried to reduce inflation by imposing price controls which angered the bazar merchants. Thus, by 1978, the ruler had managed to alienate almost all sections of society. A sudden eruption of their anger was simply a matter of time.

And the eruption came--with a bang. It began with an innocent protest by the oil-workers demanding higher wages to cope with inflation. Trying to catch up with industrialists, bankers and monopolists, they made high demands, which the government could not afford to meet without risking further increase in inflation. The result was an impasse, which resulted in occasional violence. Labor protest became infectious. Oil workers were joined by workers from other industries which came to a virtual halt. The government responded with

force, initially attempting to break up protest-marches through arrests and tear gas. Workers responded by stone-throwing and burning of cars and theaters. Police in turn started shooting, thereby initiating a cycle of violence that lasted for more than six months and ended in the forced abdication of the Shah in January 1979.

By August 1978, the Iranian eruption was in full swing. The West had always regarded the Shah as a protector of their interests in the Persian Gulf which has great strategic importance. *Time* magazine reports that "even after the revolution began, U. S. officials were convinced that 'there is no alternative to the Shah.' President Carter took time out from the Camp David summit in September 1978 to phone the Iranian monarch and assure him of Washington's continued support." [2, p.12].

Had the U. S. policy-makers studied the law of social cycle, had they understood Sarkar's philosophy of history, they could have clearly seen that the Shah was not the only alternative. For, as I have stated before, Sarkar's theory suggests that political power rests on three types of forces--military belonging to Khattris, ideas belonging to Vipras, and wealth belonging to Vashyas. While the Shah was supported by the wealthy Vashyas, he had lost the support of Vipran mullahs, Westernized intellectuals and professionals. He had also alienated the Shudran peasants and workers, whereas the Khatrian army was committed to the Constitution, not necessarily the Shah. Thus any serious student of the law of social cycle could have told the Western governments that

- (i) the Shah was not the only alternative in Iran, and
- (ii) he was likely to be soon overthrown by the

Vipran class of mullahs, dervishes, theologians and above all the high priests of Shiism--the ayatullahs.

And this is precisely what I told an audience of more than 300 students and teachers in a lecture at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. In Chapter 1, I have mentioned the circumstances leading to this lecture which was arranged by a sorority called Omicron Delta Epsilon on December 5, 1978. By that time the cycle of violence in Iran was in full gear. There were daily protest-marches attended by hundreds and thousands of people from all walks of life. The Shah's police and troops would routinely fire at them, at first with pistols, later with guns. When guns could not stop the protests, heavy tanks and helicopter gunships were used to bombard the innocent, defenseless people. Thousands of Iranians were thus massacred. But the world governments continued to support the Shah and his lust for the throne. They called the Iranian martyrs fanatics, thereby lending justification to royal acts of gruesome tyranny. Even if the victims were fanatic, what in the world can justify wholesale massacres?

Time reports that "almost to the very end, the conventional wisdom of Western diplomats and journalists was that the Shah would survive; after all, he had come through earlier troubles seemingly strengthened." [2, p. 12]. How myopic were they! They could not see that tyranny ultimately recoils on the tyrant. Nor could they see that if the ruling forces of wealth were overthrown in Iran, then either the Khatrian military or the Vipran mullahs could have come to power.

I had begun the study of Muslim civilization early in 1978, and reached the conclusion that Islamic society was, and is, passing through the early phase of the Vashyan age. There had been no

Vashyan era in this society before. Religion had been its basis ever since its birth. Both Khattris and Vipras had utilized Islam to keep themselves in power over the last 13 centuries. And here was the 20th century, when Vashyas, for the first time, were beginning to be prominent in the Muslim world.

This, to me, meant that Muslim society was going to pass through a new kind of conflict and cohesion. This was a society facing a challenge that it had never faced before. The Vashyan prominence in Islam had no precedence. The Muslim world could not take guidance from any such experience in its past, where the rich Vashyas had been actually denounced by kings and the Ulema. There were many instances in Islamic history showing the king confiscating the inherited wealth of rich merchants.

When a society is faced with something completely new, something unprecedented, there is bound to be a great clash between the old and the new forces. Before it learns how to cope with the new attitudes, it has to modify its inherited attitudes. And this can be a painful process through which all civilizations had to pass. The West had passed through such conflict at the dawn of Feudalism, introducing its first Vashyan age. Christianity of feudal Europe, for instance, was remarkably different from that of its preceding Vipran age.

With nothing similar to draw from its past, the Islamic world does not know how to cope with the rising tide of Vashyas. And that signals an unprecedented clash between the forces of wealth and those of Vipran clergy who ruled the Muslim world, with ups and downs, from the 16th century to the end of the 19th. This is a conclusion that I had reached in early 1978, when I seriously began a study of Muslim society. And the eruption in Iran at the time seemed to confirm my view.

Ayatullah Khomeini

According to Sarkar, each society is composed of four classes, namely Khatris, Vipras, Vashyas and Shudras. To me, the Shah and most of his supporters appeared to be greedy Vashyas, the clergy and Westernized intellectuals were the Vipras, army and skilled industrial workers were the Khatris, and peasants and unskilled workers were the Shudras. And the Shah had managed to alienate all classes except some sections of the Vashyas. The emerging conflict in Iran appeared to be a conflict between the Vashyan forces of wealth and the Vipran forces representing mainly the religious ideas.

When the Iranian revolution began in early 1978, it had no focus, no leader. It was simply a protest against the Vashyan oppression which had resulted in great inequities of income and wealth. But soon Ayatullah Khomeini, who had been exiled to Iraq in 1964, became a symbol of the revolution. Throughout his exile, he had insisted that the Shah must go. Even from outside, he commanded a large following in Iran. His simple and austere way of life stood in sharp contrast to the ostentations and corruption of the Shah and his Vashyan supporters. That contrast was not lost on the Iranians.

Every entity in this world moves around a nucleus. The Iranian eruption was leaderless in the beginning. But when Ayatullah Khomeini, while in neighboring Iraq, began to urge his followers to struggle and fight to overthrow the Shah, he became the nucleus, and the eruption turned into a revolution. The demonstrators began to wave the Ayatullah's pictures in their marches; they began to shout slogans in his name.

Frightened, the Shah pressured Iraq into throwing Khomeini out. In October 1978, the Ayatullah

was exiled to France where he made his home just outside Paris. There, joined by close followers and other exiles, he began to broadcast his views through Western news media and press. This was an unexpected boon to the revolution. For now Khomeini's words could be heard by Iranians on radios attuned to the British and French broadcasting stations. Upon his calls, his followers shut down the factories, the bazars, the banks, the postal service, and above all the oil wells which were the main source of foreign exchange and imports. The Shah responded with martial law, but it did not help. It could not, because the oppressed people were prepared to accept bullets.

Initially, I too had felt that the Shah would ride out the storm. I had expected the unrest in Iran to continue for years, before a compromise occurred between the forces representing the ruling Vashyas and those representing Vipras who had been prominent in the preceding age. But when the Shah turned absolutely tyrannical, when he responded, as in August 1978, with helicopter gun-ships and tank bombardment on defenseless protestors, I became convinced that the Shah was going to be overthrown by 1979 at the latest. I was still not sure who would replace him and his Vashyan supporters. When an era is in infancy, the ruling class is temporarily dethroned by other classes with greater frequency than is the case when that era has attained youth and maturity. The same thing happens when that era is very old, close to senility and death.

The Vashyan era in Iran, as in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, had started around the 1930s. It was still an infant, and the possible dethronement of the Shah and Vashyas, at least temporarily, was consistent with this fact. As regards the alternatives to Vashyas, I felt either Khattris or Vipras could rise in the aftermath.

Until the month of October when Khomeini moved to Paris and obtained the use of Western news media, I still was not sure whether Khatriis or Vipras would take the place of the ruling Vashyas. But after the Ayatullah became the nucleus of the Iranian eruption, my question was answered. I felt that the Vipras were going to replace the Vashyas and their Shah. The Ayatullah appeared to be the high priest of Islam, and the foremost Vipra in Iran. So it was that when on December 5, 1978, an Iranian student attending my lecture asked me about the future of his country, I said to him, "The Shah will be overthrown in 1979 and the priests will take over the reins of government." He was not prepared for this answer. Neither were the U. S. policy-makers, nor the Western diplomats, historians and journalists.

I had expected the Shah to last until the middle of 1979. In this, however, I had underestimated the power of the news media through which Khomeini broadcast his fiery sermons. For the Shah was forced into exile in January 1979, fully five months before I expected his downfall.

With Shah's exile, events in Iran took a dramatic turn. There was no way then to stop the Vipran tide. Yet the U. S. diplomats continued to think, or hope, that the "regency council" left behind by the Shah would rule with the help of the military. The head of the regency council, Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar, also thought that way. He urged Khomeini not to return to Iran, for he could not guarantee his safety. Khomeini, however, declared that Shahpur was not acceptable. As a result, Iran experienced the largest riot of the revolution. On February 1, 1979, the Ayatullah returned to the land he had to leave 15 years ago, while Bakhtiar fled. The Iranians gave him a hearty welcome, shouting that the holy one had come.

Khomeini settled at the holy city of Qum, and appointed a provisional government headed by Mehdi Bazargan. But the real power rested with a fifteen man Revolutionary Council headed by the Ayatullah. Along with the Council sprang up revolutionary *komitehs* all over the country, and the *komitehs*, composed mainly of local ayatullahs and mullahs, bypassed the provisional government of Bazargan. Within a few weeks of the revolution, it thus became apparent that all power was concentrated in the clergy or Vipras: Priests had taken over the land.

Following the revolution, many Vashyas and their Khatrian hirelings were summarily executed. Islamic revolutionary courts sentenced about 650 Iranians to death, with no rights of appeal. This is deplorable. But in a way, some of the former officials were fortunate in that in other uprisings, such as the French revolution of 1789, the Bolshevik terror of 1917, the British Civil War of 1643 and the American Civil War of 1861, the destruction of life and property was simply incalculable. In the Bolshevik terror alone, four million people had lost their lives. The fact that the Iranian revolution was controlled by Vipras accounts for fewer executions. Had it been controlled by Khatris, the carnage would have been much higher.

The Vipran rule rests on the force of ideas. Vipras control society with their superior intellect and theories. Therefore, when the clergy came to power in Iran, the return of numerous rules and regulations restricting individual behavior was inevitable. It had happened in Muslim society and all other civilizations before, and there was nothing to prevent its repetition in contemporary Iran as well.

Shortly after the revolution, a series of

directives (*elamiehs*) were issued, imposing an austere way of life on all Iranians. Some of these were designed to root out lechery and the dilution of moral values. Thus prostitution houses, bars and casinos were closed. Others, such as the ban over all forms of music, were pure restrictions on individual freedoms.

Whenever male *Vipras* come to power, the social restrictions on women's behavior increase. While *Vipras* impose constraints on all individuals, women become the special objects of their attention. The same thing happened in Iran. Under the Shah, women had won many freedoms. They could participate in all social activities without having to hide themselves under veils (or *chadors*). With the rise of the clergy, however, a series of restrictions were imposed on the female behavior. Women were now urged, though not forced, to wear the *chadors*. They were barred from several professions, and were advised to confine themselves to household activities. Iranian women did protest at first, but there was nothing they could do to stem the *Vipran* tide. However, women's social status has also improved somewhat. Under the Shah's rule, prostitution and pornography had increased manifold, and women, working as secretaries, were sexually harassed by their *Vashyan* bosses. All that has now disappeared.

When *Vipras* come to power, the economy usually declines. This is because the *Vipran* rules and regulations weaken individual initiative and create rigidity in the economy. Soon after the revolution, banks and heavy industry were nationalized. The government officers did not have the managerial expertise. As a result, the general standard of living has by now considerably declined. The economy is currently suffering from a 30 percent rate of unemployment and a 50 percent rate of inflation.

The revolution had occurred in February; by the month of December, a new constitution was introduced to legalize and solidify the hold of the clergy. It was overwhelmingly approved in a referendum, turning Iran into a theocracy. The Constitution provides for a President and a parliament (Majlis); but above them is a "guardian council" of Muslim theologians to make sure that the legislation of the elected government conforms with Islamic law as contained in the Koran and Hadith. Heading them all is a *faqih*, the foremost theologian, who must approve of the President and can veto any legislation. The *faqih* commands the military and can even fire the President. Khomeini, of course, is the first *faqih* of Iran.

The first President of Iran was, and is, Abolhassan Bani Sadr, a long time associate of the Ayatullah. He was elected in an election held in February 1980. In May, elections were held for the parliament, and a clergy-dominated group called the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), under the leadership of Ayatullah Seyyed Muhammad Beheshti, won a majority of seats. Thus, by now the hold of the clergy over the country has been formalized. And it appears that Iran will remain in the Vipran age for a while.

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Chapter 8

ISLAM, CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM

In the three preceding chapters, I have analyzed the history of Muslim society and concluded that it has evolved in tune with Sarkar's philosophy of history. Starting from the Khatrian age under Prophet Muhammad, early Caliphs and the Umayyad dynasty, Islamic civilization moved into the Vipran age under the Abbasid dynasty which ended in the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258. Had the Muslims won, their society would have then moved into feudalism or Vashyan age. However, this did not happen, because the Mongols were fierce warriors, and their victory meant that in terms of the law of social cycle, the Muslim world had to start again with the Khatrian age. Later in the 14th and 15th centuries, Islamic regions came under the hold of Turkish warriors who established the Ottoman empire and provided continuity with the Khatrian age.

During the 16th century, Muslim society moved again into the Vipran age where wazirs, clergy and the Ulema ruled by monopolizing the interpretations of Sharia and Koran. This era lasted until the first quarter of the 20th century when increasing Muslim contact with the West introduced new ideas into the Islamic world and broke the clergy's hold over people's thinking. This, along with the discovery of oil wealth, produced a Vashyan era through which Muslim civilization continues to evolve.

What is the future of Islam? Where is it heading? How is it going to affect the rest of the world and be affected by it in turn? These are some of the questions which naturally come to mind at this point. They are difficult to answer, but Sarkar's philosophy of history is broad enough to be equal to the task.

As stated in preceding chapters, while Muslim society as a whole is currently in the Vashyan age, some of its members are under the rule of Khatriis, whereas Iran has suddenly moved into the Vipran age. Being in early stages of a Vashyan era, the Islamic world displays a good deal of heterogeneity as well as disunity, because it is in the Vashyan period that society gets decentralized and local centers of power command respect and attention.

Over time, as the Vashyan era grows to youth and then maturity, Muslim society will become more homogeneous than it is now. The trend will be towards increasing division of power among the rich. Therefore, most Muslim nations will slowly move towards popular representation and democratic governments dominated by the wealthy. Militarized republics, constitutional monarchies and theocracies will gradually evolve into democracies.

During a Vashyan age, the general standard of living rises in society, because Vashyas, being solely interested in making money, are mentally best suited to manage the economy. The process of rise in general prosperity follows a pattern. First the rich get richer through their control over the means of production. Then the poor fight back, create a conflict and draw attention to their cause. Finally, the rich, in order to stabilize their rule, agree to partial sharing of their wealth through the creation of certain institutions such as labor unions. Muslim society, being in the early stage of the Vashyan era, is currently at the point where the wealthy keep getting wealthier. The surge of oil prices has resulted in a huge transfer of wealth from the rest of the world to oil-rich Muslim countries. But the major beneficiaries of this transfer are those individuals who are already fabulously rich. However, a part of this prosperity will gradually trickle down to the general public.

In the Vashyan era, as the Vipran hold weakens, the restrictions on women's freedoms generally ease. Accordingly, we should expect an increasing role for women in Muslim society over time. They will become better educated, will hold jobs previously reserved for men and will even participate in political affairs.

The infancy of the Muslim Vashyan era means that there is likely to be a continued conflict between the former ruling class of Vipras and the currently rising class of Vashyas. More specifically, there may occur a fight between Vashyan supporters and Islamic fundamentalists who do not want to adjust their inherited attitudes to the rising forces of materialism. What happened in Iran is likely to spread to the neighboring Muslim lands in the next few years. But in Iran the Vipras won because of downright tyranny of the Shah who aroused widespread resentment. To my knowledge, such tyranny is not occurring in other Muslim lands, so that Vashyas are likely to remain on top, although in some strategic areas such as Saudi Arabia the rebels could initially win.

As the Vashyan era evolves, Islam will undergo a great change. Muslim scholars will impart it new interpretations. Institutions and practices that were ignored or denounced by the Ulema in the past are likely to become acceptable to Muslim scholars in the near future. Take, for instance, the question of the rate of interest on money-lending. Islam does not approve of this practice. But it is impossible to imagine a Vashyan society today without loan-making financial institutions. Credit and money-lending activity will grow in Muslim countries over time. As long as oil revenues are plentiful, domestic interest rates will be nominal or even zero. But that will change one day, and Muslim scholars will find ways to make Islam compatible with the charging of interest fees. They

might give other names to such fees, but a different interpretation nevertheless would have been given to Islam.

The same thing, for instance, happened with Christianity. As late as the 18th century in the West, which was then in the Vipran age of its second social cycle, the Christian Church denounced the charging of interest fees as usury and extortion. In this respect, Christianity was actually a step ahead of Islam. The former even condemned the practice of making profits on one's investment, something that Islam permits. In the Christian world of the 18th century, income from land and professions was considered much more prestigious than the profit income. In fact, merchants, bankers and capitalists were regarded as lowly because of their penchant for money and profits. But as soon as the Vashyan era evolved in the West sometime in the 19th century, the previously denounced class of acquirers came to acquire power, prestige and increased wealth of which they already had plenty. Today profits are openly acclaimed, no matter how exorbitant they are. Acquirers are now served by Vipras, Khattris and Shudras. Just as interpretations of Christianity changed in the past, so will those of Islam in the future. Note that the fundamentals of Islam will not be modified; only the social practices that derive from it will change.

But this change will not come without a conflict. Never in its history did Islam have to face Vashyan rule and the resulting institutions. It faced Khatrian or Vipra-dominated monarchies but not decentralized governments dominated by the wealthy. Hence Islam does not know how to cope with the currently rising forces of materialism. An unprecedented conflict between Vipras and Vashyas in Muslim lands is inevitable.

In this conflict, the Vashyan forces will eventually win, because time is now on their side. But before their victory is complete, not only Islam but also the rest of the world will pass through a great deal of turmoil: Adjustments in the world of Islam will cause the downfall of capitalism, and even communism.

The International Role of Islam

In my earlier book [1], I have argued that Vashyas will be overthrown in India and the West by the year 2010, give or take a decade. This is because both India and the West are currently passing through the Vashya-cum-Shudran age and are very close to Shudran revolutions. On the other hand, Russia has been in the Khatrian age for the last four centuries, and a Vipran era there should also emerge by the year 2010.

All these changes in the world are likely to occur in the next 20 to 30 years. For such a drastic overhaul of so many governments, an external cause, an external catalyst is essential. This catalyst will come from the changing world of Islam.

In the study of history, one observes a remarkable pattern. There have been bloody wars among tribes, races, nations, religions as far as one can see into the past. In all these conflicts, one pattern clearly stands out, namely, the initial victor was eventually conquered by the vanquished, either through arms or through superior culture. Those who were masters at first were later defeated either by their adversary's armies or relatively cosmopolitan thought and literature. This has happened time and again. In ancient times, for instance, the Egyptians were trounced by the Hyksos from Assyria. Two hundred years later, the Egyptians turned the tables on the Assyrians

and captured their domains. Later the Romans colonized western Europe and many parts of West Asia and North Africa. Subsequently, warriors from the captured lands rose to overpower their former masters. And these warriors in turn were captured by the relatively cosmopolitan outlook of Christianity.

In the Muslim world, the Arabs had conquered Iran, but were later conquered by the rich Iranian heritage and culture. Subsequently, the Mongols destroyed the Baghdad Caliphate, but then sat down humbly to accept Islam. Many other instances can be cited in history wherein the initial victor was eventually conquered by the vanquished. This may be called the law of reverse justice.

In the modern, or post-medieval, period of history, encompassing the last 2 to 3 centuries, we find that the West caused great commotion in the world of Islam and India. European countries, especially Britain and France, colonized or economically exploited almost all of Africa and Asia. The British penetration was the deepest and the most thorough in India. At the same time, Britain, France, Italy and even Russia had at one time captured or exploited the territories of the Ottoman empire. The European nations caused enormous upheaval in India and Muslim nations during the period lasting from 1800 to the 1960s, by which time most former colonies attained independence. It is now the turn of India and Islam to cause upheaval in the Western world and Russia. It is the Orient that is now poised to determine the future of the Occident.

Let me first consider the role of Islam in shaping world events in the near future. In a way, it is already clear that Islamic countries have turned the tables on the Western world. The West crucially depends on the import of oil whose pro-

duction and price are determined mainly by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Of the 14 OPEC members--Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Ecuador, Gabon, Indonesia, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, and the U.A.E.--all except Venezuela, Ecuador and Gabon are Muslim nations. The Islamic members of the OPEC hold about 60 percent of the world's proven reserves of oil. The United States, the world's largest consumer of oil, holds only 5 percent. Many other capitalist nations such as France, Germany and Italy meet all their oil needs through imports, which are critical to the health of most, if not all, Western economies.

Indeed the dependence of the West on Islamic members of the OPEC is so large that they hold the capitalist world in their palm. On their actions and mood rests the future of capitalist countries. This is a situation completely opposite to that prevailing in the preceding century when European powers frequently meddled in the internal affairs of Muslim nations to advance their own economic interests. Reverse justice has occurred: the former victor is now at the mercy of the vanquished.

Futhermore, the dependence of the West on the OPEC is steadily growing. In 1973, the year of the oil-embargo, the United States imported about one-third of its oil needs. Today, it imports about 40 percent of its requirements. And this at a time when oil prices have surged from 12 dollars per barrel to about 35 dollars per barrel. It is therefore crystal clear that the Islamic world is already playing a deterministic role in the destiny of the West.

I have mentioned earlier that capitalism is going to fall in the next 20 to 30 years. With the stability of the Islamic world so crucial to the

functioning of Western economies, it is easy to see how Islam could be the external catalyst expediting this fall. For Islam itself is on the verge of an unprecedented change, as the Vipran forces attempt to preserve what they are fast losing to the rising forces of Vashyas. If captalism is to vanish in say the next two decades, then Islam, the catalyst for this vanishment, will undergo changes much earlier. The conflict in the Islamic world is likely to occur in the 1980s.

Seeds of this conflict have already been sown by the 1979 upheaval in Iran. Major events in the world usually occur at intervals of roughly 3 or 7 years and their multiples. There have been, for instance, so many 7 years' wars in history. Adding 7 to 1979 means that by 1986 the turmoil of Iran will spread to neighboring Muslim nations. In Iran 90 percent of the population professes the Shia faith. Another country where the Shiites are in majority is neighboring Iraq. Therefore we should expect that Iraq will be among the first to be infected by the Iranian revolution.

When the Iranian revolution comes to infect Arab nations, the flow of oil to the West will be severely disrupted. West European nations and Japan will then be the most affected among capitalist countries, for they either depend excessively on oil imports, or, as in the case of England, on the prosperity of world economies. The turmoil in Islam is likely to produce a severe depression in Western Europe around the year 1986. Within 3 years, this depression will spread to the United States. Thus by 1990 all capitalist economies are likely to be trapped in an unprecedented depression. With Islam in turmoil and the West under depression, the rest of the world will also be caught in this cataclysm.

Is it possible for the world to avoid the

ensuing turmoil? Yes, it is possible, something I shortly discuss in the likely role to be played by India in international affairs. But given the current greed and materialism all over the world, it is not probable.

The West, of course, will try its best to lower its dependence on the OPEC. But now it is too late. The law of reverse justice cannot be avoided. An immediate application of this law is the current conflict between the U.S. and Iran. The CIA meddled in Iran's affairs in 1953 and helped reinstate the Shah. It did this to foil the precedent of nationalization of oil and protect American interests against Communism. As a result of that meddling, for a long time the multinational oil firms were able to exploit all oil-exporting nations by paying them pennies per barrel. Thirty-six years later, Iran was in a position to strike back at the West in general and the U.S. in particular. It is too late now for the West to avoid the law of reverse justice, unless certain humanitarian actions and reforms, to be discussed shortly, are undertaken.

On November 4, 1979, a group of Iranian students attacked the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and seized about 65 Americans as hostages. Twelve, including women and Black Americans, were later freed. The background of the attack was the entry of the Shah into the United States in October. The Shah, after his exile, first went to Egypt, then to the Bahamas, and later to Mexico. There he had contracted serious illness. He had tried to come to the U.S., his friend for as long as he could remember, but had found its doors closed. However, President Carter relented when the Shah became ill and permitted him to enter New York for treatment of cancer. This was a humanitarian gesture, but its outcome proved disastrous for Americans working in the Embassy in Iran.

The Iranians, suspicious because of the CIA's assistance to the Shah in the past, rejected the U.S. explanation that the Shah had been admitted on purely humanitarian grounds. They smelled another CIA plot in the making to overthrow Khomeini and reinstate the exiled monarch the second time. So it was that an angry group of Iranian students seized the Embassy and its occupants, demanding the return of the Shah to Iran.

The United States is a democratic country. Even though it has interfered quite often in affairs of other countries to further its interests, its government follows certain values and principles. The U.S. is a super-power. Russia is another super-power, but the Russian government has no moral scruples what-so-ever, something I will shortly discuss. Even if President Carter wanted to return the Shah to Iran, he could not. The American public had been justifiably angered by the burning of the U.S. flag in Iran. On top of that many Iranian students living in the U.S. had demonstrated in Washington and shouted anti-Carter slogans. And the Shah faced certain execution upon his return home. There was, thus, no way that President Carter could hand the Shah over to Iran.

At the time of this writing, the 53 Americans were still in captivity. The two sides are at an impasse, with the Iranians still demanding the return of the Shah who, following his treatment, moved first to Panama and then to Cairo. The law of reverse justice has indeed struck again. The U.S. had interfered in Iran in 1953, but now finds itself humbled by the same country. Things have recently turned from bad to worse for America, which attempted a military rescue mission in April 1980 but failed. However, the law will strike again, but this time against Iranians, for no matter what the U.S. government did in the past, the 53 American hostages had nothing to do with it.

They are innocent bystanders caught in the cross-fire of recriminations between the U.S. and Iranian authorities. They have silently suffered for more than six months, and the sooner they are released, the better it is for all parties concerned.

Islam and Communism

While the West finds itself critically dependent on the OPEC, Russia, the chief Western adversary and the Communist giant, is now getting increasingly entangled with the Islamic world. In the 19th century game of colonization, Russia grabbed its own share of the loot from the Ottoman empire. In the 1875 war, it captured the entire area of Bessarbia which until then had formed the northern border of the Ottoman territory around the Black Sea. Russia was also involved with Iranian affairs first in the 1921 uprising when Reza Shah came to power and then in 1941 when he was forced to abdicate in favor of his son. In fact, the Russian occupying forces refused to leave Iran until 1946 when the United Nations pressured them into quitting.

Since the second world war, Russian involvement with Muslim nations has steadily increased. Under Nasser, Egypt had cordial relations with Russia, but under Sadat the relations have soured. However, Russia still has a good deal of influence with Syria, Libya, Iraq and Ethiopia.

Russia does not import oil and for this reason is not dependent on the OPEC. Its interest in the Persian Gulf and Muslim nations stems from the fact that oil is critical to Western economies. The Soviets look upon the West as their chief adversary. If they could control the flow of oil or the ocean routes through which oil tankers pass, they could easily bring the West down to its knees. Therefore given the Soviet interest in a worldwide

hegemony, Russia's desire for greater involvement with the oil-rich Muslim nations is understandable.

This desire for greater involvement took a dramatic and ugly turn as 1979 drew to an end and the 1980s began. On Christmas morning, Soviet troops and tanks poured across the southern border and instigated a military coup in an Islamic country, Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not an oil-rich nation, but it lies on Russia's way to the Persian Gulf. The Soviet forces executed the ruling Communist, President Amin, and installed a puppet, Babrak Karmal, in his place. All this was done in a ruthless manner and with maximum bloodshed for which the Soviets are known ever since the Bolshevik terror of 1917. The heroic Muslims of Afghanistan put up stiff resistance, but they were outnumbered and outgunned.

Since the coup the number of Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan has steadily increased and has by now reached 100,000. The Afghans are known for their courage and fighting-stamina against foreign powers. In the 19th century, they defied Great Britain who at the time was the mightiest nation on earth. Russia has invaded a people of legendary valor. The Afghans, despite little support from the rest of the world, despite token sympathies from Muslim brethren, continue to fight against overwhelming odds. Their heroic resistance has been met by equal cowardice and brutality by the Russians. Not only have the Soviets thrown their giant tanks, helicopters and MIGs against lightly armed Afghan rebels, but they have also used napalm and internationally outlawed nerve gas.

The Russians do not believe in taking prisoners, only in executions. Thousands of rebels have been summarily executed. Even teen-age boys and girls have not been spared. But tyranny is its own nemesis. The law of reverse justice will one

day haunt the Soviet government as well. Every drop of blood spilled by Afghan patriots will one day become a nail in the coffin of totalitarian communism.

The world is silently watching the carnage that the Soviets are unleashing in Afghanistan. Even the Muslim nations are snoring under the spell of materialism and their own petty squabbles. When would they wake up to see that aggression unresisted leads to further aggression? The Afghan heroes, resisting a ruthless tyrant with no moral scruples, deserve all the material and moral support of the free world.

I am not sure how the law of reverse justice will strike at the Soviet government. But strike it will. The Soviets will one day have to pay for their atrocities in Afghanistan. And that day may come before this century is over. Thus the changing face of Islam, which is now slowly destroying the roots of capitalism, will one day cause the downfall of totalitarian communism as well.

The Role of India

So far I have examined the possible role of Islam in future international events. Let me now turn to the Indian sub-continent, which is another area that was plundered by European powers from the 18th century to the middle of the 20th. In the 18th century, four companies, one each from Portugal, Holland, France and Britain, were involved in trade relations with India. As the Indian rulers grew weak, each of these companies expanded its role from pure commerce to territorial acquisition. Gradually, the companies became involved in Indian politics to control territory and to obtain favorable trading rights. They tried to outdo each other, and, if necessary, to fight it

out with gunboats and soldiers. In this struggle, lasting well over a century, eventually the British East India Company won out, so much so that in 1765 it won the right to administer the states of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal from the reigning Mughal emperor. Thus was paved the way for the British umbrella to quickly spread over India. Among the other three companies, the French were restricted to a small region called Pondicherry, and the Portuguese to Goa, while the Dutch simply withdrew from the area.

From the 18th century to about the middle of the 20th, Britain, and to some extent France and Portugal, exploited India with great abandon. Indian handicrafts and industries were destroyed through tariff policies favoring the Europeans, while vast quantities of gold and silver were transported to England. So much so that India, which was one of the richest countries in the 18th century, became an overpopulated and a poverty-stricken nation by the 19th. The sub-continent was reduced to a plantation for raw materials to Britain as well as a dumping ground for British exports of industrial products.

Thus, as in the Muslim world, the West caused a turmoil in India. Western outlook and institutions transformed the traditional Indian view of life. From the 19th century onward, both the West and India evolved together in terms of a Vashyan age. While Vashyan capitalists came to power in Western Europe and America, capitalists, money-lenders and wealthy landlords became prominent in the sub-continent. Today, both India and the West are passing through the Vashya-cum-Shudran age, and are close to a Shudran revolution.

The law of reverse justice says that in the tussle between peoples, the exploiting victor eventually is conquered by the vanquished. It is

now India's turn to conquer the West. But India has neither military strength nor oil. Its conquest will therefore be in the realm of ideas. A new cosmopolitan and all-pervading philosophy originating from India will first capture the West and then the rest of the world. The name of this philosophy is Prout, which I will briefly describe in a short while.

The West, in addition to colonization, created a great upheaval in Indian political and social thought. Prout will cause an equally great upheaval in Western thought. It will shake up intellectual and political establishments in capitalist countries. It will destroy the traditional materialistic outlook and introduce a balanced attitude towards life.

Muslim, Western and Communist countries, and India practically constitute the whole world. All four of these regions are destined to undergo massive changes in the next two to three decades. While the world of Islam, with its strangle-hold over oil, will be responsible for the downfall of capitalism and communism, Prout will be responsible for the reconstruction of society. It will build a new social structure on the debris. After the world, because of excessive greed and materialism, has gone through a lengthy turmoil, Prout will introduce an oasis of peace, general prosperity and spirituality in the 1990s and beyond.

What is Prout?

I have examined this subject in detail in an earlier work entitled, *Prout: The Alternative to Capitalism and Marxism*. The present work therefore deals only with a brief introduction.

Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar is an intellectual and spiritual giant. He has written original books on

virtually all social affairs. There is no aspect of life that he has left untouched. Prout is the name that he gives to his economic, social and political philosophy. The name is actually an acronym. It derives from what Sarkar calls progressive utilization theory, that is, pro taken from progressive, u from utilization, and t from theory, together make up Prout.

Prout is a socio-economic theory with a spiritual base. It calls for true democracy, egalitarian economic and political reforms, and a return to the moral values as originally preached by various prophets. The world today is experiencing unprecedented problems of over-population, technological pollution, poverty, general discontent among people, high crime, income and wealth inequities within and among all nations, possibility of nuclear war, and so on. Prout ascribes all these problems to excessive greed and materialism of the ruling classes, and provides humanitarian solutions without resort to illogical dogmas.

Underlying Prout is a certain conception of a human being. "Human existence," says Sarkar, "is an ideological flow." That is to say, every person has a certain mode of thinking, a certain ideology which may be materialistic, intellectual, spiritual or a combination of the three. The ideological flow may vary with time, but all our actions at any moment reflect a certain line of thought. For the sake of all-round progress and harmony in life, we need to focus on all three aspects of our personality--physical, mental and spiritual. If only the physical aspect is exalted, we become extremely materialistic; society may then develop economically, but spiritual and moral values lag behind, and as a result pornography, drug and alcoholic addiction, family problems, crime, social conflicts and indiscipline eventually soar high enough to make everyone's life miserable. This has

been the path followed by Western democratic and communist countries. As a result they have insurmountable social problems despite unprecedented prosperity.

If we focus excessively on intellectual development and disregard the physical and the spiritual, we are bound to develop ill health, arrogance and eventually bigotry or mean mentality. A person may then become an intellectual giant possessing vast knowledge, eloquence and pedantry, but his resulting arrogance invariably hinders his spiritual development and hence mental happiness. Similarly, a society which emphasizes the mental aspect to the exclusion of the other two eventually grows sickly and intolerant of the ideas of other societies. That is why all societies that were once dominated by priests, who exalted dogmas at the expense of true spirituality, bred intolerance and wars of religion.

Finally, if we attend mostly to our spiritual needs, that is, meditate hard or pray a lot, and neglect the physical aspect of our existence, we will lack the desired harmony, and even the spiritual progress will be slowed. Similarly, if the society focuses primarily on the spiritual, or on dogma and rituals in the name of spirituality, it will painfully lag behind in the economic sphere; this will ultimately impede its spiritual advance as well. For subsistence comes first, and then do subtler aspects of life. This has been the case with India, China and some other eastern societies, and today they are finding it difficult to ensure even a minimal living standard to their people. True, they have a rich spiritual heritage, but all that fades into insignificance if they cannot properly feed their citizens.

The upshot is that for a smooth overall progress, each person along with his society has

to attend to all three aspects of life; otherwise tensions will emerge and some people will be exploited by others economically as well as intellectually. This, in short, is Sarkar's message; this is his vision of a human being and of human society. All his writings manifest this central theme.

Sarkar's concept of a human being is one idea underlying Prout. His definitions of progress and resources are two other ideas underlying it.

The term "progress" is commonly associated with scientific inventions and intellectual advancement. But according to Sarkar, progress is possible only in the spiritual arena. If progress really means a forward movement, then it is unlikely to occur in the physical sphere. For every scientific invention, which produces a forward movement by adding comforts to life, is associated by a side-effect producing a backward movement contributing to life's misery. Hence inventions are unlikely to lead to progress.

In the intellectual sphere also, progress is unlikely because intellectual activity such as reading and writing usually leads to sleeplessness and nervous break-down. Here also a positive step is normally accompanied by a negative step. While intellectual activity adds to a person's intelligence, it also adds to his misery by making him prone to nervous tension. Therefore, progress is unlikely in the mental sphere also.

Human behavior has three aspects--physical, mental and spiritual. While progress is unlikely in the first two, it is inevitable in the third. Because the spiritual sphere deals with selfless action which inevitably leads to broadening of mind and happiness. Since there is no selfishness involved in the spiritual arena, there is only a positive movement and no negative step. Increased

happiness here is not accompanied by misery. This is what progress really is.

While progress is not possible in the physical and mental realm, Sarkar does not advocate the neglect of these areas. On the contrary, he is a great champion of art, music and science. But he insists that, in order to maintain balance in individual and social affairs, materialistic and intellectual activities should be accompanied by spiritual activities, which include meditation, love for ideals, and above all selfless action.

The third concept underlying Prout is the concept of physical resources which include space, air, light, water and the solids. Sarkar classifies them as causal, subtle and crude. The causal resource includes space, the subtle resource includes air, light and water, and the crude resource includes the solids. In addition to these, society possesses intellectual and spiritual resources.

Prout, or progressive utilization theory, means that all individual and social resources should be utilized in such a way as to result in progress, which to Sarkar occurs only through spiritual activity. Science and technology are important, but they ought to be utilized in such a way that their harmful emissions are kept under control. Therefore, Prout calls for harnessing not only traditional resources such as land, labor, machines, minerals and human intellect, but all the crude, subtle and causal resources along with the artistic and spiritual endowments of individuals and society.

In order to achieve progress, Sarkar gives five guidelines called the fundamental principles of Prout. I present them here without elaboration.

1. There should be no hoarding of wealth

without the permission of society.

2. There should be maximum utilization of crude, subtle and causal resources of the universe. In addition, the distribution of income and wealth should be rational. That is to say, it should satisfy minimum needs of all human beings on earth, permitting some but not excessive inequalities.
3. There should be maximum utilization of the physical, mental and spiritual potentialities of the individual and collective organisms.
4. There should be a proper adjustment among the crude, subtle and causal utilizations. This adjustment is designed to prevent air and water and space pollution.
5. Utilizations should vary in accordance with changes in time, space and person, and should be of a progressive nature. This principle is designed to keep Prout from becoming an inflexible dogma in the future.

These, in bare outline, are the five fundamental principles of Prout. They yield many economic and political reforms needed all over the world, something I have discussed in detail in [2] and will not do that here. But one can easily see that if the principles of Prout, especially 1 and 2, are fully implemented, the world could avoid the turmoil towards which it is now headed.

Prout is appearing on the world horizon at a time when a tremendous vacuum is being felt in the realm of ideas. Materialism of capitalist and Marxist philosophies has created selfishness and callousness all over the world. The antidote of selfishness is selflessness. Prout argues, logically and scientifically, that selfless action is

the only way to happiness. Since everyone wants happiness, not just titillation of nerves, Prout will eventually prevail. But its quick acceptance could save the world from bloodshed and violence.

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- Abbas, Shah, Safavid, ruler, 137
 Abbasid Dynasty (Caliphate), 102-8, 124, 131
 Abdal Rahman, Caliph in Spain, 116
 Abdul Ibn Saud, 154-5
 Absolutism, 21, 28, 39, 63, 72, 82, 126, 133, 141-2
 Abu Abbas, Caliph, 102-105
 Abu Bakr, Caliph, 94, 97
 Abu Dhabi, 159-60
 Achaemenid Dynasty, 50-1, 67
 Afghanistan, 69, 125, 169, 202-3
 Ahmad Abu Asim, 127
 Ahura Mazda, 51-4, 60-7, 70, 83
 Akbar the Great, 135
 Al Dawwani, 133
 Al Muqtadir, Caliph, 111
 Al Mutawakkil, Caliph, 111, 122
 Al Nassir, Caliph, 109, 123
 Alauddin Khilji, 128
 Alexander the Great, 66-8
 Algeria, 161-4, 168-9
 Ali, Shia Caliph, 97, 100
 America, 39, 177, 204 (also see United States)
 Anahita, 56, 65-6
 Anglo-Irianian Company, 177
 Arabia, Saudi, 91, 152-61, 164, 169, 193
 Ardashir, Sasanid ruler, 79, 80-3, 86-7
 Armajani, Yahya, 85, 89
 Arsacid I, Parthian ruler, 68-78
 Arsacid Period, 68-1, 84
 Artabanus, 79
 Artaxerxes, Achaemenid ruler, 68
 Aryans, 45, 47, 51, 128
 Astyages, 50, 59
 Attaturk, Mustafa Kemal, 144, 150-2, 172, 174
 Aurangzeb, 135
 Avesta, 51-2, 58, 67
 Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini, 171, 179, 185-190, 200
 Azerbaijan province, 125
 Bahamas, 199
 Bahrain, 169
 Baghdad, 102, 111, 117, 123-7, 144
 Bakhtiar, Shahpur, 187
 Bangladesh, 161-2, 169
 Bani Sadr, 190
 Barmak, Khalid, 105
 Batra, R., 16, 44, 145, 170, 211
 Bausani, A., 88-9
 Bazargan, Mehdi, 188
 Bolshevik terror, 188, 202
 Brahmins, 56
 British East India Company, 139, 204

- Brundage, B.C., 71, 85
 89
 Buddha, 96
 Burns, E.M., 22, 44, 69,
 89
 Buyid Dynasty, 111-4, 122
 Byzantine empire, 95-6,
 130

 Caliphate, 92-145; abo-
 lition of, 150-1, 169
 Canada, 39
 Capitalism, 1, 2, 35,
 195-9, 203-5
 Capitalists, 6, 34, 40,
 194, 204
 Carter, U.S. President,
 182, 199-200
 Caspian Sea, 45, 69
 Catholic Church, 26, 28,
 150
 Central Intelligence
 Agency (CIA), 175, 178,
 199-200
 Centralization/central-
 ized authority: in
 Khatrian age, 21, 39;
 in Vipran age, 26-7,
 39; in Vashyan age,
 35; in ancient Persia,
 50, 81 (also see
 absolutism)
 Chaagatoy, 125
 Chingiz Khan, 123-6
 China, 69, 73, 77, 123,
 207
 Christ, 69
 Christianity, 87, 125,
 148, 184, 194, 196
 Colledge, A.R., 73, 75,
 78, 89

 Communism, 1, 2, 195,
 199, 201-5
 Constantinople 130
 Constitution : Ottoman,
 142-3; in Egypt, 165-
 7; in Iran, 176, 178,
 190
 Cro-Magnon man, 18, 19
 Culican, W., 89
 Cyaxares, 49-50
 Cyrus the Great, 50, 59

 Damascus, 98, 102
 Darius I, Achaemenid
 ruler, 46, 51, 60-4, 70,
 83
 Decentralization, 27, 29,
 35, 72-5, 81, 147-150
 Democracy, 152, 165, 168,
 192, 206
 Dervish, 132, 172, 183
 Dhalla, M.N., 59, 60,
 65-6, 90
 Divan, office of state,
 86-7
 Divine right of kings,
 21, 26, 84, 109, 143
 Dubai, 159-160
 Durant, Will, 57, 90

 Egypt, 1, 22-4, 33, 58,
 94-5, 111, 116-8, 122,
 125-130, 153, 161-9,
 199, 201
 England/Britain, 28,
 151, 162-6, 172, 196-8,
 202-4
 Ethiopia, 201

 Farouk, king of Egypt,
 167

- Faruki, K.A., 108,
 133, 145
 Fatimid Dynasty, 111,
 118, 127, 136
 Feudalism, 35, 68-78,
 81, 121-2, 184
 France, 116, 151,
 162-5, 186, 196-7,
 203-4
 French Revolution,
 188
 Frye, R., 54, 58-9,
 71-2, 77, 90

 Gumata, usurper, 51,
 59, 61-4, 70
 Genghis Khan, see
 Chingis Khan
 Germany, 197
 Gibbons, 69
 Glorious Revolution,
 28
 Gokalp, Ziya, 150
 Greece, 33, 69
 Group Mothers, 24, 31
 Gruchy, Alan, 108,
 170
 Hajib al-Mansur, wazir,
 116-7
 Harun, Rashid, Caliph,
 105, 109
 Hasan, son of Ali, 97
 Herodotus, 46, 49,
 51, 56, 63-5
 Hijra, 93
 Hillary, Edmund, 21
 Hitler, 174
 Hitti, P.K., 105-6,
 110, 113, 118, 145
 Hodgson, M.G.S., 126,
 132, 134, 138, 145

 Huart, C., 82-4,
 86, 90
 Hulagu Khan, 124-5

 Iliffe, J.H., 63, 90
 Imam, 101, 155
 India, 4, 13, 23-4,
 33, 45-7, 51, 56-8,
 73, 128-9, 135, 139,
 161, 169, 203-11
 Intellectuals, 6, 8,
 14, 26, 32, 74, 105,
 108, 120, 144
 Iqta, 121-2
 Iran, 1-2, 45-89, 91,
 98, 101, 104, 118,
 125, 129, 135, 164,
 169, 196, 198, 201;
 geography of, 45;
 Arab conquest of,
 95; revolution in,
 171-90
 Iraq, 95, 101, 104,
 124-5, 153, 161-9,
 185, 198, 201
 Islam, 45, 88, 91-104,
 147-8, 193-203
 Istanbul, 130, 134
 Italy, 116, 164,
 196-7

 Jahangir, 135
 Janissary corps,
 129-30, 140-1
 Japan, 198
 Java man, 18
 Jordan, 165

 Khadijah, 92
 Khaldun, Ibn, 3, 5,
 113-8, 145

- Khatrian age, 15-6, 21-167-9; in ancient Persia, 47-51, 81-9; in Muslim society, 94-105, 120-2, 141; and woman's status, 100, 126-7
 Khatri/Khatrian mind, 6-25, 39, 41, 98, 104, 108-11, 117, 121, 133
 Khomeini, Ayatullah, see Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini
 Khosro I, Sasanin ruler, 85-8
 Khwarizm Shah, 123
 Koran, 99, 101, 133, 139, 154-5, 163, 190
 Kuwait, 159-61, 169

 Lebanon, 160, 165, 169
 Labor union, 192
 Lacroix, P., 33, 44
 Law of cyclical motion, 37-8, 59, 96, 110
 Law of reverse justice, 196-204
 Lewis, B., 134, 145
 Libya, 161-4, 168-9, 201
 Lipsky, G., 148, 156, 170

 Madina, 93-4, 100, 154-155
 Magi, priests, 54-68, 75, 82, 104
 Mahmud, S.F., 119-20, 145
 Majlis/Parliament, 176, Mamluk Dynasty, 125-8 130
 Marx, 1, 5, 6
 Materialism, 39, 74, 94, 139, 144, 147, 152, 162, 170, 199
 Mazdaism, 83
 Mecca, 91-3, 154-5
 Medes/Medeans, 47, 49, 56, 59-60
 Merchants, 34, 40, 73, 156, 160-1, 164, 172, 175, 179, 184
 Mexico, 199
 Mez, Adam, 110, 112, 145
 Mithra, god, 56, 66
 Mithradates I, 69, 76
 Mongols, 43, 121-5, 132, 144, 196
 Morocco, 104, 109
 Mossadeq, Dr. Muhammad, 176-7
 Motavasseli, Mahmoud, 3
 Moulten, J.H., 59, 63, 66, 90
 Muawiyah, Caliph, 97-8, 119
 Muhammad, Prophet, 91-101, 104-5, 153
 Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, 1, 2, 171, 174-85, 189, 199, 200

- Mughal Dynasty, 129, 134-9
 Myrdal, Gunar, 148, 170

 Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 158, 167, 201
 National Front, 176-7
 Nationalism, 143, 149-50, 165-6
 Nationalization, 177
 Neanderthal man, 18-9
 Neolithic period, 22-4
 Nizam al-Mulk, wazir, 113, 122

 Oil, 156-8, 177-9, 192, 197, 201, 205
 Olmstead, A.T., 63, 90
 Oman, 169
 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), 158, 197, 199, 201
 Ottoman empire (state), 129-37, 140-2, 149-151, 154, 164, 201

 Paganism, 92-4
 Pakistan, 153, 1612, 169
 Paleolithic period, 18, 19, 25
 Palestine, 51, 95, 98, 165
 Panama, 200
 Parliament, 142-3, 165, 176, 190
 Parthia, 68
 Parthian period, 46, 68-78

 Peretz, Don, 155, 157-8, 167, 170, 190
 Persia, 23, 45-89, 94-8, 111, 122-3, 137
 Persian Gulf, 45, 69, 159, 201-2
 Priests/priesthood, 1, 3, 9, 14, 26, 28-33, 100, 187-8; in ancient Persia, 68, 74, 81-9, 104
 Prime Minister, 26, 28, 85-6, 104, 111
 Prostitution, 20-1, 32-3, 67, 147
 Prout, 205-11

 Quraysh, 91
 Qum, 188

 Ralph, P.L., 22, 44, 69, 89
 Rauf, M.A., 109, 124, 144
 Razmara, 177
 Reza Shah, 172-6, 201
 Rig-Veda, 23
 Riyadh, 154-5
 Roman empire, 26
 Rome, 69, 73, 77
 Russia, 1, 21, 43, 47, 58, 163, 174, 195-6, 201-2, also see Soviet Union

 Sadat, Anwar, 167, 201
 Safavid period, 134-7

- Sahib, Ibn Abbad, wazir, 112
- Samanid Dynasty, 111-2
- Sarkar, P.R., 1-44, 205-11
- Sasanid period, 46, 70-1, 80-9, 111
- SAVAK, 178, 181
- Seleucid period, 67-8
- Seljuk period, 113-5, 122-3
- Sharia, 103, 106-9, 126, 132-3, 137-8, 155
- Shaykh al-Islam, 134, 140
- Sheikh Jabir, 161
- Sheikh Rashid, 159
- Sheikh Zayid, 159
- Shia faith, 100-1, 113, 118, 135-7, 172
- Shudran age, 13-7, 20-4, 37-42, 128; in ancient Persia, 78-9
- Shudran revolution, 15, 41-2, 79-81
- Shudras/Shudran mind, 6-25, 41, 98
- Social cycle, theory of, 1, 11-41, 46, 153, 164, 168, 182
- Somalia, 168-9
- Soviet Union, 178, 203
- Spain, 116-8, 122
- Spirituality, 208-9
- Spuler, B., 113, 127, 146
- Sudan, 161-4, 168-9
- Suleyman, Ottoman ruler, 130-4
- Sunni faith, 110, 113
- Sykes, Percy, 51, 72, 90
- Syria, 50, 91, 94-8, 104, 126, 153, 161-5, 168-9, 201
- Tabatabay, 172
- Tabriz, 136
- Tehran, 50, 7,, 199
- Tenzingg 21
- Time, Magazine, 182-3, 190
- Timur the Lame, 125, 129
- Toynbee, A.J., 1, 5
- Transoxiana, 125
- Tunisia, 164, 168-9
- Turkey, 50, 129-30, 142-4, 154, 166, 169, 172
- Ubayd, Allah, 118
- Ulema, 9, 99, 107-8, 117, 126-7, 132-41, 144, 147-8, 151-2, 161-3, 166, 169, 184, 193
- Umar, Caliph, 94, 97, 102
- Umayyad Dynasty, 98-105, 108, 116
- United Arab Emirates, 159-60, 169
- United States, 39, 177, 197-8; conflict with Iran, 199-201; also see America
- Uthman, Caliph, 97
- Vashyan age, 15, 17, 3-37, 40, 121, 128, 153, 183-44 in ancient Persia, 68-81; in Muslim society, 138-45, 147-70

- Vashyas/Vashyan mind, 6-25, 34, 41, 121, 178-9
- Vedas, 51
- Vipran age, 14, 26-33, 40-3, 139, 153, 169, 171; in ancient Persia, 5691 in Muslim society, 104-121, 131-9, 158, 191
- Vipras/Vipran mind, 6-26, 30, 34-6, 39, 41, 48, 133, 140
- Vizier, see wazir
- Watt, W.M., 1078, 146
- Wazir, 85-6, 104-23, 132, 135-8, 141
- Waziri, Muhammad, 2
- Western society/the West, 1, 13, 26, 32, 35, 38-9, 138, 142, 148-149, 165, 177, 184, 194-200
- White Revolution, 179-180
- Wilber, D.N., 87, 90
- Woman's status, 19, 20; in Khatrian era, 14, 24, 31, 119, 126-7; in Vipran era, 14, 31-2, 119-20, 126-7, 171, 189; in Vashyan era, 37, 147, 193; in Muslim society, 99, 119-20, 126-7; in Iran, 171, 173, 189
- Xerxes, 46, 64-5, 68, 83
- Yasa, 126, 132
- Yemen, 91, 163
- Young Ottomans, 142-3
- Young Turks, 143
- Yu, Dr. Eden, 2
- Zaehner, R.C., 65, 74, 83, 90
- Zaghlu1, 166
- Zoroaster, Prophet, 48, 51-8, 60, 62, 83, 96, 173