

On the Clash of Civilisations

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After wars of countries aligned by political ideology in the last century, the world now faces wars by countries of different religions. Not politics, but culture drives violence. So spoke Huntington. This article argues that accumulation has slowed since the 1960s; the long wave of capitalism has entered a phase of recession. 'Vast religious upheavals are generally indicative of powerful changes in the productive basis,' said D D Kosambi.

Within less than ten years after the fall of Berlin wall, speculations on the nature of post-cold-war era forged two sensational paradigms. In his crystal ball Fukuyama saw an image of perfect capitalism in full glory of ultimate triumph which augurs the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, in short, the "last man" at the 'end of history.'

By contrast, Huntington painted a rather gloomy picture showing "Clash of Civilisations", spurred by wars of religions, not a rehearse of old quarrels between political ideologies like liberal democracy against communist dictatorship, but collisions between faiths like Christianity and Islam. Post-cold-war conflicts would be of two dimensions: global, e.g. America versus China; and front-line (border battles), e.g. between Israel and the Palestine authority. Since religion is the principal defining characteristic of civilisations, fault line wars are almost always between peoples of different religions.

Why do civilisations clash? Among all civilisations the West had a major impact on every other civilisation. Relations between the power and culture of the West and the power and cultures of other civilisations are the most pervasive characteristics of civilisations. As the relative power of other civilisations increases, the appeal of Western culture fades and non-Western peoples have increasing confidence in and commitment to their indigenous culture. That's why!

The central problem of the relation between the West and the rest is the discordance between the West's, particularly America's, efforts to promote a universal Western culture and its declining ability to do so. The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the West's power. It is the West, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the missionary obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West.

In his map of global wars Huntington finally drew a bifurcation: the West confronting China on the one hand and Islam on the other.

CHRISTENDOM AND ISLAM

To geographers Europe is an Asian peninsula, a little cape, linked with the East by a broadening continental landmass, and with the seven seas in all directions. Its history is that of ships, convoys and the conquest of distant oceans. It has a

highly indented coastline with five large peninsulas that approach islands in their isolation, and all of which evolved independent languages, ethnic groups and governments. It has two islands (Britain and Ireland) big enough to assert their political independence and to maintain their own languages and ethnicities. High mountains of the continent carve out distinct social formations. Europe's fragmentation fostered advancement of technology, science, and capitalism by competition between states and providing innovation with alternative sources of support and havens from persecution.

Rise of the West began in 8th and 9th centuries as European Christendom emerged as a distinct civilisation. It was the time of dark ages, of the primary poverty of a continent that had struggled everyday simply to survive. Lacking broad outlets, reduced to a subsistence economy, this impoverished Europe was a citadel of besieged or rather invaded. Yet this troubled continent, oppressed from within and attacked from without, was already quite clearly a homogeneous entity, a feudal civilisation. The Muslim conquest of the Mediterranean had deprived the West of free movement there and forced it back upon itself.

Feudalism had compartmentalised Europe. Villages huddled close to the lord's castle for protection. All that mattered was small region, the narrow, mother countryside. Each region was able to grow at its own pace in its own way to become a robust and self-aware unit ready to defend its territory and independence. Yet there was a convergence of Europe's civilisation and culture. There was indeed the Christendom, crystallised during the crusades which were mass movements of collective adventures and passions. They would cost the West in two centuries (11th- 13th) one-tenth of the small population of 50 million. Religion's compulsion was the trigger but crusades were sustained by the enthusiasm of jobless marauders of feudal Europe. Converted as Christian, Vikings, Slavs, and Magyars meant that there was an entire class of warriors who then had very little to do but fight among themselves and terrorise the peasant population. Economic pressures felt by them served as the engine analogous to the impetus of Arab's venture outside of Medina in the 7th century.

Between 11th and 13th centuries European culture began to develop with appropriation from Islam and Byzantium. By 1500 the renaissance of European culture was under way; and social pluralism, expanding commerce, and technological achievements provided the basis for a new theatre in global politics. Subsequently capitalism would enable the West to command a world empire.

Islam is contemporary of Christendom. The first Muslim state was founded in Medina in 632. Within twenty years after the death of the prophet in 632 Arab forces overran much of the Byzantine empire in Syria and Egypt and all of the Sassanid empire in Iraq and Iran. Forty years later, with the addition of North Africa, Spain, most of Afghanistan and vast areas of central Asia, the Arab domains spanned three continents from the Atlantic to the Indus and from the upper Nile to the Aral Sea. A little later Mongols and Turkmans would appear on the scene making the Ottoman empire a formidable rival of Christendom as a world faith and world power.

At the prophet's death, Abu Bakr became the first caliph. His reign was short but crucial. He was preoccupied with the war of riddah (apostasy). Most of bedouin tribes who had entered the umma under Mohammad threatened

secession. Abu Bakr quelled the uprising by offering the bait of lucrative *ghazu* raids, i.e. ambush, upon non-Muslim lands. For centuries, the Arabs had eked out their inadequate resources by means of *ghazu*, but Islam had put a stop to this practice because the tribes of the umma were not permitted to attack one another. Now the tribes got engaged in *ghazu* outside of the umma authorised by the caliph. Soon, the Islamic law, Sharia, would bestow upon it religious sanctity.

One hundred and fifty years after the death of Mohammad, the legendary Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, encouraged systematic anthology of the traditions set by the prophet and his companions, which were to be emulated by the believers in order to acquire the interior attitude of perfect submission. This literature is known as respectively *Hadith* and *Sunna*. The Koran together with the Hadith and the Sunna would be the source of Islamic law, *Sharia*. By the 10th century, in the closing years of the Arab empire, the Sharia was declared completed. Islamic law would no longer require further elaboration of fresh principles and rules, or so it was proclaimed by the ulema. This event is remembered as the closing of the ***gates of ijihad***, i.e. the suspension of independent juristic reasoning. The gates have remained closed ever since.

With an exclusive hold over the exegesis of scripture and the tools of controlling society, economy and polity at their hand, the ulema left for the caliph the singular burden of pushing frontiers of the empire. The Sharia solemnly partitioned the world into the *dar ul-islam* (the house of Islam), which combats the *dar al-harb* (the house of war). Ghazu raids upon infidels received the religious seal.

There was another type of classification, this time relating to individual human beings. The scripture has some harsh words on the infidel, but all that is about afterlife. In respect of the present, the Koran consistently displays toleration: “Unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship” (109:1-5). Here the word ‘ever’ signifies the absence of any intention in favour of conversion ever. Rather it directs positively to the contemplation of peaceful religious coexistence, which is made explicit as the sura closes with this sentence : ‘You have your religion, and I have mine’ (109:6).

It was not until after one century from the date of the prophet’s death that conversion started, under the exigency of imperial war. Umayyad caliph, Umar II, had made a daring attempt to capture Constantinople, but that adventure brought him a disastrous defeat with a heavy loss of troops. The caliph was now under pressure to replenish his army. Infidels were offered monetary incentive to profess Islam. Application of force was not excluded, under pain of death, despite the clear Koranic injunction to the contrary: ‘There shall be no compulsion in religion’ (2:256). First it was ghazu raids that ransacked non-Muslim homelands outside the umma, and then came conversion within the umma; these two in combination marked a watershed of departure from the essence of Koran’s universal spirituality.

The extension of ghazu abroad as a means of buying domestic peace has its own peril. As a means of financing imperial expeditions, it had limits. Once launched, it tends to press for its own continuance; then, if stopped, the empire would fall into economic trouble. Absent the cultivation of internal economic

provision, the imperial momentum may not run for long. Each annexation of territory brings in its trail further commitment of expenditure, for new troops are to be recruited, trained, stationed in distant garrison towns, and provided with supply; hence more ghazu abroad. It is a compulsively self-repeating project, subject to a forced termination only by a decisive failure at the battlefield on foreign shores.

The Arabian ghazu had inspired a popular movement of 'ghazis', holy warriors of the faith. Recruited from the mixed crowd of volunteers, often vagabonds, fugitives, malcontents, and unemployed persons seeking subsistence, their preferred task was to fight infidel, and their predominant motive was plunder. Traditionally, they fought as mercenaries, carrying out raids beyond the frontiers of Islam. In the 11th century, a group of nomads, known as Turkmans, came upon to operate as ghazis on the fluid borders between the Seljuk and the Byzantine empires in Asia Minor.

In 1243, Mongols overran the Seljuk army in Anatolia, but the Mongol power itself proved ephemeral, lasting in Asia Minor for a mere generation, leaving an opening for the Turkmans. Fighting among themselves the tribes established and ruled over some ten ghazi principalities. One of these, the principality of Osman, was destined to grow into a great power, the Ottoman empire founded in 1299, to endure under his dynasty for more than six centuries. The accession of Suleiman to the Ottoman caliphate in 1520 coincided with a turning point in the history of European civilization. The middle ages, with its dying feudal institutions gave way to the renaissance, followed by the enlightenment. Suleiman had been acknowledged with manifold appellations: the lawgiver, the magnificent, the Ottoman Prince of the renaissance. He was himself an enlightened caliph-sultan, yet he could not take his empire to the road towards enlightenment and democracy.

Turkmans had shared with the Mongols the same wilderness of Mongolia, wherefrom they migrated west. Between the two tribes, a lot more was common : descent, manners and ethos. The law code of the Mongol empire, *Yasa*, was attributed to Genghis Khan himself. It was a narrow military system. The Turkish Ottoman state adopted the Mongol's *Yasa*. The military spirit pervaded all spheres of the empire: economic, social, political. 'Every labour was servile except the profession of arms.' Agriculture, industry, commerce were unbecoming of Muslim pride, hence meant for inferior others, the infidel. A variation of the ancient 'Athens syndrome' revisited: the more the believers purified the piety the more derided and deprived felt the slaves and women. The Ottomans adhered to the ethos of their old ideal, seeing themselves as manning a frontier state, dedicated to the jihad against the enemies of Islam.

For long, the distribution of land had remained decentralized, administered by provincial governors. This led to abuses in the form of frequent and irresponsible changes in the ownership of land, which had already become a general practice. This in turn infringed the prerogative of the sultan, who in theory, as God's representative, was the owner of it all. Suleiman centralized the transfer of large fiefs, that must be now referred for approval to the central government in Istanbul, otherwise to the sultan himself. As time passed, the allocation of large fiefs depended less on the justice of claims to them than on palace intrigues and

corrupt dispense of favours. There grew up a new class of big landlords who were often officials, courtiers, and servants of the palace and indeed often from outside it, moreover as a rule absentees living in the cities. By corrupt means it became possible for a single person to procure any number of fiefs, and make a big landed property.

These absentee landlords promptly turned their private estates into ranch to raise horses and livestock, and thus drastically altered the traditional agrarian pattern of land use throughout Anatolia. Peasants lost land, in desperation flocked to the cities for a living. Famine stalked the land. The economy faltered. After the death of Suleiman in 1566, the empire would limp on for over three centuries to be a casualty at the rampart of World War-I.

Christendom and Islam are spiritual twins of one parent. Abraham; historical twins of one mother-civilisation, Graeco-Jewish. Yet they had often unsheathed sword against each other. Evidently, religion does not make a civilisation; it is not constant across time; it evolves with the terrain, society, economy and polity.

CHINA AND INDIA

In the 3rd century BC, one century after Chandragupta Maurya had ascended the throne in India, the first imperial dynasty unified China and created a monarchy-bureaucratic system which would endure and hold the country together for two thousand years. The first emperor declared Confucianism the state religion. Four factors have contributed most to China's integration of diverse tribes into one civilization. One: despite numerous spoken dialects, the written language for greater part of China was uniform, Mandarin. Two: the public examination to recruit imperial officials was an open door for all, leading to the highest echelon of aristocracy. Three : the imperial and popular ethos. Confucianism, taught that though all men possess the same human nature, they are not yet all equal. But when men, any men, acquire virtue through classical scholarship, they also gain access to high ranks in society. Four : the concept of *Mandate of Heaven* arose way back during the reign of the Zhou dynasty (1000-771 BC); it introduced an ethical idea into society. The term 'Heaven' in China's cosmology represents Nature itself, not a transcendental entity like God. Heaven's mandate to rule over the people might be conferred on any family that was morally worthy of the responsibility. The emphasis on moral behaviour and right conduct led to an idea of 'government by the goodness'. The Mandate of Heaven was at once a code of ethics for benevolent and effective government, and an assertion of legitimacy for rebellion against bad government. This subtle combination of stability and the right to rebel was China's strength and was indeed a great political invention.

Ancient China had two distinct regions: arid steppe in the north and fertile plain in the south, demarcated by the Yellow river, whose basin was the cradle of China's civilisation. Internal integration of various cultural traits inaugurated the classical era of Chinese philosophy, to be enriched in due course with influences from abroad including India. Confucius—virtual contemporary of Buddha, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle—had laid the foundation. Chinese thought is humanistic. Confucian ethics is about the improvement and humanisation of human relationship. Its categorical imperative is this: The only purpose man can have and also the only worthwhile thing a man can do is to become as good a man as possible. Goodness is to be pursued for its own sake and with complete

indifference to success or failure. On the question of rebirth, Confucianism is agnostic; it does not assure a reward in this life or in the next, if any.

Early Chinese cosmology (perception of the universe as an ordered whole) differs from the Western thought. It had no 'creation' myth and no creator-lawgiver outside of this world, no 'first cause', not even a Big Bang. The early Chinese assumed 'a philosophy of organism, an ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer', "a fatherless world". Though generally regarded Heaven as the supreme cosmic power, they saw it as immanent in nature, not transcendent.

As a school of philosophy, Taoism came much later than the time of Confucius. While trying to reveal the underlying laws of nature, it stands for conformity with nature and its laws; hence the doctrine of *Wu-Wei* or inaction. Taoism is an empirical philosophy seeking the truth from natural phenomena and human experience. It flourished more among the common people, while standing opposite to the elitist stance of Confucianism. Tao literally means the *path*, the *way*. It expressed common people's naturalistic cosmology and belief in the unseen spirits of nature. Taoism was an enormous repertoire of popular lore. It also provided escape from Confucianism, profiting from revulsion of scholars against ritualism of the classics. It was a refuge from the world of affairs.

Confucianism and Taoism rivalled one another, but also complemented each other. They exercised a balance of power and interaction between them and provided momentum to Chinese thought. A common example of balancing act is as follows. A Chinese scholar was a Confucian when inside his office and a Taoist when outside of office.

China had met repeated invasions from the nomads of Inner Asia, a wide arc running from Manchuria through Mongolia and Turkestan to Tibet. During the last thousand years greater parts of China had been ruled more than half the time by alien invaders. In the fourth century, nomadic hordes came down southward from the plateaus in the north to set up many petty kingdoms in the plain. A great exodus of Chinese people, including members of literati, was inevitable. They crossed the Yangtze river and settled temporarily in the south-east. Confucianism suffered a setback. Under the circumstances the literati could no longer bear with the Confucian classical restraint; they turned to Taoism and Buddhism for solace, an escape to mystic ecstasy and an asylum in resignation. By the twelfth century, the three trends—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—coalesced into one, in the form of Neo-Confucianism. A principle of Neo-Confucianism reads as follows : 'human mind is a manifestation of the Universal Mind, which is the legislator of the laws of nature.' The modern Chinese family had accepted Neo-Confucianism. Its magnanimous attitude to faith and philosophy could be glimpsed from this : The father may be a Buddhist, the mother may be a Taoist, the son may be a Christian; and nobody worries about them. The religion of China is humanistic and agnostic. Metaphysical speculation did not appeal much to the people.

At the beginning China and India had certain commonality. In olden days most societies had a belief in the High God, aka the Sky God, who was neither transcendental, nor accessible to humans, but the manifestation of Nature, a spirit of the Heaven.

About that time in India a hymn of Rig Veda indicated a High God. 'He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, 'Whose eye

controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows it not.' The deep ambiguity of the hymn about the creation and about 'he' explains the 'Heaven' and the "Mandate of Heaven" of China's cosmology, while the singularity of 'he' points to the monotheism of Christianity and Islam.

Much like the later experience of China, an age of invasions visited India too over five centuries straddling between AC and BC when foreign hordes from Bactria, Parthia. and the wilds of Turkestan poured across the north-west frontier and assimilated in their new homeland. Later, Rudradaman, a Shaka, the 'Mahakshtrapa' (Great Satrap), would uphold dharma and resurrect Sanskrit from its classical slumber.

India's path diverged from China's in the 4th century with the accession of the Gupta emperor. The nouveau riche, bureaucrats, nobles and army brass basking in the Gupta affluence imported costly luxury : silk, saffron, jewels. Lead, copper and silver, wines and slaves for household service, concubine and entertainment, the art and craftsmanship of the Roman-Greek world were of insatiable demand. To pay for all these precious imports the imperial treasury was exhausted of silver coins leaving little currency for business transactions in bulging rural markets at home. This domestic trauma was resolved with a radical scheme of making village trade a cash-free barter deal.

Each village was ordered to have its precisely required numbers of artisan potter, tanner, barber, not exceeding twelve in total. Each of them was assigned a piece of land to till in spare time. For subsistence he was to receive a small share of the harvest from farmers. The village community thus became a tight, viable, closed nest oblivious of the world outside. The ancestral-commodity fetishism ossified the societal order : varna by varna, caste by caste. Never before has a financial deficit brought such mischief to a society.

The Indians seldom ventured far to war for conquest. Farmers ploughed in perfect security while armies did battle in the next field. Although they might have a stake in the outcome of the battle or might have contributed to the equipage of one of the protagonists, they were not to get involved. Warriors fought with warriors; the ploughmen's dharma was to plough. Not even a single arrow was ever thrown in the name of religion. The epic Maha-bharata was about the correct observance of a particular faith, not a trial of faiths.

STAGNATION OF CAPITALISM

Capitalism is better understood if graded in the scale of rich and poor. Rich capitalism, American and European, has gotten rid of smokestack manufacturing industries, flown away on the wings of globalisation, and reinstalled in poor capitalism. Between 1960s and 1990s, the annual growth of gross fixed investment in rich capitalism fell from 7 percent to 2 percent. In the United States, between 1960 and 2007, the annual rate of savings declined from 12 percent to 3 percent of national income. Evidently, at the moment capitalism is not in a growing mode.

There are two steps of capital accumulation, namely, concentration and centralisation. With the increasing mass of wealth which functions as capital, accumulation increases the concentration of that wealth in the hand of many individual capitalists and thereby widens the basis of production on a large scale.

Concentration is followed by centralisation. Centralisation involves concentration of capital already formed, destruction of their individual independence, expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, transformation of many small into few large capitals. Capital grows in one place in a huge mass in a single hand, because it has in another place been lost by many.

Economic growth since World War II was an event of concentration of capital at the hand of many capitalists. Since 1980s, centralisation of capital by a few capitalists has taken place. This process witnessed two most powerful levers of centralisation, namely, competition, and credit: competition between companies to gobble one another and the concomitant rise of debt in corporate portfolio.

Centralisation of capital, as distinct from concentration, only presupposes a change in the distribution of capital already on hand, and functioning; its field of action is therefore not limited by the absolute growth of social wealth. Capitalism may then be caught in a trap of stagnation.

Above all, every capitalist upstart has personally to go through the following stage, namely, passions of avarice, and desire to get rich. Luxury enters into capital's expenses. His personal expenditure grows faster than his capital accumulation which consequently decelerates. This proposition of capitalist stagnation is apparently contrary to the common Marxian literature. But, it is consistent with the currently observed trajectory of capitalism.

After all, capitalists do not die, only those who got lost in luxury fade away. Then a fresh bunch of frugal capitalists sprout to pick up the mantle. If the capitalists of the West are already spoiled by the temptation of conspicuous consumption, as they look like, their substitutes are in the making in the poor capitalism of the East, maybe precisely in China or India.

Global warfare involving China and the US is unlikely in the foreseeable future so long as their relationship remains such as that of labour and capital with capitalism. Somewhat like the Arabian ghazu, crusades in medieval Europe were prompted by economic scarcity in the Christendom. Similarly the stagnant capitalism of today may breed considerable tension of fault line battles, some by way of proxy war of rich countries in pursuit of resources around the globe. In view of their historic traditions China and India would be reluctant to initiate violence on such matters.

Exhausted by a millennium of ghazu, crusades, inquisitions, wars of religion, jihads, and Holocaust, the wiser Christendom and Islam are now groping for reconciliation. Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's Interfaith Dialogue, the Vatican's Catholic-Muslim Forum, Turkey's Alliance of Civilisations, and America's 'Service Projects' for Christians, Jews, and Muslims together are signals in the direction of peaceful coexistence of faiths. Furthermore, addition of a new academy of independent scholars and religious leaders to deliberate on the issues of civilisation and faith could be a welcome complement to the abovementioned initiatives. □□□

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