

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

July 2024



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

– The Mother

Year 15

Issue 4

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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 15

Issue 4

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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)

HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

NATO Summit Reaffirms Support for Ukraine

The annual summit of NATO held in Washington this year reaffirmed the alliance's support for Ukraine with renewed pledges. The summit was also marked by a renewed focus on China, with NATO, for the first time, accusing China of being a “decisive enabler” of Russia's war against Ukraine. NATO accused China of supplying Russia with advanced software, technology and components to rebuild its defence industry. According to evidence gathered by the US, while China has – in order to circumvent sanctions – not supplied Russia with full weapons systems, it has provided everything short of that to enable Russia to rebuild its defence industrial base.

The new pledges included the promise of additional strategic air defence systems, military aid of nearly \$43 billion, and expediting the provision of F-16 fighter jets. As far as Ukraine's NATO membership is concerned, the bloc emphasized that Ukraine will inevitably become a member but only after the war with Russia is over. Further, the US also committed to deploying longer-range missiles in Germany by 2026, in response to the growing threat of Russian aggression.

The pledges made by the Western countries at the NATO summit continued to be incremental and cautious in approach, even as the US continues to restrict Ukraine's ability to fully use the weapons systems provided by it to hit targets deep inside Russia. Even though on the eve of the summit, Russian

airstrikes killed 44 Ukrainians in Kyiv, and wounded some 200, including casualties in a maternity hospital, the US continued to reinforce restrictions on Ukrainian long-range strikes, citing the risks of escalation. Thus, the alliance's overall approach continues to remain non-strategic, reactive, shaped by fears of escalation, self-detering, and reluctant to coalesce around the political objective of victory in the war for Ukraine.

Instead of reaching a security agreement with NATO, Ukraine has concluded bilateral agreements on security cooperation with its 23 member states on an individual basis, with the agreements undergirded by a common framework. They all envisage large-scale military assistance and national security-related economic support to Ukraine for a ten-year period. However, these agreements are non-binding in nature. Finally, this arrangement is no substitute for making Ukraine a part of the alliance.

Zelensky's Change of Strategy

With political winds in the United States showing signs of uncertainty, Ukraine's President Zelensky appears to be seeking negotiation with Russia. This was made evident by his statements that he wants Moscow's participation in the second international peace summit on Ukraine being planned for later this year. The desire for negotiation may have also arisen in view of the deadlocked nature of the war, with Ukraine and Russia periodically making gains but neither moving in a conclusive direction. The incremental pledges made at the NATO summit may have further reinforced the fact that the present tepid state of affairs is likely to continue, further magnified by Western countries' fears of escalation, and low stockpiles and atrophied production capacities in most NATO countries.

ISRAEL-HAMAS: FAILURE OF THE PEACE PLAN

Hardening of Domestic Political Opinion:

The hardening of domestic political opinion in Israel has been witnessed across the political spectrum as became evident through a vote in the Israeli Knesset on a resolution opposing the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine issue. With 68 members voting in favour of the resolution opposing the two-state solution and only 9 members voting against it, it has become evident that the Israel-Palestine problem has reached far beyond the domain of political compromise. This is the first time in its history that the Israeli Knesset has passed such a resolution.

China's Rising Influence in the Middle East:

After successfully mediating a delicate peace agreement between rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran last year, the Chinese success in bringing together fourteen rival Palestinian separatist organizations under a single umbrella shows the increasing influence of the country in the international political domain. This was reflected in the Beijing-brokered agreement between rival Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah, on ending division and “strengthening Palestinian unity.” Israel has rejected the agreement, as it has made it clear that, in the governance of post-war Gaza, neither Hamas nor Fatah will have a role to play.

Israeli Rejection of Negotiations:

The ongoing peace negotiations between Israel and Hamas

suffered a blow with the daring elimination of Hamas's top leader, founder and chief negotiator, Ismail Haniyeh. Further, Israel has assassinated Hezbollah's leader, Fuad Shukur. Expectedly, these assassinations were carried out in retaliation for the attack on civilians and children in Golan Heights. The fact that Haniyeh's assassination was carried out on Iranian soil at a time when he was attending the Presidential ceremony was further indicative of Iranian weakness, as Iran failed to anticipate or have any prior knowledge of this assassination. When placed in the context of the fact that the bomb was remotely exploded and was placed in the room, where Haniyeh was staying, many weeks in advance, the Iranian failure becomes even more evident.

In the wake of the assassination, Iran has accused Israel of carrying out the killing – which Israel has neither accepted nor denied – and has vowed retaliation. At the same time, it is evident that Iran neither possesses the intelligence capacity nor military capacity to carry out any large-scale retaliation against Israel.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE:

Deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Robotics:

The all-pervasiveness of AI across nearly all sectors continues to impact human society. In services sectors, such as education, healthcare, law, entertainment, and defence, the impact of AI has been most visible and is increasing substantially. Now the latest sector to witness the fine-tuning with AI is the Robotics sector. While robots have been around for the last few decades, their deployment has been mostly

seen on a limited scale, mainly in certain manufacturing industries and based on the use of basic commands/instructions by engineers. A few years back, the ‘humanoid’ wave – robots which look and behave like humans – tried to take societies by storm but turned out to be a passing phenomenon. Robotics could not achieve the scale of appeal among the common masses achieved by embedded AI and generative AI software like Chat GPT, Gemini and others.

This may now change as scientists are exploring ways to create a ‘brain’ for advanced robots. The new AI models that the robots are now being programmed with will enable them to go beyond merely following basic instructions and enable them to upgrade themselves autonomously by adapting to their changing environment. This is possible due to the rise of deep learning models in AI. They will use advanced neural networks that mimic the human brain to power robots just like other AI technologies, using computer vision and spatial reasoning capabilities.

Presently, the world’s biggest technology and AI companies, such as Google, OpenAI and Tesla, are among those racing to build the AI “brain” that can autonomously operate robotics. In recent times, Google DeepMind announced advances in its research, including harnessing large language models to train humanoid robots. Open AI is creating similar start-ups and investments. If successful, this could potentially further transform all the sectors around us, especially manufacturing and those sectors which require physical labour. The development is also significant as it will potentially redefine the boundaries of physical interaction by making human-like robots more interspersed in our physical spaces, whether public or personal.

Breakthroughs in AI decision-making:

Till now, research in AI has been focused on how generative AI has been deployed to provide solutions to humans and interact with them in various ways. Scientists are now attempting to imbue it with features that can make it also ‘think’ like humans. In other words, instead of merely answering questions, a new software – RTNet developed at Georgia Tech University – seeks to hone the decision-making abilities of generative AI, in the face of uncertain or unpredictable input commands being given to AI systems, which it usually deflects instead of answering. This is based on adding features from neuroscience to AI neural networks.

There are two main types of AI neural networks viz. regular and convolutional. In regular neural networks, each neuron is connected to every other neuron and transmits a common output throughout the network. In convolutional neuron networks, there are some unconnected neurons which are used, not for transmitting information, but for abstraction, that is, to study contrasts and thus understand patterns, usually used in image-processing. The new software, RTNet, will add more features to the convolutional neural networks. It consists of five convolutional and three regular connected layers, thereby combining AI’s image-processing ability with a human being’s dynamic stochastic reasoning.

Representing a significant step forward in machine learning, RTNet – which is still being developed – not only imbues AI with human thinking and use of memory, but also with ability to make predictions and with confidence – the two attributes that have been lacking in generative AI till now. This breakthrough brings AI closer to mimicking the human brain in many respects.

Further, as the quest for enhancing the reasoning abilities of AI continues, OpenAI is also close to releasing its own project for significantly enhancing the reasoning abilities of generative AI. The secret project by the company, codenamed ‘Strawberry’, seeks to do this, by not just generating answers to queries but to plan ahead enough to navigate the internet autonomously and reliably to perform deep research – something that has eluded AI till now. This is significant as the attainment of such reasoning capabilities is key to AI achieving human or super-human-level intelligence. The idea is to take AI beyond merely assisting the humans to completely bypassing them in making new discoveries and inventions rather than merely answering questions.

STAMPEDE IN HATHRAS

The tragic stampede that took place at a religious gathering in Uttar Pradesh’s Hathras, on July 2nd, has brought to the fore the deep penetration of religious congregations – transcending caste divides – in Hindu society. A key reason for the stampede was that the authorities had initially given permission for a gathering of around 80,000 people at the congregation but had not anticipated that thrice that number of devotees would turn up. The immediate cause of the stampede was a frenzied crowd rushing to collect the *charan raj* from under the godman’s feet and catch pictures and glimpses of him. With a lack of management, and late arrival of police and ambulances, the fallout from the stampede only worsened. Despite the massive scale of the tragedy, it is noticeable that the godman’s devotees are refusing to blame him, saying that the tragedy happened due to circumstances. Not a single complaint has been filed against him from the victims’ families or civil society organizations.

The event reaffirms an old but less acknowledged powerful reality – the hold of religion over the Indian masses. In the Hathras case, this becomes even more important in the light of the communal and caste fault lines that are being sought to be desperately erected by the so-called ‘secular’ Opposition political parties.

The godman – popularly known as Bhole Baba alias Narayan Sakar Hari – who was presiding over the religious gathering is a Jatav Dalit and has an immense following not only among the Dalits, but also among other castes. He holds great appeal among people with not just a lower caste, but also poor socio-economic background. Beyond this, his following also comes from lower caste civil servants and officers. His followers among government officers are said to have trained his private volunteer army as well. Facing discrimination in society and socio-economic problems, many of his followers found solace in his congregations. His followers also included a substantial number of women, who often faced household issues (including violence and economic crises) and were attracted to his religious discourse.

He was a former constable in the UP police and his official name is Suraj Pal Singh. After having been suspended for misdemeanor, he took voluntary retirement and assumed the role of a religious preacher during the 1990s. His religious popularity has spread beyond UP to other states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. Interestingly, he proclaims himself to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the immense popularity he holds among Dalits and other castes attests to the fluidity of Hindu religious practices which no ‘secular’ or ‘identity politics’ narrative has been able to breach. He often preached about shunning untouchability, maintaining social harmony and

following the laws of the land. Such has been Pal's following that his followers even claim to have seen *Sudarshan Chakra* and a divine halo around him, and attested to his healing powers.

It is no wonder then that despite the loss of lives running into hundreds of people, not a single political party – and even the ruling administration – has attempted to charge him. The effectiveness of such religious discourses is visible through their deep penetration into every aspect of Indian society. Particularly striking is the co-existence of caste-based Ambedkarite politics and the religious commitment of lower castes to Hinduism – two discourses which the 'secular' forces have sought to portray as being mutually contradictory. In the Hathras village where the tragedy took place, the mutual co-existence of such political and religious anomalies is visible through the fact that the village houses of Dalits and other lower castes have prominently plastered photos of Hindu gods on the walls of their houses at the entrance. At the same time, there are also big blue posters everywhere propagating the ideas of Ambedkar.

Bhole Baba himself tried to intertwine a social message with his religious instruction, as he also tried to combine Ambedkarite politics with Hindu religion. In line with Ambedkar's focus on modernity, he did not dress up in religious robes but in Western attire. His instruction also tried to cultivate hope and pride among the Dalits. At the same time, he gave importance to religion, speaking of it in terms of cutting beyond caste divides. That is why he referred to his identity as Narayan Sakar Hari in the third person, as combining the transcendent realities of Vishnu, Shiva and Krishna. He further emphasized that this Divine trio exceeded even the Hindu religion and

will listen to devotees even from church or mosque. As a result of his simple yet appealing discourse, his followers cut across all kinds of ideologies, including pro-Hindutva and anti-Hindutva ones.

CHINA'S THIRD PLENUM

China's Third Plenum – a major meeting that takes place every five years – reinforced the consolidation of Xi Jinping's vision for the country. The Third Plenum was held under a backdrop of serious and increasingly unbridgeable differences between the US-led Western group of countries and China. While the mutual trade restrictions appear to be the immediate form that these differences have assumed with Western countries restricting exports of critical technological components to China and attempting to cut China out of global supply chains, their key causes lie in deep-rooted competition in the areas of security and technology on which China and the West are increasingly diverging.

In terms of security, China is increasingly articulating a world order which aims to challenge the dominance of the West, particularly the US. China's support of errant countries like Russia and North Korea is just a small manifestation of this approach. The actual edifice of such an alternative world order is visible through numerous initiatives that China is spearheading – Belt and Road, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilizational Initiative, to name a few – which not only have short-term interests, but also a long-term vision for the world.

In terms of technology, the immediate manifestation of China's dominance is visible through its lead in the manufacturing

and export of critical technologies in a way that is soundly undercutting the US, such as lithium-ion batteries, electric vehicles, PV cell components, telecom equipment etc. In particular, China has established its dominance in critical technologies needed to transition to a clean energy future. It is also not far behind in the quantum computing race. This is visible from the fact, that in 2023, more than half the addition in renewable energy generation capacity came from China alone, that is, 63% of global net additions in total renewable capacity – 298 GW out of the 473 GW added in 2023 – came solely from China. More than that, China’s share of year-on-year growth in global additions of net renewable capacity was 96%. Its dominance in the electric vehicles market – including the export of cheap but good quality EVs to Europe – is also notable.

These strides in technology are underpinned by Xi’s larger vision of steering the country on a path of “high-quality economic development” – an idea echoed at the Third Plenum. This relates to Xi’s call, in recent times, to focus on the development of “new productive forces”, that is, replacing labour-intensive and capital-intensive economic factors of production with technology-intensive economic growth, relying on innovation, big data and artificial intelligence. And China’s immense strides in technology bear this out.

The Third Plenum was a reiteration of this vision. It stood out by focusing on consolidating an already existing vision, rather than making any new or breakthrough commitments. Its three key themes centered around – high-tech innovation, taxation reform and re-collectivization of rural land. These are meant to address the challenges China is facing presently, with massive unemployment, a real estate property slump which

has drastically compromised revenue collection by local governments, and finally, a chronic lack of domestic consumption resulting in corporate overcapacity (necessitating cheap exports) and fueling overreliance on investment. With these economic fundamentals necessitating the continuation of an export-oriented growth model, China's autonomy in realizing its ambitious vision will be particularly hampered. That is why the country does not want all-out hostility with the West and would want to maintain sound economic relations with India, Japan and Korea as well.

Whether Maoist-era measures like re-collectivization – by sending people back from cities to agriculture – will help to solve any of China's structural chronic economic problems, will remain to be seen. While the Third Plenum was apt in articulating a self-congratulatory rendition – a much deserved one, perhaps – of Chinese achievements under Mr. Xi, its failure to provide a concrete roadmap to deal with the country's numerous challenges shows that the path ahead requires delicate political and economic balancing by China.

POLITICAL FLUX IN THE US

The assassination attempt on former President, Donald Trump, at a rally in Pennsylvania, has resulted in a complete makeover for him. He is not only being perceived as a victim of political violence in a system controlled by the liberal 'deep state', but also as a strong personality who faced possible death with defiance instead of fear. The image of Mr. Trump, with his fist raised, against the backdrop of the American flag, contributed to this aura in a big way. To make things worse for the Democrats, the incident revealed not just the carelessness and shabbiness of the Secret Service in charge of Trump's

security, but also a deliberate overlooking of the potential threat. For, subsequent investigations show that the shooter had managed to sneak into the venue with a gun and had even positioned himself to target Trump. Many people had alerted the security agents of suspicious movements, and yet the security failed to pay heed to any of this.

The fact this event came right on the heels of a disastrous Trump-Biden Presidential debate, further led to the conviction that there was nothing that Biden could possibly do to redeem his image against Trump's rising popularity. In the aftermath of the assassination attempt on Trump, the Democrats were quick to realize that they cannot stem their rapidly falling fortunes under Joe Biden. The disastrous Presidential Debate between Trump and Biden had already turned the tide in Trump's favour. The assassination attempt on Trump and the positive spirit with which he faced the bullet on the spot had further overwhelmingly turned even many of his detractors in his favour.

In the aftermath of these events, Biden's bowing out of the Presidential race was a given. His passage of mantle by endorsing Kamala Harris – who also received overwhelming nominations from across the Democratic party and raised record fund-raising in the first few days – appears to have produced immediate positive effects for the Democrats. Not only was the Trump assassination attempt overshadowed, but the entire Republican narrative – centered around Biden – was disturbed, with Republicans unsuccessfully hastening to attack Ms. Harris on personal issues like her racial identity instead of substantive ones. In addition, the unpopularity of Trump's running mate, Mr. Vance has turned the tide in the Democrats' favour in general and the swing states in particular.

ELECTIONS IN FRANCE AND BRITAIN

UK elections

The recently held snap elections in the UK predictably yielded a Labour government headed by Keir Starmer as the Prime Minister. The clean sweep by the Labour party came with 412 seats with a 34% vote share. While the Conservatives were expected to face a complete rout, their performance was face-saving, winning 121 seats with a 24% vote share. While the Labour increased its seats by 211 compared to the last election, the Tories lost 250 seats compared to the last election. The Liberal Democrats came third with 71 seats and a 12% vote share. The highlight of this election was the emergence of extreme right-wing leader, Nigel Farage's Reform UK winning 5 seats with a 14% vote share.

Key takeaways:

First, the Tories were expected to perform much worse, if the initial opinion polls – which showed the Labour having a 20-percentage point lead over the Tories – were to be believed. Yet, while the Labour did get a clean sweep of seats, their vote share was much more modest at 34%.

Second, the performance of Reform UK shows how the public sentiment against immigration and Muslim extremism is gaining traction in British politics. In fact, the Tories also suffered because the Reform UK ate into their vote-share.

French elections

The election results to France's legislative assembly yielded an outcome that was widely believed to be contrary to opinion

polls which had predicted the victory of Marine Le Pen's far right party. The election results show the Leftist alliance coming at the top (with 180 seats, with 25.8% vote share), followed by President Macron's centrist coalition (with 159 seats, with 24.5% vote share), with Le Pen's right-wing party coming third (with 142 seats, with 37.06% vote share). No single party/coalition won a majority, plunging government formation into crisis. Incidentally, despite the loss of right-wing forces, the substantive vote share cornered by Le Pen's party shows its rising appeal across France, with its agenda of anti-immigration and anti-Islamism finding wide appeal among white, Christian French people.

Another controversy associated with the results was the exposure of how Macron's coalition had subtly joined hands with the Leftists – without entering a formal alliance – through the implicit understanding of not fielding candidates against each other in three-way contests in order to prevent a division of votes in Le Pen's favour. Had this strategy not been adopted, Le Pen probably would have performed even better. Due to the deadlock, France continues to be under a caretaker government, continuing with the existing Prime Minister from Macron's party.

MODI'S MOSCOW VISIT

Modi's visit to Moscow came at a time when the Russia-Ukraine war shows no signs of abatement and Russia took the opportunity of this visit to bomb a children's hospital in Ukraine. The visit also coincided with the simultaneous NATO summit being held in Washington. While the real subtext of the visit lay in politics, a slew of technical cooperative arrangements were also agreed upon.

The Political Subtext:

The visit reflected India's delicate geopolitical position in a rapidly changing world. It must balance between a selfish, sly America-led Western bloc known for regime changes in the name of imposing democracy, and a growing Russia-China alliance with which India is increasingly finding it difficult to share common interests. India also must balance these broad geopolitical considerations in the light of a hostile and destabilized neighbourhood, with India's neighbours falling into instability like dominoes – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Given these realities, India is hardly in a position to parrot the moral positions of the West indiscriminately, especially considering the souring of diplomatic relations with the US in recent times. It is no wonder that India is not only attempting to re-build bridges with Russia, but also with China, having accelerated trade and border talks with the latter with a view to finding an early resolution to the border stand-off. Further, through the Moscow visit, India also attempted to ensure that Russia's long-standing position of neutrality between India and China does not get disturbed given Russia's growing closeness with China.

Despite this difficult context, Modi's Moscow visit sought to strike a balance between different considerations. The visit itself was an annual formality – the 22nd annual summit – that India had been long avoiding since 2022. The fact that it finally took place signalled that India will not snap relations with Russia at the behest of the West. At the same time, Modi also gave a message to Putin that India does not support Russia's war in Ukraine, by saying that the death of innocent children

and civilians causes great pain, that a solution to the war in Ukraine cannot be found on the battlefield and that sovereignty and territorial integrity of every country needs to be respected. Significantly, India managed to get Russia to agree on a joint statement which emphasized that Ukraine conflict needs to be resolved “through dialogue and diplomacy...in accordance with international law and on the basis of the UN Charter in its entirety and totality.” Further, Modi’s decision to travel to Vienna after Moscow underscored India’s efforts to balance out ties with the West.

The difficult political subtext of India-Russia relations has further had an impact on military cooperation between the two countries, characterized by a lack of any significant Russian military purchases by India. The delays in defence supplies also came up during the talks.

Technical Cooperation:

Despite the difficult political subtext of India-Russia relations, economic cooperation continues to advance. On the back of oil purchases, bilateral trade has grown from \$10 billion in 2021 to \$66 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach \$100 billion by 2030. Further, rupee-rouble exchange accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the payments. In addition to the boost to trade, the joint statement also agreed to explore and develop new connectivity projects such as the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime route, the Northern Sea Route, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) via Iran. A number of MoUs were signed on climate change, polar research, pharma certification and other areas.

THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (4I)

(Continued from the May 2024 Issue)

8. SOME SELECTED WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER ON INDIA AND ITS CULTURE

V. What Needs to Be Done

“There must be a group forming a strong body of cohesive will with the spiritual knowledge to save India and the world. It is India that can bring Truth in the world. By manifestation of the Divine Will and Power alone, India can preach her message to the world and not by imitating the materialism of the West. By following the Divine Will India shall shine at the top of the spiritual mountain and show the way of Truth and organise world unity.”³²

“India has or rather *had* the knowledge of the *Spirit*, but she neglected matter and suffered for it.

The West has the knowledge of matter but rejected the Spirit and suffers badly for it.

An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised.”³³

“...we have merely suffered the European impact, overborne at points, crassly resisting at others, and,

altogether, miserable, enslaved by our environments, able neither to perish nor to survive. We preserve indeed a certain ingenuity and subtlety; we can imitate with an appearance of brightness; we can play plausibly, even brilliantly with the minutiae of a subject; but we fail to think usefully, we fail to master the life and heart of things. Yet it is only by mastering the life and heart of things that we can hope, as a nation, to survive.

How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity? By reversing, for a time at least, the process by which we lost it, by liberating our minds in all subjects from the thralldom to authority. That is not what reformers and the Anglicised require of us. They ask us, indeed, to abandon authority, to revolt against custom and superstition, to have free and enlightened minds. But they mean by these sounding recommendations that we should renounce the authority of Sayana for the authority of Max Muller, the Monism of Shankara for the Monism of Haeckel, the written Shastra for the unwritten law of European social opinion, the dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits for the dogmatism of European scientists, thinkers and scholars. Such a foolish exchange of servitude can receive the assent of no self-respecting mind. **Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to be free, – in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe. It would be a poor bargain to exchange our old Indian illuminations, however dark they may have grown to us, for a derivative European enlightenment or replace the superstitions of popular Hinduism by the superstitions of materialistic Science.**

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her

appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think, – to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. Let our brains no longer, like European infants, be swathed with swaddling clothes; let them recover the free and unbound motion of the gods; let them have not only the minuteness but the wide mastery and sovereignty natural to the intellect of Bharata and easily recoverable by it if it once accustoms itself to feel its own power and be convinced of its own worth. If it cannot entirely shake off past shackles, let it at least arise like the infant Krishna bound to the wain, and move forward dragging with it wain and all and shattering in its progress the twin trees, the twin obstacles to self-fulfilment, blind mediaeval prejudice and arrogant modern dogmatism. The old fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use clinging to the old ice-floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. **It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a secondhand Europeanism. We shall only die there a miserable and unclean death.** No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotchpotch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of East and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything

and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is **only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe.** We must not begin by becoming partisans but know before we take our line. Our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything. That means to get rid of all unexamined opinions old or new, all mere habitual sanskaras in the mind, to have no preconceived judgments.... the great mass of our habitual conceptions are not only temporary, but imperfect and misleading. We must escape from these imperfections and take our stand on that which is true and lasting. But in order to find out what in our conceptions is true and lasting, we must question all alike rigorously and impartially. The necessity of such a process not for India, but for all humanity has been recognised by leading European thinkers. It was what Carlyle meant when he spoke of swallowing all formulas. It was the process by which Goethe helped to reinvigorate European thinking. But in Europe the stream is running dry before it has reached its sea. Europe has for some time ceased to produce original thinkers, though it still produces original mechanics. Science preserves her freedom of inquiry in details, in the mint and anise and cummin of the world's processes, but, bound hand & foot in the formulas of the past, she is growing helpless for great ideas and sound generalisations.... Europe is becoming stereotyped and unprogressive; she is fruitful only of new & ever multiplying luxuries and of feverish, fiery &

ineffective changes in her political and social machinery. China, Japan and the Mussulman States are sliding into a blind European imitativeness. **In India alone there is self-contained, dormant, the energy and the invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world's fetters.**"³⁴

It should be plain and clear to us that, "The utmost widening of a physical objective knowledge, even if it embrace the most distant solar systems and the deepest layers of the earth and sea and the most subtle powers of material substance and energy, is not the essential gain for us, not the one thing which it is most needful for us to acquire. **That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race. Our true happiness lies in the true growth of our whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of our existence, in mastery of the inner as well as and more than the outer, the hidden as well as the overt nature; our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began, but by transcendence.** It is for this reason that, after the first necessary foundation in life and matter, we have to heighten our force of consciousness, deepen, widen, subtilise it; we must first liberate our mental selves and enter into a freer, finer and nobler play of our mental existence: for the mental is much more than the physical our true existence, because we are even in our

instrumental or expressive nature predominantly mind and not matter, mental much rather than physical beings. That growth into the full mental being is the first transitional movement towards human perfection and freedom; it does not actually perfect, it does not liberate the soul, but it lifts us one step out of the material and vital absorption and prepares the loosening of the hold of the Ignorance.

Our gain in becoming more perfect mental beings is that we get to the possibility of a subtler, higher and wider existence, consciousness, force, happiness and delight of being; in proportion as we rise in the scale of mind, a greater power of these things comes to us: our mental consciousness acquires for itself at the same time more vision and power and more subtlety and plasticity, and we are able to embrace more of the vital and physical existence itself, to know it better, to use it better, to give it nobler values, a broader range, a more sublimated action, – an extended scale, higher issues. Man is in his characteristic power of nature a mental being, but in the first steps of his emergence he is more of the mentalised animal, preoccupied like the animal with his bodily existence; he employs his mind for the uses, interests, desires of the life and the body, as their servant and minister, not yet as their sovereign and master. It is as he grows in mind and in proportion as his mind asserts its selfhood and independence against the tyranny of life and matter, that he grows in stature. On one side, mind by its emancipation controls and illumines the life and physicality; on the other, the purely mental aims, occupations, pursuits of knowledge begin to get a value. The mind liberated from a lower control and preoccupation introduces into life a government, an uplifting, a refinement, a finer balance and harmony; the

vital and physical movements are directed and put into order, transformed even as far as they can be by a mental agency; they are taught to be the instruments of reason and obedient to an enlightened will, an ethical perception and an aesthetic intelligence: the more this can be accomplished, the more the race becomes truly human, a race of mental beings.”³⁵

“India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create. Religion has been a central preoccupation of the Indian mind; some have told us that too much religion ruined India, precisely because we made the whole of life religion or religion the whole of life, we have failed in life and gone under. I will not answer, adopting the language used by the poet in a slightly different connection, that our fall does not matter and that the dust in which India lies is sacred. The fall, the failure does matter, and to lie in the dust is no sound position for man or nation. But the reason assigned is not the true one. **If the majority of Indians had indeed made the whole of their lives religion in the true sense of the word, we should not be where we are now; it was because their public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking,**

materialistic that they fell. It is possible, that on one side we deviated too much into an excessive religiosity, that is to say, an excessive externalism of ceremony, rule, routine, mechanical worship, on the other into a too world-shunning asceticism which drew away the best minds who were thus lost to society instead of standing like the ancient Rishis as its spiritual support and its illuminating life-givers. But the root of the matter was the dwindling of the spiritual impulse in its generality and broadness, the decline of intellectual activity and freedom, the waning of great ideals, the loss of the gust of life.

Perhaps there was too much of religion in one sense; the word is English, smacks too much of things external such as creeds, rites, an external piety; there is no one Indian equivalent. But if we give rather to religion the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the allembicing unity and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that **there was not too much of religion, but rather too little of it** – and in what there was, a too one-sided and therefore an insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is, not to belittle still farther the agelong ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense. This is the direction in which the philosophy, poetry, art of the West is, still more or less obscurely, but with an increasing light, beginning to turn, and even some faint glints of the truth are beginning now to fall across political and sociological ideals. India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the

ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge.”³⁶

“We need faith above all things, faith in ourselves, faith in the nation, faith in India’s destiny. A dozen men rendered invincible by a strong faith in their future have in other times spread the contagion of nationalism to the remotest corner of vast countries.”³⁷

“I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man’s history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and

superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, "Be blind, O man, and see!" In short, **I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda** – the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after – yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam. **I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism**, – but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men."³⁸ (The Greatness of India and Its Culture in the Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, The Resurgent India Trust, 2016, pp. 362-71)

References:

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| 32. CWM 13: 353 | 33. CWM 13: 361 |
| 34. CWSA 12: 40-42 | 35. CWSA 22: 757-59 |
| 36. CWSA 20: 38-40 | 37. CWSA 6: 348 |
| 38. CWSA 12: 61-62 | |

“A revival of Hindu intellectual faith in the totality of the spiritual aspects of our religion, whether Vedic, Vedantic, Tantric or Puranic, I believe to be an inevitable movement of the near future.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, Dec. 1984: 135)