

NOTE E DISCUSSIONI

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The Making of a Civilisation-State by Academic Fiat*

It is indeed worthy of note that in what indubitably shall be a year of celebrative recitals, even among our poorly funded domestic communities of South Asianists, in Turin, a city that can rightly claim to be the fountainhead of modern Italian Indology, was held a conference on India's demystified present and emerging future. The meeting, however, can hardly be considered the product of a precipitous desire to give the cue to the ensuing celebrative hubbub. It must, instead, be seen as the latest manifestation of an on going effort by the Agnelli Foundation to sponsor and finance research on the evolving complexities of the contemporary Indian scene. This scientific endeavour linked, as candidly admitted, during the final session of the three day meeting, by Dr Milanese, a Fiat manager, to the importance that India has come to play in Fiat's global strategy, has aimed at promoting a more pregnant and meaningful process of reciprocal Indo-Italian awareness, if not understanding. This long term objective was in fact voiced in the opening greetings by the conference's host, Dr Marcello Pacini, Director of the Agnelli Foundation.

Urged on by the guideposts set by a group of Indian scholars culled from leading interdisciplinary Indian institutions and by the stimulating observations forwarded by not the least bowdlerised Italian discussants,¹ the conference, and accompanying discussions, proceeded to lay bare problematics that have spawned a great deal of writing, and not only by Indian ink. In fact one of the more tangible virtues of this meeting, undoubtedly a choice in line with the above-mentioned objectives, was to rely exclusively on Indian scholars,

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¹ The discussants were: Michelguglielmo Torri, Enrico Fasana, Enrica Collotti Pischell, Giovanni Vaggi respectively from the University of Turin, Trieste, Milan and Pavia. The discussant of the last session was Gen. C.A. Carlo Jean from the Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa, Rome.

though deftly blending the critical fervour coming from institutions as the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies with the sombre realism emanating from The Centre for Policy Research and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.² This not only led to a particularized account of the state of the Union and of the responses induced by the structural reform process started in 1991, but also shed light on that still amorphous, yet recurrent, idea of civilisation-state. A concept often invoked as a remedy to both internal and global transformations.

The meeting, organised in thematic sessions, was opened by Ashis Nandy. This scholar, for almost two decades, has been one of India's more stimulating though at times controversial, voices.³ The present director of that Delhi based 'Centre for the Study of Developing Societies', an institution often associated with the figure of Rajni Kothari, proceeded simply to outline the guiding ideas of his paper 'Contending Stories in the Culture of Indian Politics'. This is one of Nandy's favourite stories, first narrated in 1971.⁴ But, as he warned the audience 'these stories create their own surprise in the process of being re-told'; thus, notwithstanding the many familiar 'refrains' one was to discover that the music had changed indeed. Nandy's old guiding idea, one may suspect, stimulated by an earlier study hailing from Chicago,⁵ is that in India the political process can become a legitimate force of cultural change only by reconciling the persistent relevance of both politics and traditions. As in the earlier version of his account he went on to describe how changing historical settings determined the rise of distinct political styles that subsequently intertwined to form today's multilayered political culture. Nandy, deeming of limited value for the understanding of this process both culturalist and materialist overarching deterministic conceptions and rejecting the Namierization of the history of modern India,⁶ proceeded to delineate the nature of the four preva-

² It may not be superfluous to point out that in India most of the research work is not carried out by the universities but by non-academic governmental research institutions. On academic life in India it is still worthwhile to read Edward Shils' 1970 study of India's academic life.

³ Apart his role in the 'secularist' controversy, Nandy's writings have often provoked strong reactions. Thus his uneasy relationship with Indian feminist groups became rather tense following the publication in 1988, during an ongoing debate on Sati, of an article on the issue. For an enlarged version of the article 'Sati as Profit versus Sati as a Spectacle' which appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* on 17 January 1988, see Nandy (1995).

⁴ For the earlier version of the story see Nandy (1971: 57-79).

⁵ The reference is to the well-known 1968 study of Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph. Although there is no overt acknowledgement in the 1971 article, Nandy may have been stimulated by the Rudolph's thesis.

⁶ The term 'crumbs' employed by Nandy has come to be used as a trope by those scholars who reject the interpretation of the Indian Freedom Movement forwarded by the so-called Cambridge School.

lent political styles – his old four contending stories – that have evolved out of the transformation of the relationship between politics and society.

The earliest manifestation of this process is traced to the first phase of colonial rule when the relative aloofness of the regime and its 'orientalist' approach facilitated the co-optation of upper caste elements who, thus, went on to establish a perdurable dominant position in the professions and bureaucracy. This development led, on one hand, to a consolidation of the old caste hierarchy and on the other, to a self-definition based on a controlled split between public roles and private values. The second style is predicated on the rather ambivalent concept of 'deeper penetration of western norms' which provoked a more aggressive response by what Nandy calls the 'Indian middle class'. These emerging groups gripped, according to Nandy, by growing cultural anxieties opted on one hand, for aggressive modernization whose final outcome were forms of liberalism and radicalism and, on the other, for reactive westernization in which is rooted nationalism and revivalism. Nandy thus went on to identify the third phase with Gandhian politics. This innovative style privileged the vernacular and indigenous political idioms while promoting forms of social realignment. It was, thus, able to meet the historical need to mobilise wider support for the freedom cause. The fourth phase, deemed a post-independence phenomenon, is structured by the growing role of peripheral groups who employ politics as a tool to accomplish social and economic mobility. The 'professionalized' political leadership ensuing from this development has displaced both the Brahminic and Gandhian styles.⁷

Having repeated the salient features of his earlier study, including an abridged account of how these different strands of political culture interpreted central themes of the Indian tradition, Nandy, against the backdrop of a clearly changed political and cultural optic, already evident in many of his post-71 writings, comes to radically different conclusions. In the earlier study, apparently in pursuit of what he himself half-jestingly had occasion to call 'primordial affiliation', Nandy followed the analysis forwarded by Kothari (1970) in his well known study on politics in India.⁸ Thus in delineating the relationship between tradition and politics, Nandy did not slight the role of the latter. Moreover, although he pointed to the existence of a compartmentalised political culture he had adumbrated to the positive binding function of a shared

⁷ This 'professionalization' which to western ears denotes a negation of the role of civil society in the political process, is seen by Nandy in an ambivalent manner. On one hand he attributes it the important role of undermining the sway of the traditional elite in the political arena fostering, thus, a change both in 'criteria and incumbents'. On the other hand, postulating the Indian cultural drive to create hierarchies, Nandy underscores the functions of politics as an avenue to paramount social status. Nandy appears to think that this is an obligatory transition and that the permeation of the new political culture shall in the end 'create multiple centres of power and statuses' (Nandy 1980: 54-56).

⁸ Kothari has, since 1970, of course moved on to more critical positions.

though articulated national awareness, underlining its modernising potentials. It is this latter emphasis that disappears in the paper read in Turin. The burden of unity is now attributed to what Nandy apparently conceives as an immaculate dynamic culture whose plurality is deemed, in a rather unproblematic way and echoing faintly the essentializing assumptions of the much maligned orientalist, a source of creative tension. A new-found awareness in which are embedded those parties representing 'popular' interests. Nandy's description of this process calls to mind that wider Asian ferment which is bringing about a quite distinct understanding of democracy,⁹ an idea of democracy that, shunning the liberal idea of the individual, elevates the community, with its own regulating mechanism, to the pivotal element of democratic life. He thus sees this development, leading to the Indianisation of democracy and to the Indianisation of modernity itself, as a powerful channel for the empowerment of the Indian people. This final note of optimism following the grim reconstruction of India's modern past, though presented in a cultural-civilisation garb, was indeed a relief.

The next two papers of this first session dedicated to Culture and Society in India, seemed to underwrite, the first from an identity perspective, the second from a political-electoral one, the significance of the evolution of the new political culture highlighted by Nandy. Nagaraj's 'Beyond the Essentialist and Constructivist Paradigms' appears to have been patterned on those 'discourses' which aim to overcome those two paradigms. The paper being basically a 'post-colonial' reading of the Babri Masjid – Ram Janmabhoomi issue could not but make recourse to an idiom and style which for the listeners, without the aid of a written text, must have resulted depressingly nebulous. Nagaraj's immediate contention is with the 'essentialist' Hindu nationalist's transformation of Rama in an overt political symbol, but the real objective is that 'strategy of confrontation' adopted by the constructivist.¹⁰ As an alternative to those two paradigms, assimilated on the basis of their shared reliance on historical consciousness, Nagaraj presents three modes of understanding symbols. These are viewed as a possible remedy to the pervading violence and communal conundrum. Nagaraj thus underlines the value of the following al-

⁹ The Indian process may be assimilated to the East Asia group-centred idea of democracy. However, an evolution of the concept of democracy is also taking place in the Islamic Middle East. Norton (1995: 5) of this evolution notes: 'Like Coca-Cola "democracy" needs no translation to be understood virtually everywhere, yet the vocabulary of democracy is more succinct than the institutional variations that democracy may assume. There is no reason to presume, a priori, that one variant or another of western democracy is especially adaptable to the other locales. Instead, scholars must be alert to the possibility that the Middle East will evolve its own characteristic style of democracy, no doubt with an Islamic idiom in some instances'.

¹⁰ Nagaraj's recourse to the expression 'anatomy of confrontation' could not have been accidental. He surely was making a rather barbed reference to the well-known 'constructivist' publication edited by Gopal (1991).

ternatives: Gandhi and his reliance on the richness and authority of everyday life, the Jain understanding of symbolic violence, lastly, the multiple nature of folk symbolism as a bulwark to the absolutist use of symbols. In Nagaraj's observations one could hear the strong echo of themes recurring often in post-colonial writings including the standard claim that his theoretical framework is grounded in social – cultural reality. His conclusion is an optimistic reliance on the salutary role of everyday life in curbing violence. The problem is that one cannot dissipate the feeling that all this remains mere wishful thinking. Indian's daily life is not as idyllic as Nagaraj wants us to believe. It is also made of religious identities, which not only touch one's inner spiritual sphere but also determine social divisions. In Indian cities daily routines can hardly be considered psychologically salutary. Everyday life is also the diffuse sense of disorientation of a disenchanted population, especially the middle classes, searching for social and psychological moorings. It is hardly surprising then that a vision that replaces questions with answers, doubts with certitudes, uncertainties with stability was most welcomed. But it is also hardly surprising that this vision also provides the ideological cement for a more aggressive and violent society. Against this backdrop Nagaraj's faith in the resilience of a hyphenated local symbolism and its capacity to resist and baffle attempts towards reduction to a fixed identity appears too optimistic.

But the real value of this paper was that it brought clearly into view the deep ideological chasm existing between this school of thought and the so-called secularist scholars. It is indeed true that the latter have often evidenced a blinkered vision that has barred a proper appraisal of the multicenteredness of Indian culture; nevertheless, a convergence in the defence of that very diversity that Nagaraj wants to protect appears possible. In that very *Anatomy of Confrontation* that Nagaraj subtly attacks, there is an article by Thapar lamenting that the peril issuing out of recent trends was to deny 'validity, of the variant versions of the story of Rama'¹¹ (Thapar 1991: 160). Thus it is hoped that Thapar's invitation 'to a dialogue' (Thapar 1989: 231) should not go unheeded¹² and that social scientists in India follow Das's (1996: 2) suggestion to 'learn to treat each other as the addresses of our discourses'.¹³

What more fitting Italian city than Turin for Peter Ronald De Souza, from the University of Goa, to address the issue of the 'future of democracy'.¹⁴ In

¹¹ It must be pointed out, however, that most contributors to the above mentioned volume evidence the strong tendency to rely on a narrow secularist position.

¹² This invitation does not in the least imply that the Indian historian is oblivious to the dangers ensuing from recent political development.

¹³ On the whole Das work seems to shun from rigid ideological and methodological positions.

¹⁴ This was the 1984 (English 1987) title of Norberto Bobbio's study on that 'democracy' which the Turin-based Italian scholar has often castigated but even more often celebrated. It was no wonder that Prof. De Souza while in Turin expressed the desire, fulfilled thanks to a colleague, to meet the retired professor. It may be of some interest here to point out that the Indian guests

India, this question has not only stimulated the interest of scholars but it is an issue that a growing malaise has catapulted to the forefront of public concern. De Souza takes issue with those scholars, often called 'dooms-day theorists', who relying on a threadbare understanding of democracy, forward a negative appraisal of the contemporary political landscape in India. Prof. De Souza prospects, instead, a radically different scene, seeing in those signs of divisiveness and confrontation new challenges and the constitutive elements of that process of social and political transformation which is the ultimate goal of the 'historic project of democracy' in India.

The core idea of Prof. De Souza's argument is that in India the democratic process is evolving within, and yet in opposition to, a hierarchically stratified society. The struggle between contrasting rationalities is bound to produce stresses but the democratic process, notwithstanding its magnitude, is sound and remains a source of legitimacy. Its most outstanding innovative feature is its growing local orientation best underlined by the growth of a middle tier leadership. Such emerging leadership may indeed be animated by a patrimonial conception of state power but it is also strongly bound to a local perspective. Democracy by reviving local identities, has thus percolated down to the very 'life-world' of the voters. But, within these changed political dynamics, the ultimate goal remains that of gaining access to societal resources and to determine the political agenda of the state. This process still to be completed, according to De Souza, highlights the limits of the nation-state and underlines the need of a new and more pregnant understanding of the country's unity and diversity.¹⁵ This trend noted De Souza was mirrored by the last election. In fact the 1996 election results more than the shift in the relative strength of the two major contending forces has evidenced a more profound change. For the first time, the regional forces almost balance the national formations. This, in a certain way, was a verdict on the growing irrelevancy of the nationalist ideologies and of the concept of nation-state, which ought to be replaced, according to De Souza, by a civilisation state.¹⁶

Against this overview of the more significative socio-political trends the second session, under the heading *Politica, Religione e Istituzioni* addressed,

were every-ready to evidence some familiarity with Italian culture. Although these references often resulted dated and stereotyped, as was the case of speaker's reference to Guareschi's work, there was one case where such interest was really profound and heart-felt, namely that for Gramsci. This was evidenced during a dinner in one of Turin's better know restaurant during which some of the Indian guests were fascinated by the information that Gramsci started his career as drama critic of the performances given at the adjoining Carignano theatre.

¹⁵ This does not seem a mere rewording of Nehru's 'Unity of diversity' slogan whose end-result appeared to have been simply to exorcise – more than recognise and cultivate – cultural and regional identities.

¹⁶ De Souza is apparently influenced by the civilizational approach conceptualised by Kumar (1989).

from different perspectives, the issue of the crisis of the nationalistic conception of the state. Ajit Mazoomdar, a former Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Planning, affiliated with the Centre of Policy Research, New Delhi, focused the attention on the centre-periphery dialectics, through a critical appraisal of the nature of the Indian federal structure. A form of governance that in any case cannot, according to Mazoomdar, mirror the cultural complexity and richness of a country like India. Thus, although broad linguistic identities found expression in the reorganisation of the States, other institutional safeguards are needed to protect the more diffused religious and caste identities. The abortive nature of the Indian federal system was linked by the speaker, on one hand, to the nationalist leadership overriding compulsion for unity, on the other to the homologizing effect of one party dominance. But political opportunism and national cohesion though important do not, in my opinion, fully explain the centralising drive of those years. They may also be seen as mere tools of the overriding state-led modernization agenda animating the Indian leadership. It is this priority in my opinion that nurtured many of the unitary features of the Indian state which Mazoomdar duly underlines. His perspective barred a more critical evolution of the influence on the Indian Federal structure, exercise by such instrumentalities as central police forces, financial and fiscal control and economic planning. Mazoomdar concludes by calling for the maintenance of a form of a co-operative federalism, whose full implementation is possibly assured by a changed political scenario, thus, with no need of profound constitutional revisions. Apart the merits of the conclusions the paper was valuable in pointing to the need, especially urgent in India, to study the interaction between institutions and evolving political and social processes.

One may or may not agree with Nandy's thesis regarding the Indianisation of the democratic process, but it is undeniable that the on-going evolution has caused stresses and strains. It is to these that drew the attention Pran Chopra of the Center for Policy Research and a noted political commentator. Warning of the peril that an overly simple criteria of government longevity may have on the perception of change and stability (an explanation only too familiar to an audience having experienced the different phases of the Christian Democratic era) he proceeded to present, as a contrast to the present difficulties, a favourable appraisal of the Nehruvian period. A transition period during which were implemented institutional changes needed to consolidate the new polity. Chopra 'en passant' also points to the quiescent political climate of the period and to the changes caused by the state's socio-economic policies. The toning down of these latter factors may obscure the remote cause of the present strains that, in my opinion, appear rooted in that period. In fact one could argue that in the immediate post-47 years the new state rather than thrust the different problematics to the forefront of Indian consciousness, aimed simply at exorcising them. In the wake of a general optimism an idealised self perception came to veil the harsh reality. It is indeed true that this

was a manifestation of the consensus enjoyed by the leadership and its nationalistic ideals, but this widespread sentiment came to be utilised as a legitimising tool for implementing development policies which became indeed sources of changes but, also seedlings for skewed changes. But Chopra shifts the burden on the post-Nehruvian leadership, seeing in the authoritarian drift in government and party management the root-cause of the prevailing political inertia. Although this was indeed a detrimental factor, to exclude from the analysis of this complex period the weakness of a political leadership unable to free itself from electoral powerful lobbies but also, later on, from its own ideological commitments to state-led modernization,¹⁷ tends to place excessive weight, as is the case here, on the influence of psychological-personal factors.

It was in the concluding section of his lecture that Chopra was most stimulating. With a lucid, straightforward language, eschewing any recourse to trite jargon, he led the audience behind the facade of the present political instability, projecting the image of a pulsating society. The dominant theme was that the democratic process has fractured the monolithic socio-political structure and induced a diffused articulation of political power. On one hand, this has enhanced the role of the different peripheral institutions, on the other this same process of diffusion of power has fostered a new consciousness in those marginal groups utilised, in the past, as passive vote banks. Chopra appears to remain anchored to the old view of the progressive role of the middle class. Although one may share his refusal to accept the travesty of this class as one addicted to forms of conspicuous consumption, it appears problematic, within such a segmented political system and in presence of limited resources, that this hybrid class will abdicate to its narrow interests and acquire the will and the capacity to gain the hegemonic role necessary to fulfil the historical goal of modernising India.

Any discussion of the Indian State inevitably leads to focus the attention on secularism. Shail Mayaram of the Institute of Development Societies, Jaipur, who has been working for some years on Meo and Mawati traditions, tackled, in a rather straightforward manner, the issue of secularism and its failure in curbing religious conflicts in India. To substantiate her view Mayaram in a paper entitled 'Of Tolerance and Secularism' proceeded to illustrate how secularism in India had rendered marginal and irrelevant Indian core values. These, in fact, emerged from the historical process of mutual adjustment imposed by a traditional variegated sectarian world. This development, according to Mayaram, assured to India a diffused and widespread tolerant outlook. The speaker having overtly divorced such development from Hindu culture, although obliquely linking it to an Indic setting, traces the sources of this tolerance to folk religious traditions with their fusion of cosmologies and amalgam of rites, rituals and beliefs and characterised by legal and medical pluralism.

¹⁷ For this question see Rajnayar (1992: 145-71).

The paper clearly evidences the influence of the theoretical approach adopted by Nandy and other scholars. They, in trying to free the domain of tolerance from the sterile embrace of secularism, proceeded to elaborate a distinction between religion as ideology and religion as faith, seeing in the latter the true source of tolerance.¹⁸ But Mayaram moves from theorisation to concrete historical reconstruction and in doing so she appears to furnish a too lop-sided idyllic narrative. Indeed such religious world-view did have relevance but it was never a world free from the 'cumbersome' presence of the Great Tradition or of the strains and stresses induced by the dialectic relationship of the two levels of religious experience. Thus, when Mayaram underlines the importance of translating or rielaborating of pan-Indian texts in the idioms of the world-view of the local culture she ought not only to see it as a manifestation of resistance but also, as was often the case, as an imaginative attempt by the Great Tradition, or by 'cultural mediators', to fill the yawning gap between the two cultural levels.¹⁹ However, unless one opts to take refuge in what has become a marginal world, it must be accepted that the present religious situation in India is the product of the Great Traditions's decision to break out of their disdainful aloofness, often, as in the case of Islam, tinged by racialism, and accomplish a hegemonic position within the respective communities. Undoubtedly the colonial regime's catalytic function may have promoted or accelerated the process, but on the other hand, the Raj was as real as, for example, the changing course of the Gangetic delta which produced the early Bengali Muslim fluid and composite religious identity. But on the foundation of such domesticated historical reconstruction, with the Great Traditions reduced to cosy silhouettes, Mayaram, after duly underlying the limits of the current melting pot understanding of secularism affirms that the only viable alternative is the empowerment of local people and their culture so as to break the hold of the state and of religious homogeneity. The paper was indeed stimulating although one could not overcome the feeling of disquieting ambivalence that it produced. On one hand some, especially those orphans of by-gone utopias, were only too willing to be led in Mayaram's new world. On the other hand, this accent on an ideological rather than a concrete basis for local empowerment was somewhat alarming and one could not dissipate the fear that this was only a well dressed version of that trajectory that aims at the 'tribalization' of the people and the globalisation of goods.

The ideological foundations of the Indian leviathan were analysed by T.N. Madan in a paper entitled 'Religion and Politics in India. Political Culture, Revivalism, Fundamentalism and Secularism'. Madan, honorary professor at the Institute of Economic Growth and editor of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, as a cultural anthropologist, has carried out seminal research in his

¹⁸ Nandy (1996) has devoted much attention to this question.

¹⁹ Not to speak of 'incursions' in this world of modern fundamentalist 'missionaries', as was the case of Swami Shradhdhanam 1923 *shuddi* movement among the Malkana Rajputs.

field. However, the soft-spoken academician became known, or if one prefers, notorious, to a wider intellectual circle for his being part of that restricted group of Indian intellectuals who, over the years, have forwarded a critique of secularism.²⁰ During the crucial years of the past decade Madan came to see the casual root of the rise of religious fundamentalism in secularism itself. To use his words (Madan 1987: 749) 'It is the marginalization of religious faith, which is what secularisation is that permits the perversion of religion, there are no fundamentalists or revivalists in traditional society'.²¹ In the paper delivered in Turin, Madan broadening his perspective attempted to break-out of the confines of the backlash thesis and anchor these ideologies primarily within the setting of their respective traditions. The contextualization is accomplished through the prism of 'political culture' which he, in order to avoid terminological haziness – a preoccupation recurrent in his writings – proceeds to define as the legitimising ideological sources of political action and of the equally legitimising end-product of such actions. The paper, although ending with a brief restatement of his views on secularism, deals mainly with the rise of fundamentalism in the Islamic and Hindu religious traditions. The theoretical backdrop is provided by his often stated concept that in these two religious traditions the dichotomy between the secular and the sacred, clearly evident in Christianity is either absent, as in the case of Islam or, as in Hinduism, welded in a hierarchical unity with the sacred subsuming the secular.

To underscore his view of Islamic fundamentalism Madan etches a cursory survey of the political orientation that has characterised Muslim presence in India. A first phase, shadowed by a permanent tension between the Muslim State and the Ulama, is identified with the period that goes from the conquest of Sind up to Aurangzeb whose reign, echoing Lane Pool's old thesis, Madan sees as the end of political Islam in India. The loss of political power, asserts Madan, led to the rise of fundamentalist positions which he identifies with Shah Waliullah and Sayyid Ahmad Shahid. This interlude was followed by a resurgent revival position, represented earlier, in the Mughal period, by Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, and later on identified with the nationalistic traditionalism of Deoband and the separatist modernism of Aligarh. But these were transient positions, which were to be displaced by Maududi's Jamaat-i Islami state-oriented ideology. Although it is somewhat difficult to be contentious with a historical interpretation characterised by such extreme condensation it is deemed neces-

²⁰ Madan's fellow traveller along this path was Nandy. This was not a mere intellectual exercise, but an endeavour that involved a feeling of personal anguish. As Madan (1987: 758) passionately observed: 'should you think further that the skepticism to which I have given expression has been easy to come by cultivate and accept you would not be, I am afraid, quite right. Secularism has been the fond hope of many of my generation in South Asia. But, then that is my personal problem, and therefor let me say no more about it'.

²¹ The alluring thesis rested, however, on a rather elastic if not obscure definition of traditional society.

sary, on one hand, to query one affirmation that has a direct bearing on the issue at hand, and on the other to offer some consideration on the underlying interpretative framework.

One cannot but agree with Madan that the post-Aurangzeb period witnessed the rise a Muslim revitalisation movement, to use Wallace's old label, which drifted toward radical fundamentalist positions. But as to its dynamics and ultimate goals, I must voice a profound disagreement. Of course Sah Valiu'llah movement needs to be placed against the backdrop of Mughal decline. However, as C.A. Bayly has underlined this was more a period of political realignment than one of collapse, as the contemporary dynamism of the various Muslim successor state, soon to be stifled by the colonial power, underlines. Nevertheless elites like Sah Valiu'llah indeed perceived the crisis as real and strove to find remedies, but hardly in the direction prospected by Madan. The misleading reading of Valiu'llah's work is certainly not imputable to Madan but to a certain historiography which, as Baljon notes, has overestimated certain letters of doubtful authenticity. In fact the Delhi based divine, in line with the evolving Naqsbandiya positions, shifted the attention from the top to the 'bottom' of the Umma. He rejected the narrow perspective of a renewal of the imperial legacy and the view of religion perceived primarily as a state ideology. His efforts were channelled, instead, towards promoting a workable and comprehensive view of faith, based on an innovative synthesis of the prevailing conflicting tendencies, so as to furnish the needed guideposts to individuals in search of stable socio-cultural moorings. Under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi Shah Valiu'llah's ideas acquired overt fundamentalist characteristics the most conspicuous of which was a shift towards a leader-oriented movement, a trait that Madan, under the label 'charismatic leadership', in other writings (1997: 28) includes among the constituent elements of fundamentalism.²² But this cannot induce to politicise a movement, which, notwithstanding Hunter and subsequent ideological and sectarian writings, remained anchored primarily to religious and social renewal. In fact the *tariqa-yi muhammadiya* spread mainly among those discontented urban lower classes and Bengali peasants alienated by the structural innovations introduced by the new English regime. The social displacement forced them to abandon their old syncretic religiosity and adhere to the *sari'a*. One can thus argue that the key-symbol of this fundamentalism was not the jihad, an event not free of English manipulation, but Sayyid Ahmad's hajj.

²² It must be noted that this development, undoubtedly also linked to the changed social base of the movement, was perceived in different ways. Among the Delhi elites, as Mo'min's poems underline, Sayyid Ahmad was deemed to possess exceptional spiritual and intellectual qualities. In his biography, written in later years in Tonk, there is the tendency, instead, to exalt his miraculous powers.

Madan's interpretation, given the inherent 'dual nature' of Islamic fundamentalism, is undoubtedly based on tendencies present in the movement. However, Madan, maybe as a result of the given heuristic framework, evidences a strong manipulative arbitrariness. But the same form of arbitrariness, indeed acceptable in the age of 'narratives', transpires also from his overall historical reconstruction of Muslim presence in India. Having postulated with almost Kharijite fervour an understanding of Islam untarnished by history,²³ he goes on to draw the picture of an Indian Islam, of a concrete community, immobilised by the permanent fear of an alien and hostile cultural-social environment. But it was the Muslim State, according to Madan, with its opportunistic compromises that, notwithstanding its protective functions, resulted to be a hindrance to the realisation of the religious ideal. It follows thus that Islamic fundamentalism with its cravings for the creation of a state is not pursuing a religious ideal.²⁴ It is apparent that Madan is basically treading on theoretical grounds with the aim to uncover the real culprit of India's ethnic conundrum – the state. One can accept this choice of not getting soiled by concrete realities; however, it must be underlined that the paper had hardly any bearing on the present problems of the Muslims in India if not that of outlining the historical root-causes of Muslim discontent, which have indeed become worse. The ideal Islam envisaged by Madan has yet to materialise, nor it seems possible to revive it with the magic touch of hierarchy. The threat from a hostile environment from mere potential has become real – the only traces of Urdu script in North India are those found in old secondary railway stations. Of course the meeting's agenda contemplated the discussion of broader questions, however it must be underlined that although Indian Muslims may not be peripheral to Indian life they were indeed in Turin.

²³ It seems that we are in presence of a recurring confusion: the real world is reduced, or if one prefers elevated to the ideal one. Ideal here is understood as exemplary and not in the Weberian sense of an ideal type. In fact Madan's interpretation appears to have hardly any heuristic value. This approach brings to mind an observation made by Athar Ali (1989: 337): '... there has been a tendency to go on to assert that Islamic history can only be understood by those who believe in Islam, who can study it on its own terms and still better, interpret it in its terms. This is a very attractive notion ... without totally denying the claims of this school to legitimacy I would still argue that the basic premises here are not acceptable. A believer has a perfect right to expound the tenets of Islam "on its own terms" in its own terminology but this would be theology, without any indignity necessarily attaching to the term. Can it be History? Islam, as a historical phenomenon, has always interacted with other elements that have indisputable originated and existed outside its fold'.

²⁴ It may be a paradox but from an ideological perspective, Madan's position finds close correspondence with the present views of the Jama'at-i-Islami Hind, that section of the Jama'at-i-Islami operating in post-Partition India. This can be traced not only to the shared judgement on the un-Islamic nature of past Muslim presences in India and the refusal of secularism, but can also be seen in the movement's anti-statist stand which bars even participation in electoral politics.

But getting back to Madan's paper, in the second section he proceeded to diagnose the cause for the spread of the malady of statism in Hindu fundamentalism. Apparently accepting the view that the rise of Hindu religious revitalisation was mainly the product of the catalytic role of western presence, he proceeds to trace the transformation of Roy's revivalism in the overt fundamentalist posture of the Arya Samaj. This process affirmed Madan on the whole non-political, fostered a consciousness that come to be utilised by movements with overt political agenda. Madan thus delineates the salient aspects of this new fundamentalism underscoring Savarkar's elevation of national culture to a pivotal role and Golwalkar's blueprint for the hinduization of power. From this latter perspective his discussion of the basic political role of the RSS was highly stimulating. Moreover, he exposed the shallowness of the RSS claim of being a non-political organisation by pointing to the hierarchical relationship, within a Hindu cultural setting, between culture and politics. But Madan's ultimate aim was to point-out that religion as understood by the original movements has become in effect irrelevant and that the primary goal of the new fundamentalism is power, mainly state power.

The concluding remarks were dedicated to delineate the nature of the prevailing form of Indian secularism deemed by Madan not only a travesty of the enlightenment tradition but also a colonial legacy. As such it has accomplished a narrow defensive posture of religious pluralism which is radically different from the pluralism and tolerance envisaged by this latter tradition. Secularism has not accomplished religious peace but has served simply to buttress the power of the state. Thus all three ideologies, typologically assimilated, were seen as leading to an unbearable statism which was stifling not only viable religious traditions, but, far more important, a dynamic civil society.

It was to this dynamism that the third session, under the heading 'Struttura e Ruolo della Società Civile' turned its attention. Although the concept of civil society retains a certain elasticity of meaning, it has generally been heralded as the 'icon of the global trend of democratisation'.²⁵ Such a democratisation process, as often underlined at this meeting, is indeed taking place in India, yet there is a certain hesitancy in retaining many of the actors that have won these more advanced forms of democracy as part of the civil society. This uneasiness is a product not only of a tendency, often misplaced, to idealise civil society but also of the perdurable influence of a narrow Eurocentric perception of it. It is thus regrettable that in Turin there was no paper providing concrete theoretical clues on the nature and role of the Indian civil society. But this lacuna was filled by the three speakers of this session who furnished empirical and often vibrant evidence of the vitality of civil society in India.

²⁵ Norton (1995: 5) focuses his attention mainly on the role of civil society in the Islamic context; however, many of his observations are relevant to the Indian scene.

D.L. Seth, Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Society Delhi, where he was director during the years 1984-89, with the paper 'Castes and Classes. Social Reality and Political Representation' addressed the question of caste. At the outset Seth, certainly not a Dumontion, rejected those theoretical interpretation of the caste system, deemed a product of the excessive reliance of western scholars on Brahmanic sources, that have, with their web of classifications and statuses, barred the probing of the ongoing transformation of the system. It is to the nature of these changes that Seth, in the first part of the paper, turned his attention. Having postulated the maieutic function of the colonial and post-colonial state – the super Brahmin as he calls it – he traces the emergence of the consciousness of a new caste identity moulded by the confluence of different jatis in a horizontal, translocal varna-like community. A process that under the catalytic impact of education, wealth and the new professions eroded, even in rural India, the force of traditional caste rules and the nexus between hierarchical ritual status and occupation.²⁶ In the two decades following Independence, the liberating potential of this budding development was bridled, according to Seth, by Congress' manipulation of caste identity to shore up the needed consensus. The Left's sterile appeal to class antagonism and the Right's velleity to exploit politically traditional linkages facilitate the drive of the middle-class/upper caste Congress leadership to harness, in the name of the nationalist ideology, the support of these lower caste groups. In the process these lower castes were reduced to mere vote banks. As such they remained outside the power structure, unable to take advantage of the transformative potentials of both democracy and modernisation. Seth points to the fact that the erosion of traditional forms of social security had the effect of worsening their overall situation.

The crisis of the Congress system brought these lower castes, welded by the force of affirmative action, to create autonomous political parties. The outcome, affirms Seth, is the evolution of a new macro-stratificatory system consisting of formations bounding respectively upper castes, backward castes, dalits, tribals and religious minority groups. In the second part of paper Seth, in the light of these developments, examines the transformation of the middle class. He forwards illuminating comments on the interaction between castes and middle class. He concludes that middle class status, in India, does not imply the shearing of caste identity but simply that of uplifting the status associated with the latter. New economic interests and a new life-style substitute traditional norms. The rise of growing number of members of lower castes to middle class status, a process that is duly documented, is leading, according to

²⁶ Regarding the policies of the colonial state, Seth appears to disregard those studies that have underlined its role in 'traditionalising' Indian society. A case in point is the issues of the erosion of the *Jajmani* system deemed by Seth simply a modern development. In fact in the monetised economy of early modern India the system had already lost much of its importance. For an introduction to these questions, see Marshall's volume (1987).

Seth, to a change in the composition and character of this pivotal category of India's new macro-stratificatory system.

A key factor in this evolution of Indian society was the expansion and diversification of education. This issue was examined by Suma Chitnis, Director of the J.N. Tata Endowment for the Higher Education of Indians, Bombay, in a paper entitled 'The Role of Schools and Universities in Promoting a Common Culture and Social Development'. As the title discloses, the aim was to gauge the degree of fulfilment of the nationalist expectations, mirrored by the Constitution,²⁷ that education would be the harbinger of a new and shared self-understanding. To this end Chitnis organised her paper under four headings: education for equality, the need of a link language, education for secularism and the role of education in promoting 'unity in diversity'. Chitnis' conclusion, somewhat modified during the discussion, was on the whole negative. On the first question although she underscored the impressive growth of educational structures, the accent was placed primarily on the mechanisms that have determined, at all levels of the system, a hierarchical differentiation. She thus proceeded to point to the limited success of the system in establishing Hindi as a link language and in promoting secular values. She concluded with a discussion on the inability of the system to promote a proper acceptance of the 'unity in diversity' understanding of the Indian nation. On this last question Chitnis herself appeared unable to break out of the confines of the nationalist paradigm and accept a different concept of nation.²⁸ Chitnis' empirical analysis offered valuable clues as to the problems afflicting the Indian educational system. It is, however, to be regretted that she did not explore in depth the basic shortcomings of the system, which are not, to be identified, as often done with partisan manipulation of the system,²⁹ but with the dissonance between the nationalist voluntarist vision and resiliency of traditional society.

The basic weakness of the 'voluntaristic' illusion was the belief that education would be able to transform Indian society independently of other needed social changes. To the latter difficult, but not impossible, task turned her attention Shobha Raghuram of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, and Director of the Bangalore-based regional office of the Humanistic Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries, Netherlands. Her paper entitled 'Civil Society, Social Movements and the State in India: The Politics Social Change', evidenced an authentic participatory tension which not only

²⁷ Education is included among the Fundamental Rights, Articles 29, 30 and among the Directive Principles of State policy, art. 45. This latter articles calls for providing free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, within ten years of the enactment of the Constitution.

²⁸ For a critique of the educational system that has failed to 'impart a lived sense of cultural variation and difference because of a fundamental and misrecognised discomfort with the very notion of a federated and diverse nation', see Advani (1996).

²⁹ For a discussion of the negative effects of this partisan manipulation see Shills (1970) and Rudolph (1972).

enhanced the speaker's authority but also provided the audience with what must have been a welcomed respite from the too often invoked 'paradigms' and 'discourses'.³⁰ The paper can be seen as a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on the nature and functions of the 'third sector' or 'third zone' in the post-91 socio-economic setting. The basic question addressed is whether the changed internal and international perception of the role of these groups can best be described by the label NGO / Independent sector.³¹ The forging of links with the national government and with the different international agencies, asks Raghuram, is for these organisations a new opportunity or an atrophying trap.³² In the mid-eighties the contemplated transfer of welfare functions to the voluntary organisations had led to a lively debate on the role of the voluntary agencies, however, the issue today, in the light of the profound effects of the policies of 'structural adjustments', has become more meaningful and acquired added urgency.³³

Raghuram addressed the focal issues of this ongoing debate. The basic point that she underlined was that for these organisations there is no alternative but to cooperate with both the state and the corporate sector. Retreat to an ideological niche, in her opinion, simply means to abdicate to carry out any propulsive role. But this forced option, with its ever-present danger of co-option, imposes on the voluntary sector the urgency to evolve new organisational approaches and elaborate clear-cut strategic goals. On the first aspect she underscored the necessity of freeing these organisations from the dangers ensuing from financial dependency with its attendant drift towards 'parasitic' positions. She thus emphasized the necessity of forging internal cohesion and of acquiring political strength. This internal transformation is deemed, apparently, a prerequisite for the necessary linkage of the voluntary sector with other organisations of the civil society, in particular with community-based

³⁰ It is to note, however, that Raghuram's theoretical overview was based mainly on the work of Deleuze with a sprinkling of neo-Gandhism.

³¹ NGO has become a blanket term with which to indicate different national and international experiences. In India it is identified mostly with voluntary organisations. In Italy the question is also being debated. For an introduction to the Italian experience, see Passuello and Bianchi (1997).

³² For a negative appraisal of this growing relationship see Parthasarathi (1993: 78).

³³ The early debate had a strong echo in the 1985 columns of *Mainstream*: Roy (March 9); Baxi (April 6); Pardesi (April 27); Singhal (May 18); Chandra (ibid.); Kulkarni (June 8); Shivakumar (June 22); Bhattacharjee (July 27) and Vishwanath (ibid.). The issues debated – relationship with government, foreign funding, management skill and others – were analysed by the same Raghuram in her paper. However, in the 1980s and, although to a lesser extent, now the issue was clouded by strong ideological implications. As Bhattacharjee (1985: 16) wrote: 'Voluntary organisations mean many things to many people. To the leftists, it is a design, or at best a pawn, in the neo-colonialist strategy; to the rightists it is a bulwark against any radicalism; to the Government's caprice it is sometimes as righteous as the Government itself, and at times it is 'anti-social' 'extremists', 'seditionist', and all that deserve gunning down...'

groups.³⁴ As to the goals to be achieved, the basic priority was identified with the struggle for non-material objectives such as social justice and human rights. The ultimate aim is to put a stop to the growing disenchantment and proceed instead to the empowerment of the people. This represents for Raghuram not only a bulwark to the onslaught of market-centred policies but also a valid check on the voluntary sector itself. Moreover, she argued, the aim of these organisations is not to substitute the state but strive to change it. The 'soft' state subservient to 'demand' groups has to be replaced by a people-oriented 'strong' state. Thus Raghuram's perception of the role of the voluntary organisations is highly political. The ultimate aim is to implement radical change in the existing power structure. The fulfilment of this goal, when all is said and done depends, according to Raghuram, on the commitment of the activist. To use her words: 'I strongly believe that emotional and intellectual commitments are necessary for the politics of everyday life to be governed by a continued defence of public good, of wider social accountability, and of morality. There needs to be that conviction in a convergence of concern and a convergence of the acts that flow from it'.

To this people-oriented session with its emphasis on the need to promote mobilisation followed, as a dramatic counterpoint, an afternoon session in which the sombre realism of the practitioners of the 'dismal science' proceeded to lay bare basic economic constraints. The framework of the session entitled 'Economia e Società' was Manmohan Singh's 1991 New Economic Policy with the famous Mahalanobis project reduced to a faded backdrop.³⁵ Isher J. Ahluwalia of the Centre of Policy Research with her paper 'The Indian Economy and Its Prospects' proceeded to a formal representation of this transition. In the first part of the paper she summarised the basic flaws of that development strategy based on state ownership of strategic industrial sectors and stringent administrative control of the private sector. She thus proceeded to trace the drift, during the 1980s, towards that unsustainable macro-economic situation which ushered at the beginning of the 1990s, the New Economic Policy. With regards to the latter the attention was focused on the limited success in achieving fiscal stabilisation, a failure linked to the inability to curb current expenditures and to reform the tax structure. As far as the restructuring process she underscored how the rigidity of the labour market and of the financial sector was hampering the move toward deregulation and liberalisation.

³⁴ For an introduction to the 'divide' existing between NGOs and community based organisation see J. Sen (1996).

³⁵ Today's neo-classical binge tends to obfuscate the early enthusiasm. As Das (1996: 1) noted: 'the goals of rational organisation of life, the scientific management of society, modernisation and development, to which great energies had been devoted in the sixties and early seventies, now seem like signpost to cities that are abandoned and empty. There is an exhaustion of utopian energies which does not simply reflect a passing mood of cultural pessimism but relates to fundamental changes in modern society and polity'.

Ahluwalia's primary aim was to trace the root causes of India's economic stagnation,³⁶ which she proceeded to link with a state dominated system that has proved wasteful, corrupt and inefficient. A system, according to Ahluwalia, difficult to reform because of the lack of what she calls, but hardly explains, political will.

As was to be expected, during the ensuing discussion on this lack of political will, many Indian commentators in making analogies with the Italian situation lamented the fact that India did not have an external inducement to economic reform as the European monetary union. However, as E. Sridharan with his paper entitled 'The Role of the State and the Market in the Indian Economy' was to highlight, notwithstanding striking similarities, such as deficit financed growth, a state assisted industrial capitalism, and last but not least, a dominant and parasitic 'social bloc', there are peculiar Indian factors inhibiting the liberalisation process. In fact the scholar from the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, with a broad political economy approach proceeded to forward an interpretative analysis of the nature of the societal resistances to the leadership's decision to implement liberalising policies. Thus in the last part of his paper, he pointed to the unwillingness to accept the burdens of the reform process by such organised interest groups as unionised labour, public sector employees, protected industries, rent-seeking politicians, bureaucrats and subsidised farmers and consumers. The analysis was hardly new; however, in Turin the solution prospected by Sridharan was somewhat innovative. In the past the scholar had often underlined the need to promote institutional reforms as the only way to give the necessary autonomy to a democratic state;³⁷ however, in this lecture the solution was seen in a 'downward political alliance'. Sridharan does not explain which forces are to form the core of this political consensus, but I would like to think, given also the negative appraisal that he furnishes of the Indian middle class, that the prime actors of this necessary development may be those emerging forces that kept at the margins of the power structure, in a contradictory manner, have been empowered during the last years.

The session included two papers on key socio-economic issues. The demographic problem was addresses by V.A. Pai Panandiker. The paper outlined, on one hand, the constitutional, political and economic obstacles to the adoption of an effective family planning programme, and on the other, the current manipulation of the issue by ethnic and caste groups. The speaker accepting as accurate the demographic projections, argued that India had the food production capacity to assure food security, while the environmental, and quality of life problematics could be managed by a proper social and economic develop-

³⁶ In fact Ahluwalia's best known work, published in 1985, was entitled '*Industrial Stagnation in India*'.

³⁷ On this see Sridharan (1991; 1993).

ment. From his perspective, thus, population growth will not be a liability but an asset. Population growth has direct bearing on poverty and skewed distribution of income and wealth. Nilakantha Rath of the Indian School of Political Economy, Maharastra, tackled this issue analysing sectorial and regional disparities, within a more basic rural-urban divide. Rath also dealt specifically with the question of poverty, linking it to the demographic question. These problems, concluded the speaker, are destined to remain and only a reorganisation of public expenditure can partly control a most volatile situation.

The adoption of the New Economic Policy was accompanied by the end of the Cold war. The resultant effects of these changes had a profound impact on India's geopolitical and geo-economic perspectives. The fifth session proceeded to delineate the broad directions and the new options available to India, a rather skilful player in the cold-war setting,³⁸ in the evolving and for many aspects, far more difficult framework. Conventional Indian analyses of the country's international posture often seem characterised by an inherent duplicity: stirring idealism, often voiced in a disturbing self-righteous tone, is matched by forms of callous realism. But foreign policy mirrors psychological, emotional value, and interest compulsions that lead to such apparent contradictions. Moreover, in the case of India there may be the lingering effect of the two-pronged strategy of the past. On one hand Nehruvian globalism and non alignment, a badge of India's autonomy in foreign affairs,³⁹ on the other, the drive to create an Indocentric power structure in South Asia.⁴⁰ But autonomy and a hegemonic role on South Asia remain India's basic security priorities and the speakers of this session outlined present efforts to accomplish these goals.

A general analysis of India's foreign policy, with particular attention to relations with the South Asian neighbours, was provided by the well-known

³⁸ Many observers have, however, underlined the negative effects that U.S.-Soviet rivalry produced in the area.

³⁹ Some observers (Thornton 1992: 1067) now consider non-alignment 'something of oxymoron'; however many in India underline its continuous relevance. Dhanjal (1993: 29) writes: 'May be it becomes more difficult to practice non-alignment in a unipolar world, as in a bipolar or a multipolar world, but the policy or stance as such does not cease to be relevant or valid. Only that practicing of non-alignment becomes more challenging, as it has in fact become in the present context, when practically the whole world seems to be paralysed in practising independence of policy action from the unprecedented dominance of world affairs by the United States'.

⁴⁰ These apparently conflicting positions may be traced back to a basic trait of Indian nationalism itself. As A. Sen (1997: 12) has observed: 'It is worth noting that classical Indian formulations of nationalism often did emphasize the importance of broader concerns that go beyond the national limits. In one form or another, references to such constraints can be very clearly seen in the writings of Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru and others. The anti-colonial nationalists often had strong global commitments, while invoking the unity of the nation in pursuit of demands for self-determination'.

editor-journalist Verghese who, since 1986, has been at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. Verghese's underlying assumption is that basic economic and military parameters and the given geostrategic situation of the region-India is the only one of the seven states that is contiguous with the others-assign to India a dominant role in South Asia. But – asserts Verghese – this very primacy calls on India to 'mend' her relations with her neighbours. Thus he fully endorsed the policy, best personified by Inder Kumar Gujral,⁴¹ aimed at promoting a climate of mutual trust.⁴² This approach has led to such positive result as the solution of the Ganga waters dispute and the creation of SAPTA (South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement). Moreover Verghese stressed the fact that this climate can lead to more advanced developmental projects. Thus a better understanding with Bangladesh could transform the entire N.E. region in a pole of a commercial triangle stretching to Singapore and Sri Lanka.⁴³ Good relations with Pakistan, ensuing from the settlement of the Kashmir⁴⁴ issue, would facilitate the creation of economic links with the strategically relevant region of Central Asia. Verghese went on to review other issues such as China's military, in particular naval, build-up and the effect of this latter development on ASEAN and Myanmar. He also touched upon the future global role of Russia and EU.

In the second part of his paper, Verghese expanding the notion of security proceeded to deal with other questions. He touched upon the threat posed by environmental degradation and stigmatised, on one hand western lifestyles and, on the other, western attempts, as in the case of the Sardar Sarovar project, to impose its own environmental agenda. Similarly, he rejected western preachy pressures concerning democratisation and the issue of human rights. He also focused the attention on such issues as 'the Malthusian' refugee problem and the threat posed by global underworld networks.⁴⁵ All these problems, underlined

⁴¹ In 1992 Gujral, the then former external minister, wrote: 'It is time, that South Asian leaders and opinion-makers engage themselves in free, open-minded discussion to build a regional consensus Deeply ingrained suspicions of the neighbours result in ever-increasing expense on military hardware that in turn intensifies economic distress, internal disturbances and need for outside help and support' (1992: 10).

⁴² This security approach has also been evident also in South East Asia; however, in South Asia it was also geared to India's goal to keep external forces from participating in the settlement of the area's problem. In effect it was a strategy aimed at consolidating India's 'commanding position' in the region.

⁴³ The analogy is with the Chinese sponsored 'Great Golden Triangle between Yunnan, Myanmar and Singapore'. On the future role of the North East see Verghese (1996: 380).

⁴⁴ It may be noted that Verghese acted as the convener of a committee, set up by the Press Council of India, to investigate newspapers' report of army atrocities in Kashmir. For a critique of the committee's conclusion that such stories were baseless, see Sinha (1991).

⁴⁵ Hagerty (1991) notes that there are reports that Sri Lankan Tamils participation in the 1988 attempted coup in the Maldives was induced by the prospect of using the islands for drug and gun-running activities.

Verghese, point to the need of a new world order, with a more incisive role assigned to international bodies. India, according to Verghese, beginning with its good neighbour policy in South Asia, is ready to do her part.

But the immediate challenge for India remains the search for a coherent foreign and security policy in the light of the ongoing post-89 strategic changes. This issue was addressed by Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, Director of the influential Delhi-based Institute For Defence and Analysis. Singh opened with what indeed sounded as a rhetorical note: India strategic priority is the fulfilment of the two cardinal objectives of the Freedom Movement: the socio-economic development of the Indian people and the safeguard of India's autonomy. Given the stature and renown of Jasjit Singh in the field, but also the conviction that transpired from his paper, it became quite clear that there was no rhetoric in his words. Instead one could detect in them the lingering legacy of the struggle against colonialism, and, far more important, a perception of the centrality and role of the nation-state current among the military elite. But that these were and are the security signposts was clearly and convincingly asserted. In fact Singh, from this perspective, claimed continuity with the objectives of Nehru's non-alignment and economic self-reliance policies.

With this premise Singh passed on to illustrate the evolving geo-political architecture. An analysis based on objective trends, which, however, appeared somewhat domesticated by a Delhi-based optic. He delineated a polycentric system with six centres: USA, Japan, EU, China, Russia and India. Apparently refuting the hierarchical division between first-tier and second-tier actors, he opted to invoke the criteria of asymmetry of power and capability and willingness to exercise it. The inclusion of India was 'justified' primarily on the basis of its growing domestic strength. Here the analysis appeared indeed somewhat skewed. It may be true that India has a growing middle class estimated at 180-200 million; however, there are also about 400 million Indians below the poverty line. Undoubtedly India possesses a sophisticated political, administrative and legal system but it must be stated, without any conspiratorial intent, that communal and ethnic confrontation seems endemic. Not to speak of the recurrent charges of brutality levelled against Indian security forces.⁴⁶ But these contradictions do not really obfuscate the overall strength and future potential of the country and one cannot but agree with Commodore Singh that India is a power that has to be included among this selected group.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Gordon (1995: 884) notes that India is 'endeavouring to improve its record on human rights by allowing visits of Amnesty International and the Int. Red Cross (although not to Kashmir) and moving to modify the draconian Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act'.

⁴⁷ Lyon (1992: 37) voiced a more basic reason for this inclusion: 'South Asia is not and, probably, cannot become merely a regional ghetto of the contemporary system. Within the globe of increasing, albeit highly uneven, interdependence, what happens to countries of the demographic size and weight of India or Pakistan or Bangladesh, must, and will be of consequence to this wider world'. One may wonder if J. Singh may construe this view as patronising!

According to Singh such a polycentric world order, notwithstanding the uncertainty that it may foster,⁴⁸ is a positive development for it allows India, in the absence of polarisation or of a hegemon, to independently pursue its national interest.⁴⁹ Within such a system India is anchored to a policy of war avoidance, seeing in mediation the primary tool for conflict prevention and resolution. Here Singh seemed to reconfirm the validity of the policy evolved within the context of South Asian bilateralism⁵⁰ whose declared aim is not mere conflict management but conflict resolution or peace, as Singh preferred to call it. Against such a backdrop, Singh, here in Turin opted somehow to mute references to Indian military capability, shifting the attention on what he called 'the minimalist approach' in defence spending.⁵¹

The concluding remarks were dedicated, in the light of India's refusal to approve the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) to the controversial issue of nuclear weapons.⁵² The focal point of Singh's argument was that India, since the 1950s, had always linked the test ban with disarmament. The final draft of the above treaty, according to Singh, did not promote such process of disarmament,⁵³ thus it was against India strategic interest. As he was to write in the *Pioneer*:

In this context, U.S. policy to target India in pursuit of its policy of 'cap', reduce and eliminate India's nuclear capabilities without any solution for its security problems, clearly stemmed from remarkable insensitivity. If the principle of cap, reduce and eliminate is to be applied in a global context, we should have no problem with it. But discriminatory application can hardly be so.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ On the question of 'uncertainty' in a multipolar world see Mak (1995) and Simon (1996).

⁴⁹ The growing convergence of India-U.S. interests, particularly evident with relation to Indian Ocean security may undermine this independent posture. As Muni (1991: 865) underlined: 'For Indian foreign policy the dilemma of the early 1950s has qualitatively re-emerged. The choice now, as it was then, is difficult and tricky, i.e., choosing between joining the Pax-Americana and the charting of an independent Nehruvian course'.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of this policy in its early manifestation in the South Asia context, see Kapur (1988).

⁵¹ Singh in his lecture simply made reference to the 1.5 of GDP devoted to defence spending during the first fifteen years of Independence. For a more complete, yet sympathetic, picture see Gordon (1992). For a more 'severe' assessment, instead, see Maass and Bautzmann (1996).

⁵² It must be pointed out that on the domestic scene the question is hardly controversial. The anti-nuclear activist Achin Vanaik (1996), though speaking of Indians being 'ill-informed' had to admit that 'the pressure in India to test or exercise the option has grown to heights never before experienced'.

⁵³ In fact India, thanks also to the lobbying of the Institute directed by Jasjit Singh, linked CTBT to time bound disarmament.

⁵⁴ Singh's article by the title 'Who Jeopardised CTBT' (originally published in the *Pioneer*) was reproduced by *Mainstream* (1996).

Singh went on to underline that Indian nuclear policy has been determined by China's acquisition in 1964, of nuclear weapons. As he recently wrote (1995: 64): 'Si l'on situe dans le cadre d'une région comme l'Asie du Sud, les enjeux nucléaires prennent un tour bilatéral entre l'Inde et le Pakistan (...). Mais une telle perspective serait à la fois artificielle et limitée, puisque la politique nucléaire de l'Inde est tournée en priorité vers la Chine'.⁵⁵ In such a nuclearized environment, J. Singh concluded, India's security could best be served by maintaining a nuclear option that would assure her a minimum of deterrence.⁵⁶

The relevance of this particular projection of military power was, somewhat unwittingly, endorsed by Wadhwa's paper on India's emerging geo-economic perspectives. Although the author, from his peculiar point of view, appeared to slight the relevance of traditional geo-strategic considerations, he underlined the economic importance of what he called a 'look East Policy', in particular the geo-economic centrality of further development of India's economic linkages with the ASEAN countries. In fact Charan D. Wadhwa, affiliated with the Centre of Policy Research, following a lengthy analysis of the causes for India's pre-1990 lack of export competitiveness, focuses the attention on the reciprocal advantages accruing from India-Asian economic co-operation.⁵⁷

The conference ended with a 'Tavola Rotonda' to which participated Eric Consalves, Ambassador of India to the EEC; Patrizia Toia, Sottosegretario Ministero degli Affari Esteri; Gaetano Zucconi, Italian ambassador to Delhi; Jasjit Singh and V.A. Panandiker. Following Eric Consalves' reading of a paper on Indo-Italian relations and a fleeing and arid speech by Sen. Toia, there was a lively discussion on the more controversial issues raised during the meeting. However, during this final session, some important new problems were debated. Thus the question of India's exclusion from the recent ASEM high level meeting was raised. It was declared that the creation of closer relations between India and Europe may facilitate a solution of this problem.⁵⁸ But in this closing session attention was primarily focused on the implications of the concept of Indian civilisation. Consalves in his paper forwarded the view that South Asia must unite the different parts of what he called the Indian

⁵⁵ The need to look at the Indian military and political situation not only in terms of the sub-continent has become almost a dogma for the Indian military elite. Singh, over the years, has staunchly advocated this policy. For an early formulation of this view see his 1989 article in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Jul. 12).

⁵⁶ It may be superfluous to signal that India and Pakistan have meanwhile carried out nuclear tests.

⁵⁷ The speaker did not touch upon the growing ASEAN security concerns, which may have facilitated the growth of India-ASEAN relations.

⁵⁸ It is with a certain satisfaction that I signal that the Italian representative to the recently created ASEM Cultural Foundation, ASEF, is Prof. Adriano Rossi, vice-chancellor of the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli.

civilizational area. During the ensuing discussion this civilizational area was broaden so as to include the South East Asia region. Undoubtedly old cultural ties may facilitate the creation of economic ties, but to postulate the nebulous concept of 'Indian civilisation' or 'Indian Culture' as the possible basis of strategic unity appeared somewhat of a perilous velleity.⁵⁹

This meeting went a long way in correcting that pervasive and perverse image of an India immobilised by ingrained problems and by a mood of self-indulgent disenchantment. The Indian scholars in Turin drew the picture of a vibrant and dynamic India ready to face the new global challenges.

⁵⁹ It may be superfluous to note that the concept of Indian civilisation here discussed was radically different from the Hindu civilisation contemplated by Huntington in his eight-fold classification scheme. In a way it represented the very negation of Huntington concept of fault line.

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