

HALL, J.A., *Powers and Liberties: The Cause and Consequences of the Rise of the West*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.

This is a book about philosophic history, written by a sociologist aware of the criticism made of such enterprises by eminent philosophers and social thinkers during the last few decades. His ambition is to outline the emergence of the "European miracle", the causes why the West became what it has become, against the background of three major world civilizations viz. the Indian, the Chinese and the Islamic civilizations. What is it that Europe had that these three lacked? In the process of trying to answer this question, Hall takes us through their religions and state systems, through the division of labor in these societies to the role that intellectuals played. In the process, the theories of Marx and Weber are tried and found wanting even though Hall is willing to acknowledge their influences in his own theories.

In the first chapter, he assess the weight of criticisms made of attempts

to look for "patterns of history" and finds them not all that forbidding. In the next four chapters, which constitute the first part of the book, Hall takes through a journey that begins in China and ends in Europe having travelled all the way through India and Arabia. The basic problem with China, Hall tells us, was the *weakness* of the central authority. The market was constructed only in fits and starts and never attained the autonomy that was required. But, of course, this does not imply that China was a stagnant society as the Europeans of the 18th and 19th centuries thought it to be.

Regarding the Indian civilization, the story is much the same: the capacity of the Brahmans to organize much of social life and the strict divorce between the political and the spiritual power maintained by the Brahmans which contributed a great deal to the political instability, both of these stifled the growth of an autonomous market. The role of the "caste system" in enforcing a hierarchical society that did not facilitate a spontaneous division of labor had its role to play as well.

With respect to Islamic civilization, the outline of the argument remains similar. The tribalism coupled with the religious hostility towards political power made it almost impossible for the growth of mercantilism.

Latin Christendom not only allowed autonomous power sources, but also prevented their stand-offs as was the case with the three major civilizations. Its state was an organic growth, and did not block politics. Consequently, a political instability that blocked the growth of market did not come into being.

This sketch of a thesis already indicates that Hall takes a diametrically opposed stance to those that looked at the East as an exhibition of "oriental despotism". Not only was this Wittfogel's thesis, it also strongly colors the Marxist notion of the "Asiatic Mode of Production".

In the second part of the book, Hall looks at the modern world: the nature of liberal society that the West has become, the nature of Soviet Union and the third world with its nationalism and the relationship it has to the first world.

The book ends on a fairly good bibliographical essay, which I found extremely helpful.

What could be said about the book as a whole? Because it tries to sketch the outlines of human historical evolution of the last 2000 years in a matter of 250 pages, it is very easy to find faults with the details. To give an example, neither his portrayal of Brahmanism nor its relation to Buddhism is accurate. He talks almost as if the latter emerged as an opposition, and was defeated because the former organized the social life whereas the latter withdrew from the social life. This way of talking about the response of Brahmanism is quite useless, if the intention is to give any insight into the real dynamics of struggle that took place. To begin with, Buddhism emerged from a long-standing tradition of the Sramanas within the fabric of Indian society. Secondly, it requires to be asked, What within the tradition of the Brahmanas allowed the absorption of the Sramana tradition into itself? Otherwise, the account looks suspiciously like some sort of quasi-conspiracy theory. But, as I said, this is a question of detail and any book of such a scope is vulnerable to these kind of criticisms.

If we concentrate on the nature of the project, and simply keep to the outlines of a thesis, I must admit that I am impressed. Whether one agrees to it

or not, the idea is bold and provocative, and the project daring and timely. This is a book which I would recommend wholeheartedly to any intelligent layman, leave alone historians and philosophers. Students from all human sciences would only gain, if his book is made a required reading in their first or second year undergraduate courses. It is not often that one can say this about a book of this nature. And that is in itself a high praise for Hall's efforts.

Balu.