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A Monthly National Review

June 2015



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

Year 6

Issue 3

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

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

Year 6

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

– The Mother

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

The Crisis in Delhi: The Politics of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

One doesn't know where to begin when talking about the mounting 'crisis' in Delhi. Each day has brought out to the public view a new conflict within or outside the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) ever since it came to power in Delhi a few months ago. The crisis has now resulted in a democracy and governance deficit on the one hand and of politics on the other hand. It reveals the superficial reality of a formation like the AAP in Indian politics. And, more than revealing the failure of the kind of empty aspirations it represents, the AAP crisis also highlights the failure of an imported Western mode of political process in the Indian context.

On the face of it, the AAP crisis is characterized by two facets: internal squabbling and outer conflict. Internally, the party was never seen to possess a democratic or mature way of functioning. Even before it assumed power in Delhi, it was well-known that the AAP was a largely one-man show with Arvind Kejriwal at the helm. He could never manage various members – like Kumar Vishwas and others – some of whom publicly spoke out against his method of dictatorship and others deserted the party for various reasons. Many celebrities and famous people who had joined the AAP were quick to desert it out of disappointed expectations, much before Kejriwal came to power in Delhi. These people had genuinely believed that AAP would bring some change. Even till recently, some of its supporters were under the delusion that whatever else AAP may be, it is better than BJP and Congress, on fronts such as corruption and people power. These unwarranted expectations were shaken when one of the biggest internal splits of the party took place a few months ago, resulting in the ouster of intellectuals like Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan and Prof. Anand Kumar. The ouster of these academicians disillusioned a huge section of AAP supporters consisting of youth from universities like DU and JNU. As usual, like all of the AAP's internal conflicts, this bitter drama too was played out in the public

domain clearly revealing a lot of other things, such as instances of corruption, exposure of incriminating taped conversations where Kejriwal is heard exhorting his MLAs to engage in horse-trading to 'buy' the legislators from opposition parties and other instances of internal corruption within the party.

Once this phase of the crisis got old, we thought that we would now hear something from the Delhi government about, at least, its short-term governance agenda. But that was not to be. The Delhi government is unique in that it has not even pretended to have taken a single initiative since it came to power. When it is not engaged in public theatrics, it is harassing – and, of course, 'protesting', which is its favourite mode of harassment – the central government to release more money for Delhi, complaining that it won't be able to govern without funds. This brings us to the other conflict – with the AAP at its centre – which unfolded recently. The persistent clash with the centre took on a new turn when it morphed into the conflict between the AAP and the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Najeeb Jung.

Like some of the centre-state conflicts, the current conflict too occurred over the issue of appointments. In the temporary absence of the Chief Secretary, KK Sharma, Najeeb Jung appointed Shakuntala Gamlin as the Acting Chief Secretary on 15th May. This appointment was contested by Kejriwal on the ground that Gamlin had previously tried to 'trick' his government into giving more money to the power companies in Delhi. There was no good reason for the L-G to bow down before Kejriwal's demands, so when Gamlin took over in accordance with the L-G's wishes, Kejriwal accused the BJP of playing politics through the L-G. Subsequently, when Kejriwal accepted Gamlin's appointment with a threat to monitor her, other conflicts followed. Appointment and removal of a number of bureaucrats became an issue for contest between the L-G and the Delhi government. Here also it was Kejriwal who first started the conflict, as immediately after the Gamlin controversy, Kejriwal sacked the principal secretary for services, Anindo Majumdar who had notified Gamlin's appointment. He also subsequently appointed the principal

secretary for general administration by bypassing Jung altogether. More recently, the AAP again took a controversial step when it sourced police personnel from Bihar and trashed the appointment by the L-G of MK Meena as the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) chief. They were defeated in this decision, but subsequently Kejriwal tried to transfer Delhi's Home Secretary, Dharam Pal, who had notified Meena's appointment – a step which was again struck down by the L-G – a constitutional action on the L-G's part as land, law and order and police fall under the jurisdiction of the L-G. In each of the issues, the question was not one of constitutionality, but of the AAP's aggressive confrontation with the centre, through the medium of the L-G.

The most recent crises to engulf AAP are those of the fake degrees of its law minister Jitendra Tomar and the domestic violence allegations against AAP member and previous law minister Somnath Bharti, who was also accused of prosecuting the Africans in a Khirki Extension raid last year. The fact that Kejriwal had personally stood by Tomar a few months back when some party members accused him of forging degrees speaks volumes about Kejriwal's double-faced approach to corruption.

Besides this identity crisis that the AAP and its members are now facing, there is also a clear-cut 'governance crisis' in Delhi, which has been ongoing since Kejriwal took over, but which has just been acknowledged in the public domain viz. AAP's thwarted unrealistic promises of delivering electricity at low prices and the waste management crisis. More than 10,000 tonnes of waste accumulated in less than 10 days in East Delhi because of the inability of the government to deal with the strike by the workers demanding the payment of their long overdue salaries.

Right and Wrong: Was Kejriwal Justified?

A study of the events, as they unfolded, clearly shows that the answer is no, due to several reasons.

First, it was AAP's Manish Sisodia who had initially proposed two names to the L-G to choose from, in appointing the acting Chief

Secretary – Shakuntala Gamlin and Parimal Rai. He had also indicated to the L-G to select Rai instead of Gamlin. Why he proposed Gamlin's name among the two is something to be wondered about. The L-G, disregarding AAP's 'indications' chose Gamlin for the simple reason that she was more senior – a perfectly legitimate decision. Moreover, in what came as a huge blow to the AAP, Rai himself rejected his nomination for the post of the acting Chief Secretary. Despite this, the AAP persisted in opposing Gamlin's appointment and changed it into a full-blown centre-state issue, by levelling baseless charges against the centre.

Second, besides the above obvious catch, other factors also show that Kejriwal had instigated the conflict for a baseless, personal reason and not the other way round. Even if Jung had appointed Gamlin, why would Kejriwal object on the ground that she took the side of the power companies, since the appointment was only a temporary one? The Chief Secretary was on a leave for only 10 days, while the tussle of Delhi government with the power companies has been an issue since more than a decade! Even Kejriwal would recognize that 10 days of Gamlin in a temporary position would not make his government hostage to the power companies, so the public drama clearly points out to a usual AAP ploy to gain public attention.

Third, legal experts – who are also, ideologically, left-of-the-centre intellectuals – proffered their view on the crisis. Their position, unsurprisingly, backed Kejriwal. The arguments were that Kejriwal's was an elected government and, therefore, represented the 'will of the people' (an argument given by several political parties), and that, legally, the L-G cannot impose his choice on the government as the initial decision has to be taken by the government and then sent to L-G for approval. Here it should be noted that the Union Territory of Delhi is unlike any other U.T. and State because of the physical presence of the Central Government over there. There are subjects such as police, land etc. where constitutionally the L-G is entitled to exercise full right on the behalf of the Central Government.

Kejriwal was really playing politics over appointments. Having

been defeated over the Gamlin issue, Kejriwal sought to play politics of revenge by nullifying other existing appointments and new appointments notified by the L-G.

AAP in the Near Future

Seldom have political parties written a script of their own demise as clearly as the AAP has done. Its transition from an ambitious tributary of the Anna Hazare movement to a political party has been an abject failure. Forget about Delhi, it could not tailor itself to the reality of the rest of India, for two main reasons.

First, even its outer form, the AAP has simply been the partial political expression of middle and working class discontent, concentrated in the Delhi population. Pinched by economic deterioration, loss of international prestige and the legacy of corruption left by the Congress, the people saw the AAP as an alternative. There is nothing new in this trajectory. It has been replicated world-over. The rise of extreme Left and far-right movements all over Europe and in the UK – such as, the Five Star movement in Italy, the Independent Party in UK, the Golden Dawn party in Greece, rise of Le Pen's party in France and the anti-Islamic PEGIDA movement in Germany – are similar, in idea, to the AAP's rise in Delhi.

This never really meant anything long-term. It was obvious, right from the beginning, that AAP was unlikely to last long. Every party has had to cultivate a strong grassroots base and mobilization consistently for a number of years. The AAP has no such organizational base. Its voters keep fluctuating, and, as the by-polls showed, it hasn't been able to touch the core BJP vote-bank in Delhi. If AAP has attracted the disgruntled voters of the Congress, it should have displayed the political acumen to retain them. But, as the recent events show, it could not even display a pretense of governance, let alone taking any real initiatives.

Second, the AAP suffers from a fundamental flaw – not an organizational one, but at its roots. Its functioning, ideology and

process clearly symbolize assumptions based on the Western conception of national life. It started with big dreams about petty realities. It made the mistake of assuming that conversations about a 'rules-based system' in the Indian context meant something, forgetting that the Indian national life can never be circumscribed or imposed upon by mere formal rules and institutions. And if this were not enough, the AAP has also a peculiar psychological character – it can only survive by feeding on continuous public drama. There is nothing it can deliver on the governance front which, even a corrupt party like Congress, could deliver – after all, there is nothing to be delivered under the present conditions of its functioning. The AAP seems to have fallen prey to the necessity of asserting its identity through constant confrontations and baseless dramas. As a result, what AAP really achieved was the opposite – a total de-institutionalization and chaos within itself – of what it sorely needed.

The AAP does not seem to us to signify anything long-term even in the context of Delhi politics.

The Roots of Religious Conversion in India

PART – I

Controversy Over Conversions: An Analytical Overview

The last few months have witnessed the re-emergence in Indian politics of the issue of religious conversions. This issue has come up at an opportune time. With all the so-called 'secular' forces trying to mobilize against the rapid changes from the Congress-era status quo, the issue of conversion presents an opportunity to reveal the farce that is often carried out in the name of freedom of expression and right to propagate one's religion.

The Current Scenario

The last few months have seen the revival of the issue of Love Jihad and conversions by Christian missionaries. Love Jihad, as the term suggests, refers to a social phenomenon wherein men from the Muslim community engage in a concerted, underhanded campaign based on 'love' to trap women from other religions with the purpose of converting them to Islam, mostly under the guise of marriage.

The controversy over Love Jihad first surfaced in Kerala in 2009 and has ever since remained in the public discourse. It re-surfaced last year when the BJP sought to leverage the issue of conversions as its key election campaign in the Uttar Pradesh by-polls. However, despite the fact that Love Jihad came into the public eye only in 2009, the roots of the problem are much deeper. In a judgement on a case on this issue by Kerala High Court, the court, quoting a police report on Kerala, stated that the roots of Love Jihad, with the express purpose of conversions, can be traced to organized efforts by Muslim organizations in this direction as early as 1996.¹ This confirmed the erstwhile Kerala Chief Minister's – VS Achuthanandan from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – position that strict action

needed to be taken against conversions due to Love Jihad.² Furthermore, in 2012, the new Kerala Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy belonging to the Congress party, gave statistics in the state legislature stating that out of the total number of conversions to Islam, between 2009³ and 2012, 2667 were women from both Hindu and Christian religions⁴, whereas the number of conversions to these religions was only 81!

Despite the clear evidence that was amassed when conversion through Love Jihad was at its peak, the debate over Love Jihad in India is politicized in terms of the minority question. This is a wrong approach. Conversions in the name of love are not peculiar to India or confined to the Hindu-Muslim question. They are happening in other countries too and have raised the angst of other religious communities as well. Not only had the Hindu and Christian organizations joined hands to counter connived Islamic conversions in Kerala, but there was also clear evidence of such conversions happening in the United Kingdom, where these manipulative conversions are referred to as 'grooming'.

The rise of conversions to Islam is also a product of the aggressive proselytizing tendency of that religion, while another proselytizing religion – the Christianity – is in a mode of major decline world-over, especially in the West. According to the latest analysis of statistics⁵ on religion in a 2014 article in *The New Indian Express*, Islam is spreading rapidly in Europe as the followers of Christianity lose faith. In Britain, Anglicanism has been overtaken by Islam as the dominant religion, due to factors like ageing population, rapid 'secularization' and global onslaught of aggressive Islamism. Britain has seen the closure of about 10,000 churches since 1960, and Christian organisations predict that another 4,000 churches will be closed by 2020. More strikingly, 2013 census statistics⁶ released by the British Office for National Statistics (ONS) documents that more than half the Christian population in Britain is over the age of 50, and fewer than half the population under the age of 25 describe themselves as Christian, in contrast to the fact that one in ten people under the age of 25 is now Muslim. The current situation is no better

in the rest of Europe. Not only is France home to the largest Muslim population in Europe, even the number of mosques being built has doubled to 2000 in the last one decade, and with an estimated 70,000 French citizens converting to Islam in recent years.⁷ Large-scale conversions have also been occurring in Sweden, Germany and Spain.

Although, Christianity is losing sway, especially, as seen above, in the West, this should not preclude the recognition of its fundamentally proselytizing nature and its struggle to establish a foothold in failing times. Evangelical missionary organizations are especially active in Asia and, increasingly, in Africa also. Recent reports confirm a truth that is already well-known – missionary organizations engage in widespread conversions in the name of providing humanitarian relief in conflict-ridden areas of Africa and with the vaunted aim of doing socio-economic good in other developing countries, including powerful countries like India and China. In Nepal, which used to be a Hindu kingdom where conversion was banned, missionary activity gained ground after 2007 with the adoption of a ‘secular’ Constitution. The rapid rise in Christian population in Nepal provoked a backlash from the Hindu, Buddhist and Kiranta communities.⁸ Whether the Christian missionaries act as agents on the behalf of the American government can only be speculated upon. However, the fact remains that they get massive funding from leading official ‘development’ organizations like the USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and use these funds for proselytizing rather than promoting aid and development work as they are required to do under the USAID ‘rules’. Some of such Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), controversially active in India, include Human Life International established in Goa in 2011, and Samaritan’s Purse which is active in both India and Africa and whose deep disdain for Hinduism in India is funded by both Republicans and Democrats in the US, and which is amongst the top ten recipients of the USAID funding.

These organizations engage in numerous innovative ways to attract more followers within the fold of Christianity. Much as in the case of Islam, the conversions are not based on outright coercion as

was the case before the 19th century in India. Instead, they go even a step further than Islam in attracting followers by providing economic incentives, gifts, promises of equality and liberation from the caste hierarchies of the Hindu religion and a range of material and spiritual promises. Samaritan's Purse, for instance, in what is called 'Operation Christmas Child' world-over⁹, delivers packaged gifts along with the Bible to the 'needy' children of the developing and underdeveloped countries, to eventually make them attend Church and convert to Christianity.

Besides these American government funded missions, there are even more non-US government funded organizations that do not even have to use the pretext of separating humanitarian work from proselytizing work to carry on their evangelizing activities.¹⁰ This has recently evoked the ire of the central government and falls in line with the government's sustained crackdown on foreign-funded NGOs which have been violating the FCRA rules.

An Anti-conversion Law

Besides the Indian government's crackdown on foreign-funded NGOs and Faith Based Organizations, several ministers of the current government have also proposed the promulgation of an anti-conversion law in response to the Parliamentary logjam instigated by the opposition parties, in the Winter session of 2014, on the issue of 'ghar wapsi' campaigns by Hindu organizations. Our colonial administrators did not have any laws against conversion,¹¹ even though some princely states had such a law.¹² Despite the fact that post-Independence, there has been no anti-conversion law on a national scale due to want of political support,¹³ several individual states – like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan – have wide-ranging anti-conversion laws.

At present, the proposal for an anti-conversion law has placed the 'secular' forces in a confused spot, while the Hindu organizations support the proposition. This is because Hinduism is a fundamentally non-proselytizing religion. However, Islam and, especially

Christianity, being proselytizing religions will suffer if an anti-conversion law is put in place. On the one hand, secularists argue for religious equality before law, and object when organizations from the majority religion engage in re-conversions or 'ghar wapsi' campaigns. On the other hand, a proposal to ban conversions is met with stiff opposition as it is supposedly the right of freedom of expression under Articles 25-30 and also represents 'affirmative action' for the cause of minorities and their right to 'profess, practice and propagate' their religion. In all this, they fail to recognize the fact that India has the third largest Muslim population in the world, that Islam and Christianity are globally expansive religions, and that, minorities are not persecuted in India as a policy, unlike the case with some Islamic states.

In fact, thanks to the current 'secular' laws, history bears witness to the marked increase in the activities of missionaries in India after Independence, many of which were those expelled from China by the Communists.¹⁴ Suppressed voices such as those of K.M. Panikkar and the Niyogi Committee of 1956, from within the establishment, which reported on the rise of missionary activities post-Independence were marginalized in the mainstream secular discourse, while judgments like the Supreme Court judgment of 1954, by vesting the fundamental right to propagate with the non-citizens as well, helped in these activities. In fact, their aggressive onslaught, funded by foreign countries,¹⁵ post-Independence, was seen clearly when the missionaries supported the isolation of the tribals from the mainstream, to convert them, and by portraying the government as consisting of infidels.

According to the Niyogi Committee report,¹⁶ post-Independence, Christian missionaries followed a threefold policy, which clearly revealed their ambitious aims of conversions:

(1) to resist the progress of national unity... (2) to emphasise the difference in the attitude towards the principle of coexistence between India and America... (3) to take advantage of the freedom accorded by the Constitution of India for the propagation of religion,

and to create a Christian party in the Indian democracy on lines of the Muslim League ultimately to stake out a claim for a separate State, or at least to create a militant minority.

They engaged in extensive conversions among the backward castes and tribals through their schools, hospitals, employing *pracharaks* and moneylending services where the loan was waived in case of conversion to Christianity.

The appalling statistics, provided by the 1971 census data on population corroborate this fact.¹⁷ Between 1951 and 1971, the percentage increase in population of Christians in India was 69.4%, while the general population increase was only 51.7%. In the North East, the situation was worse.¹⁸ These figures corroborate the historical reality of Christian conversions in India, abetted by the removal of restrictions which even the British had placed over the missionaries.

Yet the secular view on an anti-conversion law paints the proselytizing minority missions in a victimized light. In this context, another argument put forwarded by the secular intellectuals is that forced conversions would automatically be covered under the criminal law, and an anti-conversion law would only hinder voluntary conversions especially by the lower castes who feel a sense of 'bargaining power' in being able to change their material circumstances by changing their religion.¹⁹ This is a common argument used by Christian organizations active in the South. The facts, however, belie it on two counts.

One, it is hardly 'voluntary' or liberation when people feel the need to change their religion out of allure for only marginally better economic circumstances. The realization of the promise of a better economic future may remain an unfulfilled dream, as seen in many studies done by sociologists in Southern states. In fact, the promise of economic betterment through re-conversion has equal, if not better, chances of providing a good material future, since it is not based on traditional discrimination or ousting of lower castes but the very opposite.

Two, do the Hindu lower caste converts to Christianity really

achieve social liberation? This argument has been seriously outdated for years in the light of the numerous research studies that have been undertaken by sociologists like M.N Srinivas in states like Kerala. True to its spirit, India has accommodated Christianity in its fold, instead of remaining in confrontation with its structures. Down south, Christianity is itself characterized by deep caste hierarchies, which definitely make life oppressive for the 'untouchable Christians' or 'Dalit Christians'. In fact, the top-ranked caste viz. the Syrian Christians prefer to intermarry with the Nambudiri Brahmins rather than lower caste Christians. The lower caste Christians have increasingly been agitating to be recognized by the Indian law in the same way as Hindu Scheduled Castes are recognized.

These realities belie the secularist arguments against an anti-conversion law on the ground that conversions are 'voluntary' and result in better economic and social circumstances.

Deep-rootedness of the Conversion Psyche: Islam and Christianity

The aggressive proselytizing onslaught of Islam and Christianity is aided by constructions of the modern Enlightenment social philosophy. The general tendency of the Enlightenment thought has been to re-define the individual and collective role of the person in accordance with rational-materialistic modes of life. Liberal/individualistic as well as varying degrees of socialist/totalitarian/collective philosophies of life are pervaded by this understanding. Even the so-called recent 'post-modern' thought, which claims to transcend the biases of the liberal and collectivist thought suffers from this fundamental rational-materialistic bias, beginning from the same assumptions about 'reality' that the earlier thought did. Even though these modern philosophies assert a division between 'modernity' and 'tradition', they yet do not hesitate to use spiritual categories to couch their ideas – for instance, the re-definition of the 'Self' and 'liberation' is in terms of the purely individualist-materialist self, based on the selfish assertion of material freedom and 'liberation' from material structures of society.

Proselytizing religions play on, and appeal to, the formations and constructions of people living in such a society. It is, thus, that Christianity claims to mobilize factors like religio-social discontent with Hindu social structures such as the caste system, and uses philanthropy and charity work to show itself to be the upholder of modern ideas of equality, liberation and brotherhood. Similarly, the Islamic idea of jihad through love exploits the modern-materialistic definitions of individual and social identity to their advantage, making the targeted women feel as if they are asserting their identity or claiming the 'freedom of expression' by defying the dictates of their religion and society. Both the religions rely heavily on the misplaced modern constructions of social equality and brotherhood, which they claim, the Hindu caste system lacks.

In the context of the aggressive attempts at expansion by these religions, two questions arise. First, why do these religions proselytize, unlike Hinduism? Second, despite centuries of their proselytizing activities, why haven't they been able to establish a sustained foothold in India? The perspectives on both these questions are to be found in the nature of their historical expansion as compared with Hinduism and in the very nature of the deeper roots of Hinduism itself.

Nature of Islamic Expansion in India

The nature of Islamic rule in India reveals that the conversion or the proselytizing psyche was inherent in the spread and consolidation of Islam in India. It cannot be compared to ordinary foreign conquests which preceded Islamic invasions, as these conquests did not seek to demolish the cultural and religious institutions of the country, unlike Islam which sought to expand itself through religious aggression and demolition. As historian Sita Ram Goel points out, the pre-Islamic conquests of the Greeks, the Scythians, the Kushans and the Hunas, did not target Hindu symbols, traditions and their women.²⁰ The historian further argues that such records of Muslim plunders can be found in the Muslim documentation itself, where all the wars were regarded as furthering

the cause of 'jihad' or a holy war, as has been documented widely in the treatises of Muslim invaders themselves. Historical events abound whereby famous rulers like Mahmud Ghaznavi, due to their foremost allegiance to Islam, expressly refused to accept wealth in exchange for leaving the Hindu shrines intact.

Such events belie the theory of modern intellectuals like Bipan Chandra and Romila Thapar that medieval conflicts between Hindus and Muslims were not a product of their identity but merely a political conflict, or, a construction of the British imperialistic policy of divide-and-rule. The main argument of modern secular intellectuals that religious conflict over conversions and massacre cannot be traced to the history of Muslim invasions is, thus, riddled with politically convenient exclusions. The modern Indian historical narrative borrows heavily from the baseless assumptions of the Aligarh school, which absolves Islam of all responsibility by laying the blame at the door of the Turkish 'barbarians' who also came to India during that time – a theory which was widely accepted by the 'secular' intellectual and political class in the post-Independence period.

There is, however, ample evidence to the contrary. Historian Sita Ram Goel quotes from the treatise of the ruler Amir Timur, *Tuzk-i-Timûrî*, when Timur came to India in 1399 AD, "O Prophet, make war upon the infidels and unbelievers, and treat them severely...My great object in invading Hindustan had been to wage a religious war against the infidel Hindus[so that] the army of Islam might gain something by plundering the wealth and valuables of the Hindus". This was common to all famous Mughal rulers, such as Babur, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. In Babur's reign, it was incumbent upon every king that he should style himself a *Ghāzî*, that is, slayer of infidels,²¹ and this tradition was faithfully followed by Akbar, in the name of the Prophet, in his massacre at Chittor, although Akbar also combined massacre with diplomacy and reconciliation to bring non-Muslims within the political fold of Islamic kingdom. Jahangir, on the other hand, besides, ordering Hindu massacres, carried forward the policy of religious conversions by giving daily allowances to the converts. It was during Aurangzeb's reign that the

resistance against conversions took the form of the rise of the Sikhs. Historical records document how, in 1675 AD, Guru Tegh Bahadur was tortured to death for resisting the conversions of Hindus.²²

Moreover, the widely practiced policy of the Muslim rulers was the choice given between death and conversion, to Hindus. Several well-known historians have documented how this played out. Particularly notable in this regard is Chapter 6, Volume 1 of *The Story of Civilization* by Will Durant. According to Durant, “The Mohammedan Conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history”, the public exercise of Hinduism was strictly banned, and the Hindus were deprived of their wealth through excessive taxation and other coercive measures. Famous Indologist Koenraad Elst in his work *Negationism in India: Concealing the Record of Islam* has documented that conversions of low-castes occurred during the Muslim rule – through rewarding instruments such as tax discrimination, legal discrimination, awarding posts to converts and through pure coercion – once the Muslims had consolidated their power. According to Elst, the choice offered by Islam between death and conversion can be seen in the fact that between 1000 and 1525, about 80 million people were wiped out of the Indian subcontinent. Subsequently, the pacifist ideas of the Hanifite school of Islamic thought persuaded the Muslims to extend the possibility of compromise to Hindus, as they had done with Christians and Jews, although this compromise came with humiliating conditions and collection of the ‘toleration tax’ or ‘jizya’.

These historical recollections show exactly from where the conversion psyche is coming. Not only has the tendency been very strong as early as the medieval period in India, but there is also the significant fact that this tendency is not simply external, but can be traced to certain aspects of the Islamic religion which have inclined themselves to such outer manifestations. This is because the early history of Islamic imperialism shows that the life of the Prophet and his followers also followed such a trajectory of aggressive expansion.²³ Whatever be the various spiritual-philosophical interpretations of Islam – centered on the idea of the One and

attempts to trace spiritual absolution through devotion – by the Sufi saints or later philosophers, its dealings with life and action simply did not figure in its spiritual descriptions of salvation. Therefore, the outer curve that the historical and current trajectory which such a religion would follow will necessarily be full of human resistance and arbitrariness. What is the way of dealing with outer forms of human resistance and the perceived forms of sin and evil in this world, when the holy text dictates absolution and liberation in the One? Islam – having not the provisions to understand the life manifestation and its relationship with the Divine Reality – cannot answer this question except by dictating the outer ‘conquering’ of such resistance. This is what is clearly reflected in the history and current prevalence of Islamic wars or jihad and forcible or manipulative conversions.

Christian Expansionism in India:

Much like Islam, global history of Christianity is full of bloody records such as the Inquisition, torture of the non-believers, and providing a cultural backbone to the imperialistic ambitions of the British Empire. Evangelism and conversions form an inseparable part of the Christian religion²⁴ and are regarded as sacred duties by many of its followers. The initial Christian contact with India can be traced to their internal divisions and persecutions in foreign lands of Syria and Iran which drove the Roman Catholic refugees towards tolerant Asian countries like India and China, subsequently allowing them to take full advantage of the economic liberties and shelter provided by the Indian kings in Malabar.²⁵ Despite having acquired the mannerisms of the local population, the Syrian Christians, as they came to be known, remained alienated from the Hindu society, as seen in their loyalty towards the Portuguese invasion.²⁶

This alienation took a more aggressive turn, later in history, with the coming to India of the notorious Francis Xavier²⁷ in 1542 AD, who had the clear intent of uprooting paganism and establishing the reign of Christianity. Directing major assaults towards the Brahmins due to their power in the Hindu caste hierarchy, the Church

immediately started the clear movement towards mass conversions.²⁸ These conversions were realized by creating conditions that would leave the Hindus with no option but to convert. The Portuguese state was a partner with the Catholic Church in this institutionalized discrimination and violence, which included the destruction of temples, banning of public practice of Hindu rituals, discrimination in employment and mandatory attendance of the church to listen to the refutation of Hinduism, besides widely providing money to the converts as has been recorded in *The Marsden Manuscripts* preserved at the British Museum.²⁹ Conversions also occurred through the mode of 'mass baptism', popularized in Goa by the Jesuits, wherein Hindus were forced to violate their beliefs to make them untouchable within their own religion and convert them to Christianity. They displayed extreme cunning in the conversion agenda, unlike the plain crudeness of the Muslims, as they showed patience towards the imperfections of the initial converts, targeting instead, the strong indoctrination of the subsequent generations. Long abandoning the forced conversion scheme of Francis Xavier, the innovative attempts of missionaries like Robert di Nobili – known as the leader of indigenization of Christianity in India and the leader of the first 'Christian Ashram'³⁰ – showed the extent to which the missionaries were willing to adapt their customs to the local culture to ensure conversions to Christianity. This clearly reveals how well-planned the agenda of conversion has always been, historically. Besides south India, during that time the Augustinians and the Jesuits were also practicing active conversions in Bengal.

In contrast to the Catholics, the Protestants have always been known to be more democratic and secular, though only marginally better in their dealings with the Hindus. They too espoused an agenda of conversion. But the technique they adopted was different. They tried to understand the roots of persistent Hindu resistance to Christianity by learning their languages and texts, and some, like Abraham Rogerius, acknowledged the existence of the Hindu ideas of the Divine.³¹ This manipulative tendency only consolidated during the later period of the rise of the British Empire and the decline of

the Maratha political power in the 19th century. Individuals like William Hastings, J.S Mill and Lord Macaulay used intellectual and cultural mediums of attack on Hinduism to weaken Indian culture and melt away all forms of resistance.

As the current debate on conversions shows, instead of breaking away from the British tradition of Christian consolidation, post-Independent India continued this under the statist ideology of 'Nehruvian secularism', which gave unparalleled power to the Christian missionaries to propagate their religion and practice conversions under the mandate of the Indian Constitution.

As these historical descriptions show, the mode of conversions by Christianity considerably differed from those of the Muslim invaders, which were based largely on forcible conversions through genocides. The major history of Christian conversions occurred after the 16th century, which was also the period of the decline of the medieval age and the emerging power of British imperialism. The ideas that, therefore, couched the philosophy of conversion were no longer so crudely expressed as during the Mughal rule. Instead, two tendencies – of inner decline and outer conquest – were clearly visible.

The inner decline occurred through the loss of vitality in the true Hindu religious spirit and a fossilizing of life into empty rituals no longer providing scope for spiritual liberation of the individual. The emergence of untouchability and the skewed functioning of the *varna ashrama* were the hallmarks of this period, where every little violation was decried by the pandits who had become the guardians of the religion. It ceased to express the *sanatana* or infinite spirit of its culture in its life. This inner decline was exacerbated by the external assault of the Christian culture, which solidified in the later centuries with the advent of British imperialism. Consistently claiming to be on a 'civilizing' mission of the Indian race, Christianity pretended to be the self-righteous harbinger of equality and brotherhood and attacked the Hindu practices like caste-system, idol worship etc. It was greatly helped in its assault, in the later ages, with the global rise of the Enlightenment era and its modern ideas of fraternity, equality, freedom and justice.

Confrontation of Islam and Christianity with Indian Life-values: Failure of Proselytization

As we have seen in the spirit of expansion of Islam and Christianity, both historical and present, these religions are marked by a fundamental disjuncture between their spiritual and social action. They necessarily need the presence of an external adversary in order to assert the basis of their social action. They need to thrive on the ideas of sin, evil, divisions between good and bad, and enemies of the God or 'kafirs' in order to have a basis for action in life. Their spiritual philosophies do not relate to life in its social or individual manifestations. Thus, these cultures are not resilient or spontaneously pervasive. This is documented clearly in the current rapid decline of Christianity. As already seen, not only has this religion declined in the West, but in Africa and developing countries too it has been reduced to a mere political instrument of American foreign policy, dependent on funding to propagate itself and hardly presenting any cultural threat whatsoever.

How, then, can we place the failure of these cultures in relation to the Indian cultural development? Having suffered widespread cultural and political assaults by Islam and Christianity, how is it that the Indian culture is still thoroughly infused with the spirit of the Hindu religion, and what exactly is this Hindu religion?

The next issue will throw more light on this perspective.

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3. Note that 2009 was also the year when the Love Jihad mode of conversions came to light in India.
4. Out of these, 2195 women were Hindus, and 492 women were Christians.
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15. According to Sita Ram Goel, "To give an extreme illustration only Rs. 6,000 of the total income of Rs. 1,12,500 of the National Christian Council of India... is from Indian sources and the rest comes from the Mission Boards abroad."
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27. As Sita Ram Goel points out, the anti-Brahminism of Xavier and his widespread massacre of Brahmins was clearly documented in a note presented by Lord Minto while debating the inclusion of missionaries under the Charter of 1813.
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History of India – The Vedic Age (9)

III. The Vedas

“At the root of all that we Hindus have done, thought and said through these many thousands of years, behind all we are and seek to be, there lies concealed, the fount of our philosophies, the bedrock of our religions, the kernel of our thought, the explanation of our ethics and society, the summary of our civilisation, the rivet of our nationality, a small body of speech, Veda. From this one seed developing into many forms the multitudinous and magnificent birth called Hinduism draws its inexhaustible existence. Buddhism too with its offshoot, Christianity, flows from the same original source. It has left its stamp on Persia, through Persia on Judaism, through Judaism, Christianity and Sufism on Islam, and through Buddha on Confucianism, and through Christ and mediaeval mysticism, Greek and German philosophy and Sanskrit learning on the thought and civilisation of Europe. There is no part of the world’s spirituality, of the world’s religion, of the world’s thought which would be what it is today, if the Veda had not existed. Of no other body of speech in the world can this be said.”¹

“Since our earliest ages the Veda has been, in the invincible tradition of our race, the bedrock of all our creeds; in this our goddess of veiled and ancient speech we have always persisted in seeing the fruitful mother of all our Indian spirituality. For it is nothing but the simple truth, evident whenever we look below the surface & beyond the details, that every creed, sect, school of philosophy which has had any roots in our Indian temperament or any vitality of survival in our Indian surroundings has been in its secret nature, if not in its open features, a child of the eternal Vedic inspiration. All the outbursts of religious life that have helped to maintain or renew through the course of several millenniums the vitality of our race, the eternal richness and fruitfulness of our ancient culture, the fineness and profound sincerity of our undying spiritual attainment and endeavour, were derived, if we trace them to their remote sources,

from the word or the substance of the Veda. All our religious innovators, restorers, systematisers, wittingly or unwittingly, of good will or against their grain, have been stirred to their task by some vibration that reached them from those far-off ages. Our Darshana, Tantra and Purana, our Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism, our orthodoxy, heresy and heterodoxy, even when they have been the most perfect misunderstandings of each other, have always been imperfect understandings of one Vedic truth. Shankara clasped the head of Vedic truth, Ramanuja embraced its heart; but both the great disputants were dazzled by their adoration of the body of one veiled deity. Our greatest modern minds are mere tributaries of the old Rishis. This very Shankara who seems to us a giant, had only a fragment of their knowledge. Buddha wandered away on a byepath of their universal kingdom. In our own day Ramakrishna lived in his being and concretised in his talk, Vivekananda threw out into brilliance of manysided thought and eloquent speech the essence of ancient Veda. **The Veda was the beginning of our spiritual knowledge; the Veda will remain its end.** These compositions of an unknown antiquity are as the many breasts of the eternal Mother of knowledge from which our succeeding ages have all been fed.”²

“The Vedas are the roots of Indian civilisation and the supreme authority in Indian religion. For three thousand years, by the calculation of European scholars; for a great deal more, in all probability, **the faith of this nation, certainly one of the most profound, acute and intellectual in the world, has not left its hold on this cardinal point of belief. Its greatest and most rationalistic minds have never swerved from the national faith.** Kapila held to it no less than Shankara[.] The two great revolted intellects, Buddha and Brihaspati, could not dethrone the Veda or destroy India’s spiritual allegiance. **India by an inevitable law of her being casts out, sooner or later[,] everything that is not Vedic.** The Dhammapada has become a Scripture for foreign peoples. Brihaspati’s strictures are only remembered as a curiosity of our intellectual history. Religious movements & revolutions have come

& gone or left their mark but [a]fter all and through all the Veda remains to us our Rock of the Ages, our eternal foundation.

Yet the most fundamental and important part of this imperishable Scripture, the actual hymns and mantras of the Sanhitas, has long been a sealed book to the Indian mind, learned or unlearned. The other Vedic books are of minor authority or a secondary formation. The Brahmanas are ritual, grammatical & historical treatises on the traditions & ceremonies of Vedic times whose only value – apart from interesting glimpses of ancient life & Vedantic philosophy – lies in their attempt to fix and to interpret symbolically the ritual of Vedic sacrifice. The Upanishads, mighty as they are, only aspire to bring out, arrange philosophically in the language of later thinking and crown with the supreme name of Brahman the eternal knowledge enshrined in the Vedas. Yet **for some two thousand years at least no Indian has really understood the Vedas**. Or if they have been understood, if Sayana holds for us their secret, the reverence of the Indian mind for them becomes a baseless superstition and the idea that the modern Indian religions are Vedic in their substance is convicted of egregious error. For the Vedas Sayana gives us are the mythology of the Adityas, Rudras, Maruts, Vasus, – but these gods of the Veda have long ceased to be worshipped, – or they are a collection of ritual & sacrificial hymns, but the ritual is dead & the sacrifices are no longer offered.

Are we then to conclude that the reverence for the Vedas & the belief in the continued authority of the Vedas, is really no more than an ancient superstition or a tradition which has survived its truth? Those who know the working of the human mind, will be loth to hasten to that conclusion. Great masses of men, great nations, great civilisations have an instinct in these matters which seldom misleads them. In spite of forgetfulness, through every misstatement, surviving all cessation of precise understanding, something in them still remembers their origin and holds fast to the vital truth of their being. According to the Europeans, there is a historical truth at the basis of the old persistent tradition, but a historical truth only, a truth of origin,

not of present actuality. The Vedas are the early roots of Indian religion, of Indian civilisation; but they have for a long time past ceased to be their present foundation or their intellectual substance. It is rather the Upanishads & the Puranas that are the living Scriptures of mediaeval and modern Hinduism. But if, as we contend, the Upanishads & the Puranas only give us in other language, later symbols, altered forms of thought the same religious truths that we find differently stated in the Rigveda, this shifting of the immediate point of derivation will make no real difference. The waters we drink are the same whether drawn at their clear mountain sources or on their banks in the anchorite's forest or from ghats among the faery temples and fantastic domes of some sacred city. The Hindu's belief remains to him unshaken."³

A. The Text of the Veda

"The text of the Veda which we possess has remained uncorrupted for over two thousand years. It dates, so far as we know, from that great period of Indian intellectual activity, contemporaneous with the Greek efflorescence, but earlier in its beginnings, which founded the culture and civilisation recorded in the classical literature of the land. We cannot say to how much earlier a date our text may be carried. But there are certain considerations which justify us in supposing for it an almost enormous antiquity. An accurate text, accurate in every syllable, accurate in every accent, was a matter of supreme importance to the Vedic ritualists; for on scrupulous accuracy depended the effectuality of the sacrifice. We are told, for instance, in the Brahmanas the story of Twashtri who, performing a sacrifice to produce an avenger of his son slain by Indra, produced, owing to an error of accentuation, not a slayer of Indra, but one of whom Indra must be the slayer. The prodigious accuracy of the ancient Indian memory is also notorious. And the sanctity of the text prevented such interpolations, alterations, modernising revisions as have replaced by the present form of the Mahabharata the ancient epic of the Kurus. It is not, therefore, at all improbable that **we have the Sanhita of Vyasa substantially as it was arranged by the great sage and compiler.**

Substantially, not in its present written form. Vedic prosody differed in many respects from the prosody of classical Sanskrit and, especially, employed a greater freedom in the use of that principle of euphonic combination of separate words (*sandhi*) which is so peculiar a feature of the literary tongue. The Vedic Rishis, as was natural in a living speech, followed the ear rather than fixed rule; sometimes they combined the separate words, sometimes they left them uncombined. But when the Veda came to be written down, the law of euphonic combination had assumed a much more despotic authority over the language and the ancient text was written by the grammarians as far as possible in consonance with its regulations. They were careful, however, to accompany it with another text, called the Padapatha, in which all euphonic combinations were again resolved into the original and separate words and even the components of compound words indicated.

It is a notable tribute to the fidelity of the ancient memorisers that, instead of the confusion to which this system might so easily have given rise, it is always perfectly easy to resolve the formal text into the original harmonies of Vedic prosody. And very few are the instances in which the exactness or the sound judgment of the Padapatha can be called into question.

We have, then, as our basis a text which we can confidently accept and which, even if we hold it in a few instances doubtful or defective, does not at any rate call for that often licentious labour of emendation to which some of the European classics lend themselves. This is, to start with, a priceless advantage for which we cannot be too grateful to the conscientiousness of the old Indian learning.

In certain other directions it might not be safe always to follow implicitly the scholastic tradition, – as in the ascription of the Vedic poems to their respective Rishis, wherever older tradition was not firm and sound. But these are details of minor importance. Nor is there, in my view, any good reason to doubt that we have the hymns arrayed, for the most part, in the right order of their verses and in their exact entirety. The exceptions, if they exist, are negligible in

number and importance. **When the hymns seem to us incoherent, it is because we do not understand them. Once the clue is found, we discover that they are perfect wholes as admirable in the structure of their thought as in their language and their rhythms.**"⁴

"The Sanhita of the Rig Veda, as we possess it, is arranged in ten books or Mandalas. A double principle is observed in the arrangement. Six of the Mandalas are given each to the hymns of a single Rishi or family of Rishis. Thus the second is devoted chiefly to the Suktas of the Rishi Gritsamada, the third and the seventh similarly to the great names of Vishwamitra and Vasishtha respectively, the fourth to Vamadeva, the sixth to Bharadwaja. The fifth is occupied by the hymns of the house of Atri. In each of these Mandalas the Suktas addressed to Agni are first collected together and followed by those of which Indra is the deity; the invocations of other gods, Brihaspati, Surya, the Ribhus, Usha etc. close the Mandala. A whole book, the ninth, is given to a single god, Soma. The first, eighth and tenth Mandalas are collections of Suktas by various Rishis, but the hymns of each seer are ordinarily placed together in the order of their deities, Agni leading, Indra following, the other gods succeeding. Thus the first Mandala opens with ten hymns of the seer Madhuchchhandas, son of Vishwamitra, and an eleventh ascribed to Jetri, son of Madhuchchhandas. This last Sukta, however, is identical in style, manner and spirit with the ten that precede it and they can all be taken together as a single block of hymns one in intention and diction.

A certain principle of thought-development also has not been absent from the arrangement of these Vedic hymns. The opening Mandala seems to have been so designed that the general thought of the Veda in its various elements should gradually unroll itself under the cover of the established symbols by the voices of a certain number of Rishis who almost all rank high as thinkers and sacred singers and are, some of them, among the most famous names of Vedic tradition. Nor can it be by accident that the tenth or closing Mandala gives us, with an even greater miscellaneity of authors,

the last developments of the thought of the Veda and some of the most modern in language of its Suktas. It is here that we find the Sacrifice of the Purusha and the great Hymn of the Creation. It is here also that modern scholars think they discover the first origins of the Vedantic philosophy, the Brahnavada.”⁵

B. The Vedic System

The following is the statement of a few principal details of the Vedic system in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“(1) Vedic religion is based on an elaborate psychology and cosmology of which the keyword is the great Vedic formula OM, Bhur Bhuvah Swah; the three vyahritis and the Pranava. The three Vyahritis are the three lower principles of Matter, Life and Mind, Annam, Prana and Manas of the Vedanta. OM is Brahman or Sacchidananda of whom these three are the expressions in the phenomenal world. OM and the vyahrities are connected by an intermediate principle, Mahas, Vijnanam of the Vedanta, ideal Truth which has arranged the lower worlds and on which amidst all their confusions they rest.

(2) Corresponding roughly to the vyahrities are three worlds, Bhurloka (Prana-Annam, the material world), Bhuvarloka (Prana-Manas, the lower subjective world), Swarloka (Manas-Buddhi, the higher subjective world). These are the tribhuvana of Hinduism.

(3) Corresponding to Mahas is Maharloka or Mahi Dyaus, the great heavens (pure Buddhi or Vijnana, the ideal world). The Pranava in its three essentialities rules over the three supreme worlds, the Satyaloka (divine being), Tapoloka (divine Awareness and Force), Anandaloka (divine Bliss) of the Puranas, which constitute Amritam, immortality or the true kingdom of heaven of the Vedic religion. These are the Vedic sapta dhamani and the seven different movements of consciousness to which they correspond are the sapta sindhu of the hymns.

(4) According to the Vedanta, man has five koshas or sheaths of existence, the material (Annamaya), vital (Pranamaya), mental (Manomaya) which together make up the aparardha or lower half of our conscious-being; the ideal (vijnanamaya) which [links] the lower

to the parardha or higher half; the divine or Anandamaya in which the divine existence (Amrita) is concentrated for communion with our lower human being. These are the pancha kshitis, [five] earths or rather dwelling places of the Veda. But in Yoga we speak usually of the five koshas but the sapta bhumis, seven not five. The Veda also speaks of sapta dhamani.

(5) In each of the seven strata of consciousness all the other six work under the law of the stratum which houses them. This means seven sub-strata in each; in the three vyahritis there are therefore thrice seven, trih saptani.

(6) Man, although living here in Bhu, belongs to Swar and Bhuvar. He is manu, the Thinker, – the soul in him is the manomayah pranasarira neta of the Upanishad, “the mental captain and guide of life and body”. He has to become vijñanamaya (mahan) and anandamaya, to become in a word immortal, divine in all his laws of being (vrata and dharman). By rising to Mahas in himself he enters into direct touch with ideal Truth, gets truth of knowledge by drishti, sruti and smriti, the three grand ideal processes, and by that knowledge truth of being, truth of action (satyadharma), truth of bliss (satya-radhas) constituting amritam, swarajyam and samrajyam, immortality, self rule and mastery of the world. It is this evolution which the Vedic hymns are intended to assist.

(7) In his progress man is helped by the gods, resisted by the Asuras and Rakshasas. For the worlds behind have their own inhabitants, who, the whole universe being inextricably one, affect and are affected by the activities of mankind. The Bhuvar is the great place of struggle in which forces work behind the visible movements we see here and determine all our actions and fortunes. Swar is man’s resting place but not his final or highest habitation which is Vishnu’s highest footing, Vishnoh paramam padam, high in the supreme parardha.

(8) The 33 great gods belong to the higher worlds but rest in Swar and work at once in all the strata of consciousness, for the world is always one in its complexity. They are masters of the mental

functions, masters also of the vital and material. Agni, for instance, governs the actions of the fiery elements in Nature and in man, but is also the vehicle of pure tapas, tu, tuvis or divine force. They are therefore mankind's greatest helpers.

(9) But in order that they may help, it is necessary to reinforce them in these lower worlds, which are not their own, by selfsurrender, by sacrifice, by a share in all man's action, strength, being and bliss, and by this mutual help man's being physical, vital, mental, spiritual is kept in a state of perfect and ever increasing force, energy and joy favourable to the development of immortality. **This is the process of Yajna, called often Yoga when applied exclusively to the subjective movements and adhwara when applied to the objective.** The Vritras, Panis etc of the Bhuvarkala who are constantly preventing man's growth and throwing back his development, have to be attacked and slain by the gods, for they are not entirely immortal. The sacrifice is largely a battle between evolutionary and reactionary powers.

(10) A symbolic system of external sacrifice in which every movement is careful[ly] designed and coordinated to signify the subjective facts of the internal Yajna, aids the spiritual aspirant by moulding his material sheath into harmony with his internal life and by mastering his external surroundings so that there too the conditions and forces may be all favourable to his growth.

(11) **The Yajna has two parts, mantra and tantra – subjective and objective; in the outer sacrifice the mantra is the Vedic hymn and the tantra the oblation; in the inner the mantra is the meditation or the sacred formula, the tantra the putting forth of the power generated by mantra to bring about some successful spiritual, intellectual, vital or mental activity** of which the gods have their share.

(12) The mantra consists of gayatra, brahma and arka, the formulation of thought into rhythmic speech to bring about a spiritual force or result, the filling of the soul (brahma) with the idea and name of the god of the mantra, the use of the mantra for effectuation

of the external object or the activity desired.

(13) The tantra is composed of neshtra, savanam, potra and hotra, the intensifying of the vasu or material (internal or external) so as to prepare it for activity, the production of it in a usable form, the purification of it from all defects and the offering of it to the god or for action.

(14) The Veda proper is karmakanda, not jnanakanda; its aim is not moksha, but divine fulfilment in this life and the next. Therefore the Vedic Rishis accepted plenty and fullness of physical, vital and mental being, power, and joy as the pratistha or foundation of immortality and did not reject it as an obstacle to salvation. It is supposed that in the Kaliyuga this is no longer possible, or possible only by direct selfsurrender to the Supreme Deity. Therefore the complexity of the Vedic system has been removed from the domain of our religious practice and in its place there has been increasingly substituted the worship of the Supreme Deity through Love.

(15) The world being one in all its parts **every being in it contains the universe in himself. Especially do the great gods contain all the others and their activities in [themselves],^a so that Agni, Varuna, Indra, all of them are in reality one sole-existent deity in many forms.** Man too is He, but he has to fulfil himself here as man, yet divine (that being his vrata and dharma) through the puissant means provided for him [by] the Veda.”⁶

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The Greatness of India and Its Culture (8)

2. Indian Civilisation and Culture

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

“There are three powers that we must grasp in order to judge the life-value of a culture. There is, first, **the power of its original conception of life**; there is, next, the power of the forms, types and rhythms it has given to life; there is, last, **the inspiration, the vigour, the force of vital execution of its motives** manifested in the actual lives of men and of the community that flourished under its influence.”¹

A. The Original Conception of Life – the European and the Indian

“The European conception of life is a thing with which we in India are now very familiar, because our present thought and effort are obscured with its shadow when they are not filled with its presence. For we have been trying hard to assimilate something of it, even to shape ourselves and especially our political, economic and outward conduct into some imitation of its forms and rhythms. The European idea is the conception of a Force that manifests itself in the material universe and a Life in it of which man is almost the only discoverable meaning. This anthropocentric view of things has not been altered by the recent stress of Science on the vast blank inanities of an inconscient mechanical Nature. And in man, thus unique in the inert drift of Nature, the whole effort of Life is to arrive at some light and harmony of the understanding and ordering reason, some efficient rational power, adorning beauty, strong utility, vital enjoyment, economic welfare. The free power of the individual ego, the organised will of the corporate ego, these are the great needed forces. The development of individual personality and an organised efficient national life are the two things that matter in the European

ideal. These two powers have grown, striven, run riot at times, and the restless and often violent vividness of the historic stir and the literary and artistic vivacity of Europe are due to their powerful colours. The enjoyment of life and force, the gallop of egoistic passion and vital satisfaction are a loud and insistent strain, a constant high-voiced motive. Against them is another opposite effort, the endeavour to govern life by reason, science, ethics, art; a restraining and harmonising utility is here the foremost motive. At different times different powers have taken the lead. Christian religiosity too has come in and added new tones, modified some tendencies, deepened others. Each age and period has increased the wealth of contributory lines and forces and helped the complexity and largeness of the total conception. At present the sense of the corporate life dominates and it is served by the idea of a great intellectual and material progress, an ameliorated political and social state governed by science. There is an ideal of intelligent utility, liberty and equality or else an ideal of stringent organisation and efficiency and a perfectly mobilised, carefully marshalled uniting of forces in a ceaseless pull towards the general welfare. This endeavour of Europe has become terribly outward and mechanical in its appearance; but some renewed power of a more humanistic idea is trying to beat its way in again and man may perhaps before long refuse to be tied on the wheel of his own triumphant machinery and conquered by his apparatus. At any rate we need not lay too much emphasis on what may be a passing phase. The broad permanent European conception of life remains and it is in its own limits a great and invigorating conception, – imperfect, narrow at the top, shut in under a heavy lid, poor in its horizons, too much of the soil, but still with a sense in it that is strenuous and noble.”²

“The Indian conception of life starts from a deeper centre and moves on less external lines to a very different objective. The peculiarity of the Indian eye of thought is that it looks through the form, looks even through the force, and searches for the spirit in things everywhere. The peculiarity of the Indian will in life is that it feels itself to be unfulfilled, not in touch with perfection, not

permanently justified in any intermediate satisfaction if it has not found and does not live in the truth of the spirit. The Indian idea of the world, of Nature and of existence is not physical, but psychological and spiritual. Spirit, soul, consciousness are not only greater than inert matter and inconscient force, but they precede and originate these lesser things. All force is power or means of a secret spirit; the Force that sustains the world is a conscious Will and Nature is its machinery of executive power. Matter is the body or field of a consciousness hidden within it, the material universe a form and movement of the Spirit. Man himself is not a life and mind born of Matter and eternally subject to physical Nature, but a spirit that uses life and body. It is an understanding faith in this conception of existence, it is the attempt to live it out, it is the science and practice of this high endeavour, and it is the aspiration to break out in the end from this mind bound to life and matter into a greater spiritual consciousness that is the innermost sense of Indian culture. It is this that constitutes the much-talked-of Indian spirituality. It is evidently very remote from the dominant European idea; it is different even from the form given by Europe to the Christian conception of life. But it does not mean at all that Indian culture concedes no reality to life, follows no material or vital aims and satisfactions or cares to do nothing for our actual human existence. It cannot truly be contended that a conception of this kind can give no powerful and inspiring motive to the human effort of man. Certainly, in this view, matter, mind, life, reason, form are only powers of the spirit and valuable not for their own sake, but because of the Spirit within them. *Ātmārtham*, they exist for the sake of the Self, says the Upanishad, and this is certainly the Indian attitude to these things. But that does not depreciate them or deprive them of their value; on the contrary it increases a hundredfold their significance. Form and body immensely increase in importance if they are felt to be instinct with the life of the Spirit and are conceived as a support for the rhythm of its workings. And human life was in ancient Indian thought no vile and unworthy existence; it is the greatest thing known to us, it is desired, the Purana boldly says, even by the gods in heaven. The

deepening and raising of the richest or the most potent energies of our minds, our hearts, our life-power, our bodies are all means by which the spirit can proceed to self-discovery and the return to its own infinite freedom and power.”³

“The dignity given to human existence by the Vedantic thought and by the thought of the classical ages of Indian culture exceeded anything conceived by the Western idea of humanity. Man in the West has always been only an ephemeral creature of Nature or a soul manufactured at birth by an arbitrary breath of the whimsical Creator and set under impossible conditions to get salvation, but far more likely to be thrown away into the burning refuse-heap of Hell as a hopeless failure. At best he is exalted by a reasoning mind and will and an effort to be better than God or Nature made him. Far more ennobling, inspiring, filled with the motive-force of a great idea is the conception placed before us by Indian culture. Man in the Indian idea is a spirit veiled in the works of energy, moving to self-discovery, capable of Godhead. He is a soul that is growing through Nature to conscious self-hood; he is a divinity and an eternal existence; he is an ever-flowing wave of the God-ocean, an inextinguishable spark of the supreme Fire. Even, he is in his uttermost reality identical with the ineffable Transcendence from which he came and greater than the godheads whom he worships. The natural half-animal creature that for a while he seems to be is not at all his whole being and is not in any way his real being. His inmost reality is the divine Self or at least one dynamic eternal portion of it, and to find that and exceed his outward, apparent, natural self is the greatness of which he alone of terrestrial beings is capable. He has the spiritual capacity to pass to a supreme and extraordinary pitch of manhood and that is the first aim which is proposed to him by Indian culture. Living no more in the first crude type of an undeveloped humanity to which most men still belong, *na yathā prākīto jana*, he can even become a free perfected semi-divine man, mukta, siddha. But he can do more; released into the cosmic consciousness, his spirit can become one with God, one self with the Spirit of the universe or rise into a Light and Vastness that

transcends the universe; his nature can become one dynamic power with universal Nature or one Light with a transcendental Gnosis. To be shut up for ever in his ego is not his ultimate perfection; he can become a universal soul, one with the supreme Unity, one with others, one with all beings. This is the high sense and power concealed in his humanity that he can aspire to this perfection and transcendence. And he can arrive at it through any or all of his natural powers if they will accept release, through his mind and reason and thought and their illuminations, through his heart and its unlimited power of love and sympathy, through his will and its dynamic drive towards mastery and right action, through his ethical nature and its hunger for the universal Good, through his aesthetic sense and its seekings after delight and beauty or through his inner soul and its power of absolute spiritual calm, wideness, joy and peace.

This is the sense of that spiritual liberation and perfection of which Indian thought and inner discipline have been full since the earliest Vedic times. However high and arduous this aim may be, it has always seemed to it possible and even in a way near and normal, once spiritual realisation has discovered its path. The positivist Western mind finds it difficult to give this conception the rank of a living and intelligible idea. The status of the *siddha*, *bhāgavata*, *mukta* appears to it a baseless chimera. It seems to its Christian associations a blasphemy against the solitary greatness of God, before whom man is only a grovelling worm, to its fierce attachment to the normal ego a negation of personality and a repellent menace, to its earthbound rationalism a dream, a self-hypnotic hallucination or a deluding mania. And yet in ancient Europe the Stoics, Platonists, Pythagoreans had made some approach to this aspiration, and even afterwards, a few rare souls have envisaged or pursued it through occult ways. And now it is again beginning to percolate into the Western imagination, but less as a dynamic life-motive than in poetry and in certain aspects of general thought or through movements like Theosophy that draw from ancient and oriental sources. Science and philosophy and religion still regard it with scorn as an illusion, with indifference as a dream or with condemnation as a heathen

arrogance. It is the distinction of Indian culture to have seized on this great dynamic hope, to have kept it a living and practicable thing and to have searched out all the possible paths to this spiritual way of perfect existence. Indian thought has made this great thing the common highest aim and universal spiritual destiny of the soul that is in every human creature.”⁴

References:

1. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, p.153, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry*
2. *Ibid., pp.153-54*
3. *Ibid., pp.154-56*
4. *Ibid., pp.156-58*

THE WORKING OF THE GREAT INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT OF HUMANITY IN INDIA

“If we take in its general results in India the great intellectual movement of humanity, we see that it broke up & scattered about in fragments the ancient catholic tradition & knowledge, placed its stamp on much that yet remains, destroyed a great deal which it could not assimilate, left a little surviving under veils & in our remote & secret places. **On the mental temperament of our people, the long struggle had a disastrous effect;** for it has deprived all except the few of the higher supraintellectual inner life of our forefathers, it has made impossible any general resort to that discipline which gave them the use to a certain extent, at least, of the higher intuitive mentality, the satyadrishti, the direct sight, and has driven the many to be content rather with the irregular intuitions of the heart, the aesthetic faculties & the senses; we have kept those faculties which receive the actual touch of the higher truth obscurely, with the eyes of the intellect closed but lost those which receive them directly, with the eyes of the intellect open and luminously transmitting them to the mind imprisoned in matter. We have therefore neither been able to organise the intellectual efficiency of the Europeans, nor retain the principles of inner greatness known to our forefathers. Nevertheless, we still have among us important remnants of the old knowledge & discipline & we have firm hold in our schools of Yoga on the supreme means by which its lost parts can be recovered. The key of a divine life upon earth lies, rusted indeed in an obscure corner of our mansion, used only by a few, but still it lies there & is still used. It has to be singled out from amid much waste matter, made fit for complete & general use and given freely to mankind.”

– Sri Aurobindo

Price: Rs. 31/- (Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 17, Pages 564-65)