

# The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

February 2024



*“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”*  
– The Mother

Year 14

Issue 11

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## SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

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

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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, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

# INDIA AT 2047: THE FUTURE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*“The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the cooperative 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 (CWSA 25, 1997, p. 257).*

At the G-20 Summit held last year, PM Modi had appealed to the assembled world leaders to “shift away from a GDP-centric view of the world to a human-centric view” (Maira, *The Tribune*, 2023). In line with this appeal, the Indian government had also re-framed the central theme of the Indian G-20 Presidency as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* which translates as ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’, marking a shift away from the economy-centric focus of the G-20 Summits, which had believed that the future of the world lay in the path of economic interconnectedness through neo-liberal globalization. Yet, despite conceiving rightly the necessity of moving away from a GDP-centric paradigm, the vision has understandably been difficult to realize. This difficulty is reflected in the underpinnings of the latest economic exercise of the government in the form of the Economic Review and the Interim Budget released in February 2024.

The Interim Union Budget 2024-25 presented by the Indian government – a few months before the elections – may appear to be an unremarkable document. And yet, with its attempts to ground a vision for *India at 2047*, critical stock-taking of the

performance of the previous regimes since Independence, and its marked emphasis on the economic achievements of the Modi government over the last ten years, the budgetary exercise appears to be at pains to indicate the difference made by the past decade of economic development. There is little doubt that the ambition to make a difference and provide an alternative – nationally and globally – born out of a general national goodwill has been an attempt by this government, which is reflected in numerous fields. For example, in education, the New Education Policy (NEP) of the government emphasized the need for cultural revival, while in environment and climate change, the Modi government has emphasized the discourse of ancient Indian traditions as well as the need to fundamentally change lifestyles and consumption patterns to bring about lasting change. Similarly, at a global level, India has emphasized the idea of the country as a *Vishwaguru*, a leading light among nations. This has, to some limited extent, shaped Indian outlook.

Through the Interim Budget and the documentary review of Indian economy accompanying the budget, the government appears to be attempting something similar in the economic field as well – the attempt is to highlight a break from the past and show the difference made. However, in this case, the attempt appears largely compromised due to the lack of a deeper perspective about the true nature of economic development. The pre-budget document released by the government – *The Indian Economy: A Review* – as well as the budgetary allocations, reflect the dense nature of conventional economic wisdom which the government faithfully accepts. At a time when global changes – climate change, rise of diseases and pandemics, trends of deglobalization, increasing wars and conflicts etc. – reflecting the failure of conventional economic models are

already underway, the focus of the government on traditional developmental models stands at odds with the changing times. Thus, instead of being a break from the past, the recently released budgetary documents by the government reflect a continuation with the past, with changes that show that the country still has a long way to go.

## **REFLECTING PRIORITIES: INDIAN ECONOMY THOROUGH GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE**

The release of the document titled “The Indian Economy: A Review” ahead of the interim budget has shed comprehensive light on the dominant view of economic development prevailing among policymakers in the country. The report reflects on the economic goals and priorities of the country over the next six years, and the regulatory initiatives and achievements since 2014 that have brought about positive changes.

### **The Initial Decades: 1950-2014:**

Tracing the developmental trajectory of India since Independence, the report asserts that Indian economic development faced structural constraints between 1950 and 2014, characterized by inefficient decision-making and policy paralysis. During the first few decades of Independence, the goal of self-sufficiency and rapid industrialization was sought to be achieved within a socialistic economic framework. The emphasis was on the creation of large state-owned enterprises and investments in heavy industries. It must also be emphasized that the government was attempting to introduce land reforms, which led to the impoverishment of the agrarian sector without bringing about any substantial benefits in terms of land redistribution. Initiatives like the Community Development



Programme launched in 1952 failed in their agrarian objectives. Furthermore, neglect of the agricultural sector which formed a major part of the economy led to a multi-pronged agrarian crisis. Thereafter, the country was soon faced with economic crisis, due to wars with China and Pakistan, and widespread food shortage in the country, leading to devaluation of the currency and economic growth rate touching an all-time low during the 1970s. The report also highlights how these decades of sluggish economic growth were accompanied by severe political instability, including the imposition of Emergency. It must also be emphasized that this political instability included the rise of regional parties and political leaderships as well as the coinciding of these new political leaderships with the rise of new landowning classes empowered by the Green Revolution. These changes led to a new political rationale of appeasement of rich farmers. As the organizational base of the Congress under the personalized leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi progressively deteriorated, it was mainly the regional parties that began courting these new classes of rich farmers as well as the emergent Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The need to counterbalance the emergent rural elite and OBCs saw the Congress also shifting its political strategy to craft new alliances – in the form of big business classes. With the economy underperforming and going through a fiscal crisis, reforms were introduced when Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980. Mellowing her socialist rhetoric of the 1970s, the Indira Gandhi government now began to focus on removal of price controls, initiation of fiscal reforms, revamp of the public sector, reductions in import duties, de-licensing of the domestic industry, and, promotion of exports to encourage greater integration with the global economy (GoI, 2024).

However, by the end of the decade, external shocks in the form of the breakup of Soviet Union and the Iraq-Kuwait War (1991) exacerbated the unsustainable expenditures of the government and culminated in the Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis of 1991. It was the BOP crisis that acted as an immediate impetus for the liberalization of the Indian economy through the 1991 economic reforms. The reforms eliminated the complex system of rules, permissions, and licenses, led to disinvestment, overhauled the protectionist trade policies, and gave a positive fillip to sunrise sectors of the economy. It has also been shown through various studies that economic changes consequent to the 1991 reforms led to a reduction in poverty, even though inequality and unemployment have continued to be persistent challenges. The reforms also increased the rate of economic growth.

Based on improved gross domestic output and favourable global conditions, the decade of 2000s witnessed several welfare reforms by the government to expand the social safety net for the people. However, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis put an end to the era of loose monetary policy by major central banks, leading to investment outflows from emerging markets like India and an accumulation of bad debt. From 2009 onwards, to sustain high growth momentum, the government began to run high fiscal deficits, leading to high nominal GDP growth, but also to very high double-digit inflation and high current account deficit. In its diagnosis of the period between 2009 and 2014, the report attributes economic stagnation to structural constraints like tardy decision-making or policy paralysis, excessive subsidies at the cost of public investments, decline of manufacturing, rise of large informal sector, and decline in agricultural productivity.

## **The Post-2014 Economic Trajectory:**

In contrast, to this period (1950-2014), the report extolls the post-2014 years as a transformative decade for the country, asserting that India's 7% growth (when the world grows at 2%) is "qualitatively superior" to the 8%-9% achieved during the previous era when the global economy grew at 4%. It also forecasts that the economy is expected to expand from about \$3.7 trillion in Financial Year 2024 to \$5 trillion in three years, making it the world's third largest, and could even reach \$7 trillion by 2030. The report also highlighted the reduction in urban unemployment, high growth rates in the post-COVID19 pandemic period, expansion in infrastructure development, rise in indicators pertaining to insurance and education coverage as well as efficient crude oil management and rise in the spending capacity of states. The report also argues that the key drivers of India's growth have been centered around introduction of various regulatory provisions and Acts (such as those dealing with corporate insolvency, Goods and Services Tax, Production Linked Incentives for exports and manufacturing, initiatives taken under the programme of Aatmanirbhar Bharat etc.), enhanced tax base and high tax collection aggregates, formalization of the economy, facilitating the ease of doing business by decriminalizing minor economic offences and reducing the burden of compliances. The report also argues that, along with all these drivers of economic growth, the social aspects of growth have also been considered by implementing a number of social schemes to promote inclusive welfare.

A comparison between the two phases of growth (1950-2014 and 2014-2024) will reveal that despite institutional changes that have been brought about in the economy after 2014 and

which have resulted in positive outcomes in some areas (such as infrastructural expansion, greater efficiency of welfare schemes, rationalization of regulatory regime etc.), the structural aspects of the economy continue to remain consistent. This is reflected in the economic fundamentals and priorities of the government. The difference from the pre-2014 era is that there is now greater rationalization of the economy and greater efficiency due to the quality of political leadership and improved political stability. However, the commitment to the present economic model, based on prioritization of GDP and per capita targets, continues to remain a hallmark of this government. This is further reflected in the interim budget priorities of the government.

## **THE PRESENT INTERIM BUDGET**

The interim budget is based on an overarching vision of a developed India by 2047, based on the goals of inclusive growth, economic stability, strategic global positioning, sector-specific priorities, environmental sustainability, and tax reforms.

It has come as a break from the past pre-election budgets. Even though the general elections are on the anvil, the interim budget is not a populist document. It highlights the achievements of the government in areas such as social welfare and benefits, women empowerment through various schemes, tax collections etc., but remains conservative on full-fledged allocations. It also did not announce any changes in direct and indirect taxes. Despite it being an election year, the government signaled a commitment to fiscal prudence, with the deficit for Financial Year 2024 being contained at 5.8 percent and a sharp reduction to 5.1 percent projected for Financial Year 2025.

### **Achievements Highlighted in the Budget:**

- The government assisted 25 crore people out of multi-dimensional poverty in the last 10 years.
- Direct Benefits Transfer of Rs. 34 lakh crore using PM-Jan Dhan accounts led to savings of Rs. 2.7 lakh crore for the Government.
- PM-SVANidhi provided credit assistance to 78 lakh street vendors. 2.3 lakh have received credit for the third time. · PM-KISAN SAMMAN Yojana provided financial assistance to 11.8 crore farmers.
- Under PM Fasal Bima Yojana, crop insurance is given to 4 crore farmers.
- Electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) integrated 1361 mandis, providing services to 1.8 crore farmers with trading volume of Rs. 3 lakh crores.
- 30 crore Mudra Yojana loans given to women entrepreneurs.
- Female enrolment in higher education gone up by 28%. · Over 70% houses under PM Awas Yojana given to women from rural areas.
- Direct tax collection tripled, return filers increased to 2.4 times, in the last 10 years.
- Average monthly gross GST collection doubled to Rs 1.66 lakh crore this year, with GST tax base also having doubled.

### **Significant Goals:**

- PM-JANMAN Yojana to aid the development of particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG).
- Healthcare cover under Ayushman Bharat scheme to be extended to all ASHA workers, Anganwadi Workers and Helpers.

- A corpus of Rs.1 lakh crore to be established with fifty-year interest free loan to provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates.
- A new scheme to be launched for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and expediting ‘atmanirbharta’.
- Capital expenditure outlay for Infrastructure development and employment generation to be increased by 11.1 per cent to Rs.11,11,111 crore, that will be 3.4 per cent of the GDP.
- 3 major economic railway corridor programmes identified under the PM Gati Shakti to be implemented to improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost.
- Initiatives to promote green energy:
  - Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 MT to be set up by 2030.
  - Phased mandatory blending of compressed biogas (CBG) in compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport and piped natural gas (PNG) for domestic purposes to be mandated.
  - 1 crore households targeted to obtain 300 units free electricity every month through rooftop solarization, with each household is expected to save Rs.15000 to Rs.18000 annually.
  - Promotion of electric vehicles and the establishment of a biomanufacturing and bio-foundry scheme.
- States to be encouraged to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centers, with long-term interest free loans to be provided to States for financing such development.
- In pursuit of ‘*Viksit Bharat*’, a provision of Rs.75,000 crore rupees as fifty-year interest free loan is proposed to support milestone-linked reforms by the State Governments.

- Same rates for direct and indirect taxes have been retained.
- Proposals to withdraw outstanding direct tax demands for small amounts will benefit about a crore taxpayer.

Source: Compiled from PIB (2024).

The key theme of the interim budget revolves around the idea of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047, through a focus on demography, democracy, and diversity. The vision is also based on a commitment to national development with new inspirations and resolutions, termed as ‘Kartavya Kaal’ (Era of Duty). In her Budget speech, the finance minister said that the vision for Viksit Bharat is that of a “prosperous Bharat in harmony with nature, with modern infrastructure, and providing opportunities for all citizens and all regions to reach their potential.” (Express Web Desk, 2024). Further, in line with the campaign of the Prime Minister and to counter the caste-based polarization by the Opposition, the Budget speech also emphasized that the major “castes” which required government focus were ‘Garib’ (Poor), ‘Mahilayen’ (Women), ‘Yuva’ (Youth) and ‘Annadata’ (Farmer).

## **FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE ECONOMY: GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC REALITIES**

Albert Einstein had once famously said that “We cannot solve complex systemic problems with the same ways of thinking that have caused them.” This applies at the present time more than ever, as the country appears to be struggling to evolve a new paradigm to conceive of development but is

unable to do so. Despite its vision for a developed India by 2047 and attempts to frame this vision through a wider perspective of national growth, the present economic thinking – prevalent world over and reflected in Indian policy frameworks as well – is rooted in foundations that have become ill-suited to deal with the massive changes that are rapidly happening on the planet. The present economic model, based on the philosophy of Utilitarianism and calculative rational choice individualism, is based on the narrow idea that economic growth and development will beget qualitative aspects of human life and fulfilment. That is why governments around the world extol GDP numbers, even as real well-being remains unmeasurable.

Increasingly, this conventional economic wisdom is coming under doubt, as the multi-pronged crisis facing humanity is leading to serious questioning about the nature of development that is being pursued, with an increasing awareness that the present economic model, based on an extractive and exploitative relationship with Nature, is becoming dangerously ill-equipped to deal with the external changes taking place around the world. For, the present economic model does not account for externalities that increasingly shape the economy, such as impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, the rise of machine intelligence, the rise of pandemics and psychological problems, which are increasingly affecting all aspects of our lives.

## **Challenges in India:**

In India, the environmental crisis fueled by the present developmental model is borne by the fact that nearly every year, the country is witnessing an increase in the adverse



environmental events striking it, from land submergence in Joshimath to barrage of floods and heatwaves that are taking place with rising frequency, disturbances in monsoon patterns due to changes in precipitation, etc. The country's agrarian sector – despite accounting for 15 percent of the economy – provides employment to nearly half the population and is based on Green Revolution development strategies which have led to immense groundwater scarcity, and growth of unsustainable crops and cropping patterns, among other afflictions. Furthermore, India, among the fastest growing economies in the world, is also home to the largest number of polluted cities compared to other developing countries.

Despite high levels of GDP growth, the employment generated for every percent of GDP growth has progressively decreased. This is borne by the fact that, in the Indian economy, between 1980 and 1990, every one percent of GDP growth generated roughly two lakh new jobs; between 1990 to 2000, it decreased to one lakh jobs for every per cent growth; and from 2000 to 2010, it fell to half a lakh only (Maira, 2022). This decrease in employment has proceeded in tandem with the expansion of the services sector in the country. From about 37 percent in 1990, the services sector now accounts for nearly 50 percent of the Indian GDP (Statista, 2024; PIB, 2022). World-over, this sector accounts for more than 70 percent of the world economy, making it a crucial driver of well-being. And yet, the expenditure spent on services has not been matched by a commensurate rise in either the income or the quality of services rendered, thereby raising questions about whether the rising expenditure on services and goods is leading to overall well-being even though this expenditure is leading to rise in GDP numbers.

## Global Challenges:

Globally, the situation is hardly getting better. Capitalism-driven economic models have stumbled repeatedly. The financialization of the global economy has, in the recent past, led to recessionary crises and speculative investment bubbles that the global economy has been unable to cope with. Many of the countries in Latin America and South Asia are witnessing extreme levels of double-digit inflation, as are some relatively developed countries like Turkey. The frequency with which countries are seeking bailouts or are on the brink of seeking bailouts from International Monetary Fund is also notable, as visible in cases closer home such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It is also being forecast that, globally, there is an increasing likelihood of pandemic occurrence triggered by climate change, with a significant increase in such outlook since 1940, and with the probability of a three-fold rise in extreme pandemics in the coming decades (Joi, 2022). The rising environmental crisis is proceeding, ironically, in tandem with the expansion of the capitalism-driven green economy mobilized by private sector and governmental investments and programmes. This means the more money we are pumping into the economy – even if we glorify it through a discourse of green economy – the more is the incidence of ecological disasters increasing.

These ecological changes are taking place apace with massive advancements in science and technology, advancements which have placed before mankind a plethora of utilities, but which have also buttressed the collective vital ego to a great extent. These advancements in technology – the increasingly commonplace applications of artificial intelligence

– have also become intertwined with the economy and with developmental narratives. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, *“Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites...Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements...”* (CWSA 22, 1997, pp. 1090-92).

The more the world is advancing – with the rapid progression of Science and Technology, and education – the more the human psychology appears to be moving in a reverse direction.<sup>1</sup> Presently, mental health disorders account for several of the top causes of disability in established market economies, such as the United States, with about 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. suffering from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year (John Hopkins Medicine, 2024). Thus, even though policymakers extol the ideas of development, the real well-being of the people is progressively getting diluted.

## **Inadequacy of GDP Paradigm:**

Indeed, the divergence of real well-being and GDP growth

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<sup>1</sup> According to World Health Organization data, in 2019, 1 in every 8 people, or 970 million people around the world were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders the most common. In 2020, the number of people living with anxiety and depressive disorders rose significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial estimates show a 26% and 28% increase respectively for anxiety and major depressive disorders in just one year (WHO, 2022)

is indicative of the fact that the GDP has increasingly become a measure of human deprivation rather than advancement; for, the greater is the excess expenditure, the more will be the contribution to the GDP, even if that excess expenditure is fueling a decline in real income and sucking people dry. Expenditures on healthcare are perhaps the biggest example of this trend. The billions of dollars of profits made by pharmaceutical companies during the COVID19 pandemic is the latest case in point. Other examples include out-of-pocket healthcare expenses that often take a toll on people. Similarly, the amount of money – and accompanying mental trauma – spent in seeking justice from the legal system is well-known. Excess expenditures incurred in other services like education, defence procurement contracts and infrastructure spending, regardless of the quality of contracts is common knowledge. All of these expenditures may amplify the GDP, but are based on a perverse logic.

Thus, increasingly conventional economic wisdom and extant developmental models are appearing contradictory to the real well-being of the people, thereby raising questions about the future and viability of the present economic system.

## **BACK TO THE BASICS: THE ILLUSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The root of the afflictions and inadequacy of the present economic system – wherein the GDP numbers and real well-being seem to be moving in increasingly divergent directions – lies in the rationale of the system. With the modern socio-economic system geared exclusively towards meeting the vital and physical needs of man – with even refined pursuits like arts, culture, literature, and music being commercialized towards

those ends – material perfection and well-being has become the sole Dharma of modern societies. In such a system, whatever has utility matters, and those pursuits or activities which cannot be commercialized in the light of the Utilitarian spirit are rendered insignificant.

As the Mother has pointed out, *“For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call utilitarianism. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful...more and more, the races who consider themselves civilized describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle...And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it”* (CWM 12, 1997, p. 353).

This spirit of Utilitarianism has become the bedrock not only of the modern economy, but of societies as well. It has pervaded all spheres of individual and collective life, with even individual self-worth being measured in terms of material achievements. It is, therefore, not surprising that the meaning and notion of the concept of service has become so inverted. A term that traditionally relates to an act of self-giving cannot now be envisaged without putting a commercial value on it. Thus, services like education, providing healthcare, administering justice, maintaining law and order, defence of the country, engaging in art and cultural activities and many others are measured in terms of their monetary value. Indeed, now there are serious legal and political debates about imputing monetary value to caregiving and homemaking services in the family, attempting to measure how much the family work of a

mother would be worth in terms of monetary compensation (Johri, 2021). From these trends, it seems clear that imputing monetary value to work is the only way to decide the real value of that service.

India is not immune to this discourse. The preoccupation with development has occupied Indian economic thinking since Independence. The essence of public policy in the country continues to be based on the outdated logic that India – and other developing countries – will achieve advanced levels of development by traversing a similar trajectory of modernization which was followed by the Western countries after the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the country has questioned and resisted the wisdom of the West in matters such as religion and culture the blind pursuit of the gospel of development has largely continued to captivate us from Nehru to Modi eras. We may have modified the economic thinking of the earlier decades by expanding our discourse from better-and-better issues of development to more ambitious agendas of becoming a developed country in an environment-friendly manner, yet the unquestioning acceptance of the authority of Western economic wisdom has continued largely unchanged with the country sinking to ever deeper and deeper levels of psychological degeneration. This will be obvious to anyone who – not deafened by the slogans of “Vikas” – would care to look at ever declining levels of morality, ethics, and harmony in the country. These are nullifying all the advancements in material and economic field, so loudly trumpeted by the Modi government. This is so even in the case of unquestionable and impressive advancements in the field of material infrastructure. It is incredible that the political leadership of the country fails to even notice the progressive deterioration

in the individual and the collective psychological infrastructure – the backbone of the national existence – without which all the progressive improvements in the material infrastructure are worthless and tend to be increasingly counterproductive.

The Central problem is in ourselves and it is a folly to look for it elsewhere. Ervin Laszlo in his book, *The Inner Limits of Mankind*, observed: “There are hardly any world problems that cannot be traced to human agency and which could not be overcome by appropriate changes in human behaviour. The root cause even of physical and ecological problems are the inner constraints on our vision and values... We contemplate changing almost anything on this earth but ourselves.” (*A Divine Life Manifesto*, p. 11). One’s state of consciousness determines the limitations or conditions in which we live. One can rise above them only by ascending to a higher level of consciousness. “THE CONDITIONS in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera. Those who have been able to perceive what could and ought to be done to improve the situation in the various domains of human life – economic, political, social, financial, educational and sanitary – are individuals who have, to a greater or lesser extent, developed their consciousness in an exceptional way and put themselves in contact with higher planes of consciousness. But their ideas have remained more or less theoretical or, if an attempt has been made to realise them practically, it has always failed lamentably after a certain period of time; for no human organisation can change radically unless human consciousness itself changes. Prophets of a new humanity have followed one another; religions, spiritual or social, have been created; their beginnings have sometimes

been promising, but as humanity has not been fundamentally transformed, the old errors arising from human nature itself have gradually reappeared and after some time we find ourselves almost back at the point we had started from with so much hope and enthusiasm.” (CWM 12: 39)

## THE WAY FORWARD

*“The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world”* (CWM 13, 1997, p. 361).

In recent years, the country has witnessed a great sea of changes. The most prominent marker of these changes is the wave of nationalism that is being reflected in various ways in different walks of life. A beginning has been made in the right direction, as visible through the changes brought about in the nature of education, the emphasis laid on cultural and religious revival, the rise of patriotism and a widespread of denunciation of any narrative that could potentially divide the country. Even politics, which had in the last few decades, become associated with divisive discourses based on fragmented identities and polarization, has become a medium of national unity. These changes in the national life are being matched by commensurate changes in India’s strong position in the world. The country is buttressing its strengths in military, technology and economic advancement.

While these areas are critical for external national power, it is now time for the country to realize that none of these external strengths are sufficient to set the country apart in a way which can make her a leading light among nations. The political leadership of the country is in the habit of quoting the words



of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo but does not seem, in practice, to pay any head to their words which point the way to move towards the future role of India as pointed out by the Mother. It is now time for the country to realize that none of these external strengths are sufficient to set the country apart in a way which can make her a leading light among nations. The assumption that mere religious and cultural revival on the back of nationalism, combined with the advanced levels of development, is the path for the rise of India is also misplaced. On the surface, it may appear that a pursuit of the course of development envisaged in the India At 2047 Document of the Modi government may take the country to a level of development already accomplished by the West, but it would be a thing too degrading to be espoused by any person with any depth and understanding. Before any such thing can come to pass, the India of the Ages with its great and unique spiritual culture would have been long dead and gone. In this context let us remind ourselves of the following inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda, ***“If you give up ... spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materializing civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round”*** (CWSV 3, p. 153).

It is, therefore, only by retrieving her collective spiritual consciousness that the country can become a leading light in the world. Under the crushing pressure of a looming moral and ecological disaster, the conditions are going to be increasingly ripe to lead humanity – specially India – to undertake a fundamental re-evaluation of the value of Science

and the modern gospel of Economic Growth for its true fulfillment. The lead in the direction of this inner change is going to be provided by India because, as the Mother declared, ***“India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind. India will be the land of its resurrection – the resurrection to a higher and truer life”*** (CWM 13, 1997, p. 376).

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

Even as the Russia-Ukraine war continues, the death of Russian opposition figure and anti-Putin crusader, Alexei Navalny, in an isolated, high-security prison in Russia, has recast fresh global aspersion on the Russian regime, with world leaders directly blaming Putin for his death. Navalny had been persecuted by the Russian regime for over a decade, with another previous attempt at killing him through a nerve agent in 2020. Despite such persistent persecution, Navalny continued to fight relentlessly against Putin. His resilience and endurance had made him a symbol of popular inspiration around the world. In the wake of his murder, Western attitudes have further hardened towards Russia.

While the state-directed murder of Navalny betrays the desperation of the Russian regime, Russia is also facing increasing disappointment on the war front. While there has been a marked increase in Ukrainian attacks on critical Russian infrastructure, Russia has not been able to make any significant headway in the war, with the war of attrition leading to persistent war fatigue and acting as a persistent drain on national resources. This military fatigue has been further exacerbated by the long anticipation addition of Sweden as the 32<sup>nd</sup> member of NATO, thereby ending its 200-year-old policy of neutrality and further consolidating the expansion of NATO eastward.

Failures on military and political front, combined with the murder of Navalny just before the facile Russian national elections have provided an opportunity to Putin to attempt to mobilize the country around worn-out war narratives. The latest

such narrative was the threat issued by Russia to deploy nuclear weapons in space, using its Strategic Rocket Forces. Such threats betray Russian weakness, as Moscow is aware that it cannot compete with the West in space technologies. Therefore, it assumes that the threat to use asymmetric means – such as nuclear weapons – to force the West onto the negotiating table might work.

Besides such baseless military rhetoric directed towards signaling purposes, the country continues to witness a steady decline on the domestic front. In the latest surveys, the number of people identifying as ethnic Russians has reduced to nearly 71%, even as the latest attempt by the Russian state to impose ethnic Russian linguistic terminology in a multinational country is aggravating other multiple ethnicities in Russia. A sign of this was the mass protests in Bashkortostan, few weeks ago, over the sentencing of an environmental and ethnic activist, and in general, over the state policy of Russification of ethnic non-Russians. There has also been widespread migration of people from Siberia and Russian Far east towards Mongolia. As the war progresses, these domestic fault lines are also widening.

## **DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Even as artificial intelligence continues to dominate the field of technology, regulation and investments in the area are steadily increasing. Recently, the Indian government launched the India AI Mission, allocating a substantial budget of Rs 10,372 crore over five years. This mission aims to foster the growth of artificial intelligence in the country by establishing a robust AI ecosystem. To facilitate AI development, the

government will provide access to supercomputing capacity comprising over 10,000 Graphic Processing Units. This high-performance computing infrastructure will enable stakeholders to process data at higher speeds and create innovative AI applications.

The push comes amidst increasing applications of AI systems to everyday lives. The government has also issued notifications regarding the use of deepfake and other manipulative AI technologies. In addition to this, the government is also attempting to regulate the digital space and social media companies as digital markets play an increasingly important role in the economy.

## **SANDESHKHALI TRAUMA**

Located in North 24 Parganas in West Bengal, Sandeshkhali has stirred national emotions in the wake of women-led protests against the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). The sociopolitical upheaval in Sandeshkhali has not been witnessed in the state over many years. Alleging years of oppression, sexual offences, and harassment, the women of Sandeshkhali turned against the local representatives of the ruling Trinamool Congress: Sheikh Shahjahan and his henchmen. They have now been arrested. The events in Sandeshkhali show that the village is a microcosm of what has been happening in Bengal for a long time, first under the Left and then under TMC.

Bengal politics – pervaded by violence – has, for decades, been based on the primitive party-society model, thanks to its Communist legacy. The tentacles of the ruling party are so steeped in society that the entire local economy is controlled by them. The relationship between the citizen and the state under such a model is based on patron-client hierarchy, wherein

toeing the line of local ruling party leaders and providing them with cut money and other such favors is pervasive. This model has precipitated dark developments in Sandeshkhali, where the TMC local henchmen have been accused of land grabs and of calling local women in the area into their offices at odd hours to sexually assault them.

The events were set in motion in early January this year, when a mob of TMC goons thrashed and chased away Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials who had gone to Sandeshkhali to interrogate Shahjahan Sheikh in an alleged ration distribution scam, after which Sheikh had been absconding till his recent arrest. After that incident, local women came out in large numbers alleging that Shahjahan and his men had usurped their lands to set up prawn farms and had been sexually harassing local women for years. These accusations sparked protests across the state.

The darker side of the events in Sandeshkhali also shed light on the exploitation of Dalit Hindu women who were the targets of gangrape by Shahjahan and his men. The presence of police officers during the alleged rapes further shatters the basis on which the government is being run in Bengal. With the police in cahoots with the accused and supporting the state policy of minority appeasement, the question of law-and-order situation in Bengal becomes moot. The events have rightly led to calls for the imposition of Presidential Rule given the barbaric situation in the state. The issue – widely being perceived as the Waterloo of Mamata Bannerjee government – has become particularly sensitive as it comes right before the General Election, with a desperate TMC resorting to threatening tactics to force people to vote for it.

# IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

The Uttarakhand government recently took the historic decision to pass its landmark legislation on Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The legislation seeks to consolidate laws regarding marriage and property inheritance. It aims to replace distinct personal laws of every religion, focusing on marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance, guided by Article 44 of the Constitution. This code would be a single set of personal laws that would apply to all citizens, regardless of religion.

Some of its key features are as follows:

- The UCC Act, 2024 aims to focus on gender equality by treating men and women equally in matters such as inheritance and marriage.
- The Code will extend an equal property share to Muslim women against the existing 25% share accorded under Muslim personal laws.
- Scheduled tribes (STs) have been exempted from the purview of the Act. The tribal population in the state, which is around 3%, had been voicing its dissent against UCC in the wake of the special status accorded to them.
- Minimum age of marriage remains the same viz. 18 years for women and 21 years for men.
- Mandatory registration of marriages within 60 days.
- Prohibition on dissolution of marriage in contravention of UCC rules.
- Polygamy, bigamy, halala, iddat and triple talaq have been prohibited.



- In a landmark move, the legislation mandates that live-in relationships need to be registered with the state, which will undertake verification to establish the authenticity of the relationship.

- Renting or buying property without such registration will not be permitted.

- Child born out of registered relationships will be considered legitimate.

- The State should be informed after the dissolution of relationship.

- Women will be entitled to maintenance after dissolution of relationship.

While enforcing uniformity in religious personal laws has been a key feature of the Act, the interesting provisions related to live-in relationships have attracted much debate. With state regulation and oversight of such relationships and making some aspects of these relationships equivalent to marriage (child legitimacy, maintenance etc.), it is widely expected to act as a deterrent to pursuit of such relationships. Particularly, men who enter casually into such relationships will avoid doing so, while women and men, both, will also want to avoid the social scrutiny that comes with public disclosure of such relationships.

## THE HEART VERSUS MIND THE HEART VERSUS MIND

“It is one of the evils of your Western civilisation that you are after intellectual education alone, and take no care of the heart. It only makes men ten times more selfish, and that will be your destruction. When there is conflict between the heart and the brain, let the heart be followed, because intellect has only one state, reason, and within that, intellect works, and cannot get beyond. It is the heart which takes one to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach; it goes beyond intellect, and reaches to what is called inspiration. Intellect can never become inspired; only the heart when it is enlightened, becomes inspired. An intellectual, heartless man never becomes an inspired man. It is always the heart that speaks in the man of love; it discovers a greater instrument than intellect can give you, the instrument of inspiration.”

– Swami Vivekananda

(CWSV 1: 412)