

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

March 2016



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

– The Mother

Year 6

Issue 12

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

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

Year 6

Issue 12

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

– The Mother

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

INDIA'S ECONOMY DURING THE BRITISH RULE (I)

FORMATION OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND ITS BACKGROUND – CONTESTS WITH THE DUTCH

“The arrival of Vasco da Gama’s Portuguese fleet off Calicut (Kozikhode) in May 1498 marked a violent break with longstanding tradition of free trade in the Indian Ocean. When asked by an Arab trader why he had come, da Gama responded with precision, ‘we seek Christians and spices’. He found both, but focused his attention on filling his ships with pepper for the voyage home. Not content with being one trading nation among many, da Gama and his successors used their naval supremacy to impose a commercial monopoly in the Indian Ocean. Only merchants who bought Portuguese permits were allowed to do business on pain of confiscation and death, a measure justified on the grounds that the right to free trade was limited to Christians. In a brutal extension of the wars of religion that raged between Christianity and Islam in the Mediterranean, the Portuguese enforced their monopoly with a savagery hitherto unknown in the region.

On his second voyage in 1502, da Gama dispensed with any attempt at negotiation. A large merchant ship bringing back 700 pilgrims from Mecca was taken, primed with gunpowder and sunk. He then moved on to Calicut, capturing 20 trading vessels and butchering their crews. More than 800 prisoners had their hands, ears and noses hacked off, the pieces piled into a boat and sent to the local ruler, the Zamorin, with a note telling him to make a ‘curry’ with what he found. In light of these and other incidents, the economic historian Niels Steengaard has concluded that ‘the principal export of pre-industrial Europe to the rest of the world was violence’.

The Portuguese impact on the economies of the Indian Ocean should not be overstated. What is clear, however, is that for decades thereafter, Portugal’s Estado do India would dominate European imports of pepper, accounting for as much as 75 per cent until the 1580s. This was a state-managed affair, run from Portugal’s Asian

capital at Goa and a suite of bases across the Indian Ocean from Mozambique via Malacca to Macau. Portuguese dominance would, however, be ruined by religion – from within by the horrors of the Inquisition and from without by the insurgent Protestant Dutch. When he died in 1525, Vasco da Gama was buried in St Francis Church in Fort Cochin. Today, his grave is empty, but his memory lives on with a mural in the lobby of the Indian Government’s Spice Board in Cochin, a peculiar choice for someone once described as ‘a fiend in human form’.

For a brief moment in the sixteenth century, the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal were united, bringing together their immense overseas territories in the New World, along with dominion over the Netherlands in north-west Europe. But Protestant revolt in the Netherlands led to the blockade of Antwerp, and the closure of Lisbon and Seville to Dutch traders, cutting off their spice supply. The Dutch response was rapid, and the successful return of Dutch ships laden with pepper in 1599 sent shockwaves through London’s markets. The price of pepper almost tripled, rising from three to eight shillings a pound, prompting a band of London merchants to petition Queen Elizabeth for exclusive trading rights. In many ways, the new company^a was seen a spin-off of the well-established Levant Company, which saw its business threatened by the Dutch coup. ‘This trading to the Indies’, warned William Aldrich, ‘have clean overthrown our dealings to Aleppo^b.’ Over £30,000 was raised to back the venture, which had a strikingly simple mission – ‘let us be sole masters of the pepper trade’, declared the merchants. After much haggling the ailing queen eventually relented, awarding a charter on the last day of 1600, with the objective of bringing back valuable commodities from the East Indies, which should be ‘bought, bartered, procured, exchanged, or otherwise obtained’. Alongside the pursuit of mercantile profit, Elizabeth’s charter^c inserted the public policy goal of the ‘advancement of trade’. In the end, the 218 investors

^a The East India Company

^b A place in Syria

^c East India Company charter

who came together under this banner raised a total of £68,373 to finance a fleet of four small ships, which set sail in February 1601 to find an English niche in this lucrative business.

What lives on from these times are tales of piracy and high adventure. Pirates have an ambiguous place in English folklore, part feared and part celebrated, and the first wave of East India traders simply continued an old English tradition: trade where necessary and plunder where possible. Though sometimes favoured by local people in the East Indies in their battles against the Dutch, the Company's motive was always the same: to secure exclusive control of local spice production. But the English Company progressively lost the 'spice race', outgunned and outclassed by the Dutch. Driven from the Moluccas following the massacre of English traders at Ambon (Amboina) in 1623, the Company gave up the prized nutmeg island of Run as part of wider negotiations following the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1667. In return, New Amsterdam in the Americas was transferred to British rule, and quickly renamed New York. The English Company would cling on to its residual bases in the Spice Islands, but was finally expelled from Bantam by the Dutch in 1682."¹

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S ENTRY INTO INDIA AND ITS STRUGGLE WITH THE FRENCH

"Forced from the Spice Islands, the Company refocused its gaze on India. The Company's ships had initially visited the Gujarat and Coromandel coasts of India in search of cotton textiles, which could then be bartered for spices in the Indies. A first embassy led by William Hawkins arrived at the Mughal port of Surat in 1608. His pleas for trade relations failed to interest Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who was still heavily influenced by the Portuguese. Persistence and military muscle paid off, however, and a naval victory over the Portuguese in 1612 resulted in the Company's first Mughal permit (firman) to trade from Surat, and thereafter at Ahmedabad and Agra. On the opposite coast, trading started at Masulipatam, the principal port of Golconda, in 1614. These early forays were capped in 1618, when England's ambassador Sir Thomas Roe finally won an extensive

trade treaty from Jahangir. Hoping to distinguish the English from the Portuguese and Dutch strategy of conquest and fortification, Roe counselled the Company to avoid military entanglements. 'If you will profit,' he urged, 'seek it at sea and in quiet trade.' By 1625, 220,000 pieces of cloth were being exported by the Company from Surat."²

"Maintaining a presence in Mughal India was a constant struggle. But, like the Dutch, the English Company succeeded largely by carving out a comfortable niche from the existing Portuguese empire, capturing its base at Hormuz on the Persian Gulf, for example, in 1622 and raiding Bombay in 1626. Permanent peace was signed with Portugal at Goa in 1635, giving the Company access to the Estado's ring of ports stretching all the way to Macao. It also paved the way for the establishment of the new base at Fort St George at Madras on the Coromandel coast in 1639. Bombay would follow in 1668, a wedding gift to Charles II from his Portuguese wife, Catherine of Braganza. The cash-strapped king promptly leased Bombay to the Company in return for a sizeable loan and an annual rent."³

"The wars of Frederick the Great (Frederick II was King of Prussia from 1740 until 1786) found the English and the French opposed to each other in the battlefields of Europe, Asia, and America, for well nigh twenty years, from 1744 to 1763. The servants of the English and the French Companies eagerly took up the contest in India, made alliances with Indian princes, besieged each other's commercial settlements, and evinced in the East those bitter jealousies which divided them in the West. The three wars between the English and the French, which were carried on in India within these twenty years, are known as the Karnatic wars (1746-1763).

In the first Karnatic^a war (1746-1748) the French had decidedly the advantage. They took Madras from the English, and they beat back the army of the Nawab of the Karnatic which came to retake the town. Madras was, however, restored to the British by the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.

^a The Karnatic region comprises the modern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, south eastern Karnataka, north eastern Kerala and southern Andhra Pradesh.

Dupleix, the Director-General of the French Company, was, however, fired by a lofty ambition to make his countrymen supreme in India; and for a time his success was complete. He helped an Indian ally to become Nizam of the Deccan, and he enabled another ally to become Nawab of the Karnatic. He was thus the most powerful 'king-maker' in Southern India, and the influence of the British seemed completely annihilated. The genius of Robert Clive now turned the scales. He first distinguished himself by recovering and holding Arcot, the capital of the Karnatic, from a rival Nawab, an ally of the British. The second Karnatic war (1749-1754) was at last concluded; the ally of the British remained Nawab of the Karnatic, and the ally of the French remained Nizam of the Deccan. There was thus a balance of power between the two European nations in Southern India, and the French obtained the whole of the eastern seaboard, called the Northern Circars, from the Nizam.

The third Karnatic war (1756-63) ended in the complete destruction of the French power. Lally, the patriotic but impulsive leader of the French, besieged the fort of Madras, but failed to take it. He was then beaten by Eyi-e Coote in the battle of Wandewash in 1761, and the French settlement of Pondicherry was taken by the British after an obstinate defence. Pondicherry was restored by the Peace of Paris in 1763, but the power of the French in India had been irrevocably extinguished. After 1763, the British had no European rivals in India."⁴

THE BATTLE OF PLASSEY AND THE OCCUPATION AND PLUNDER OF BENGAL

"Great events had in the meantime taken place in Bengal. Suraj-ud-Dawla, Nawab of Bengal, had taken Calcutta in 1756 from the English, and most of the English prisoners died in one hot summer night in a small and ill-ventilated prison-room, known as the Black Hole. Clive, on his return from Europe, recovered Calcutta in the following year; made peace with the Nawab; and then entered into a secret conspiracy against him. When everything was ready, he marched against the Nawab; defeated him in the battle of Plassy in 1757; and thus virtually

conquered Bengal and thus made the East India Company a great territorial power in India before he sailed for Europe in 1760.

The Nawabs of Bengal had now become mere puppets in the hands of the Company's servants. Mir Jafar was set up as Nawab after the battle of Plassy, and was deposed in 1760, when Mir Kasim was made Nawab. This last was a strong ruler, and tried to check the abuses of the Company's servants in the inland trade of Bengal. A war followed; Mir Kasim was beaten and fled; and Mir Jafar was once more made Nawab. The feeble old man died shortly after, and his illegitimate son was then hastily set up as the nominal ruler of Bengal. The administration of Bengal was in the utmost disorder; the people were grievously oppressed.”⁵

“More of a commercial transaction than a real battle, Plassey was followed by the systematic looting of Bengal’s treasury. In a powerful symbol of the transfer of wealth that had begun, the Company loaded the treasury’s gold and silver onto a fleet of over a hundred boats and sent them downriver to Calcutta. In one stroke, Clive had netted £2.5 million for the Company and £234,000 for himself. Today this would be equivalent to a £232 million corporate windfall and a cool £22 million success fee for Clive. Historical convention views Plassey as the first step in the creation of the British Empire in India. It is perhaps better understood as the East India Company’s most successful business deal.”⁶

“For the first half of the eighteenth century, the Company’s attention was focused on the prize that was Bengal. The Indian subcontinent was then the workshop of the world, accounting for almost a quarter of global manufacturing output in 1750, compared with just 1.9 per cent for Britain. Within the Mughal Empire, Bengal was the richest province (suba), described by Aurangzeb as ‘the Paradise of Nations’. Proximity to good raw materials, a highly productive agricultural sector along with a sophisticated division of labor in cloth production gave Bengal an unbeatable combination of high quality and low prices. Such was the cost advantage that in the late eighteenth century Indian cottons could be sold at a profit in

Britain, at prices 50 to 60 per cent lower than those fabricated domestically. Deeply embedded in the traditional village system, hand-woven cotton linked agriculture with industry, creating a diversity of income and providing goods that could be traded both locally and internationally. For millennia, Indian cotton cloths out-competed the rest of the world. Even in the first century A.D., the Roman historian Pliny was complaining that the extensive importing of cotton fabrics from India was draining Rome of gold. Similar complaints came from English weavers when Indian cottons once again began to enter Europe in bulk in the late seventeenth century.

Bengal's production was also distinguished by immense diversity, with over 150 different names for the textiles bought by the Company, covering muslins, calicoes and silk, along with mixed cotton and silk goods. Different production centers would specialize in particular styles; for example, Dhaka was renowned for the transparency, beauty and delicacy of its muslins. So fine was the fabric that a pound of cotton could provide upwards of 250 miles of muslin thread. Quality and style varied from the finest mull-mulls and allaballee through to shabnam (morning dew) and nayansukh (pleasing to the eye). Essential for the feel of the muslin was the short-staple phuti cotton grown on the banks of the river Meghna, near Dhaka, described by the British Resident as 'the finest cotton in the world'. One estimate from 1776 suggests that as many as 25,000 weavers were based in Dhaka producing some 180,000 pieces of cloth from thread spun by 80,000 women. Along with its textiles, Indian names for cloth also entered the English language, not least bandana, calico and chintz, dungaree, gingham, seersucker and taffeta.

For the Company, the textile craze in Europe created immense wealth for its traders and shareholders. Although it had started trading textiles from the Gujarat and Coromandel coasts, Bengal steadily grew in importance. From just 12 per cent in 1668-70, Bengal's share of total Company imports climbed to 42 per cent in 1689-90, making it the largest single source of supply; by 1738-40, the proportion had climbed to 66 per cent. But the Company was only

one trader among many, and the trade of all the European companies put together probably represented only one-third of the Bengal's total exports, the bulk still being conducted by Asian merchants. Not surprisingly, this immense source of demand created a powerful upward pressure on prices.

Access to this market was also tightly controlled, regulated by a Mughal trade policy that carefully delineated what could be traded and by whom on the basis of both economic functionality and social significance. The Mughals made clear distinctions between inland and international trade, with foreign companies being awarded the privilege of export in exchange for inflows of silver to enrich the treasury and lubricate the economy. Within Bengal's internal market, a range of prestige items, such as salt, betel and tobacco, were traded on the basis of social rather than market norms. 'European trading groups, people from the 'hat-wearing nations' (kulahposhan) were admitted into these transactions of privilege and power as long as they did not disrupt the material hierarchy of exchange.' This combination of strong demand and tight regulations meant that the terms of trade for the European traders drawn to Bengal were tough. Only bullion would do, and between 1708 and 1756 three-quarters of the Company's imports into Bengal were in the form of silver."⁷

"It was the wealth of Bengal's textile industry that had first lured the Company to Bengal, and it would be Bengal's weavers who felt the full force of the Company's new-found market power. Never rich, Bengal's weavers still had a better standard of living than their counterparts in contemporary England, largely owing to their ability to determine their terms and conditions. According to Prasannan Parthasarathi, there is compelling evidence that India's weavers had 'higher earnings than their British counterparts and lived lives of greater financial security'. Economic tradition in India supported the position of the weaver against the merchant. At a time when the British state was intervening on the side of the employer – for example, to set maximum levels for wages – Indian weavers were able to act as a collective body, improving their ability to negotiate

favourable prices. This bargaining power combined with strong European demand for cloth in the first half of the eighteenth century created a seller's market, enabling Indian weavers to enjoy a 'golden age' of low costs and high prices.

All this ended following Plassey. From a situation of relative economic independence, Bengal's weavers were forced into a position of near slavery, unable to sell to others and obliged to accept whatever the Company's agents (gomastas) would offer for their cloth. 'The Company went to market as Sovereigns and Tyrants', argued a revealing briefing written for Philip Francis in the 1770s. 'Instead of seeking a preference by paying better,' it added, 'they forced the manufacturers to Work for them and to work at an under price, at the same time that they prohibited all private merchants from dealing in the Assortments required for their Investment.' The outcome was inevitable: 'thus a general Monopoly was at once rigorously established'.

The Company employed all kinds of subterfuge to squeeze prices ever lower. One practice that was particularly resented was the classification of perfectly good quality cloth as sub-standard (ferreted). These pieces would then be sold on to the open market at price substantially higher than that given to the weaver, in the process making a tidy profit for the Company's gomasta and Resident.

As prices fell, weavers became unable to cover the costs of production, leaving themselves increasingly unable to earn enough to pay back the advances they had received from the Company. Further poverty and indebtedness followed. For Bangladeshi scholar Hameeda Hossain, it was 'the corporate buyer, who had provided the weaver with his working capital and access to the market [that] became the root cause of his pauperization and alienation from his occupation'.

Some weavers resisted this abuse of power. For example, in 1767, a group from Khirpal sent a delegation to Calcutta with a petition requesting an increase in the purchase price of cloth.

Remarkably, the Company authorities agreed. But the local Company Resident not only ignored the order, but threatened to have the troublesome weavers arrested if they pursued their case. Yet, this was a rare example of resistance, and by the early 1770s, the Company was earning impressive returns from its policy of oppressive exchange. One estimate suggests that the Company's gomastas were able to pay 'in all places at least 15 per cent and in some even 40 per cent less' than the weaver would receive in the public bazaar.

These price cuts were achieved at the cost of a brutality that became infamous at the time. According to William Bolts's celebrated account, 'various and innumerable' were 'the methods of oppressing the poor weavers, such as by fines, imprisonments, floggings, forcing bonds on them etc'. For some of the weavers, the reaction to this abuse was simply one of despair. Among the winders of raw silk, called nagaads, Bolts reported that the Company's practices led to a shocking form of self-mutilation, stating that 'instances have been known of their cutting off their thumbs to prevent their being forced to wind silk'.

It is difficult to imagine the scale of economic violence required to force skilled workers to harm themselves in this way. Apart from Bolts, however, no other evidence exists for this or similar incidents. This has not stopped it achieving apocryphal status as a symbol of the physical and psychological pain inflicted by the Company's takeover of Bengal. Indeed, the image remains alive in popular memory across the subcontinent, as poet Shahid Ali expressed in his 1980s poem, 'Dacca Gauzes':

In history, we learned: the hands
of weavers were amputated,
the looms of Bengal silenced,
and the cotton shipped raw
by the British to England.

History of little use to her,
my grandmother just says
how the muslins of today

seem so coarse and that only
in autumn, should one wake up
at dawn to pray, can one feel that same texture again.”⁸

“Almost immediately after the Plassey coup, the techniques that Clive had deployed were subject to substantial scrutiny, and have been the focus of controversy ever since. Many criticized Clive for stooping to so-called ‘Oriental’ practices of corruption and deceit. Surveying Clive’s career many years later, Thomas Babington Macaulay concluded that he had become an ‘Indian intriguer’, and his trickery of Amir Chand was ‘not merely a crime, but a blunder’. Clive’s most recent English biographer, Robert Harvey, takes a more Machiavellian approach and argues that Clive ‘deserves enormous credit for his skill in deceit’. There can be little real sympathy for Amir Chand, outwitted by someone more underhand than himself. But Clive’s great deception forms part of the original lie that underpinned British rule in India. The ‘black hole’ incident would later be blown up as a crime that justified the Company’s fullest retribution. But the Company would remain wide open to the charge of hypocrisy when it later extolled its ‘plain dealing’ (in Clive’s own words) as providing the foundations for its rule.

More serious are the charges of corruption leveled at Clive. Along with other leaders of the expeditionary force, Clive profited enormously from the Plassey Revolution, gaining Rs. 200,000 as a member of the Bengal Select Committee, a further Rs. 200,000 as commander-in-chief, and another Rs. 1,600,000 in the form of private donations from the Bengal nobility, in all amounting to £234,000 – some £22 million in 2002 values. Aged 33, Clive had suddenly become one of the richest men in England. Defending himself in Parliament many years later, Clive declared himself innocent of all charges: ‘Mr Chairman, at this moment, I stand astounded at my own moderation.’ Unseemly as these payments may well have been, Clive was breaking no law in accepting them. He was merely setting ‘an evil example’ to others, according to Macaulay.

What Clive had started, others would copy. In the eight years

that followed Plassey, the Company placed four nawabs on the throne of Bengal. Each 'revolution' was accompanied by the transfer of more and to the Company to reschedule the Nawab's now-hefty debts, along with lavish presents for leading Company executives, totaling £2.2 million, along with another £3.8 million in reparations. In 1760, Mir Jafar was toppled by the Company in favour of his son-in-law Mir Kasim, who in turn was overthrown in 1763 when he tried to stop the cancer of the Company's private trade. Mir Kasim's solution was bold – abolishing all internal customs duties, thereby negating the value of the Company's duty-free dastaks. This reform could not be allowed to stand, and so the Company went to war once more.

Such was the hatred of the Company that a group of English prisoners held in Patna were murdered by Mir Kasim's troops in 1763, a deliberate act of vengeance far more brutal than the 'black hole' incident six years earlier. The once pre-eminent Jagath Seths were also beheaded for their complicity with the British. In addition, armed bands of holy men (sannyasi) contributed to the turmoil, with one group raiding Dhaka and looting the Company's factory at Baiganbari. Mir Kasim joined forces with the Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II to challenge the Company for control of Bengal. In this second 'Company-Mughal War', the original outcome was reversed. At the battle of Buxar in October 1764, the Company's forces triumphed in a victory that was perhaps more decisive even than Plassey. Mir Jafar was returned to the throne for a pitiful last few months before his son Najim-ud-Daula took over in early 1765."⁹

"After Buxar, all of Bengal was at the Company's mercy. Its competitors had been dealt with, and the Nawab was no longer any threat. But there was still one final acquisition that would complete the revolution: the absorption of Bengal's treasury into the Company's accounts. The transfer of 24 parganas following Plassey had added £58,000 in taxes to the Company's revenues. Soon Clive was being approached by the Mughal Emperor, requesting that the Company assume the office of tax management (diwani) in order that Bengal's regular tribute to Delhi could be resumed. Writing to the Prime

Minister, William Pitt, in January 1759, Clive explained that he had declined ‘for the present’. Clive then sailed home with a £300,000 fortune – worth over £34 million today – and a lifetime award (jagir) from Mir Jafar worth some £30,000.

The installation of Mir Kasim in 1760 brought the districts of Midnapore, Burdwan and Chittagong under Company control, yielding another £650,000. When Clive returned to India for the third and final time in May 1765, he threw off his initial caution and forced the enfeebled Shah Alam II to formalise the Company’s control. On 12 August 1765, the Emperor granted the Company the diwani rights for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, in return for an annual tribute of Rs2.6 million, equivalent to £325,000. When all the costs of the Nawab’s administration had been deducted, Clive calculated that from Bengal’s annual tax revenues of Rs 25 million, there would still be ‘a clear gain to the Company’ of Rs 12 million or £1,650,900. In twenty-first-century terms, this amounted to an annual surplus of over £150 million, a profit margin of some 49 per cent.

For the cost-conscious directors back in Leadenhall Street, who had obsessively managed the export of scarce bullion to the Asia for over 150 years, Clive painted a wondrous picture of bounty. The acquisition of diwani rights would now ‘defray all the expenses of the investment, furnish the whole of the China treasure, answer the demands of all your other settlements in India, and leave a comfortable balance in your treasury besides’. Clive cleverly maintained the fiction of Mughal authority by ensuring that taxes continued to be collected by local officials, ‘a perfect example of income without investment’, according to Professor Sirajul Islam of Bangladesh’s Asiatic Society. In the next six years, the Company would collect over £20 million, generating a surplus of £4 million, less than initially expected. But this was still a substantial haul at a time when the Company’s total exports from Asia before the diwani amounted to just £1 million each year.”¹⁰

“While the London establishment were contemplating the costs of its financial excesses in the summer of 1769, across the world in

Bengal a drought of unprecedented ferocity was just commencing. For six whole months from August 1769 to January 1770, the monsoon rains failed to arrive, delivering a chronic water shortage that destroyed up to half the crops, particularly in the west and north-west of Bengal. With the New Year, drought started to turn into famine. Plentiful rain fell in June 1770, but 'hopes of relief were disappointed by the overflowing of the rivers in the eastern provinces', adding flood to famine."¹¹

To be continued...

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THE PSUEDO-SECULARISM AND THE ISOLATION OF MUSLIMS SINCE INDEPENDENCE

In the last article, we surveyed the state of Hindu-Muslim relations in India before Independence and how the minority politics played out in the making of the Indian Constitution. Through that analysis, it has become clear that pitching the Hindu-Muslim hostility as an outcome of the colonial state's policy of divide-and-rule is a myth. As records from Ambedkar's – the chief architect of the Constitution and a known figure of social justice in India – writings show, it was the Indian intelligentsia, the Indian National Congress and its icon Gandhi who were mainly responsible for mobilizing a pro-minority discourse. The criteria for deciding whether minorities should be accorded a special status was finally decided according to social and economic backwardness, rather than the numerical status of a group. Thus, while Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes were accorded special status, the religious minorities like Muslims were not.

However, the reasoning that underpinned the policy of Muslim appeasement continues to hold sway even today viz. catering to Muslim demands will lead to more peace and harmony. The upshot is that it has led to communalism in the country and also left the Indian Muslims more ghettoised and isolated than ever, by reducing them to a political vote-bank. Such results have been a direct upshot of Congress politics since Independence.

THE PRESENT CREATION OF THE BOGEY OF MUSLIM IDENTITY

It is well-known that much like any other community, Muslims are internally divided on the basis of caste, class and religious lines. Moreover, the way they respond to politics differs from state to state. As the upcoming elections will show, there is a substantial difference between the condition of Muslims in Kerala, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Yet, 'secular' political parties like the Congress have managed to construct a Muslim vote-bank, and on the basis of it,

have been engaging in a policy of minority appeasement.

As we have already seen in the last issue, the existing divisions between the Hindus and the Muslims due to the inherently radical nature of Islam were exploited by Gandhi during the colonial era. After Independence, the policy was carried forward by Nehru who went out of the way to assure the Muslims that they were important political stakeholders in the country. In the name of secularism and personal atheism, he interfered extensively in reforming the Hindu personal laws, left the Muslim personal laws unchanged despite their oppressive nature towards their own community members and provided paternalistic subsidies to the Muslims. The actions clearly pitted the Hindus and the Muslims against each other and did nothing to actually ensure that, at least on a basic, albeit superficial level, Muslims can be included in the country's social and economic structure in any real sense. This has only further isolated the radical community and augmented the vote-bank of parties like the Congress.

Other actions by secular political parties include 'the appeal of non-Congress parties, excluding the Jan Sangh to create a social alliance of Muslims-Dalit and backwards in the name of anti-Congressism in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the rise of a 'secular camp' in the wake of Shah Bano and Babri Masjid controversies in the late 1980 and 1990s; the continuation of this 'secular' front in Indian politics throughout the 1990s to ensure that the BJP remains isolated and out of power; and finally, the proposal for Muslim reservation by the [Congress-led] United Progressive Alliance I and II, and the best efforts of Sonia Gandhi to introduce the virulent Communal Violence Bill which would have universally penalised the Hindus for every incident of communal violence in the country, have contributed to the making of 'Muslim issues'.¹ This politics has been further supported by the intellectual-academic class of the country in the universities and the schools, where course-books have consistently sought to project a polarised view of history by depicting the Muslims as victims of Hindu majoritarianism. The extent to which the Congress, led by the party President Sonia Gandhi has

exacerbated the exclusivity of Muslims can be grasped from the former PM, Manmohan Singh's statement in the aftermath of the Sachar Committee report of 2006 viz. that Muslims have the first claim over the country's resources.

Politically, that is how the Muslim 'identity' in India has been forged. Even a single question against Muslim radicalism invites a public backlash from the 'secular' class of this country.

The upshot is that – much like Gandhi's Congress's biased approach before Independence – the cases of communal disturbances are treated selectively. Every incident – the Dadri lynching, the assassination of rationalists, the Rohith Vemula suicide and now the JNU controversy – is made an occasion to pin the blame on the so-called 'Hindu radicals'. Ever since the Modi government came to power in 2014, the country has witnessed a consistent trend, with the Opposition picking up themes from academic theories and magnifying the otherwise small incidents in their frame. Thus, while 2014 saw the Opposition training its guns on the government on 'pro-poor' socio-economic issues, 2015 marked the debate on intolerance and 2016 has witnessed the debate on nationalism, in the wake of the JNU controversy.

On the other hand, the country also saw various, comparable, if not worse, incidents implicating the other side, such as the brutal lynching of a young RSS worker in Kerala (how is this less worse than the Dadri lynching?), the vandalisation of offices of a media house by radical Islamists, and the Malda riots in West Bengal. The riots saw a complete failure of the state machinery, with only a handful of arrests from the large crowd of Muslims who had engineered the riots and their bail immediately afterwards. And incidents like the lynching of the RSS worker have become a regular feature in Kerala. The politics of that state, in which the Muslims and the Christians form an elite class, is deeply vitiated. And despite the well-known track record of Kerala as having a 'progressive' record across human development indicators, there is also deep and rising inequality.

Given this, where are we standing at the present juncture?

THE CRITICAL FACTOR

Today, we are at a critical, determining juncture. With Narendra Modi representing the rise of a direct attack on the communal, pro-minority attitudes, the forces on the other side have become more virulent, than ever, in their onslaught.

According to recent research, “Muslims and Christians enjoy unique and discriminatory benefits as compared to Hindus – whether they be SC/ST and Hindu OBCs – under some of these heads:

- State Minority Benefit Schemes
- OBC Benefit Schemes – Approximately more than 50 per cent of Muslims and Christians were moved to the OBC category by National Committee for Backward Classes (NCBC)
- SC/ST Schemes – A big percentage of Muslims and Christians were moved to SC/ST. Hindu SC/STs converted to Christianity continue to enjoy SC/ST benefits with Christian and OBC benefits
- Central Benefit Schemes for Minorities

The schemes listed...are not applicable for Hindu SC/STs.”²

And, with the by-polls in key states around the corner, Muslims are already being appeased by all the political parties. In states like Assam, Kerala and West Bengal, they constitute a critical mass of the population.

With the decades of distorted secular discourse burning in the country, the process of extinguishing it will be painful and protracted.

On a broader front, the immediate factor that will help will be the contestation of Islam itself by the Muslims. Already this is happening in various Muslim organizations in India, as the divisions in Islamic organizations deepen and the silent voices acquire a voice in public. But this will have to be a global movement. It will happen once the situation of Islamic extremism reaches a precipitating point, which it is already nearing. Now the tolerance for such fundamentalism has become zero, across both Western and Gulf

countries. In fact, a top jihadi leader even said that Indian Muslims are in an extremely good condition.³

On the immediate political front, what is necessary is for the Muslims to recognize how they have been deliberately ghettoised by the 'secular' political parties like the Congress. These parties have used a paternalistic and condescending discourse of protection of minorities to ensure that they always remain an isolated community and never merge into the mainstream national fabric. Their vote-banks have thrived on this strategy. This has translated into marginal economic gains and material improvement of these communities. Now, even the Muslims have begun to recognize that nothing has really been done for them. So, for them, the choice of political representation lies between the lesser of the two evils.

What is needed in such a context is for parties like the BJP to ensure that the Muslim vote comes their way. This is a challenge, since the community does not relate to the language of mainstream nationalism. For them, it has always been Muslim first, allegiance to Muslim countries second and Indian last.

In the next issue, we will explore the future of secularism and of Hindu-Muslim relations in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings.

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HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (I8)

XI. THE PROBLEM OF VEDIC INTERPRETATION

“A Hypothesis of the sense of Veda must always proceed, to be sure and sound, from a basis that clearly emerges in the language of the Veda itself. Even if the bulk of its substance be an arrangement of symbols and figures, the sense of which has to be discovered, yet there should be clear indications in the explicit language of the hymns which will guide us to that sense. **Otherwise, the symbols being themselves ambiguous, we shall be in danger of manufacturing a system out of our own imaginations and preferences** instead of discovering the real purport of the figures chosen by the Rishis. In that case, however ingenious and complete our theory, it is likely to be a building in the air, brilliant, but without reality or solidity.

Our first duty, therefore, is to determine whether there is, apart from figure and symbol, in the clear language of the hymns a sufficient kernel of psychological notions to justify us in supposing at all a higher than the barbarous and primitive sense of the Veda. And afterwards we have to find, as far as possible from the internal evidence of the Suktas themselves, the interpretation of each symbol and image and the right psychological function of each of the gods. A firm and not a fluctuating sense, founded on good philological justification and fitting naturally into the context wherever it occurs, must be found for each of the fixed terms of the Veda. For, as has already been said, the language of the hymns is a language fixed and invariable; it is the carefully preserved and scrupulously respected diction consistently expressing either a formal creed and ritual or a traditional doctrine and constant experience. If the language of the Vedic Rishis were free and variable, if their ideas were evidently in a state of flux, shifting and uncertain, a convenient licence and incoherence in the sense we attach to their terminology and the relation we find between their ideas, might be justified or tolerated. But the hymns themselves on the very face of them bear exactly the contrary testimony. We have the right therefore to demand the same fidelity and scrupulousness in the interpreter as in the original he interprets. **There is obviously a**

constant relation between the different notions and cherished terms of the Vedic religion; incoherence and uncertainty in the interpretation will prove, not that the face evidence of the Veda is misleading, but simply that the interpreter has failed to discover the right relations.

If, after this initial labour has been scrupulously and carefully done, it can be shown by a translation of the hymns that the interpretations we had fixed fit in naturally and easily in whatever context, if they are found to illuminate what seemed obscure and to create intelligible and clear coherence where there seemed to be only confusion; if the hymns in their entirety give thus a clear and connected sense and the successive verses show a logical succession of related thoughts, and if the result as a whole be a profound, consistent and antique body of doctrines, then our hypothesis will have a right to stand besides others, to challenge them where they contradict it or to complete them where they are consistent with its findings. **Nor will the probability of our hypothesis be lessened, but rather its validity confirmed if it be found that the body of ideas and doctrines thus revealed in the Veda are a more antique form of subsequent Indian thought and religious experience, the natural parent of Vedanta and Purana.”¹**

“The interpretation of the Rigveda is perhaps the most difficult and disputed question with which the scholarship of today has to deal. This difficulty and dispute are not the creation of present-day criticism; it has existed in different forms since very early times. To what is this incertitude due? Partly, no doubt, it arises from the archaic character of a language in which many of the words were obsolete when ancient Indian scholars tried to systematise the traditional learning about the Veda, and especially the great number of different meanings of which the old Sanskrit words are capable. But there is another and more vital difficulty and problem. The Vedic hymns are full of figures and symbols, – of that there can be no least doubt, – and the question is what do these symbols represent, what is their religious or other significance? Are they simply mythological figures with no depth of meaning behind them? Are they the poetic images of an old Nature-

worship, mythological, astronomical, naturalistic, symbols of the action of physical phenomena represented as the action of the gods? Or have they another and more mystic significance? If this question could be solved with an indubitable certitude, the difficulty of language would be no great obstacle; certain hymns and verses might remain obscure, but the general sense, drift, purport of the ancient hymns could be made clear. But the singular feature of the Veda is that **none of these solutions, at least as they have been hitherto applied, gives a firm and satisfactory outcome. The hymns remain confused, bizarre, incoherent, and the scholars are obliged to take refuge in the gratuitous assumption that this incoherence is a native character of the text and does not arise from their own ignorance of its central meaning.** But so long as we can get no farther than this point, the doubt, the debate must continue.”²

Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of the ambiguous character of the Veda is based on a distinction between the inner (for the initiates) and the outer (for the profane) sense of the Vedic hymns. According to him “... these hymns were written in a stage of religious culture which answered to a similar period in Greece and other ancient countries, – I do not suggest that they were contemporary or identical in cult and idea, – a stage in which there was a double face to the current religion, an outer for the people, *profanum vulgus*, an inner for the initiates, the early period of the Mysteries. **The Vedic Rishis were mystics who reserved their inner knowledge for the initiates; they shielded it from the vulgar by the use of an alphabet of symbols which could not readily be understood without the initiation, but were perfectly clear and systematic when the signs were once known.** These symbols centred around the idea and forms of the sacrifice; for the sacrifice was the universal and central institution of the prevailing cult. The hymns were written round this institution and were understood by the vulgar as ritual chants in praise of the Nature-gods, Indra, Agni, Surya Savitri, Varuna, Mitra and Bhaga, the Aswins, Ribhus, Maruts, Rudra, Vishnu, Saraswati, with the object of provoking by the sacrifice the gifts of the gods, – cows, horses, gold and other forms of wealth of a pastoral people, victory over enemies, safety in travel, sons,

servants, prosperity, every kind of material good fortune. But behind this mask of primitive and materialistic naturalism, lay another and esoteric cult which would reveal itself if we once penetrated the meaning of the Vedic symbols. That once caught and rightly read, the whole Rigveda would become clear, consequent, a finely woven, yet straightforward tissue.

According to my theory the outer sacrifice represented in these esoteric terms an inner sacrifice of self-giving and communion with the gods. These **gods are powers outwardly of physical, inwardly of psychical nature**. Thus Agni outwardly is the physical principle of fire, but inwardly the god of the psychic godward flame, force, will, Tapas; Surya outwardly the solar light, inwardly the god of the illuminating revelatory knowledge; Soma outwardly the moon and the Soma-wine or nectarous moon plant, inwardly the god of the spiritual ecstasy, Ananda. The principal psychical conception of this inner Vedic cult was the idea of the Satyam Ritam Brihat, the Truth, the Law, the Vast. Earth, Air and Heaven symbolised the physical, vital and mental being, but this Truth was situated in the greater heaven, base of a triple Infinity actually and explicitly mentioned in the Vedic riks, and it meant therefore a state of spiritual and supramental illumination. To get beyond earth and sky to Swar, the Sun-world, seat of this illumination, home of the gods, foundation and seat of the Truth, was the achievement of the early Fathers, *pûrve pitarah*, and of the seven Angiras Rishis who founded the Vedic religion. The solar gods, children of Infinity, Adityah, were born in the Truth and the Truth was their home, but they descended into the lower planes and had in each plane their appropriate functions, their mental, vital and physical cosmic motions. They were the guardians and increasers of the Truth in man and by the Truth, *ritasya pathâ*, led him to felicity and immortality. They had to be called into the human being and increased in their functioning, formed in him, brought in or born, *devavîti*, extended, *devatâti*, united in their universality, *vaisvadevya*.

The sacrifice was represented at once as a giving and worship, a battle and a journey. It was the centre of a battle between the

Gods aided by Aryan men on one side and the Titans or destroyers on the opposite faction, Dasyus, Vritras, Panis, Rakshasas, later called Daityas and Asuras, between the powers of the Truth or Light and the powers of falsehood, division, darkness. It was a journey, because the sacrifice travelled from earth to the gods in their heaven, but also because it made ready the path by which man himself travelled to the home of the Truth. This journey opposed by the Dasyus, thieves, robbers, tearers, besiegers (vritras), was itself a battle. The giving was an inner giving. All the offerings of the outer sacrifice, the cow and its yield, the horse, the Soma were symbols of the dedication of inner powers and experiences to the Lords of Truth. The divine gifts, result of the outer sacrifice, were also symbols of inner divine gifts, the cows of the divine light symbolised by the herds of the Sun, the horse of strength and power, the son of the inner godhead or divine man created by the sacrifice, and so through the whole list. This symbolic duplication was facilitated by the double meaning of the Vedic words. *Go*, for instance, means both cow and ray; the cows of the dawn and the sun, Homer's *boes Eelioio*, are the rays of the Sungod, Lord of Revelation, even as in Greek mythology Apollo the Sungod is also the Master of poetry and of prophecy. ***Ghrita means clarified butter, but also the bright thing; soma means the wine of the moon plant, but also delight, honey, sweetness, madhu.*** This is the conception, all other features are subsidiary to this central idea. The suggestion seems to me a perfectly simple one, neither out of the way and recondite, nor unnatural to the mentality of the early human peoples.”³

An a priori objection that can be brought against such a theory by Western scholarship is that “... there is no need for all this mystification, that there is no sign of it in the Veda unless we choose to read it into the primitive mythology, that it is not justified by the history of religion or of the Vedic religion, that it was a refinement impossible to an ancient and barbaric mind. None of these objections can really stand. The Mysteries in Egypt and Greece and elsewhere were of a very ancient standing and they proceeded precisely on this symbolic principle, by which outward myth and ceremony and cult

objects stood for secrets of an inward life or knowledge. It cannot therefore be argued that this mentality was non-existent, impossible in antique times or any more impossible or improbable in India, the country of the Upanishads, than in Egypt and Greece. The history of ancient religion does show a transmutation of physical Nature-gods into representatives of psychical powers or rather an addition of psychical to physical functions; but the latter in some instances gave place to the less external significance. I have given the example of Helios replaced in later times by Apollo. Just so in the Vedic religion Surya undoubtedly becomes a god of inner light, the famous Gayatri verse and its esoteric interpretation are there to prove it as well as the constant appeal of the Upanishads to Vedic riks or Vedic symbols taken in a psychological and spiritual sense, eg, the four closing verses of the Isha Upanishad. Hermes, Athena represent in classical mythology psychical functions, but were originally Nature gods, Athena probably a dawn goddess. I contend that Usha in the Veda shows us this transmutation in its commencement. Dionysus the wine-god was intimately connected with the Mysteries; I assign a similar role to Soma, the wine-god of the Vedas.

But the question is whether there is anything to show that there was actually such a doubling of functions in the Veda. Now in the first place, how was the transition effected from the alleged purely materialistic Nature-worship of the Vedas to the extraordinary psychological and spiritual knowledge of the Upanishads unsurpassed in their subtlety and sublimity in ancient times? There are three possible explanations. First, this sudden spirituality may have been brought in from outside; it is hardily suggested by some scholars that it was taken from an alleged highly spiritual non-Aryan southern culture; but this is an assumption, a baseless hypothesis for which no proof has been advanced; it rests as a surmise in the air without foundation. Secondly, it may have developed from within by some such transmutation as I have suggested, but subsequent to the composition of all but the latest Vedic hymns. Still even then it was effected on the basis of the Vedic hymns; **the Upanishads claim to be a development from the Vedic knowledge, Vedanta repeatedly appeals to Vedic**

texts, regards Veda as a book of knowledge. The men who gave the Vedantic knowledge are everywhere represented as teachers of the Veda. Why then should we rigidly assume that this development took place subsequent to the composition of the bulk of the Vedic mantras? For the third possibility is that the whole ground had already been prepared consciently by the Vedic mystics. I do not say that the inner Vedic knowledge was identical with the Brahmovada. Its terms were different, its substance was greatly developed, much lost or rejected, much added, old ideas shed, new interpretations made, the symbolic element reduced to a minimum and replaced by clear and open philosophic phrases and conceptions. Certainly, **the Vedic mantras had already become obscure and ill-understood at the time of the Brahmanas.** And still the groundwork may have been there from the beginning. It is, of course, in the end a question of fact; but my present contention is only that there is no *a priori* impossibility, but rather a considerable probability or at least strong possibility in favour of my suggestion. I will put my argument in this way. The later hymns undoubtedly contain a beginning of the Brahmovada; how did it begin, had it no root origins in the earlier mantras? **It is certain that some of the gods, Varuna, Saraswati, had a psychological as well as a physical function.** I go farther and say that this double function can everywhere be traced in the Veda with regard to other gods, as for instance, Agni and even the Maruts. Why not then pursue the inquiry on these lines and see how far it will go? There is at least a *prima facie* ground for consideration, and to begin with, I demand no more. An examination of the actual text of the hymns can alone show how far the inquiry will be justified or produce results of a high importance."⁴

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THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (17)

2. INDIAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

VI. THE RECORD OF THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIA IN EVERY FIELD

“To say that there has been no great or vivid activity of life in India, that she has had no great personalities with the mythical exception of Buddha and the other pale exception of Asoka, that she has never shown any will-power and never done any great thing, is so contrary to all the facts of history that only a devil’s advocate in search of a case could advance it at all or put it with that crude vehemence. India has lived and lived greatly, whatever judgment one may pass on her ideas and institutions. What is meant after all by life and when is it that we most fully and greatly live? Life is surely nothing but the creation and active self-expression of man’s spirit, powers, capacities, his will to be and think and create and love and do and achieve. When that is wanting or, since it cannot be absolutely wanting, depressed, held under, discouraged or inert, whether by internal or external causes, then we may say that there is a lack of life. ... The ancient and mediaeval life of India was not wanting in any of the things that make up the vivid interesting activity of human existence. On the contrary, it was extraordinarily full of colour and interest. ... India has been as much a home of serious and solid realities, of a firm grappling with the problems of thought and life, of measured and wise organisation and great action as any other considerable centre of civilisation. ... The colour and magnificence have been its aesthetic side; she has had great dreams and high and splendid imaginations, for that too is wanted for the completeness of our living; but also deep philosophical and religious thinking, a wide and searching criticism of life, a great political and social order, a strong ethical tone and a persistent vigour of individual and communal living. That is a combination which means life in all its fullness, though deficient, it may be, except in extraordinary cases, in the more violent egoistic perversities and exaggerations which some minds seem to take

for a proof of the highest vigour of existence.

In what field indeed has not India attempted, achieved, created, and in all on a large scale and yet with much attention to completeness of detail? Of her spiritual and philosophic achievement there can be no real question. They stand there as the Himalayas stand upon the earth in the phrase of Kalidasa, *pṛthivyā iva mṇadaśśā*, 'as if earth's measuring rod,' mediating still between earth and heaven, measuring the finite, casting their plummet far into the infinite, plunging their extremities into the upper and lower seas of the superconscient and the subliminal, the spiritual and the natural being. But if her philosophies, her religious disciplines, her long list of great spiritual personalities, thinkers, founders, saints are her greatest glory, as was natural to her temperament and governing idea, they are by no means her sole glories, nor are the others dwarfed by their eminence. It is now proved that in science she went farther than any country before the modern era, and even Europe owes the beginning of her physical science to India as much as to Greece, although not directly but through the medium of the Arabs. And, even if she had only gone as far, that would have been sufficient proof of a strong intellectual life in an ancient culture. Especially in mathematics, astronomy and chemistry, the chief elements of ancient science, she discovered and formulated much and well and anticipated by force of reasoning or experiment some of the scientific ideas and discoveries which Europe first arrived at much later, but was able to base more firmly by her new and completer method. She was well-equipped in surgery and her system of medicine survives to this day and has still its value, though it declined intermediately in knowledge and is only now recovering its vitality.

In literature, in the life of the mind, she lived and built greatly. Not only has she the Vedas, Upanishads and Gita, not to speak of less supreme but still powerful or beautiful work in that field, unequalled monuments of religious and philosophic poetry, a kind in which Europe has never been able to do anything much of any

great value, but that vast national structure, the Mahabharata, gathering into its cycle the poetic literature and expressing so completely the life of a long formative age, that it is said of it in a popular saying which has the justice if also the exaggeration of a too apt epigram, 'What is not in this Bharata, is not in Bharatavarsha (India),' and the Ramayana, the greatest and most remarkable poem of its kind, that most sublime and beautiful epic of ethical idealism and a heroic semi-divine human life, and the marvellous richness, fullness and colour of the poetry and romance of highly cultured thought, sensuous enjoyment, imagination, action and adventure which makes up the romantic literature of her classical epoch. Nor did this long continuous vigour of creation cease with the loss of vitality by the Sanskrit tongue, but was paralleled and carried on in a mass of great or of beautiful work in her other languages, in Pali first and Prakrit, much unfortunately lost,* and Tamil, afterwards in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and other tongues. The long tradition of her architecture, sculpture and painting speaks for itself, even in what survives after all the ruin of stormy centuries: whatever judgment may be formed of it by the narrower school of Western aesthetics, – and at least its fineness of execution and workmanship cannot be denied, nor the power with which it renders the Indian mind, – it testifies at least to a continuous creative activity. And creation is proof of life and great creation of greatness of life.

But these things are, it may be said, the things of the mind, and the intellect, imagination and aesthetic mind of India may have been creatively active, but yet her outward life depressed, dull, poor, gloomy with the hues of asceticism, void of willpower and personality, ineffective, null. That would be a hard proposition to swallow; for literature, art and science do not flourish in a void of life. But here too what are the facts? India has not only had the long roll of her great saints, sages, thinkers, religious founders,

* E.g. the once famous work in Paisachi of which the *Kathāsaritsāgara* is an inferior version.

poets, creators, scientists, scholars, legists; she has had her great rulers, administrators, soldiers, conquerors, heroes, men with the strong active will, the mind that plans and the seeing force that builds. She has warred and ruled, traded and colonised and spread her civilisation, built polities and organised communities and societies, done all that makes the outward activity of great peoples. A nation tends to throw out its most vivid types in that line of action which is most congenial to its temperament and expressive of its leading idea, and it is the great saints and religious personalities that stand at the head in India and present the most striking and continuous roll-call of greatness, just as Rome lived most in her warriors and statesmen and rulers. The Rishi in ancient India was the outstanding figure with the hero just behind, while in later times the most striking feature is the long uninterrupted chain from Buddha and Mahavira to Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Nanak, Ramdas and Tukaram and beyond them to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and Dayananda. But there have been also the remarkable achievements of statesmen and rulers, from the first dawn of ascertainable history which comes in with the striking figures of Chandragupta, Chanakya, Asoka, the Gupta emperors and goes down through the multitude of famous Hindu and Mahomedan figures of the middle age to quite modern times. In ancient India there was the life of republics, oligarchies, democracies, small kingdoms of which no detail of history now survives, afterwards the long effort at empire-building, the colonisation of Ceylon and the Archipelago, the vivid struggles that attended the rise and decline of the Pathan and Mogul dynasties, the Hindu struggle for survival in the south, the wonderful record of Rajput heroism and the great upheaval of national life in Maharashtra penetrating to the lowest strata of society, the remarkable episode of the Sikh Khalsa. An adequate picture of that outward life still remains to be given; once given it would be the end of many fictions. All this mass of action was not accomplished by men without mind and will and vital force, by pale shadows of humanity in whom the vigorous manhood had been crushed out under the burden of a gloomy and all-effacing

asceticism, nor does it look like the sign of a metaphysically minded people of dreamers averse to life and action. It was not men of straw or lifeless and will-less dummies or thin-blooded dreamers who thus acted, planned, conquered, built great systems of administration, founded kingdoms and empires, figured as great patrons of poetry and art and architecture or, later, resisted heroically imperial power and fought for the freedom of clan or people. Nor was it a nation devoid of life which maintained its existence and culture and still lived on and broke out constantly into new revivals under the ever increasing stress of continuously adverse circumstances. The modern Indian revival, religious, cultural, political, called now sometimes a renaissance, which so troubles and grieves the minds of her critics, is only a repetition under altered circumstances, in an adapted form, in a greater though as yet less vivid mass of movement, of a phenomenon which has constantly repeated itself throughout a millennium of Indian history.

And it must be remembered that by virtue of its culture and its system the whole nation shared in the common life. In all countries in the past the mass has indeed lived with a less active and vivid force than the few, – sometimes with the mere elements of life, not with even any beginning of finished richness, – nor has modern civilisation yet got rid of this disparity, though it has opened the advantages or at least the initial opportunities of a first-hand life and thought and knowledge to a greater number. But in ancient India, though the higher classes led and had the lion's share of the force and wealth of life, the people too lived and until much later times intensely though on a lesser scale and with a more diffused and less concentrated force. Their religious life was more intense than that of any other country; they drank in with remarkable facility the thoughts of the philosophers and the influence of the saints; they heard and followed Buddha and the many who came after him; they were taught by the Sannyasins and sang the songs of the Bhaktas and Bauls and thus possessed some of the most delicate and beautiful poetical literature ever produced; they contributed many of the greatest names in our religion, and from the outcastes

themselves came saints revered by the whole community. In ancient Hindu times they had their share of political life and power; they were the people, the *viśā* of the Veda, of whom the kings were the leaders and from them as well as from the sacred or princely families were born the Rishis; they held their villages as little self-administered republics; in the time of the great kingdoms and empires they sat in the municipalities and urban councils and the bulk of the typical royal Council described in the books of political science was composed of commoners, Vaishyas, and not of Brahmin Pundits and Kshatriya nobles; for a long time they could impose their will on their kings, without the need of a long struggle, by a single demonstration of their displeasure. So long as Hindu kingdoms existed, something of all this survived, and even the entrance into India of central Asian forms of absolutist despotism, never an indigenous Indian growth, left some remnant of the old edifice still in being. The people had their share too in art and poetry, their means by which the essence of Indian culture was disseminated through the mass, a system of elementary education in addition to the great universities of ancient times, a type of popular dramatic representation which was in some parts of the country alive even yesterday; they gave India her artists and architects and many of the famous poets in the popular tongues; they preserved by the force of their long past culture an innate aesthetic sense and faculty of which the work of Indian craftsmen remained a constant and striking evidence until it was destroyed or degraded by the vulgarisation and loss of aesthetic sense and beauty which has been one of the results of modern civilisation. Nor was the life of India ascetic, gloomy or sad, as the too logical mind of the critic would have it be. The outward form is more quiet than in other countries, there is a certain gravity and reserve before strangers which deceives the foreign observer, and in recent times asceticism and poverty and an increase of puritanic tendency had their effect, but the life portrayed in the literature of the country is glad and vivid, and even now despite certain varieties of temperament and many forces making for depression laughter,

humour, an unobtrusive elasticity and equanimity in the vicissitudes of life are very marked features of the Indian character.

The whole theory of a want of life and will and activity in the Indian people as a result of their culture is then a myth.”⁶⁷

Reference:

1. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, pp.242-49, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Form IV (see rule 8)

Statement about the ownership and other particulars about the newspaper "The Resurgent India" to be published in the first issue every year after the last day of February.

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6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital:

I, Mrs. Suman Sharma, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

March 2016

(sd) Suman Sharma
Signature of Publisher

THE TASK BEFORE US

“The debasement of our mind, character and tastes by a grossly commercial, materialistic and insufficient European education is a fact on which the young Nationalism has always insisted. The practical destruction of our artistic perceptions and the plastic skill and fineness of eye and hand which once gave our productions pre-eminence, distinction and mastery of the European markets, is also a thing accomplished. Most vital of all, the spiritual and intellectual divorce from the past which the present schools and universities have effected, has beggared the nation of the originality, high aspiration and forceful energy which can alone make a nation free and great. To reverse the process and recover what we have lost, is undoubtedly the first object to which we ought to devote ourselves. And as the loss of originality, aspiration and energy was the most vital of all these losses, so their recovery should be our first and most important objective.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.08, p.245)