Three

The Train to Nowhere

They saw a Dream of Loveliness descending from the train.

—CHARLES LELAND

At midnight on 14 August 1947 the British Raj came to an end. On the same day Pakistan was born, carved out of Punjab and Bengal. Sir Cyril Radcliffe did the actual carving in five weeks, and the demarcation on the map came to be known as the Radcliffe Boundary Award. The partition led to an unprecedented transfer of population and rendered ten million homeless. An estimated twenty million Hindus left West Punjab and East Bengal, and eighteen million Muslims went to Pakistan. As a part of this mass movement, over half a million people lost their lives; there were 22,000 reported cases of rape and kidnapping of women; 220,000 people were declared missing.

My family had also become refugees. We found asylum at my father's guru's ashram, which turned out to be some sixty kilometers within the Indian border according to Mr. Radcliffe's penciled line. There we heard Nehru's historic address to the new nation.

> *Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge .... At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance ....*

Despite the suffering and the uncertainty about our future, we were filled with emotion as we listened to Nehru's words. We heard the national anthem of the new nation for the first time. Few recognized it. My father was the first to stand up. Then one by one the other listeners got up, until everyone was standing at attention. When the reference came to "Punjab" in the song, the refugees looked at each other, helplessness in their eyes. Despite our travails, we realized our good fortune in having witnessed the birth of our free nation. In what became the most important speech delivered in modern India, Nehru went on to say, "The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the great triumphs and achievements that await us." He reminded his people that the task ahead included "the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."

It is with this task that this book is concerned. Nehru achieved much in the seventeen years that he went on to rule, but he failed in this task. After fifty years the failure is staggering: four out of ten Indians are illiterate; half are miserably poor, earning less than a dollar a day; one-third of the people do not have access to safe drinking water; only a sixth of the villages have modern medical facilities. Even more devastating, the system that Nehru created and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, perfected actually suppressed growth. The irony is that this system, which was made in the name of the poor, in the end did very little for them. As a result, 60 percent of the budgets of the Indian governments at all levels go to pay civil servants' salaries and 70 percent of the twenty-seven million Indian workers

employed in the organized sector belong to inefficient state-owned enterprises which are bleeding the country. If a small portion of this money had been spent wisely on education and health, it would have delivered far greater benefits to the average Indian.

This is not to say that there hasn't been progress. Famines have been eliminated, and the country sits routinely on a mountain of grain reserves each year. Life expectancy has doubled from thirty to sixty-four years; literacy has risen from 17 percent to 62 percent (although female literacy is below 40 percent). Infant mortality has been halved. The stagnant economy, which grew by 1 percent per year in the first half of the century, has grown by 4.4 percent a year in the second half of the century. It grew 3.5 percent annually between 1950 and 1975; it accelerated in the eighties to 5.6 percent; and after the reforms it touched 7.5 percent for three years in a row in the mid-nineties.

At the guru's ashram, my father learned that he had been transferred to Simla, where the government shifted temporarily after the loss of Lahore to Pakistan. We took a train from Jullunder to Kalka, where we changed to the miniature train for Simla. From the window of our train we feasted on the snow-tipped crests of the world's highest mountains. The journey through the lower Himalayas to Simla in August 1947 refreshed our exhausted emotions and marked the decisive break with our bloody past. The stench of death was left far behind. On each bend of the winding journey there were green slopes with tiers of neatly cultivated terraces. Towards the south, we could see the Ambala plains far below, and the Kasauli hills in the foreground. Higher up, belts of pine, fir, and deodar punctuated the terraces. Masses of rhododendrons clothed the slopes. Northwards rose the confused Himalayan mountain chains, range after snowy range.

The train stopped at Barog, where a white car on rails went speeding by. "The rail car," explained the Anglo-Indian ticket collector, "carries the rich and the busy, who don't carry luggage and who want to reach Simla in a hurry. It used to be only the white sahibs who traveled in it. Since Independence, everyone is on it. Amazing, how quickly the brown sahibs have slid into the shoes of the departing masters!" At Shogi, we glimpsed the first wondrous vision of Simla. From afar, it looked like a mythical, green-carpeted garden dotted with red-roofed houses. Our excitement mounted. We passed Jutogh, crossed Summer Hill, turned into tunnel number 103, and finally reached Simla's Victorian railway station. It was the best train journey of our lives.

Indian Railways, one of the world's greatest railway systems, was built soon after the British crown took over the running of India from the East India Company. It was the largest single injection of British capital into India's economy, and the network went on to become the third largest in the world. Yet this massive construction was not enough to modernize and lift the Indian economy. India alone among the great railway countries remained unindustrialized. In the other railway powers—the United States, Russia, and Germany—the railway had been a dynamo of the industrial revolution. It had no such effect in India, even though the country's network by 1947 was more than 50,000 miles long, employing more than a million men, with 9,000 locomotives, 225,000 freight cars, and more than 16,000 passenger coaches.

Soon after Independence, my cousin Jeet Varma got into Indian Railways. We were all proud. At a time when jobs were scarce he had landed a coveted job in the railways entirely on his own initiative. Soon after the turmoil of Partition, he had joined an engineering college at Kashmere Gate

in Delhi, where he heard that the Railways was expanding and needed engineers. He passed an exam, cleared the interview, and went off to Jamalpur for a six-year training program. Jeet was not impressed with either the colonial setting or the training program. Nor did he think much of his teachers. But he stuck it out, made a name for himself as a tennis player, and in the end was sent on his first job to Calcutta as assistant mechanical engineer in the Sealdah division. Over the years, Jeet told us many things about the Railways.

The story of Indian Railways began in London in the 1840s. The promoters were adventurous, determined men. They got in touch with Britain's merchants, manufacturers, and shipping interests, to whom they held out the prospect of a vast and opulent India. Once opened up by railways, they said, India would become a fabulous supply house of cotton and wheat and a huge consumer of textiles and manufactured products of Britain. They told the great mercantile houses that they would be able to bring coal by rail to Calcutta from the mines of western Bengal and become even wealthier. They put together a powerful coalition in Parliament and exerted great pressure on the British government. They succeeded in getting hugely favorable contracts, which allowed them to raise funds in Britain to build and manage the railway operations in India—all of it guaranteed by the government against any risk of loss. They could not have got a better deal.

The East Indian Railway Company was one of the first to get started. It built and operated a line running a few dozen miles north from Calcutta along the Hooghly River. Later it extended it to the coal mines, 100 miles northwest of Calcutta, and subsequently to the well-populated and fertile Gangetic plains. About the same time, the Great Indian Peninsular Railway Company constructed a second line running north from Bombay for thirty-five miles to Kalyan, which it expanded later over the Western Ghats into the rich cotton fields of the Deccan. Many lines followed thereafter. The cost of construction was high because the companies had a guaranteed return of cost plus five percent. They had little incentive to economize and they built carelessly and lavishly. When the work was defective, they simply rebuilt it. They erected stations in a grand style and provided luxury coaches for upper-class passengers.

These railway lines had a profound effect on millions of lives. People began to travel, and merchants began to send their goods to distant parts. New towns came up along the railway lines. However, the artisans in villages and towns began to lose their living because they could not compete with British manufactured goods that began to arrive rapidly. Earlier, the peasants had stored their surplus grains in the good years. Now the railways began to carry food and commercial crops to the ports for export. Reserves were thus depleted and in the bad years of the 1870s and 1890s devastating famines followed. If the railway companies had not thought only of British needs, and been less wasteful and conserved their resources, they might have had a more benign impact. In the end, the "spread effects" of this great investment were limited. Japan's railways, by contrast, built at the same time, had a domestic orientation, and carefully economized their limited capital. They had a more positive result. Moreover, the Indian railway network, although huge in absolute terms, was comparatively small. In 1937, India had 26 miles of railway lines per 1,000 square miles of land area. In comparison, the United States had 80 and Germany 253.3. It partially explains why the railways did not engender an industrial revolution in India. Nevertheless, it was a powerful legacy of

the British Raj to independent India in a general economic landscape of backwardness. Without the railways, India would have been even less industrialized.

After our train journey to Simla we went to a little red-roofed cottage called "Pine Villa" in Chota Simla. Like many houses in Simla it resembled something in between a Swiss cottage and a Victorian villa in an English village, surrounded by a garden bursting with dahlias, pansies, and sweet peas. We loved our little house, which had been provided us by the Punjab government, and which was icy cold at night. It was situated in a handsome grove of oaks and deodars, and from our veranda we had a spectacular view of the next ridge and many ridges beyond. From the narrow veranda, we stepped onto a little lawn; from the lawn, there was nothing to step onto except fresh air for the ground suddenly dropped beneath our feet, as it often does in Simla.

Indians now slipped into English shoes naturally and with vigor. In the evenings, everyone in Simla went to the Mall, no matter what the season. Between five and seven o'clock the thing to do was to get dressed and take a stroll from the Ridge to the end of the lower Mall in order "to eat the air." It was a delightful winding stretch of about a mile along a gentle slope, with glamorous shops and smart cafes. One went there to be seen and to see others, and every evening was a veritable fashion parade where men, women, and children vied with one another in the elegance of their clothes. The colorful display of women's silk sarees was especially striking, but even the men strutted about in the latest cuts from London. The refugees from West Punjab were so happy to be alive that they embraced Simla's joie de vivre with reckless abandon. They pulled themselves up to make a new life rather than regret the life they had lost in Pakistan. The Punjabi on the Mall felt the same emotions that a fashionable Parisian must have felt when strolling on the Champs-Elysées at the turn of the century.

My father earned a modest salary, and my mother ran the house on a tight budget. Her biggest expenses were for school fees and uniforms, and milk for her growing children. She worked hard to get us into an English-speaking school, although it cost more than she could afford. It had a long waiting list because of the recent influx of refugees, and she had to apply "influence" to get us in. She made sure that we worked hard at studies and got good marks, especially in English and mathematics. She also wanted us to excel in sports. At the end of the month there was little money left for anything else.

We used to come home from school around four in the afternoon, drink a glass of hot milk, and go out to play. We returned after an hour to do homework under the watchful eye of my mother. Before dinner she would sit with us and tell us stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. My mother's narration from the ancient Hindu epics was deeply colored by her middle-class values. She always emphasized the virtues of thrift, hard work, courage, and a respect for elders. On the other hand, my father, who often joined us at this time, emphasized the love of God, respect for the guru, the value of meditation, and the ultimate goal of life, spiritual enlightenment.

My father was a mystic and he devoted all his spare time to meditation or to reading discourses by his guru. In the evenings he would go on a solitary walk and return to his room to meditate, when we were expected to be quiet. Because of my father's spiritual inclinations, we were vegetarian. But even those who ate meat did so only occasionally. This was partly because meat was expensive, but also because Indian vegetarian food is tasty. My father used to say that one inherited the karma of the

animal that one ate and therefore one regressed in the reincarnation cycle of births and deaths. The goal of life was to break free from this cycle and achieve unity with the Absolute. It did not make sense to eat meat and add to one's karmic burdens.

Not unlike other Indian boys, I was closer to my mother. She was clearly the dominant presence in my childhood. My father, in comparison, was a distant figure. He seemed always occupied by his work or his spiritual quest. He was a good and kindly man, gentle and soft-spoken. He was also extremely shy and reserved, preferring his own company. If I had a problem or needed advice, I would turn to my mother. I cannot recall that she indulged me excessively, but she must have, for my early memories are surrounded by a warm glow. She wanted us to grow tough, do well in our exams, and rise in the world.

After dinner we listened to the English news on the radio, read in an authoritative manner by Melville De Mello. The news usually consisted of reports of Jawaharlal Nehru's activities and speeches. Nehru inspired in us the ideals of democracy, socialism, secularism, and world peace. We innocently believed in the United Nations and in the unique role that India was meant to play in a new moral world order.

Nehru was a hero to the nation and we had implicit faith in his Five Year Plans that would develop our country and one day wipe poverty from our land. We were proud that his government was investing in steel and power. Since my father was helping to design the irrigation projects in Punjab, we felt that we too were a part of nation building. It was an exciting time, and although we did not discuss politics at home, there was always optimism in the air. We felt as though we were creating our future based on grand ideals. The country was free at last, and it was a new and wonderful experience for my parents and their friends, who had only known colonial rule.

My mother used to say, "I cannot believe it! I wake up, pick up the paper, and I don't read about Gandhi and Nehru being arrested for seditious activities. Then I pinch myself, and I say, You silly thing, we are finally free. And I feel like dancing all the way to the Mall in my night-clothes because there is no English sahib to judge my behavior."

One of my earliest memories is of our class preparing for the UN Day. It was in 1950. We were learning how to march in single file, to salute, to about-face, and to stand at ease. Suddenly we heard that the Prime Minister was coming to town, and our class had been selected to stand along the road to cheer as his motorcade went by. There was endless excitement and our teacher was in a constant state of hysteria. On the appointed day, we trooped to the Mall. It had a festive air with a continuous stream of flags—the blue UN flag alternating with the Indian tricolor. Thousands of children from dozens of schools thronged the street. Nehru's open car arrived right on time, preceded by motorcycles and a pilot car with a siren. Nehru looked unbelievably handsome, I thought, in his Gandhi cap and long white coat, with a red rose on the lapel. All of a sudden, he threw a garland of marigolds towards us. It brushed my arm and landed on my neighbor, who became an instant celebrity. I too shared in some of the halo—after all, the garland had touched my arm.

Thinking back, I feel the garland was symbolic of all the fine things that Nehru gave us. He united a nation out of the most heterogeneous people on the earth. He nurtured democracy. More than any other individual, we owe him our present-day attachment to democratic institutions. He respected

minorities and made us secular in our temperament. Most important, he injected in us the modernist ideas of liberty and equality. He gave us youthful hope and optimism. Yet I had failed to catch the garland. That, for me, came to symbolize Nehru's failed economic promises, which have cost us two generations of missed opportunities. Instead of socialism, his path led to a corrupt, domineering state which we are desperately trying to dismantle today with the economic reforms. The problems of Nehru's India began to appear soon after Independence, and my cousin Jeet discovered them on his very first day at work.

By the time he left work that day in December 1954 Jeet had created a sensation. He spotted a ticket collector (TC) openly taking bribes from ticketless hawkers as they came past the exit gate at Sealdah station. Without another thought, he sprang into action. He noted the TC's badge number and grabbed his open palm just as it was about to be greased by a vegetable vendor. With his other hand, Jeet emptied the TC's bribe-filled pocket. Notes and coins fell out.

"Thief!" shouted the TC. An understandable reaction, for the TC did not recognize him. "Thief, catch the thief!" he screamed again, and jeet saw the whole station descend upon him. At that moment, Jeet made the best decision of his life—he ran. Followed by a menacing mob led by ticketless hawkers and egged on by the TC, Jeet sprinted towards the moving express to Ranaghat. His training as a tennis player helped him to quickly put some distance between himself and his pursuers. However, Jeet did not know that the TC was also a star footballer of Mohun Bagan, Calcutta's premier football club. As he looked back, he found the TC rapidly closing in. Providentially, Jeet reached the accelerating train and leapt in. The TC too tried to jump, but he missed and there was a loud thud on the platform. A few seconds more, and Jeet realized he would have had it. From Ranaghat he caught a train to Kanchrapara, where he arrived in time for tennis. That evening Jeet entertained the Kanchrapara club with an account of his first day at work.

The next morning the entire Sealdah division was on strike. All the trains were at a standstill. On his second day at work, Jeet was brought under police guard, and he found forty-five hundred screaming railway workers gathered on the maidan outside. The corrupt TC had instigated the trade union. Now, goaded on by trade union leaders, the workers were baying for his blood. The railway managers were anxious, under great pressure from the top brass to get the trains moving. Jeet was brought before the division superintendent (DS), who was surrounded by a dozen angry union men. The DS asked Jeet to make an apology to the TC and the whole matter would be closed. Jeet refused. He demanded, on the contrary, that action be taken against the dirty TC.

"But you abused him!" said a menacing union leader.

"No, I caught him red-handed." Jeet produced the Rs 69 that he had taken from the TC's pocket.

"Well, it's your word against his, isn't it?" said the union leader.

"And that of a hundred witnesses," said Jeet.

"Why don't you be a good chap, Mr. Varma?" said the DS in a conciliatory way. "Offer an apology; it doesn't cost you anything. And we are back in business."

Jeet stood adamant. The division superintendent dismissed everyone and called his boss. As Jeet was leaving, the DS hissed, "You realize, of course, this is going to hurt you." Ten minutes later, Jeet heard on the microphone, "Apology is done. Go back to work. Apology is done. You won't be

penalized for work stoppage." Jeet was stunned. A few days later he learned that the TC had been let off with a warning, and soon the affair died. But it left a bad taste with Jeet. He thought his bosses were weak and cowardly, the unions all-powerful, and corruption unstoppable. Jeet's story brought home to me the first intimations of the rot that would settle in the monopolistic public sector. Almost everything that the government touched—certainly in the economic sphere—would turn to dust.

The state-owned railways are a miniature portrait of contemporary India, reflecting both the good and the bad. They are the people's transport. For one dollar you can travel 200 kilometers in a second-class compartment. They are cheaper than anywhere in the world because extortionate freight prices subsidize the passenger fares. Yet seventy million Indians travel every year without tickets. The railways symbolize democracy's triumph. The poorest Indian has become mobile. They are also inefficient, corrupt, hopelessly overmanned, and politicized. They employ 1.5 million people, seven times more manpower per kilometer than in the developed countries. Their powerful unions resist scaling down or modernization. The fastest train between Delhi and Bombay averages 65 kilometers per hour and it is often late. Yet Indians do not seem to mind because they have no other alternative. Private companies would not dream of transporting goods by rail, not only because of high tariffs and constant delays but because they would be stolen. Consequently, even petrol and diesel are inefficiently transported by road. Politicians make investment decisions in the railways and they bear no resemblance to commercial considerations or consumer needs. They are nationalized and there is no prospect of privatization.

I remember little from my school days in Simla, but I do recall my teacher telling us the story of one of the most famous battles fought on Indian soil—between Alexander the Great and Raja Puru (Porus, in Greek) of Punjab. I was so moved by Puru's courage that I named my younger son Puru. Later in life I returned to this encounter because it illustrated for me an important weakness in the Indian character—our lack of teamwork. Since this trait affects our competitiveness as a nation, I narrate the story at some length.

On a fine spring day in 326 B C., Alexander marched over the Hindu Kush and descended upon India. There was the glitter of spears as long lines of mailed men passed through the Khyber Pass and emerged upon the plain about Peshawar. Having decimated the mighty Persian Empire, the "Conqueror of the World" now sought power and wealth across the river Indus. He had heard many fabulous tales of India from Herodotus—among others of giant, gold-digging ants who labored in gold-strewn deserts filled with riches.

The bazaars and palaces of Punjab had been filled with talk ever since Alexander made the Persian Empire vanish four years before. The princes of India had shivered when they heard that Persepolis had been set on fire. But the India that Alexander faced was not united. Even Punjab, guarding the northwest gateway, was divided between three major kings and dozens of free tribes who were constantly at war. Their inability to unite lost them four years during which they could have planned for Alexander.

Alexander crossed the Indus near Attock and reached the kingdom of Taxila, between the Indus and

Jhelum (Hydaspes) rivers. Ambhi, the king of Taxila, from prudence or cowardice, chose not to fight. He sent Alexander envoys and presents and offered him his army, provided his kingdom was spared. Ambhi warmly welcomed the Greek invader and threw open the gates to his city, long famous as a center of trading and learning. The inquisitive crowds in Taxila watched the strange Greek figures in curious dress who milled about their streets.

Smaller chiefs from the surrounding areas brought presents, and Alexander rewarded them with generous extensions of their territories and vessels of gold and silver. The Greek soldiers performed games and sacrifices before the awestruck citizens. The Greeks were impressed by the civilized city life within the mud-brick maze of Indian streets. They visited the university and the learned men. They watched the rich townsfolk go about in linen tunics, capes, and turbans, their beards dyed white, blue, red, and purple. Some carried umbrellas, others wore leather boots. Holy men blessed the passersby by smearing their foreheads with oil.

Puru watched Alexander from across the Jhelum River. He observed the traitorous alliance struck by Ambhi, his old enemy. He saw the other princes rapidly submit to the new power, including his own Paurava kinsmen. He realized that he was up against huge odds, and he had to fight or surrender. When Alexander's envoys came to summon him to Taxila, Puru replied that he could meet another king only as an equal. War became inevitable and the stage was set for one of Alexander's greatest battles.

Alexander's army soon marched towards the Jhelum, accompanied by Taxila's forces. When they reached the river and saw Puru's hundred elephants massed on the other bank, the Macedonian cavalry became frightened. Not having faced elephants before, the Greeks feared them as soldiers feared the Patton tank in recent times. Behind the elephants stood a thousand chariots and Puru's forty thousand infantry. Although different figures are given about the relative strength of the two forces, they were more or less equal, with Alexander's cavalry superior in numbers. Alexander quickly realized that a direct crossing would be impossible. Meanwhile, the river began to rise, as the snows melted early in the Himalayas. Heavy rain and storms made the river swell further. Puru's spies brought news that Alexander had ordered vast quantities of grain, and since nothing seemed to happen for days, Puru concluded that the invasion had been put off for several months, till after the monsoons.

One morning at dawn, Puru was stunned to learn that boats filled with horses had crossed twenty miles up the river. Concealed by the torrential downpour Alexander had quietly moved a third of his army upstream. He had chosen this point because it was hidden from the other side of the bank by a wooded island. As the rain abated, Alexander and his cavalry crossed in the first light of dawn. A single narrow boat carried history—the king himself with his great captains, who would one day rule vast parts of the world: Ptolemy, the future king of Egypt; Lysimachus, the future king of Thrace; Perdiccas, the future regent; and Seleucus, who would inherit Alexander's vast Asian empire. However, they had not reached the other shore. They were still on the island, which a swollen channel had completely cut off from the eastern shore after the rains.

It was here that Puru's outposts discovered the Greeks, who had to hurry to get across because Puru's troops would arrive any moment. They found to their horror that the channel was not fordable: they were caught in a trap. They made desperate efforts at various points, at all of which the water

was too deep. In that moment of panic, Alexander reassured his men that they were doing all this for the sake of glory—one day the people of Athens would talk and write about them. Eventually, they found a spot where the water was only waist-high and the men and horses struggled through.

When Puru heard that the enemy had crossed, he sent his son with a force of two thousand mounted men and 120 chariots. He did not send the bulk of his force because he did not believe that this was the main attack. Across the river, he saw the Macedonian phalanxes, the royal guard, and the Asiatic horsemen were in a state of readiness. As soon as Puru's son reached the scene, he was greeted by a hail of arrows followed by squadron after squadron of the famous Macedonian horsemen. Soon they were overpowered. Four hundred cavalry fell fighting. All his 120 chariots were captured—most of them stuck in the mud, the charioteers dead.

When Puru heard of this, he realized that the final hour of decision had come. He turned his entire force upstream. He placed himself on the largest elephant, alongside the image of Indra. Puru was a giant of a man, and his troops took courage from the sight of their powerfully built leader with the banner of the warrior god. The battle began with the trumpeting of the elephants, which terrified the European horses. Alexander's thousand mounted archers from Central Asia began to hail arrows upon the Indian left flank. The Indian archers responded, but the rain made it impossible to get a firm rest for their longer bows. When the Indian cavalry began a wheeling movement on the left wing, Alexander's horse guard charged upon them from the right. The Indian cavalry found itself outnumbered by the Greek cavalry, which had the experience of a hundred battles. Finding that they now had the upper hand, the Greeks sprang a surprise attack from the rear. Puru's infantry was thrown into confusion. The elephants, pushed back from the front, were now hemmed in from behind. Under stress, they caused a stampede on their own men. Resistance became hopeless; butchery followed. Meanwhile, the balance of Alexander's forces crossed the river, including two fresh Macedonian phalanxes, and they completed the rout. In the end, Alexander's superior cavalry had decided the battle. Among the thousands who died that bloody day were two sons of Puru and a brave neighboring prince.

Puru himself, unlike the king of Persia, did not flee nor surrender. Despite the losing battle, he kept fighting and goading his men to keep their honor. Alexander's forces were impressed, by both his size and his courage. It was only when he was hit by a dart on his right shoulder that, wounded and tired, he turned his elephant to safety. He had not gone far when he recognized the hated face of the traitor Ambhi. He turned around and hurled a lance with whatever strength his wounded arm could muster. Ambhi evaded it and turned back. Soon, two envoys from Alexander came up to him. Loss of blood had made him intolerably thirsty. He halted his elephant and got down. Alexander's envoys honored him and gave him water to drink, and he commanded them to lead him to their king.

As Puru neared the Macedonian lines, Alexander came galloping out to meet him. He was filled with admiration for his brave and proud adversary and asked Puru how he wished to be treated. "Treat me, Alexander, as you would treat a king," replied Puru. Alexander was confused and asked him to be more precise. "When I said 'a king,'" repeated Puru, "everything was said."

Alexander was pleased with the reply. He not only gave Puru back his kingdom but, much to Ambhi's chagrin, enlarged Puru's territory to all the lands towards the east. Thus, Puru accepted the

Greek dominion and became Alexander's faithful and energetic ally. Puru's own people, like the Greeks, were also proud of their king. Alexander ordered a city of victory, Nicaea, to be built on the field of battle, and another at the gray spot on the opposite bank from where he had crossed the Jhelum that morning. He called the second Bucephala, after his great horse who had died that day. The Greeks then performed their sacrifices and athletic games before the admiring people of the Paurava kingdom. After this great battle of the Hydaspes River the Greeks marched on. When they reached the fifth river of Punjab, the Beas (Hyphasis in Greek), Alexander's tired army refused to go further. He ordered and cajoled them, but it was to no avail. Disappointed, he turned back, somewhere near modern Gurdaspur.

Seven years later, all trace of Greek authority had disappeared from India. The chief reason was another romantic figure, Chandragupta, who was a lesser warrior but a greater ruler than Alexander. The young nobleman from Magadha, helped by his subtle, Machiavellian adviser, Chanakya, organized an army and overcame the Greek garrisons. He established the Mauryan Empire, which ruled north India and Afghanistan for 137 years.

At the end of this saga, the main question is, why did Puru lose and Alexander win? On the face of it, the invader's superior strategy and the element of surprise clearly gave the Greeks a decisive edge. However, beneath the surface there were important differences between the two armies. Professor Stephen Rosen, the military historian from Harvard, has recently found the answer in the divisions in Indian society, which resulted in poor coordination in Puru's army. Puru's cavalry refused to aid the infantry. On the soggy banks of the Jhelum that morning, the Greek historian Arrian observed, Puru's chariots got stuck and the charioteers were unwilling to double up as infantry. Later in the day, cohesion in the Indian army broke down as the Macedonian phalanx put pressure on Puru's infantry, and the elephants pushed back and began to trample their own men. In this crisis, Rosen notes, "the Indian cavalry … did not assist the Indian infantry against the enemy phalanx but dealt as best as it could with the Macedonian cavalry."

In contrast, Alexander's army was a professional machine. Originally it had been, like Puru's, a tribal militia. Neither was Greek society more cohesive, but Alexander had professionalized his army and separated it from the divisions in society. When Alexander's cavalry first sighted Puru's troops, their first instinct was to charge. Alexander, however, "checked the advance of his cavalry to allow his infantry to come up with him. Regiment by regiment, they made contact, moving swiftly until the whole force was again united."

Indian military historians have also noted this aspect. Rosen attributes the lack of solidarity partially to the caste system, although he correctly points out that caste structures were not yet fully developed. Caste, he hypothesizes, divides society, encourages loyalty within the subgroup, and discourages it across caste lines. Puru's upper-caste mounted cavalry did not sufficiently support the lower-caste soldier who was on foot. Jadunath Sarkar, an authority on ancient and medieval military affairs, said that although "the Indian defenders of the Punjab were brave, each man fought to death in isolation." The soldiers were "unable to make a mass movement in concert with their brethren of other corps." The people of Punjab were disunited and narrowly self-centered, with the net effect that "divided we fell."

Puru may have lost to the greatest general of his time, but the theme of the poor teamwork runs throughout Indian history. Babur's victories at Panipat and at Khanua (against the Rajput confederacy, led by Rana Sangha) were partly a result of the same deficiencies. Although the Marathas had more cohesive armies, they too suffered because some sub-castes armed themselves against others. The British Empire professionalized the Indian armies, however, and after 1947 the Indian military has been "an island of discipline." Despite that, there have been problems between generals in the battlefield. In the 1962 Indo-Chinese war, the commander of the Fourth Division at Se-La confessed that "private animosities, personal weakness and in many cases lack of mutual confidence among the commanders … led to disaster." Even in the victorious wars against Pakistan, in 1965 and 1971, there were major failures of coordination, according to Generals Harbaksh Singh and Sukhwant Singh.

Poor teamwork is pervasive in India. Take any institution, scratch its surface, and one finds factionalism. Whether it is a company, a university, a hospital, a village panchayat, or a municipal board, it is beset with dissension, and it affects national competitiveness. What is the cause of our divisiveness? Is it our diversity? Is it the caste system? I am generally wary of cultural explanations, but in my frustration at not being able to find an answer, I asked my cousin, Usha Kumar, if it had something to do with the Indian personality. She is a trained psychologist from the University of Michigan, and she pointed me to Sudhir Kakar, the author of *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India.* Kakar said that it begins with the Indian bride, who is not fully accepted in her husband's home until she produces a male child. She is so grateful when a son is born that she indulges him to excess. As the boy grows up, he remains close to the mother and distant from the father. The end result is that the boy grows up narcissistic and has a weak ego.

The adult Indian male personality that emerges from various psychologists' accounts has a weak sense of the self, one that needs the support of authority figures. He is less comfortable on his own. He needs appreciative, older, hierarchical figures, even late in his professional life. His relationships tend to be vertical and "control oriented," and he is not good at forming horizontal, cooperative relationships with his peers. This translates into poor teamwork. In an organizational setting, such a person tends to behave in an egotistical manner. A good team player is self-confident and forms easy and healthy relationships based on equality.

It is difficult to say how valid this hypothesis is in the absence of broad sociopsychological data (which, in turn, would need hundreds of senior managers, administrators, and generals on psychiatrists' couches). Nevertheless, there seems to be near-universal agreement about this Indian personality among professionals. Despite the plausibility of this explanation, I tend to shy away from value judgments based on culture, especially when comparing different societies. In the past such historical answers have been dangerous in the hands of political leaders, and psychological ones even more treacherous. I tend to be more comfortable with the economists' approach. Hence, I believe that with more competition in the Indian market, we will get better teamwork in the business world. When companies fight for survival, there is less luxury for egotistical behavior; we sink or swim together. Since the 1991 reforms Indian markets have become more competitive, cohesion should gradually increase. According to Kakar, Indian society is also changing. More women are

working, and there is less time to overindulge the male child; so perhaps there is hope that the Indian male will grow up with a healthier ego and be a better team player. With more and more self-confident women in the managerial ranks, this healthy trend might even be reinforced.

Such thoughts on cooperation were the furthest from old Puru's mind when he faced Alexander, but I believe it is important to recognize that some habits constitute virtues and others vices in a nation's economic life. Honesty and reliability are virtues because they foster trust between buyers and sellers and reduce the cost of transactions. Sociability in the form of teamwork is critical because almost all activity in a modern economy is carried out by groups rather than individuals. As human beings create wealth in the market economy, they must learn to work together. And as the economy grows, new forms of organization come into being. Although we normally associate economic growth with technological developments, innovation in organizing work has played an equally powerful part ever since the industrial revolution began.