

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

August 2015



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 6

Issue 5

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 6

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

- The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother 13, p. 124-25)

THE ILLUSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Part – I

The current trend of our economic development has confirmed what has psychologically been felt for a long time – the illusion of money and wealth without any real happiness or satisfaction. With the way things are going, it has become obvious that what we conceive of as economic development is really an illusion. Logically, it can easily be proved that, under the present conditions, not only will there be no increase in welfare and income of people, but people will progressively become worse-off and incomes will actually decline as the current system spreads its tentacles.

At the heart of this system lies,

- The spirit of selfish individual utilitarianism that will undermine all efforts to provide quality goods and services.
- A spirit of commercialization in all fields and services that will take captive the collective psyche under its self-destructive yoke.
- And, central to all this, the expansion of the baser vital and mental expressions of the purely physical compulsions, attachments and bondage under the garb of science, machinery and intellectualism.

Scientific advancement, machinery and institutions or rules are simply mediums and not the godheads we have made them out to be. They are a double-edged sword whose use depends entirely on the living consciousness that is handling them. If that consciousness is itself polluted with giant vital monstrosities, it is inevitable that we will lose control over these mediums and be destroyed by them.

This process of destruction of our established society is already well on its way. With the core being eaten away, the outer symptoms are also becoming visible now. And economic field, which is the natural abode of the modern utilitarian person, is where the effects of destruction will be felt most closely.

The modern economy consists of goods and services, and economic growth and development is measured in terms of exchange and accumulation in these two areas. While goods can be measured in terms of volume, services – like education, health, law and order, defence, community or social services, consulting etc. – cannot be quantified. They are measured purely by the amount that is spent on them. These measures cannot capture the quality of the service delivered or whether the service is happening at all.

Yet, the services sector¹ constituted 70.5% of the world economy in 2013², and is increasing by the day. It accounts for about 60% of world employment, making our incomes and well-being dependent on this sector.³

In India, the financial industry contributes the largest share to the real GDP, followed by community and social services. Both are significant areas in terms of assessing the well-being.

Since services sector forms such a large part of the economy, it is reasonable to analyse economic development and well-being by looking, mainly, at this sector.

Why is economic development an illusion?

To see why economic development is not happening, let us suppose that the economy consists only of services – an assumption that is nearly true in the present context. In such an economy, one person's expense is another person's income, since there are no goods involved.

If, however, everyone begins to charge ten times for their services – the expense of all services like medicine, education, counselling or consulting, law and order, defence and NGOs goes up by ten times – will our income increase? The answer is clearly no.

¹To see the share of various services in the real GDP of India from 2008-09 to 2012-13, refer to the Appendix.

² World Bank national accounts data n.d.

³ Loungani and Mishra 2014.

Only the cost of the service is increasing, but our income is still the same, and the well-being also remains the same or, in fact, becomes worse depending on the quality of the service being offered.

The only way to really increase the welfare is to improve the quality of the service. **The quality of service defines what the real income is. Because one person's expenditure is another person's income, you cannot get any better-off. Therefore, there is no other way of knowing whether income and welfare is actually increasing or not.**

Cost is never an indicator of the quality, and neither is its outer packaging. Both can be increased and made to look fancy while the seller actually compromises the quality to earn extra profit. Or, the seller can severely compromise the quality and lower the price to earn additional competitive advantage in the market. If one seller uses these dishonest means to sell his product, other sellers will be forced to follow suit. This is what is meant by the dictum of the bad coin driving the good coin out of circulation. And, this principle is the basis on which the utilitarian economy functions.

In today's utilitarian society, "More and more individuals are increasingly finding that the situation in their life and the field of work has become such that they must consent to the use of more and more unethical and degrading means to succeed or even to survive.

For example, let us assume that A and B are two competitors in a business and A resorts to the practice of avoiding paying of government taxes (whenever he can get away with it) and starts selling his articles a little cheaper. Even if B is a man of scruples, when he finds it increasingly difficult to stay in business he copies A. Now, to do better A decides to undercut his competitor by taking out of the product, in quality and substance, all that could be taken out 'safely' – without affecting the appearance, i.e. without the risk of the consumer finding out. This lowers the costs and enables A to further reduce his price. Now B must do something similar or if through his experience of so called 'realities of life', he gets

exceedingly groomed in the commercial spirit he may even do better and discover novel ways of cheating customers and undercutting his competitors.

Thus the disease percolates to deeper and deeper levels. Even people who begin with good intentions in any business or profession are either thrown out or begin sinking to ever lower levels in ethics and morality.

[This] utilitarian spirit...has already made deep inroads in the area of services that practically must remain – as they traditionally have been – free from the commercial spirit if they are at all going to be able to perform their sacred task. Education, health and medicine, justice and not even philanthropy and religion are any longer immune from the corrosive action of this rust of the human soul...Close family ties and intimate personal relations have so far remained largely free from the grosser forms of this commercialism because India has strong family ties and a spiritual tradition. However, a turn towards it has already been made – particularly in the urban areas – and it may not be too long before it spreads and India begins to catch up with the Western gospel of each man for himself.”⁴

Thus, it is clear that, in such a society, welfare and income increase is an impossibility because it depends on the quality of the service and you cannot deliver quality services unless the spirit and attitude towards social relations itself changes. And, this spirit and attitude depends on the consciousness of the person.

We should be under no illusion that there is an alternative to a change in consciousness. As gross human beings, we suppose that if technology, infrastructure and equipment get better, then the service rendered is better. This is not true. Science and technology are double-edged swords whose use depends entirely on the consciousness that is using them. There are numerous examples all around us that prove this. For instance, “[a]t present things have

⁴ Team Resurgent India 2012.

reached such disgustingly low levels that one hears of big drug companies producing and having ready large stock of necessary medicine for containing an epidemic before they secretly disperse the microbes that would spread it.”⁵ It is the same in other fields as well. It is quite commonplace to hear that big software companies not only create anti-virus programs for computers, but also create new viruses so that computers get infected and people are forced to buy upgraded and more expensive anti-virus programs. With technological advances, more and more sophisticated and expensive equipment is available to doctors, who in an effort to cover costs, or worse to generate more income, create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among their patients in order to make them undergo unnecessary but expensive tests and treatments.

How would such transactions constitute welfare? In the long run, it is clearly leading to a loss of income, as the people are spending more on curing artificial human-made ills and hiked expenses in the name of services even if the income remains the same. Unfortunately, in the current scenario, despite this loss of income, such spending will count as economic development as it will add to the GDP of the economy.

Paradoxically, under the present conditions, this faster rate of deterioration has been labelled as a high growth rate. Effectively, then, we are measuring rising deprivation, and counting that as our growing GDP.

That there is something wrong with the way we measure our economic growth is something that economists have recognized but only at a superficial level.

RISING DISCONTENT WITH CURRENT PATTERN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is increasingly being acknowledged that measuring well-being and real income of people through the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) is no longer workable. This has

⁵ Team Resurgent India 2012.

been brought home by the rising economic and social discontent and inequality among people and the multiple financial crises that erupted world-over after 2008. GDP and GNP have become measures of deprivation rather than income or growth.

This has provoked some re-thinking among the welfare economists. They have reached a general consensus on why there is a lack of well-being. Unfortunately, their thinking is based on the assumption that there is a problem only with the current 'measures' of national well-being, like the GDP and the GNP.

At a superficial level, the following general problems have been identified:

- GDP is simply based on quantitative addition and subtraction. It cannot capture the quality, the well-being or the real benefit to the people. There are numerous everyday examples around us that bring home this fact. For instance, if parents care for their children themselves, they are not contributing to the national income. But if they hire and pay a nanny to do so, they are contributing to the national income, even though the result is that they are becoming more selfish. To take other examples, traffic jams, incredibly, contribute to the GDP, because of the extra expense of vehicle fuel people have to bear, and, murderers contribute more to the GDP by buying a knife or a gun and other equipment, than a person who chooses not to commit murder.

Similarly, in the health sector, the rising number of diseases contributes more to the national income by increasing people's expenditure on medical services. But if people were to lead a healthy life, the GDP would effectively go down.

In the education sector, the more the money people spend on getting higher degrees, the more they are contributing to the national output, even if they do not get employment through those degrees, or are not able to pay their debt on education loans (ironically, taking education loans is also contributing the national income by leading to the growth of the banking sector).

- How can the GDP measure well-being and income increase when it cannot measure the rising inequality? Per capita GDP – which is computed by dividing the GDP by the total population – is regarded as an indicator of the average national income per person. Therefore, it is assumed that when per capita GDP increases, it indicates that more number of people have higher incomes and, therefore, a higher standard of living. However, recent studies⁶ have admitted that this is not true. For, if the increase in inequality is large as compared to the rise in per capita GDP, it would mean that more number of people are becoming worse-off even though the average national income may appear to increase.

Economists have argued that we need to develop measures that can account for the invisibles or rising risks to future generations along the lines of sustainability, happiness and equality. At the global level, organizations like UN and OECD are taking the lead in developing new approaches to well-being, and individual countries like France⁷, Bhutan⁸ and UK are following actively.

However, the big problem with these attempts is that they work on a similar assumption as the economic approaches based on GDP and GNP measurement:

The new methods – and this is happening in various countries – have started trying to measure ‘quality change’ or real output of the service. This means that instead of just measuring the service in terms of quantity of inputs and the expenditure on them (e.g. number of classrooms, better school infrastructure, number of courses and teachers and number of students), they are trying to see whether, for instance, education as a service is actually increasing competencies of students or whether medical service is actually increasing health output of people. Some of the results show that

⁶ Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009.

⁷ France commissioned, in 2008, the report by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009).

⁸ Bhutan talks about preferring GNH (Gross National Happiness) as an index rather than the GDP or the GNP.

accounting for quality or output of the service rather than only for expenditure on the service has led to decreased numbers of economic growth. For example, if you measure output or quality, then the UK economy grew only 2.75% between 1995 and 2003, whereas if only expenditure on the services is accounted for, then the economy grew higher at 3%.⁹

While the data is revealing of the superfluousness of economic growth numbers, it is not practical to think that quality can ever be fully measured. For, the practical way through which such an output can be measured is by measuring the marginal contribution of these services (like education) to a certain output, keeping all the other factors constant. In reality, however, it is impossible to exclude all other influences. Even if you are able to control the material influences – and even those will not be exhaustive – how can you control the psychological or subjective factors that do not always confine themselves to assumptions of ‘rationality’?

The only conclusion that can emerge from the current economic debates on well-being is that there is no real welfare and that there is no real increase in people’s incomes. Current measures like GDP and GNP – and even ‘net’ measures like NDP and NNP – tend to inflate factors which lead to a loss of well-being (such as, crime rates etc.) and term that as high GDP growth. Solutions to this problem are not available – taking ‘net’ measures by accounting for depreciation and taking account of ‘defensive expenditure’ are not addressing the core issue of quality of service rendered or of well-being. In fact, one can never fully measure the ‘quality’ since there will always be material and psychological invisible factors that cannot be captured by economics.

However, irrespective of whether it grasps the problems with the way we measure economic development, the folly of the current economic thinking is to believe that we can actually find

⁹ Bhutan talks about preferring GNH (Gross National Happiness) as an index rather than the GDP or the GNP.

alternatives under the present system. The economists think that the problem lies with measures and statistics – that GDP is a flawed approach which captures wrong data and leads to wrong policy intervention by the government. They assume that by coming up with new measures and approaches they can tackle the problem and lead to better policy to enhance well-being.

This reasoning is completely misplaced. **If we analyse deeply the causes of lack of well-being, we will understand that, under present conditions, no matter what measure is used and what policy and institutional interventions are put in place, there can be no real increase in income and welfare. In fact, with the way things are going, there will certainly be a fall in income as time passes, because this fall in income and welfare is related to something other than material deprivation and has psychological roots. It is the very crisis of the consciousness that is causing it.**

We will now present cases to show that the increasing expenditure on services is not only not leading to rise in income or well-being of the people, but can never ever do so, under the present conditions of human beings.

THE CASE OF EDUCATION: THE HIGHER YOUR EDUCATION, THE WORSE-OFF YOU BECOME

Take the case of the education sector. Education is considered one of the most important services provided by society today, both in terms of providing material security and in defining individual personality and roles. It is a field in which the present generation and their parents come with a mixture of aspirations and ambitions. We see all kinds of people in higher education – hopeful young graduates who think they will bring about a change in the society, energetic young people ‘driven’ by the need to be at the ‘top’ of their careers, and, finally, their families and society which egg them on and create an atmosphere in which a student cannot imagine anything wrong with these ambitions. They also believe that being educated will enhance one’s material well-being, by leading to a better society

and the personal and financial well-being of the student.

All these assumptions are completely misplaced. Not only will the current education system not lead to any welfare through any rise in income, but it is also geared to kill all chances of individual well-being and happiness. This is because 'commercialization' is finally nearing its zenith in the education system. It is no longer a process which we can safely denounce in our drawing rooms, while we participate in it actively. Instead, it is now affecting us personally. The reality of the education system is that it is shrouded in glamour only from the outside. From inside, it has become a rotting system that is producing more liability than welfare.

At an immediate and superficial level, we can analyse this by looking at a few telling measures: the number of people in higher education prone to increasingly suicidal tendencies and psychological depression; the increase in the number of unemployed people who had chosen to go for higher education degrees; the number of highly indebted people who cannot afford to pay their education loans.

First, the amount of expenditure on higher education has become nearly unaffordable for the students in the world's leading universities hub, America. Since 1978, the college tuition fees has gone up by 1120% and the student debt has gone up dramatically compared to even basic debts like credit card and auto debt, with the average debt total at the time of graduation being nearly 27,500 USD.¹⁰

Second, if we are spending so much of our money on student loans and tuition fees, there should be at least some minimum material payoffs. But even this cannot be seen. In fact, the income invested in higher education has actually become a material and psychological liability for both parents and students.

No matter how educated you are, the chances of getting a job – forget about getting a decent job – are becoming less. This is seen

¹⁰ Watson 2013.

through the rising graduate unemployment world-over. In major South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, unemployment among graduates is 4 to 9 times higher than the total unemployment in the country.¹¹

In India alone, youth unemployment among people possessing degrees at the graduate level and above is higher than people with lower education degrees. Recent reports reveal¹² that between 2004 and 2012, the rank of jobless Indians with a higher education degree (Bachelor's and above) swelled by 9%. The table below shows the condition at a glance.

Table 1: Youth unemployment (18-29 years) in India according to education level:

Source : Data taken from Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment (2013-14)

Third, added to this high graduate unemployment is the increasing psychological depression and suicidal tendencies among our educated youth. In fact, the higher the degree you get, the more

¹¹ Economist Intelligence Unit 2014.

¹² Times News Network 2014.

likely it is that you will be prone to depression. This is seen in the case of PhD students in major research disciplines of social sciences.

A recent survey¹³ by University of California, Berkeley, which made the news, reported that, 47% of its PhD students and 37% of its Master's students are suffering from depression.¹⁴ The lack of employment even after PhD has been cited as the main reason. In the academic field, 'tenure-track' or permanent positions have become increasingly rare. According to reports¹⁵, non-tenure-track positions account for about half of all faculty appointments in the American higher education system. These non-tenure-track positions are what are commonly understood as 'casual faculty', who have to spend the better part of their life in constant insecurity. Worse, even among casual positions, about 38% are part-time and only 20% are full-time appointments¹⁶. Another survey conducted in US, among 301 graduate students, found that about 22% students were on medication for depression or anxiety and 19% were in counselling.¹⁷

Under such conditions, how can one speak of well-being, no matter how educated you are? And, this does not simply happen because of material factors like student debt and tuition fees and lack of job. There are purely psychological reasons for it – unfulfilled ambition, increasing work pressure masquerading as sincerity, and, a complete commercialization of academics, and its invasion by intellectuals.

In today's society, the service of education is so deeply corrupted that it serves only two purposes:

First, either it is simply geared – right from children's school education to the higher education system – towards training people to be ambitious and successful. The reason is that our society – imitating the West – values ambition or "drive" and a good career as the hallmark of judging a person.

¹³ University of California, Berkeley 2014.

¹⁴ Otani 2015. ¹⁵ American Association of University Professors n.d.

¹⁶ Ibid. ¹⁷ DeClementi 2015.

Second, in the higher education system, the yoke of the intellectuals has sowed natural conditions for depression and loss of well-being. Besides constantly being under a pressure to succeed and perform, here, people are also under the illusion that they are gaining ‘knowledge’.

THE ILLUSION OF WORK

The biggest example of the failure of modern services sector can be seen by the recent state of the education system in our own country. Looking at the state of employment and research in the higher education system in India, it is clear that there is absolutely no work that is really being done. The amount of work done is deliberately inflated to create opportunities and money and jobs disbursed all round. The outcome, in terms of quality of research and integrity of work is zero. How, then, can there be well-being? And, as far as the incomes are concerned – the entire edifice of incomes will come crashing down as soon as this artificial education bubble is burst and unemployment takes root, since there was no real ‘academic’ work to begin with.

As the Modi government formulates its new education policy for the higher education system in India, it has taken drastic steps to cut down the amount of ‘work’ that academic teaching staff gets paid for – precisely because that work was considered unnecessary by a government which pays very little attention to the cult of ‘intellectualism’. According to information available with certain ‘secular’ academics, the government, in its overhaul of the higher education sector, has drastically reduced the course content by, not only removing a lot of Left-wing agenda but also reducing the number of core papers in Delhi University undergraduate syllabus from 21 to 14. The government, by reducing the workload, has left the universities like DU with no option but to stop hiring teachers despite the fact that there are still 4500 vacancies. This cutting down of workload, according to some professors, has led to about 1000 ad-hoc teachers losing their jobs. **More than anything else, it shows how the illusion of work has been created in India’s higher**

education sector.

This is just one aspect of the drastic higher education policy changes the government is coming up with. Even though it has produced the expected revolt within the ‘intellectual class’, yet, it reveals how much waste-load was being produced in academics for the past several decades. In the name of unnecessary and useless work or research, employment was being given. The system resting on all kinds of corrupt intentions – politically and ideologically motivated and couched in impressive language to delude the layman or driven by ambition – has been producing everything but quality education. It is not surprising. **How can a system which drives people to depression and suicide and makes selfish research ‘projects’ the source of random income here and there produce well-being in any real sense of the word? The kind of thinking that the higher education system in India promotes is based on a corruption of the soul – the disdain for nationalist thinking, the tyranny in the name of ‘secular’ and ‘liberal’ thought etc. They are the kind of institutions that eat up the very people who work in them, leaving no scope for coming out of it or going deeper, leaving no option but depression.**

It is a step in the right direction that this system may now be exposed in India.

To be continued...

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APPENDIX

Services	Share in real GDP	(in percentage)			
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Construction	8.0	7.8	7.9	7.9	7.8
Trade, Hotels, Restaurants	16.6	16.5	16.9	16.9	17.5
Transport and Communi- cation	9.4	10.0	10.4	10.6	10.3
Financing, Insurance, Real Estate and business services	16.9	17.1	17.2	18.1	18.7
Community, social and personal services	13.1	13.5	12.8	12.8	13.0

Source: Indiastat

A NEW CHAPTER IN INDIA-IRAN RELATIONS

As India embarks on a new chapter in foreign policy under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is becoming increasingly difficult to explain the emerging foreign policy trends in terms of purely bilateral relations. And yet, India's foreign policy approach does not entirely rely on international organizational forums, like United Nations (UN), WTO, either. What is emerging is a pattern of deeper bilateral relations with all significant countries through which India will subsequently be able to exercise influence in the larger forums of international organizations. India's pro-active approach towards US, Australia, Germany, France, EU, Pakistan, China and several other countries, regardless of domestic ideological and political opposition, suggests this. Institutions such as UN are no longer treated as sacrosanct in our foreign policy approach, as has been the case during certain Congress and BJP regimes.

Iran's nuclear deal and the spaces it opens up for India need to be seen in this light. After precarious negotiations for nearly 20 months between the Western powers (P5 + 1) and Iran to facilitate the lifting of economic and trade sanctions on Iran imposed since 2011 in exchange for putting a brake on Iran's potential nuclear weapons programme, a deal was finally reached on 14th July. It restricts Iran's uranium enrichment programme and allows for greater intervention by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to investigate suspicious sites which are not being used for purely scientific research. Critics of the deal are of course many, the most prominent being America's Grand Old Party or the Republicans, who holding the ratification powers of the US Congress due to their numbers, decry that the deal does not address any of the key issues such as Iran's nuclear weapons programme and ballistic missile efforts to deliver weapons the world-over, it merely legitimizes Iran's nuclear programme under the guise of an agreement.

It may not, however, be as simplistic as the Republican obstructionism indicates. Even though the substance of the deal may

not be rigorous enough – it would have been, in any case, difficult to reach a purely pro-West outcome in an age of failing American and European power – the fact that the deal was signed at all, despite Iran’s own political obstructions from the supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini, is itself a big step. At the very least, it prevents Iran from going the North Korea way and inducts it into the world system again, thereby pinning at least a minimum international responsibility on it. It is also very likely that Iran will be obliged to fulfill its larger international obligations now that it is back in the system, since the Iranian public is in transition to being more liberal under the leadership of its reformist President Hassan Rouhani, who has promised more freedom to the public and is urgently focused on bringing the economy back on track.

Iran was never really out of the system despite the sanctions, with countries like India continuing to maintain a minimum degree of exchange with the country. India relies heavily on Iran for its oil imports. The deal, therefore, has evoked mixed reactions in India.

On the economic side,

- The deal will make Iran India’s major oil-exporting partner once again, with India no longer having to rely on expensive and inconvenient Latin American oil imports to meet its energy needs.
- It will also keep India’s oil import bill cheaper for, at least, the next year. While Iran was under sanctions and unable to openly supply oil to the rest of the world, the resulting glut depressed oil prices and reduced India’s import bill. Now, even though the sanctions have been lifted and Iran will start full-fledged supply soon, the process will take until December 2015 to fully take off, thereby benefitting India for the time being¹. After that, there are fears that the oil price regime may be back to the previous status, thus, spelling the end of good days for India.

In the meanwhile, speculations were rife immediately after the signing of the deal that Iran may now demand the 41,000 crore rupees that India owes to it under the existing oil bill. However, recent

announcements by the Iranian government indicate that there is no 'emergency' for India to pay its dues immediately. This has come as a great relief to India².

- India also stands to benefit from increasing its investment in Iran. It plans to invest in Iran's Chabahar port. Besides increasing regional trade, this will be a crucial decision for India on the political front as well, as it will enable India to get direct access to markets in Afghanistan and Central Asia, without being concerned about having to pass through Pakistan.

- India has been seeking to materialize the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline for several years now. With the lifting of the sanctions, this may soon become a reality. With Iran sitting on the world's second largest natural gas reserves, the pipeline will benefit all parties, as it will enable Iran to tap into the energy-hungry markets of Pakistan and India. To date, Iran's natural gas capacity remains underutilized both vis-à-vis South Asia and Central Asia.

These economic benefits have really been made possible through the changing political dynamics between India and Iran. Modi's active outreach towards Middle-east, without compromising its friendship with Israel, has made the Indian government's position clear. Unlike the days of the Congress party, it does not have to keep its friendship with Israel an inconvenient secret in order to court the rest of the Middle-east. This strategy is paying off. It makes India a strong player in the region, with clear-cut political positions and preferences. Even though Israel has decried the deal, the complex political positioning in the region will work in India's favour. Israel has opposed the deal due to Iran's cordial relations with the terrorist group, Hamas, and its view of Iran as a 'terrorist state'. Yet even Israel realizes the threat it faces from the rise of militant Sunni Muslims, through the expansion of groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaida. Saudi Arabia is itself a Sunni-majority country. With Iran being Shia-majority, and given the hostile Shia-Sunni relations, Iran will be able to combat the rise of Sunni militancy. Due to the deal, its new-found – albeit unwilling – relationship with the West will bring these two

reluctant powers together. And, in the face of constant threats from Sunni-majority Pakistan, the larger outcome will work in India's favour.

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HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (11)

V. THE HISTORY OF THE VEDA AND THE SECRET OF THE PERSISTENT VEDISM OF INDIAN THOUGHT AND SPIRITUALITY

A. The History of the Veda

“The history of the Veda is one of the most remarkable & paradoxical phenomena of human experience. In the belief of the ancient Indians the three Vedas, books believed to be inspired directly from the source of all Truth, books at any rate of an incalculable antiquity and of a time-honoured sanctity, were believed to be the repositories of a divine knowledge. The man who was a Veda knower, Vedavid, had access to the deepest knowledge about God and existence. He knew the one thing that was eternally true, the one thing thoroughly worth knowing. The right possession of the ancient hymns was not supposed to be possible by a superficial reading, not supposed to result directly even from a mastery of the scholastic aids to a right understanding, – grammar, language, prosody, astronomy, ritual, pronunciation, – but depended finally and essentially on explanation by a fit spiritual teacher who understood the inner sense that was couched in the linguistic forms & figures of the Scriptures. The Veda so understood was held to be the fountain, the bedrock, the master-volume of all true Hinduism; that which accepted not the Veda, was and must be instantly departure from the right path, the true truth. **Even when the material & ritualistic sense of the Veda had so much dominated & hidden in men’s ideas of it its higher parts that to go beyond it seemed imperative, the reverence for this ancient Scripture remained intact....**

When was this traditional honour first lost or at least tarnished and the ancient Scripture relegated to the inferior position it occupies in the thought of Shankaracharya[?] I presume there can be little doubt that the chief agent in this work of destruction was the power

of Buddhism. The preachings of Gautama and his followers worked against Vedic knowledge by a double process. First, by entirely denying the authority of the Veda, laying a violent stress on its ritualistic character and destroying the general practice of formal sacrifice, it brought the study of the Veda into disrepute as a means of attaining the highest good while at the same time it destroyed the necessity of that study for ritualistic purposes which had hitherto kept alive the old Vedic studies; secondly, in a less direct fashion, by substituting for a time at least the vernacular tongues for the old simple Sanscrit as the more common & popular means of religious propaganda and by giving them a literary position and repute, it made a general return to the old generality of the Vedic studies practically impossible. For the Vedas were written in an ancient form of the literary tongue the real secret of which had already been to a great extent lost even to the learned; such knowledge of it as remained, subsisted with difficulty by means of a laborious memorising and a traditional scholarship, conservative indeed but still slowly diminishing and replacing more & more real knowledge by uncertainty, disputed significance and the continuously increasing ingenuities of the ritualist, the grammarian and the sectarian polemical disputant. When after the fall of the Buddhistic Mauryas, feeble successors of the great Asoka, first under Pushyamitra and his son and afterwards under the Guptas, Hinduism revived, a return to the old forms of the creed and the old Vedic scholarship was no longer possible. The old pre Buddhistic Sanscrit was, to all appearance, a simple, vigorous, living language understood though not spoken by the more intelligent of the common people just as the literary language of Bengal, the language of Bankim Chandra, is understood by every intelligent Bengali, although in speech more contracted forms and a very different vocabulary are in use. But the new Sanscrit of the revival tended to be more & more a learned, scholarly, polished and rhetorical tongue, certainly one of the most smooth, stately & grandiose ever used by human lips, but needing a special & difficult education to understand its grammar, its rhetoric, its rolling compounds and its long flowing sentences. The archaic

language of the Vedas ceased to be the common study even of the learned and was only mastered, one is constrained to believe with less & less efficiency, by a small number of scholars. An education in which it took seven years to master the grammar of the language, became inevitabl[y] the grave of all true Vedic knowledge. Veda ceased to be the pivot of the Hindu religion, and its place was taken by the only religious compositions which were modern enough in language and simple enough in style to be popular, the Puranas. Moreover, the conception of Veda popularised by Buddhism, a Scripture of ritual and of animal sacrifice, persisted in the popular mind even after the decline of Buddhism and the revival of great philosophies ostensibly based on Vedic authority. It was under the dominance of this ritualistic conception that Sayana wrote his great commentary which has ever since been to the Indian Pundit the one decisive authority on the sense of Veda. The four Vedas have definitely taken a subordinate place as karmakanda, books of ritual; and to the Upanishads alone, in spite of occasional appeals to the text of the earlier Scriptures, is reserved that aspect of spiritual knowledge & teaching which alone justifies the application to any human composition of the great name of Veda.

But in spite of this great downfall the ancient tradition, the ancient sanctity survived. The people knew not what Veda might be; but the old idea remained fixed that Veda is always the fountain of Hinduism, the standard of orthodoxy, the repository of a sacred knowledge; not even the loftiest philosopher or the most ritualistic scholar could divest himself entirely of this deeply ingrained & instinctive conception. To complete the degradation of Veda, to consummate the paradox of its history, a new element had to appear, a new form of intelligence undominated by the ancient tradition & the mediaeval method to take possession of Vedic interpretation. European scholarship which regards human civilisation as a recent progression starting yesterday with the Fiji islander and ending today with Haeckel and Rock[e]feller, conceiving ancient culture as necessarily primitive culture and primitive culture as necessarily half savage culture, has turned the light of its

Comparative Philology & Comparative Mythology on the Veda. The result we all know. Not only all vestige of sanctity, but all pretension to any kind of spiritual knowledge or experience disappears from the Veda. The old Rishis are revealed to us as a race of ignorant and lusty barbarians who drank & enjoyed and fought, gathered riches & procreated children, sacrificed and praised the Powers of Nature as if they were powerful men & women, and had no higher hope or idea. The only idea they had of religion beyond an occasional sense of sin and perpetual preoccupation with a ritual barbarously encumbered with a mass of meaningless ceremonial details, was a mythology composed of the phenomena of dawn, night, rain, sunshine and harvest and the facts of astronomy converted into a wildly confused & incoherent mass of allegorical images and personifications. Nor, with the European interpretation can we be proud of our early forefathers as poets and singers. The versification of the Vedic hymns is indeed noble and melodious, – though the incorrect method of writing them established by the old Indian scholars, often conceals their harmonious construction, – but no other praise can be given. The Nibelungenlied, the Icelandic Sagas, the Kalewala[,] the Homeric poems, were written in the dawn of civilisation by semibarbarous races, by poets not superior in culture to the Vedic Rishis; yet though their poetical value varies, the nations that possess them, need not be ashamed of their ancient heritage. The same cannot be said of the Vedic poems presented to us by European scholarship. Never surely was there even among savages such a mass of tawdry, glittering, confused & purposeless imagery; never such an inane & useless burden of epithets; never such slipshod & incompetent writing; never such a strange & almost insane incoherence of thought & style; never such a bald poverty of substance. **The attempt of patriotic Indian scholars to make something respectable out of the Veda, is futile. If the modern interpretation stands,** the Vedas are no doubt of high interest & value to the philologist, the anthropologist & the historian; but poetically and spiritually they are null and worthless. Its reputation for spiritual knowledge & deep religious wealth, is the most imposing

& baseless hoax that has ever been worked upon the imagination of a whole people throughout many millenniums.

Is this, then, the last word about the Veda? Or, and this is the idea I write to suggest, **is it not rather the culmination of a long increasing & ever progressing error?** The theory this book is written to enunciate & support is simply this, that our forefathers of early Vedantic times understood the Veda, to which they were after all much nearer than ourselves, far better than Sayana, far better than Roth & Max Muller, that they were, to a great extent, in possession of the real truth about the Veda, that that truth was indeed a deep spiritual truth, karmakanda as well as jnanakanda of the Veda contains an ancient knowledge, a profound, complex & well ordered psychology & philosophy, strange indeed to our modern conception, expressed indeed in language still stranger & remoter from our modern use of language, but not therefore either untrue or unintelligible, and that this knowledge is the real foundation of our later religious developments, & Veda, not only by historical continuity, but in real truth & substance is the parent & bedrock of all later Hinduism, of Vedanta, Sankhya, Nyaya, Yoga, of Vaishnavism & Shaivism & Shaktism, of Tantra & Purana, even, in a remoter fashion, of Buddhism & the later unorthodox religions. From this quarry all have hewn their materials or from this far off source drawn unknowingly their waters; from some hidden seed in the Veda they have burgeoned into their wealth of branchings & foliage.... The Vedantic writers of the Upanishads had alone the real key to the secret of the Vedas; not indeed that they possessed the full knowledge of a dialect even then too ancient to be well understood, but they had the knowledge of the Vedic Rishis, possessed their psychology, & many of their general ideas, even many of their particular terms & symbols. That key, less & less available to their successors owing to the difficulty of the knowledge itself & of the language in which it was couched and to the immense growth of outward ritualism, was finally lost to the schools in the great debacle of Vedism induced by the intellectual revolutions of the centuries which immediately preceded the Christian era.”¹

B. The Secret of the Persistent Vedism

“...the Vedas are dark to us except in their outer ceremonial, the Upanishads are clear to us only in their central ideas and larger suggestions.

But how then can writings so obscure or at any rate so imperfectly understood have exercised over the thought of millenniums the vast and pervasive influence of which we know, so pervasive that all positive Indian thought, even Buddhism, can be described as Vedic in origin and shaping spirit when not Vedic or even when anti-Vedic in its garb and formed character? Thought has other means of survival and reproduction than its ordinary overt and physical instruments. **After it has been deprived of propagation by speech and writing, even after it has disappeared out of the conscious mentality, it can return and recover itself not only in the individual, – that is common enough, – but, by a very similar act of memory, in the race.** The workings of our psychology are as yet ill understood and we do not know precisely by what means or forces the subconscious operations of mentality are conducted; but some of the processes used by the great Universal in His more secret works are becoming apparent.”²

(i) *The Physical Heredity*

“Physical heredity is certainly one of them. It is true that thought is not inherited; but types of mentality, and mental tendencies are, apparently, handed down with the physical plasm, and out of a persistent type of mentality there is always a possibility of the emergence from age to age of a recurrent type of thought. **The Vedic mental type was fixed in the Indian race at an early period of its formation and throughout all external variations has never really changed.** There is, therefore, in the Indian mind a predisposition to the recovery of the fundamental Vedic ideas; those directions of mentality which are most natural to the Vedic mental type, easily recur and a slight suggestion is all that is needed to set thought spinning in the old grooves[.]”³

(ii) *The Pressure of the Mental Atmosphere*

“But the physical inheritance is not sufficient in itself, nor is it even the only subconscious instrument in the persistence of human and national mentality. As psychology progresses, I think it will be more and more clearly recognised that just as men live in one physical atmosphere and are affected in their physical conditions by its state, currents and contents and by the physical condition of others near to them, so also and even to a greater extent we live in one mental atmosphere and are affected in our mental condition and activities by its state, current and contents and by the mental condition and activities of others similarly affected in our near vicinity. The dynamic action of the mental atmosphere is evident enough in the psychology of crowds, in the rapidity of development of great thought-movements & general tendencies of corporate action and in their contemporaneous efflorescence in widely divided countries. These phenomena have given rise to a vague idea of thought-waves resembling the waves of electricity in the physical parts of Nature. But if, instead of confining ourselves to these superficial and striking phenomena, we go deeper down into the normal and obscurer action, we shall find in addition to the dynamic movements a constant static condition and pressure of the mental atmosphere which varies but seems hardly to change substantially from age to age. For waves and currents presuppose a constant sea out of which they rise and into which they again sink to rest. It is the pressure of this atmospheric sea that more permanently determines the constant mentality of a continent or a nation. Into it, after all revolutions and dynamic activities, humanity tends to sink back with whatever riches it has gained and often long periods are necessary for their absorption and assimilation. The mind-atmosphere has its needs and its conditions; it alters into its own image whatever is new and foreign and assimilates even when it seems to be assimilated; it rejects everything that would too radically disintegrate its enduring composition. **It is at once infinitely yielding & plastic and infinitely persistent in its general character. It casts essential Buddhism**

out of India and replaces it by a huge phantasmagorical complex Hinduised Buddhism; it constantly purges mysticism out of Europe and replaces essential Christianity with its sublimely tender and delicate Oriental psychology by a strenuous, external, dogmatic, materialistic and practical creed. Individual men and even men in the mass are ready enough to change under a comparatively slight impulsion; it is the compelling pressure of the mental atmosphere which prevents them from changing too radically so that when we think we have effected a revolution, we find that we have only effected an external readjustment or new dress of an old reality. The soul of things in us tends to remain the same. For steadfastness in mobility is the sound law of our being & the condition of healthy survival; Nature keeps us to it on peril of prolonged disorder, deterioration or fatal decay. Into this circumambient mental atmosphere in which we live & by which we draw our mental inspiration and respiration, all the old thoughts have entered, are lying obscure, many of them disaggregated, but none entirely lost. Under the proper conditions they may, they even tend to reconstitute themselves, to reappear.

In India such returns upon our past are more common than in any other country, partly from certain external causes, from the persistence of certain external suggestions, but much more because of the constant practice of Yoga by a large number of typical and central souls who act, overtly or silently, upon the general mass of Indian humanity. The discipline of Yoga renders a man much more sensible to the surrounding mental atmosphere, than in his ordinary state. He becomes consciously aware of it, feels intelligently its impacts, stirs more quickly to its deep buried secrets and obscure suggestions. And as he becomes more quick to receive, so also he becomes more powerful to impart. Practising forms of the old Vedantic discipline, he recovers also forms of the old Vedantic thought and mentality and, modifying them in expression but not in essence by his own present personality, he pours them out on his surroundings. This has been the secret of the persistent Vedism of Indian thought & spirituality from the earliest ages to those modern

movements of which we are ourselves the witnesses or the partakers.”⁴

(iii) The Reign of Vedic Philosophies and the Influence of Religion and the Systems of Yoga

“Outward aids have powerfully confirmed the effect of these inward processes, – the reign of Vedic philosophies, the dominance of religions rich with the sap of the old Vedic spirit, the traditional teachings of particular Yogic schools, the theory & practice of the Guru-parampara. It would be as great a mistake to exaggerate as to belittle the importance of any of these aids in themselves. **Vedic knowledge was rich, manysided, elastic, flexible; but the metaphysical philosophies are limited by the very law of their logical structure.** They are compelled to select and reject, to systematise only what can be harmonised in a single logical formula; and a logical formula, however wide, is always too narrow to contain God’s truth which is universal, complex and many-faceted. The dominance of particular metaphysical systems has tended to preserve fragments of the old Vedic truth, but to disfigure and dissolve it as a whole in its comprehensiveness and catholicity. Moreover, a metaphysical system by itself can never lay powerful hold on a people. We of the present age, who are excessively intellectualised, are apt to attach too great an importance and power to the works of the pure intellect. Systems of pure metaphysics which have no connection with the constant psychological experience and practice of men, are apt to become, like the modern philosophies of Europe and unlike the old Greek philosophies, merely noble pastimes for the intellectual few. They influence the generality of men, but by a slight and indirect process, not profoundly, not puissantly, not permanently. **The Indian metaphysical systems have influenced the whole mentality of the Indian people profoundly, puissantly, permanently,** not because of their logical subtleties, not even so much by the force & loftiness of their general ideas, but **by their close dependence on powerful and widely-practised systems of psychological discipline, – systems, as we say in India, of Yoga.**

The influence of [r]eligion has been yet more dynamical; it is always indeed more dynamical than the influence of philosophy, because religion appeals to the higher, secret, unattainable parts of our nature through the emotions and sensations which are better developed in humanity than the pure intellect. But even the religious emotions & sensations, though strong, swift and tenacious of a satisfaction once given, yet eventually tire and change; for this reason religions tend after a time to decay and perish. But **in India the Vedic religions do not decay and perish; they change and are reborn. And they have this good fortune precisely because of the Vedic element in them.** Their ritual, forms, worship, ceremonies, high days are not Vedic; even if they enshrine old Vedic ideas, they do it ignorantly and under a disguise; but all these religions have in their recesses some core of constant psychological practice and discipline, in a word, some form of Yoga, by which they live; and always it is, in essence, a Vedic practice and a Vedic discipline. Religions think that they live by their dogmas, their sacred books, their ceremonies, but these are all aids and trappings; they live really by the men who practise them, by their clergy and mystics and much more by their mystics than by their clergy. **So long as a religion has in its fold a sufficient number of souls who can retire within themselves and live there with God, so long it cannot help enduring, even though all the rest of the world is against it;** once it loses this core of life, no amount of temporal power and prestige, of attractive ceremonial, of passionate belief & stiff dogmatism or even of wise and supple flexibility, savoir-faire & self adaptation can save it from its inevitable disappearance. **The great Vedic religions in India have always had this nucleus of mystics; they have always been rich in men capable of living with God;** but they have not left the preservation of the indispensable nucleus to chance, they have attempted to secure it by a traditional practice and discipline, usually of what is known in India as Bhaktiyoga. By this Yoga and the experience of the saints and Sadhus who have practised it, much more than by Puranic legend and outward devotion, – though these also have helped, – our religious systems have done

much to preserve the thoughts and experiences of the early Rishis to their distant posterity.

This vitalising core of philosophy, this saving essence of religion, Yoga, has itself an inner reality and an outer body. It has organised and variously summarised its different parts of experience and various methods of experiment in a great number of schools; and it preserves in all its schools a common fund of essential experience which goes back to the ancient Vedic sources. In these days, when the natural ignorance of Europeans about this characteristic Indian discipline has been successfully acquired as a part of their enlightenment by educated Indians, there is a tendency to identify Yoga with the Rajayogic system of Patanjali, because that alone is known to the European scholar. But **Yoga cannot be confined to a single school or a single system.** Patanjali's Yogashastra is concerned only with Rajayoga and only with one system of Rajayoga; there are a hundred others of which a few have their written rules, practices or aphorisms, but the rest, among them some of the most ancient and august, like the school of Dattatreya, have been handed down from an early era by the long linked generations of its Guru-parampara. This profuse ramification of Yogic systems, like the inexhaustible fertility of religious sects and orders, is a sign and an unflinching accompaniment of the richness, power and freedom of spiritual life in this country. It is not only an accompaniment, but a necessary condition. If, for instance, Yoga had allowed itself to formalise into the strict tenets and stereotyped methods of a single school, even a sound and great school like Patanjali's, it would long ago have perished or become, like much of our religious observance, a soulless body. The Infinite within us demands an infinite freedom, of various experience, of various self-expression, of various self-realisation; It loves order and arrangement, but will not long brook a confined immobility. It is only the material, the inert that depends for its stability on blind obedience to iron and immutable processes, the stability of inner things rests rather on a regulated, but still free and variable activity. Therefore, **whatever in the mental world formalises too rigidly, is preparing its own decadence:** the movement towards rigidity too long persisted

in, is usually a sign that the infinite Life is about to withdraw from the body it has been informing. India has not been exempt from the immobilising tendency even in that Yoga which has been its hidden wellspring of life and the secret of its perennial vitality; there has been a disposition to formalise into one school or another and repeat from generation to generation its methods & experiences. But the **Indian mental atmosphere tends always, by a return upon that which is most vital in it, to bring out great souls who, like Buddha, like Chaitanya, like Nanak, like Ramdas, like Rama-krishna, belong to no school, owe their knowledge to no spiritual preceptor, but go back to the Source of all within themselves and emerge from it with some perfectly realised truth of the eternal and universal Veda.** As their source is universal, so too they tend to cast out their gains universally upon mankind, so far at least as their surroundings & time are able to bear the truth and live; thus they revivify and preserve the spirituality in our mental environment. Great are the Yogins who, faithful to some long-established school of spiritual discipline, renew perfectly in themselves its perfect results and hand down their sacred gains as in a sealed and jealously guarded vase to the most worthy disciple; but those have a greater effect on the world who break the vase before they depart and pour out its content of life-giving sweetness on the world around them. Here too, as in philosophy, as in religion, the outer & systematised forms have done much to preserve the ancient truth, in its parts, if not in its fullness; they have served the purpose of flasks for keeping a little of the Somawine of the Veda[.] **But it is to those who have gone back most freely to the inner source that is due the perpetual reflooding of the Indian mind with Vedic truth** and its immortal permanence and unfailing reappearance in philosophy, in religious teaching and observance and in personal spiritual experience and discipline.”⁵

(iv) *The Guruparampara*

“None of these puissant exterior aids to the permanence of the Veda would have been entirely effective without another, yet more

characteristic of our Indian organisation, the guruparampara or unbroken succession of the human vessels of divine knowledge. This Indian institution, ill-understood by the mechanical rationalistic temper of our modern times, is founded upon a perfectly correct appreciation of the essential conditions indispensable for the transmission of a difficult knowledge. All human knowledge consists of three necessary elements, the thing itself which is known, the word or form in which it is expressed and the sense of the word or form which is the link between the thing and its expression. The thing itself, existing always, is always and at any given time capable of being known; the word or form can also be constantly preserved and may, then, always and at any given time yield up its secret; but that secret lies in the right sense to be attached to the symbol and needs for its preservation an intermediary, a vessel, a fourth element. The existence of the thing to be known is not sufficient for knowledge; the existence of the perfect symbol is not sufficient; we need in addition as a receptacle of its sense the competent knower who is termed technically in the language of our philosophy, the aptajana, the expert and adept. The aptajana transmitting his knowledge to a fit disciple is our Indian guru. To take a simple scientific instance, it has always been true and will always remain true that the mixture of oxygen and hydrogen results in water; the chemical formula expressing the truth, may, having been once settled, remain permanently written; but unless there is also the competent knower who understands the sense of the formula, has submitted it to the test of realisation by experience and is able to hand on his knowledge and his method to his successors, the existence of the formula would not save the knowledge from disappearing for a time from the grasp of humanity. The formula would then come to be regarded only as an incomprehensible superstitious jargon and abracadabra, as the mantras of our religious & Yogic schools are now regarded by many modernised Indians. In the things of the spirit this necessity of the human intermediary is a hundred times more keenly felt than in any material process; for the thing itself is more remote from daily experience, the methods which bring it into the range of intelligent realisation are much more difficult and delicate and the formulas in

which it is couched, are necessarily elusive and with difficulty intelligible. Therefore **India, supremely sensitive to the importance of spiritual knowledge and experience, unequalled in its instinct for the right spiritual method, has organised the institution of the guruparampara as an essential instrument for the survival of Veda.** The truth of Brahman is the thing to be known, the Veda and Vedanta are the word-symbol and formal expression of the Brahman, – shabdām Brahma, the guru is the human receptacle of the knowledge who transmits it to his worthiest disciples. Thus the guruparampara forms the succession of spiritual torchbearers, who, as in the ancient Greek festival, hand on the light of truth from generation to generation so that the sacred knowledge received in the morning of our national daytime may last, even though with diminutions and obscurations, not only into its evening but on through whatever night of time is intended, to the dawn of another golden age of spirituality. Who shall say out of what distant twilight of time the Veda was first revealed to mankind? Who shall say to what pre-cataclysmal undreamed consummation of our present humanity it shall endure? But we Hindus believe it to be an eternal message which God will have preserved by his chosen vessels as the secret thing out of which all human activity dumbly emerges and to which it is destined by a conscious fulfilment to return.

It is this wise and necessary institution of our forefathers to which we owe the preservation of Vedic truth in our midst even after the actual words of the written Vedas have ceased to bear to us their original significance. Without its aid the abstruse and difficult generalisations of metaphysics could not have prolonged their vitality nor so powerfully propagated themselves that **even the beggar in the streets and the peasant in his fields are permeated with some portion of their truth;** the living truths of religion could not have maintained so persistent and so puissant a vitality; the schools of Yoga could not have transmitted the essence of their knowledge, methods and experiences from early Vedic times onward into the darkness of our own era. But like all external forms the guruparampara is liable to vicissitudes, to formalisation, to loss of its perfect original

virtue. The orthodox formalist supposes that by the mere mechanical act of transmission the unimpaired vitality of the truth is automatically secured. But there are many accidents to which that security is liable[.] The guru may not always find a perfect disciple; he still imparts his knowledge, but the vessel can only hold according to its capacity: then the truth is obscured, if not permanently, then for one or more generations. There are also more general mishaps incidental to the general law of periodicity & decay which governs many parts of Nature[.] As the mental & vital atmosphere in which we dwell becomes thickened with obscurations, the general capacity of men diminishes and a time comes when the essential office of the guru is only fulfilled in the exceptions and the name becomes ordinarily prostituted to the mercenary priest or the unworthy physical heir of ancient Masters and knowers who either hands on the formula without any knowledge of its sense or is unable even to preserve the formula itself in its purity, – as if the scientific formula for the mixture of oxygen & hydrogen were to be mumbled faithfully from generation to generation without any slightest knowledge or practice of the actual experiment which constitutes its value. Even when this extreme degeneracy does not happen, the transmission is subject to the play of individuality & the varying tendencies of thought from century to century and under that influence this part of the truth may be overstressed, that deprived of its emphasis, much may be sacrificed as no longer useful to the actual practice of the new generations or too high for its attainment and what is preserved may be manipulated, extended, diverted by the enthusiasms of individual thought and experience. What is thus lost or blurred, may not be recovered or restored to its purity for long ages. Nevertheless the institution always preserves something of its value. Much of the body of the truth tends to survive even the worst vicissitudes, and in the body something must always remain of the spirit; even a formula long unintelligently repeated may, by passing into the possession of an alert and curious mind or an ardent & sincere nature, be a suggestion or a starting-point for the recovery of the old lost experience which it keeps as its secret. Here again, as with the other

external aids, we come back to the perennial source of the truth, the experience of the strong souls who passing beyond the school, the formula, the belief, the aid, the letter, go back into themselves for the light, respond to those buried suggestions ever lying in ambush for us in the mental atmosphere from which we draw our inner sustenance, and are strong enough to emerge with something of the ancient truth which gave so ineffable a vastness and profundity to the spiritual life of our forefathers. Behind and beyond all human gurus there dwells within us all the World-Teacher, the universal jagadguru of whom human teachers are only the masks and nominal representatives. He keeps for us the complete book of the Veda written in our secret being, nihitam guhayam; veiled, but accessible, He awaits our reverential approach and our questioning and, sincerely & constantly questioned, He lights the fire of Agni in our hearts and makes Surya to rise upon our darkness.”⁶

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THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (10)

2. INDIAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

III. The Life-Value of Indian Culture – the Supreme Achievements of Indian Culture in Its Dealings with Life

C. The Power of the Forms, Types and Rhythms That the Indian Culture Has Given to Life

In any culture aiming at completeness there must be “...not only great and noble governing and inspiring ideas, but a harmony of forms and rhythms, a mould into which the ideas and the life can run and settle. Here we must be prepared for a lesser perfection, a greater incompleteness. And the reason is that just as the spirit is vaster than its ideas, the ideas too are larger than their forms, moulds and rhythms. Form has a certain fixity which limits; no form can exhaust or fully express the potentialities of the idea or force that gave it birth. Neither can any idea, however great, or any limited play of force or form bind the infinite spirit: that is the secret of earth’s need of mutation and progress. The idea is only a partial expression of the spirit. Even within its own limits, on its own lines it ought always to become more supple, to fill itself out with other views, to rise and broaden to new applications, and often it has to lose itself in uplifting transformations of its own meaning into vaster significances or fuse itself into new and richer syntheses.”¹

(i) The Three Stages or Periods in the History of the Indian Culture

“In the history of all great cultures therefore we find a passage through three periods, for this passage is a necessary consequence of this truth of things. There is a first period of large and loose formation; there is a second period in which we see a fixing of forms, moulds and rhythms; and there is a closing or a critical period of superannuation, decay and disintegration. This last stage is the supreme crisis in the life of a civilisation; if it cannot transform itself, it enters into a slow lingering decline or else collapses in a death

agony brought about by the rapid impact of stronger and more immediately living though not necessarily greater or truer powers or formations. But if it is able to shake itself free of limiting forms, to renovate its ideas and to give a new scope to its spirit, if it is willing to understand, master and assimilate novel growths and necessities, then there is a rebirth, a fresh lease of life and expansion, a true renaissance.

Indian civilisation passed in its own large and leisurely manner through all these stages. Its first period was that of a great spiritual out-flowering in which the forms were supple, flexible and freely responsive to its essential spirit. That fluid movement passed away into an age of strong intellectuality in which all was fixed into distinct, sufficiently complex, but largely treated and still supple forms and rhythms. There came as a consequence a period of richly crystallised fixity shaken by crises which were partly met by a change of ideas and a modification of forms. But the hard binding of set forms triumphed at last and there was a decline of the inspiring spirit, a stagnation of living force, a progressive decay of the outward structure. This decay was accompanied and at once arrested for a moment and hastened in the end by the impact of other cultures. Today we are in the midst of a violent and decisive crisis brought about by the inflooding of the West and of all for which it stands. An upheaval resulted that began with the threat of a total death and irretrievable destruction of the culture; but its course is now uplifted on the contrary by the strong hope of a great revival, transmutation and renaissance. Each of these three stages has its special significance for the student of culture. If we would understand the essential spirit of Indian civilisation, we must go back to its first formative period, the early epoch of the Veda and the Upanishads, its heroic creative seed-time. If we would study the fixed forms of its spirit and discern the thing it eventually realised as the basic rhythm of its life, we must look with an observing eye at the later middle period of the Shastras and the classic writings, the age of philosophy and science, legislation and political and social theory and many-sided critical thought, religious fixation, art, sculpture,

painting, architecture. If we would discover the limitations, the points at which it stopped short and failed to develop its whole or its true spirit, we must observe closely the unhappy disclosures of its period of decline. If, finally, we would discover the directions it is likely to follow in its transformation, we must try to fathom what lies beneath the still confused movements of its crisis of renaissance. None of these can indeed be cut clean apart from each other; for what developed in one period is already forecast and begun in the preceding age: but still on a certain large and imprecise scale we can make these distinctions and they are necessary for a discerning analytic view. But at present we are only concerned with the developed forms and the principal rhythms which persisted through its greater eras.”²

(ii) The Firm Outward Basis for Founding the Practical Development of the Spirit of Indian Culture and Its Idea in Life – The Fourfold Varnasram System

“The problem which Indian culture had to solve was that of a firm outward basis on which to found the practical development of its spirit and its idea in life. How are we to take the natural life of man and, while allowing it sufficient scope and variety and freedom, yet to subject it to a law, canon, dharma, a law of function, a law of type, a law of each actual unideal human tendency and a law too of highest ideal intention? And how again are we to point that dharma towards its own exceeding by the fulfilment and cessation of its disciplinary purpose in the secure freedom of the spiritual life? Indian culture from an early stage seized upon a double idea for its own guidance which it threw into a basic system of the individual life in the social frame. This was the double system of the four Varnas and the four Asramas, – four graded classes of society and four successive stages of a developing human life.”³

(a) The Chaturvarnya System

“The ancient Chaturvarnya must not be judged by its later disintegrated degeneration and gross meaningless parody, the caste

system. But neither was it precisely the system of the classes which we find in other civilisations, priesthood, nobility, merchant class and serfs or labourers. It may have had outwardly the same starting-point, but it was given a very different revealing significance. The ancient Indian idea was that man falls by his nature into four types. There are, first and highest, the man of learning and thought and knowledge; next, the man of power and action, ruler, warrior, leader, administrator; third in the scale, the economic man, producer and wealth-getter, the merchant, artisan, cultivator: these were the twice-born, who received the initiation, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya. Last came the more undeveloped human type, not yet fit for these steps of the scale, unintellectual, without force, incapable of creation or intelligent production, the man fit only for unskilled labour and menial service, the Shudra. The economic order of society was cast in the form and gradation of these four types. The Brahmin class was called upon to give the community its priests, thinkers, men of letters, legists, scholars, religious leaders and guides. The Kshatriya class gave it its kings, warriors, governors and administrators. The Vaishya order supplied it with its producers, agriculturists, craftsmen, artisans, merchants and traders. The Shudra class ministered to its need of menials and servants. As far as this went, there was nothing peculiar in the system except its extraordinary durability and, perhaps, the supreme position given to religion, thought and learning, not only at the top of the scale, – for that can be paralleled from one or two other civilisations, – but as the dominant power. The Indian idea in its purity fixed the status of a man in this order not by his birth, but by his capacities and his inner nature, and, if this rule had been strictly observed, that would have been a very clear mark of distinctness, a superiority of a unique kind. But even the best society is always something of a machine and gravitates towards the material sign and standard, and to found truly the social order upon this finer psychological basis would have been in those times a difficult and vain endeavour. In practice we find that birth became the basis of the Varna. It is elsewhere that we must look for the strong distinguishing mark which has made of this social structure a

thing apart and sole in its type.

At no time indeed was the adherence to the economic rule quite absolute. The early ages show a considerable flexibility which was not quite lost in the process of complex crystallisation into a fixed form. And even in the greater rigidity of the latter-day caste system there has been in practice a confusion of economic functions. The vitality of a vigorous community cannot obey at every point the indications of a pattern and tradition cut by the mechanising mind. Moreover there was always a difference between the ideal theory of the system and its rougher unideal practice. For the material side of an idea or system has always its weaknesses even in its best times, and the final defect of all systems of this kind is that they stiffen into a fixed hierarchy which cannot maintain permanently its purity or the utility it was meant to serve. It becomes a soulless form and prolongs itself in a state of corruption, degeneracy or oppressive formalism when the uses that justified it are no longer in existence. Even when its ways can no longer be made consistent with the developing needs of the growth of humanity, the formal system persists and corrupts the truth of life and blocks progress. Indian society did not escape this general law; it was overtaken by these deficiencies, lost the true sense of the thing which it set out to embody and degenerated into a chaos of castes, developing evils which we are now much embarrassed to eliminate. But it was a well-devised and necessary scheme in its time; it gave the community the firm and nobly built stability it needed for the security of its cultural development, – a stability hardly paralleled in any other culture. And, as interpreted by the Indian genius, it became a greater thing than a mere outward economic, political and social mechanism intended to serve the needs and convenience of the collective life.

For the real greatness of the Indian system of the four varnas did not lie in its well-ordered division of economic function; its true originality and permanent value was in the ethical and spiritual content which the thinkers and builders of the society poured into these forms. This inner content started with the idea that the

intellectual, ethical and spiritual growth of the individual is the central need of the race. Society itself is only the necessary framework for this growth; it is a system of relations which provides it with its needed medium, field and conditions and with a nexus of helpful influences. A secure place had to be found in the community for the individual man from which he could at once serve these relations, helping to maintain the society and pay it his debt of duty and assistance, and proceed to his own self-development with the best possible aid from the communal life. Birth was accepted in practice as the first gross and natural indicator; for heredity to the Indian mind has always ranked as a factor of the highest importance: it was even taken in later thought as a sign of the nature and as an index to the surroundings which the individual had prepared for himself by his past soul-development in former existences. But birth is not and cannot be the sole test of Varna. The intellectual capacity of the man, the turn of his temperament, his ethical nature, his spiritual stature, these are the important factors. There was erected therefore a rule of family living, a system of individual observance and self-training, a force of upbringing and education which would bring out and formulate these essential things. The individual man was carefully trained in the capacities, habits and attainments, and habituated to the sense of honour and duty necessary for the discharge of his allotted function in life. He was scrupulously equipped with the science of the thing he had to do, the best way to succeed in it as an interest, artha, and to attain to the highest rule, canon and recognised perfection of its activities, economic, political, sacerdotal, literary, scholastic or whatever else they might be. Even the most despised pursuits had their education, their law and canon, their ambition of success, their sense of honour in the discharge and scruple of well-doing, their dignity of a fixed standard of perfection, and it was because they had these things that even the lowest and least attractive could be in a certain degree a means of self-finding and ordered self-satisfaction. In addition to this special function and training there were the general accomplishments, sciences, arts, graces of life, those which satisfy the intellectual,

aesthetic and hedonistic powers of human nature. These in ancient India were many and various, were taught with minuteness, thoroughness and subtlety and were available to all men of culture.

But while there was provision for all these things and it was made with a vivid liberality of the life-spirit and a noble sense of order, the spirit of Indian culture did not, like other ancient cultures, stop here.”⁴

(b) The Chaturvarnya Only a Substructure for the Higher Object to be Served by It

“It said to the individual: ‘This is only the substructure; it is of a pressing importance indeed, but still not the last and greatest thing. When you have paid your debt to society, filled well and admirably your place in its life, helped its maintenance and continuity and taken from it your legitimate and desired satisfactions, there still remains the greatest thing of all. There is still your own self, the inner you, the soul which is a spiritual portion of the Infinite, one in its essence with the Eternal. This self, this soul in you you have to find, you are here for that, and it is from the place I have provided for you in life and by this training that you can begin to find it. For to each Varna I have supplied its highest ideal of manhood, the highest ideal way of which your nature is capable. By directing your life and nature in its own law of being towards that perfection, you can not only grow towards the ideal and enter into harmony with universal nature but come also into nearness and contact with a greater nature of divinity and move towards transcendence. That is the real object before you. From the life-basis I give you you can rise to the liberating knowledge which brings a spiritual release, *mokṣa*. Then you can grow out of all these limitations in which you are being trained; you can grow through the fulfilled Dharma and beyond it into the eternity of your self, into the fullness, freedom, greatness and bliss of the immortal spirit; for that is what each man is behind the veils of his nature. When you have done that you are free. Then you have gone beyond all the dharmas; you are then a universal soul, one with all existence, and you can either act in that divine liberty for the good of all living

things or else turn to enjoy in solitude the bliss of eternity and transcendence.' ”⁵

(c) The System of Four Asramas and Its Object

“The whole system of society, founded on the four varnas, was made a harmonious means for the elevation and progress of the soul, mind and life from the natural pursuit of interest and desire first to the perfection of the law of our being, Dharma, and at the end to a highest spiritual freedom. For man’s true end in life must be always this realisation of his own immortal self, this entry in its secret of an infinite and eternal existence.

The Indian system did not entirely leave this difficult growth to the individual’s unaided inner initiative. It supplied him with a framework; it gave him a scale and gradation for his life which could be made into a kind of ladder rising in that sense. This high convenience was the object of the four Asramas. Life was divided into four natural periods and each of them marked out a stage in the working out of this cultural idea of living. There was the period of the student, the period of the householder, the period of the recluse or forest-dweller, the period of the free supersocial man, *parivrajaka*. The student life was framed to lay the groundwork of what the man had to know, do and be. It gave a thorough training in the necessary arts, sciences, branches of knowledge, but it was still more insistent on the discipline of the ethical nature and in earlier days contained as an indispensable factor a grounding in the Vedic formula of spiritual knowledge. In these earlier days this training was given in suitable surroundings far away from the life of cities and the teacher was one who had himself passed through the round of this circle of living and, very usually, even, one who had arrived at some remarkable realisation of spiritual knowledge. But subsequently education became more intellectual and mundane; it was imparted in cities and universities and aimed less at an inner preparation of character and knowledge and more at instruction and the training of the intelligence. But in the beginning the Aryan man was really prepared in some degree for the four great objects of his life, *artha, kama,*

dharma, mokṣa. Entering into the householder stage to live out his knowledge, he was able to serve there the three first human objects; he satisfied his natural being and its interests and desire to take the joy of life, he paid his debt to the society and its demands and by the way he discharged his life functions he prepared himself for the last greatest purpose of his existence. In the third stage he retired to the forest and worked out in a certain seclusion the truth of his spirit. He lived in a broad freedom from the stricter social bonds; but if he so willed, gathering the young around him or receiving the inquirer and seeker, he could leave his knowledge to the new rising generation as an educator or a spiritual teacher. In the last stage of life he was free to throw off every remaining tie and to wander over the world in an extreme spiritual detachment from all the forms of social life, satisfying only the barest necessities, communing with the universal spirit, making his soul ready for eternity. This circle was not obligatory on all. The great majority never went beyond the two first stages; many passed away in the *vānaprastha* or forest stage. Only the rare few made the last extreme venture and took the life of the wandering recluse. But this profoundly conceived cycle gave a scheme which kept the full course of the human spirit in its view; it could be taken advantage of by all according to their actual growth and in its fullness by those who were sufficiently developed in their present birth to complete the circle.”⁶

References:

1. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, pp.168, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry*
2. *Ibid, pp.168-70*
3. *Ibid, p.170*
4. *Ibid, pp.170-73*
5. *Ibid, pp.173-74*
6. *Ibid, pp.174-76*

The Future Economic System

“The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men – not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure – the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all.”

– Sri Aurobindo
SABCL 15, 241

“...money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual’s subsistence and sphere of action.”

– The Mother
CWM 12, 93