

# **The Resurgent India**

**A Monthly National Review**

October 2015



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

*– The Mother*

Year 6

Issue 7

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# THE RESURGENT INDIA

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## SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

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

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## **A Declaration**

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

– The Mother

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

# THE ILLUSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: PART III

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous article, we studied the degraded condition of the health sector in the country as well as globally. While expenditure on health services has risen by leaps and bounds in the last few years, the actual delivery of the service has fallen in proportion. Beset by mounting material and moral corruption, the treatment meted out by the doctors often worsens the bad condition of the patient. Even investment in better technology to enable the patients to bargain online and choose between doctors has limited advantages in a pervasively corrupt system where all the alternatives are bad in different degrees.

More than any other sector of the economy like education, justice, defence etc., the prevalence of the utilitarian spirit in the health sector is the most blatantly obvious. What is eating away at the system is that the moral infection is so deep-rooted that corruption has, unfortunately, become imperative for survival even for those who would have been honest had they not faced risk of being devoured by the system.

Beyond the issue of health and extending to virtually all the sectors of the economy, in a utilitarian system, – just like the proverbial bad coin that drives the good coin out of circulation – the rules and laws of the game and the people forced into playing it leave virtually no scope for an honest individual to survive.

## THE JUSTICE ‘SECTOR’ IN THE ECONOMY

Before we recount the numerous ways in which the judiciary has become a thriving sector of money-making and corruption in our economic development model, let us first acknowledge the unfortunate irony that ‘justice’ should even be considered a monetizable ‘sector’ of the economy. Yet this is the state of affairs to which a utilitarian society has led us. Legal practice, the world-

over, has become a slave to money and power.

India is no exception. The revival of the debate on the appointment of judges has brought into focus one of the main problems seen to be plaguing the higher judiciary – how to avoid the appointment of unethical judges in order to prevent corruption in the system and ensure the speedy delivery of justice. **It has to be clearly recognized that the problem is not one of formulating more laws, increasing the judge-to-people ratio and establishing more machinery, but to tackle the ethical corruption at the core of the judiciary.** Given the cases where justice was either delayed or denied, it has been acknowledged by some legal experts that while there are enough laws, **there is no alternative to ‘national character’ and willingness to ‘stand by the truth’.**

## A CHEQUERED PAST

Given its position as the bastion of justice, the judiciary has been seen as the righteous upholder of constitutional morality. However, given the controversial political positions it has taken on various social issues since Independence, the judiciary has often been accused of too much activism and ‘judicial overreach’ and has found itself in conflict with the Parliament. However, these were largely political conflicts and did not throw light on the progressive ethical degradation of the judiciary that was simultaneously going on all along.

During the last five decades, there has been a progressive degradation in the quality of the judges appointed to the apex and the High courts.<sup>1</sup> The actual track record of the judiciary is at odds with the constitutional and legal sanctity bestowed on them. Even though there have been rising number of cases of judges involved in inefficiency, favouritism and corruption, there has not been a single case of impeachment – which is the only process of removing a judge from office – against the sitting judges of the Supreme Court or High courts since Independence.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, former Supreme Court judge, Markandey Katju,

claimed that about 50% of the higher judiciary was corrupt, along with the majority of the politicians of the country.

“According to Transparency International global survey (2007), as many as 77% of Indians believe the country’s judiciary is corrupt, and 36% paid bribes to the judiciary last year. According to the Global Corruption Report (GCR) 2007, an estimated Rs. 2,630 crore was the amount Indians coughed up as bribes to the judiciary, higher than the bribe paid out in any other sector. The lower rung of the judiciary is most prone to corruption, where, according to the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) study, a majority of the bribe money went to lawyers (61%) followed by court officials (29%) and middlemen (5%).”<sup>3</sup>

Some of the issues facing the Indian courts are summed up in the box below:<sup>4</sup>

**The travails of the Indian judiciary:**

- More than 3 crore pending cases due to lack of speedy trials. According to a report, while there are 2.64 crore undecided cases in the subordinate courts, about 42 lakh more cases are pending in the High Courts.
- Increasing number of vacancies in High Courts and lower courts.
- Poor mechanisms to deal with charges of corruption against judiciary. A recent conference of judges spoke about ways to strengthen vigilance mechanisms in courts.
- Poor follow-up and punishment processes – While, in the aftermath of PILs, the courts have issued several strictures and threats of contempt of court against the guilty authorities, there is no follow-up. The issue just becomes a momentary show of activism by the courts.
- Appellate tribunals appointed for special purposes are prone to inefficiency. They are hardly scrutinised as that would mean ending the appointments of retired judges who preside over these bodies. Moreover, since people always have the option to appeal in a higher court, there is no hurdle in the

system. But the entire process reeks of expediency and elite comfort rather than dispensing justice.

- Controversial system of appointments – Through the 1993 and 1998 judgements, the Supreme Court put in place the controversial ‘collegium system’ in which only judges could appoint judges. This was sought to be scrapped in 2014 when the government formulated the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Bill through the 121st Constitution Amendment, so as to ensure that even government and external people had a say in the appointment of judges. This was recently overturned by the Supreme Court in the name of preserving judicial independence from the executive, given that the judiciary has vested interests in a non-transparent system where there is no outside interference.

- The corruption in the collegium system is quite evident. Several judges have pointed out that it is based on trade-offs and exchange of favours between parties and that judicial independence was under threat only during the one-party Congress era till the early 1980s.

- According to an article published in a leading magazine, “Shanti Bhushan, a very senior lawyer of the Supreme Court, and former Union law Minister, had filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court several years back stating that half of the previous 16 Chief Justices of India were definitely corrupt (he named them in a sealed envelope which he gave to the Court), and he was uncertain about 2 more. Since then more Chief Justices of India who retired had serious allegations of corruption against them.” (Katju 2015).

- The Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure needs to be strengthened. The current rules, which date back to the colonial era, are in favour of the accused rather than the victim. Moreover, except in high profile cases, the delay is so much that cases come up for hearing after 30 years when either the accused or the filing judge or both may be dead.

- The protection for the judges from criminal prosecution has been carried to so extreme a level with the Veeraswami

judgement of 1991 that it translates into the fact that “a judge can commit any offence under the laws of the land but his or her prosecution can only be initiated with the CJ’s prior permission.” (Bhattacharjee 2015).

- The courts’ inability to convict – In a host of high profile cases, justice is often delayed or denied, as the court cannot convict the real accused due to the absurdity of the evidentiary process of the Indian judiciary. Main reliance on every small proof means that witnesses can be manipulated, trials extended indefinitely, prosecuting agency bought, and facts changed or silenced.

## **REDUCTION OF THE REAL WELL-BEING**

How can the service provided by the judiciary be expected to contribute to real justice or enhance the people’s well-being when lack of morality and corruption has reached such levels as to become obvious even to the common man on the street? Here there is a direct link to the deteriorating material well-being of the people. It is well-known from experiences of common people and everyday interactions that:

- Right from the lower courts such as the shady and manipulative Tis Hazari in Delhi to the very top, sophisticated levels of higher judiciary, money is the mantra to gain access to justice. The judicial representative charges for all the processes. Lakhs of rupees are charged right from mere consultation to fighting and solving the case and then in the aftermath too, irrespective of whether the case is won or not. In fact, the role of money is so paramount that there are several people who pay their top lawyers every year even if there is nothing coming up, just to keep them in loop when the need arises. There are common cases of small land disputes between neighbours over a patch of area for which lakhs of rupees have been paid to lawyers.

- The entire purpose of securing access to justice for the people is defeated given the complex legal processes in which the system is ensnared. Language is almost invariably a tough barrier for the

common people who do not understand the complex legal jargon. This leads to even poor people having to spend money to hire intermediaries and advocates at the lowest levels to file a basic case or a petition. Even people who are relatively well-off and the youth have only obscure access to the judiciary to address their basic grievances. For instance, filing a case in a consumer court is, ironically, next to impossible. It is even acknowledged by many law students and advocates that the procedures are complex enough to rattle even a legal scholar. In fact, recognizing the weak grievance redressal mechanisms for the common people, a recent conference of judges had on its agenda a discussion of ways to strengthen alternative mechanisms like Lok Adalat and Mediation.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the Supreme Court has tried to address these problems since the 1980s through measures like the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) which is claimed to be more people-friendly, these have not been enough to bring about any true change except generate superficial ‘activism’. Even the so-called other ‘empowering’ instruments like the RTI (Right To Information) have been around for long but have failed to guarantee the well-being of the people. Whistleblowers are always under threat and till now there is nothing in place to guarantee their protection, rendering the whole system ineffective.

- Is the system even interested in caring for justice and well-being? The understanding of law in the minds of the youth has become totally warped with the current education system. Lack of law and order and constant crises are now an opportunity for young people to get jobs in the field of law. Were there not these constant problems of law and order, many would be sitting unemployed and the GDP would be going down considerably. Look at how the eyes of young struggle advocates/professionals light up when they sniff the opportunity to assist in a glamorous case and see their names on the case files, so that they can boost their resume for better job prospects – what is sometimes referred to as ‘cheap thrills’ of those who struggle in the legal profession.

The state of the service of justice in India has been summed up aptly recently by a retired judge viz. “[I]t matters little whether we have the NJAC or the Collegium system or any other system, as the Indian judiciary is beyond redemption.”<sup>6</sup>

## **A FUNDAMENTALLY IRREDEEMABLE SYSTEM**

India derives its system of justice from the English Common Law tradition. The British tradition of law evolved during the secularist centuries after the Renaissance period. It borrowed heavily from Roman jurisprudence and rejected entirely the Christian influences due to the perpetual conflict between the Church and the State.

To rule out any repetition of the instances of outright injustice and crude persecutions based on blind prejudices which characterised the Middle Ages, broad rules and procedures and principles – like the one requiring that an accused be considered innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt – were enacted to guide the courts and judges – who were now to be subject to provisions of the laws and acts passed by the Parliament – in their conduct. Another important development was a general acceptance of the principle of complete freedom of the judiciary from any interference by the executive branch of the government.

Be it the British Common Law tradition which depends on evidentiary process and objective proofs besides the judge’s subjective conclusions or the French inquisitorial system of ‘finding the truth’ instead of relying on objective evidence alone, the modern system of justice has become a tool in the hands of those who are able to manipulate it most successfully. It has next to nothing to do with delivering real justice and welfare to the people and everything to do with selfishness aimed at maximising personal gain.

Despite the fact that the moral and material corruption in the judiciary is out in the open in the public domain for every common man to see, all the reforms proposed in recent years are likely to make little headway in truly changing the system for good or even in preventing it from deteriorating even further.

Given the low level to which the national character has sunk...any of the proposed reforms in our judicial system cannot be expected to lead to any lasting improvement. Undoubtedly, they may change and even slightly improve things in the short run, but it is only a matter of time before the actors in the judicial arena are able to learn new tricks or rather dig new holes – the digging getting easier and easier as the layer of national character supporting the whole edifice gets thinner and thinner – to circumvent or bypass the obstructions created by the new rules and procedures (implementing the reforms) which soon end up making the judicial system even more cumbersome without making any substantial improvement in its actual functioning.

A prolonged misrule of over six decades to which the country has been subjected to even after Independence has progressively brought the functioning of all the organs of government to such low (and perverse) levels that, at present, our politics and administrative machinery seems to be taking on, increasingly, the appearance of a real nemesis for the country. Under its shadow, we have forgotten that when everyone is trying to get somewhere by stepping on everyone else, no one really gets anywhere.

**The present state of our judiciary**, like the functioning of the government machinery in general, **is what it is because the principal actors in this field** – the judges, lawyers and judicial staff – **have become**, in all the three instrumental parts of their nature (the mind, the life and the physical) **utterly tamasic**.

The judges, in general, with their hearts and minds firmly set and concentrated on the satisfaction of their physical self and its animal appetites are not able to give either their full time or their full attention to their onerous and difficult work and tend to be procrastinatory, particularly when not dishonest in the popular and narrow sense of honesty.

With the lawyers, the situation is ten times worse. It has become very very difficult to find a lawyer – especially in lower courts – who will not, if opportunity presents itself, betray his client for the sake

of money or favours from the opposite party. Moreover, the lawyers also tend to be much more interested in having or at least making a show of having a 'setting' with judges or their agents than in honestly practicing law. Also, the lawyers, invariably, tend to be hugely procrastinatory unless they have an axe to grind or are under pressure for some reason or the other to make a speedy resolution of the litigation.

Although entirely moved by the same psychological forces, the story of the staff of the courts is something of its own kind. This organ of our judiciary is so entirely tamasic that it operates, almost entirely like a coin-operated machine. Every time one needs to get even the most trifling work done, i.e., every time one needs this machine to roll over so little, fresh cash is needed, for these machines also tend to have such a short memory that even the most generous dealings or payments of the most recent past would not carry any weight with them. Each time fresh cash is needed.

As Sri Aurobindo has written about the British system, from which India derives its judicial system, **"Under a civilised disguise these Courts are really the mediaeval ordeal by battle; only in place of the swords and lances of military combatants we have the tongues and technicalities of lawyers and the mutually tilting imaginations of witnesses. The victory is to the skilfullest liar and the most plausible workman in falsehoods and insincerities.** It is largely an elaborate pitch and toss, an exhilarating gamble, a very Monte Carlo of surprising chances. But there is skill in it, too; it satisfies the intellect as well as the sensations. One should rather call it a game of human Bridge which admirably combines luck and skill, or consider it as an intellectual gladiatorial show. In big cases the stake is worthy of the play and the excitement, a man's property or his life.

But woe to the beaten! In a criminal case, the tortures of the jail or the terrifying drop from the gallows are in prospect, and it is rather the hardihood of guilt than the trembling consciousness of innocence that shall best help him. Woe to him if he is innocent! As

he stands there, – for to add to the pleasurable of his condition, the physical ache of hours of standing is considerably added to the cruel strain on his emotions, – he looks eagerly not to the truth or falsehood of the evidence for or against him, but to the skill with which this or that counsel handles the web of skilfully mixed truth and lies and the impression he is making on the judge or the jury. A true witness breaking down under a confusing cross-examination or a false witness mended by a judicious reexamination may be of much better service to him than the Truth, which, our Scriptures tell us, shall prevail and not falsehood, – eventually perhaps and in the things of the truth, but not in the things of falsehood, not in a court of Justice, not in the witness box. There the last thing the innocent man against whom circumstances have turned, dare tell is the truth; it would either damn him completely by fatally helping the prosecution or it is so simple and innocent as to convince the infallible human reason of its pitiful falsity. **The truth! Has not the Law expressly built up a hedge of technicalities to keep out the truth?**<sup>7</sup>

## **A PERSPECTIVE ON INDIA'S ORIGINAL IDEAL OF JUSTICE**

The system of judiciary arises when there is disharmony in the society and people are expected to behave in such a way that constraints need to be imposed on them. The most harmonious and desirable condition of a society is that in which there is no need of a judicial system at all. **A more and more elaborate judicial system becomes necessary as disharmony grows in a society.** This becomes clear when we see how the system of justice has evolved in the Indian tradition. In the Indian tradition, the evolution of inner and outer life of society and the individuals proceeds through the four *yugas* or ages – Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kali Yuga.

**The Satya or Krita Yuga is the Golden Age when men are full of might and wisdom. In this Yuga Vishnu incarnates as Yajña, as the divine Master in man to whom men offer up all their actions as a sacrifice, reserving nothing for an egoistic satisfaction. This is possible because people in this age, live in their inmost being in**

**full harmony with Truth.** This age of harmony and a condition of human freedom and natural and spontaneous coordination may have resulted in an entire absence of government. At any rate, given certain spiritual conditions which would constitute a government of God among men the elaborate arrangements of modern administration, made necessary because of human depravity and the needs of our Iron Age (Kali Yuga), would have been unnecessary. **The question of a judicial system does not even arise in such an age.**

**The next age – the Silver Age – is called Treta, the age of Dharma where Vishnu descends as the Chakravarti Raja –** the sustainer of society's righteousness, its sword of justice and defence and preserver of dharma. He gathers a number of human communities under his unifying sway. This age is known for its righteousness and is popularly characterized as Rama Rajya. In this age, the Raja's officials sleeplessly look after the good of the people and no elaborate judicial system is needed because there is hardly ever any occasion for disputes. The Raja Darbar itself may serve as the court because – as one can gather from the description of Sri Rama's Darabar in Valmiki Ramayana – the petitions before it are so rare that the king's ministers and officials are always looking for, but are rarely able to come across a petitioner or an aggrieved person – even an aggrieved animal!

**In Dwapara – the Bronze Age, the age of doubt – there is a further decline in man's character, powers and capacities. Intellectual regulation substitutes for the rule of Dharma.** Ideas, thoughts and emotions assume much greater prominence, and doubt sets in in man's heart and mind and he has to seek the aid of written word or Shastra to properly direct his actions. **Vishnu takes the form of King or Ruler who begins to take the help of written word – but only help, there is no mechanical subjection to it** like in the present, rather he uses his understanding and intelligence freely along with the highest available recorded wisdom of the race – the Shastra, to guide his actions.

**In the Kaliyuga or the Iron Age, there is a further diminution in man's capacities and powers as he begins to be increasingly subject to his instincts, impulses and desires.** The written word is not sufficient to maintain order in collective life and subjection to some kind of outward machinery or system – which still remained very simple in oriental societies – becomes necessary.

In the modern Western materialistic cultures – which India is at present trying hard to emulate – system, organisation, machinery seems to have attained their perfection. Bondage to these has been carried to its highest expression and man's inner spiritual freedom is getting increasingly slain in modern societies because of their passion for organising external liberty or/and equality. **When the inner freedom is gone, the external liberty follows it, and a social tyranny more terrible, inquisitorial and relentless than any that caste ever organised in India, begins to take its place.**

**In the old Indian system, the judicial authorities – village Panchayats, Judges, Rulers and Royal courts – were responsible for finding the truth of the matter** for which they were free to use whatever skills and ingenuity they were normally highly endowed with and to do whatever else was necessary to get to the truth of the matter. A prospective offender knew that, given the efficiency and unquestionable integrity of authorities, the chances of his offence going undetected were virtually nil and the result was that there were very few cases – a good indicator of the health and efficiency of the system – that ever reached the courts; unlike today, where, if one is prepared to put a sufficient amount of energy (time and money) into the case, one can be reasonably sure of winning or, at least, indefinitely postponing the final adverse verdict.

In such a state of affairs, no superficial proposals for reform as are being advocated today will work, since all laws and technological changes act as a double-edged sword that can also be misused. The victory can never be won unless we realize that the root of all our problems is not the politicians, the government officials, the lawyers, the judges, the common men or, to put it in one word, the 'Others'

but rather, 'Ourselves'. If we wish to have a perfect society, we must begin with our own perfection because, as Sri Aurobindo so beautifully points out, **"A perfected human world cannot be created by men or composed of men who are themselves imperfect.** Even if all our actions are scrupulously regulated by education or law or social or political machinery, what will be achieved is a regulated pattern of minds, a fabricated pattern of lives, a cultivated pattern of conduct; but a conformity of this kind cannot change, cannot re-create the man within, it cannot carve or cut out a perfect soul or a perfect thinking man or a perfect or growing living being. For soul and mind and life are powers of being and can grow but cannot be cut out or made; an outer process or formation can assist or can express soul and mind and life but cannot create or develop it. **One can indeed help the being to grow, not by an attempt at manufacture, but by throwing on it stimulating influences or by lending to it one's forces of soul or mind or life;** but even so the growth must still come from within it, determining from there what shall be made of these influences and forces, and not from outside. This is the first truth that our creative zeal and aspiration have to learn, otherwise all our human endeavour is foredoomed to turn in a futile circle and can end only in a success that is a specious failure."<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*"The utmost widening of a physical objective knowledge, even if it embrace the most distant solar systems and the deepest layers of the earth and sea and the most subtle powers of material substance and energy, is not the essential gain for us, not the one thing which it is most needful for us to acquire. That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race. Our true happiness lies in the true growth of our whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of our existence, in mastery of the inner as well as and*

***more than the outer, the hidden as well as the overt nature; our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began, but by transcendence.”<sup>9</sup>***

As we conclude this three-part series, we have before us a clear case of the illusion of economic development. As the modern economy consists predominantly of services, we have seen how all major economies today depend largely on the services sector for their economic growth. Therefore, it is reasonable to focus on the services sector to understand today’s economic development model. **After analysing in-depth the three economic services – education, health and justice – we have an irrefutable case that under the present conditions, not only can there be no increase in welfare and income of the people, but people will progressively become worse-off and real incomes will actually decline as the current utilitarian system spreads its tentacles further.**

While some of us often take solace in the idea that science and technology may make the system more transparent and under control of the people, this continues to be proved wrong – for the simple reason that technology is a double-edged sword that can cut both ways and can easily be misused for any selfish purpose. Good technology, infrastructure, options for online bargaining etc. may keep people under the illusion that they have greater freedom of choice, while, in reality, it is something else. This illusion is, in fact, so strong that people seem to have lost all sense of discernment. Even though they claim to understand mentally that everything around them is wrong, that they are suffering under this system and that all achieved scientific progress is not doing anything to increase their well-being, still they continue to pin their hopes on scientific progress.

It is the experience of every common man on the street that the everyday costs of basic commodities and services are becoming overwhelmingly expensive and as a result the real incomes are going down. With the quality of the goods also deteriorating, the situation becomes even worse. As we eat contaminated food, be it home-

cooked or outside, breathe polluted air and fall ill, even our ever growing nominal income brings us no relief in our continued struggle for meeting our basic needs.

The three services of education, health and justice are the core services of the economy. With their rapid utilitarian commercialisation, their traditional purpose of 'serving' the people is no longer operative. These three fields, which play a key role in shaping the future of a country's outer vitality, have become nothing more than rigorous engines of money-making. In all the three fields, the costs are rapidly going up, while there is absolutely no relief or returns on our efforts which continue to become more and more cumbersome and painful.

## **A DEEPER PERSPECTIVE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Development and progress are bandied about as the panacea of all evils of society. But what is their widest scope, the deeper implications and higher meaning, what are the psychological forces that push development? All this has been discussed and understood in a limited fashion, indeed only the surface has been scratched.

The driving force of a country's growth is the psychological push of its people which in turn is powered by what motivates them. In the modern era phenomenal results have been achieved by the concentrated power of nationalism – pride in one's country and concern for her well-being. An outstanding example is the transformation of Japan from a traditional medieval feudal culture into a modern industrialised nation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When Russia was defeated by Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Russo-Japanese war, the rest of the world sat up in astonishment. No European country had been militarily defeated by an Asian one in modern times. Almost half a century later, as a consequence of the nuclear holocaust of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan was on her knees. But thirty-five years on, in 1980, Japan had one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and it was feared by some in the West that if her growth continued apace her GNP might equal or even exceed that of the US

by the end of the century. That potential was never realised as her people became more self-centred with the exposure to Western modes of thinking and their main feeder of growth – intensity driven by a certain selflessness – dwindled almost to stagnation. The current PM of Japan realises that without rekindling her national spirit Japan cannot be pulled out of the doldrums.

The Western gospel of utilitarianism, a selfish concentration on narrow aims causes greater and greater dysfunction in the various parts of society. Utilitarianism has been transposed into materialism and everything is valued according to its money-making potential. The quality of goods and services deteriorates even as they become more expensive. Medical care, education etc. are costing more and more while delivering less and less. Only the leavening of the spirit of nationalism has kept Western societies from sinking completely into the mire of destructive selfishness.

**Until a few centuries ago India was one of the richest countries of the world (in 1700 the GDP of India was greater than that of the whole of Western Europe) and that too after centuries of repressive Muslim rule. But political unity and based on it, the spirit of nationalism is relatively new to India. Throughout her long history she has been united culturally and spiritually but not politically.** There is, however, an even greater power, more enduring and free from the ultimate evil and destructive effect of nationalism, which can fuel economic development, even though being self-sufficient in itself, not expressly concerned with it. When an individual or a collectivity can rise beyond egoism, both its own and that of a larger collectivity – a nation or even humanity – and connect to its true spiritual self and can live in it to some extent, as ancient India was able to, then the power of this greatest potential begins to act visibly in all the fields of human endeavour. Once this power is aroused in a country there are no limits to her development. Not only physical development but also a psychological growth which can be the only true basis of happiness and fulfilment – witness the widespread dissatisfaction and psychological alienation and loneliness lurking just below the glamorous surfaces in modern

materially developed countries.

Indeed, the problem has become so serious that the present top heavy material development, if not balanced, is poised to destroy all civilised societies in the world. True growth and progress can only be the results of an integral spiritual growth of consciousness whether of the individual or of the society or the nation. **The conditions in which people live are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these without a change of consciousness is a vain chimera.**

In present times, India too has sunk into the morass of utilitarianism and in a worst possible way. As a nation, as a society, she seems to have forgotten her deeper well-springs of energy and has become lost in the chaos of conflicting narrow self-interests spiralling her into greater depths of depravation of every kind. A nationistic pride in the country and her achievements may be the lever to pull her out of this degradation and set her on the road to her true destiny which is also her heritage from times immemorial – the intelligent will to live for the spirit not only individually but also collectively. Nationalism, which underpins the Modi government manifesto, can act as a bridge to carry India onto the path of integral self-fulfilment and enable her to play her true role among the community of nations. But, she must not forget that the spirit of nationalism, however necessary and useful at present, is just one stage in the greater psychology and has to be transcended to attain that for which India's soul has always been striving – a progressive manifestation and expression of the Spirit in the terrestrial Nature.

“There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul.

Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us... **It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.**"<sup>10</sup>

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## HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (13)

### VII. HOW TO RECOVER THE PERFECT TRUTH OF THE VEDA

#### A. The Supreme Importance of the Recovery

“...by the inexorable vicissitudes of Time, we have lost the sense of Veda and do not possess the full sense of Vedanta.... We possess intellectually the general truths of Vedanta, the transcendental unity of things and the universal unity, ekam advitiyam Brahma and so’ham asmi; the secret of divine renunciation of the Ascetic and the secret of divine joy of the Vaishnava, with much else that is sovereign, vital, a priceless heritage. We possess many symbolic forms of religious application by which we enter into possession of the eternal truth through the emotions, through the intellect or through active experience in our inner life & outward relations. We possess numerous methods & forms of psychological discipline by which we repeat old profound experiences and do even actually possess many apparently lost details of Vedic truth preserved in another form and couched in more modern symbols. All this is much; it has kept us alive through the centuries. **But it is only in its totality that the Truth can work its utter miracles.** Otherwise, if we live on her broken meats we tend either to lose ourselves in the outer formulae or concentrate dogmatically on fragments & sides of the living truth; when great spirits arise to give us their deep & vast experience, we prove ourselves limited and shallow vessels and are unable to receive more of the truth than is in harmony with our confined intellects and narrow natures; and, if powerful floods of materialism invade us, as in the present European era of humanity, we have not the strength to resist, to hold fast to that which is difficult but enduring; we are overborne, lose our footing and are carried away in the vehement but shallow currents. **Perfection of knowledge is the right condition for perfection of nature and efficiency of life.** The perfect truth of the Veda is the fundamental knowledge,

the right relations with the Truth of things, on which alone according to our ideas, all other knowledge can receive the true orientation needed by humanity. **The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race.** For I believe firmly that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return and is actually at the present day, in the impulses of its vanguard, tending more and more, but vaguely and blindly, to return. If we can set our feet on the path, not vaguely and blindly, but in the full light that streamed so brilliantly and grandiosely on the inner sight of our distant forefathers, our speed will be more rapid and our arrival more triumphant.”<sup>1</sup>

## **B. The True and the Only Means of the Recovery**

**“The perfect truth of the Veda, where it is now hidden, can only be recovered by the same means by which it was originally possessed. Revelation and experience are the doors of the Spirit.** It cannot be attained either by logical reasoning or by scholastic investigation, – na pravachanena, na bahuná srutena . . . na tarkenaishá matir apaneyá. ‘Not by explanation of texts nor by much learning’ . . . ‘not by logic is this realisation attainable.’ Logical reasoning and scholastic research can only be aids useful for confirming to the intellect what has already been acquired by revelation and spiritual experience. This limitation, this necessity are the inexorable results of the very nature of Veda.

It is ordinarily assumed by the rationalistic modern mind, itself accustomed to arrive at its intellectual results either by speculation or observation, the metaphysical method or the scientific, that the sublime general ideas of the Upanishads, which are apparently of a metaphysical nature, must have been the result of active metaphysical speculation emerging out of an attempt to elevate

and intellectualise the primitively imaginative and sensational religious concepts of the Veda. I hold this theory to be an error caused by the reading of our own modern mental processes into the very different mentality of the Vedic Rishis. The higher mental processes of the ancient world were not intellectual, but intuitive. Those inner operations, the most brilliant, the most effective, the most obscure, are our grandest and most powerful sources of knowledge, but to the logical reason, have a very obscure meaning and doubtful validity. **Revelation, inspiration, intuition, intuitive discrimination, were the capital processes of ancient enquiry.** To the logical reason of modern men revelation is a chimera, inspiration only a rapid intellectual selection of thoughts or words, intuition a swift and obscure process of reasoning, intuitive discrimination a brilliant and felicitous method of guessing. But to the Vedic mind they were not only real and familiar, but valid processes; our Indian ancients held them to be the supreme means of arriving at truth, and, if any Vedic Rishi had composed, after the manner of Kant, a Critique of Veda, he would have made the ideas underlying the ancient words drishti, sruti, smriti, ketu, the principal substance of his critique; indeed, unless these ideas are appreciated, it is impossible to understand how the old Rishis arrived so early in human history at results which, whether accepted or questioned, excite the surprise and admiration even of the self-confident modern intellect.... But, whatever the validity attached to them or the lack of validity, **it is only by reproducing the Vedic processes and recovering the original starting point that we can recover also whatever is, to the intellect, hopelessly obscure in the Veda and Vedanta.** If we know of the existence of a buried treasure, but have no proper clue to its exact whereabouts, there are small chances of our enjoying those ancient riches; but if we have a clue, however cryptic, left behind them by the original possessors, the whole problem is then to recover the process of their cryptogram, set ourselves at the proper spot and arrive at their secret cache by repeating the very paces trod out by them in their lost centuries.

All processes of intellectual discovery feel the necessity of reposing upon some means of confirmation and verification which will safeguard their results, deliver us from the persistent questioning of intellectual doubt and satisfy, however incompletely, its demand for a perfectly safe standing-ground, for the greatest amount of surety. Each therefore has a double movement, one swift, direct, fruitful, but unsafe, the other more deliberate and certain. The direct process of metaphysics is speculation, its confirmatory process is reasoning under strict rules of verbal logic; the direct process of science is hypothesis, its confirmatory process is proof by physical experiment or by some kind of sensational evidence or demonstration. The method of Veda may be said to have in the same way a double movement; the revelatory processes are its direct method, experience by the mind and body is the confirmatory process. The relation between them cannot, indeed, be precisely the same as in the intellectual methods of metaphysics and science; for the revelatory processes are supposed to be self-illuminating and self-justifying. The very nature of revelation is to be a supra-intellectual activity occurring on the plane of that self-existent, self-viewing Truth, independent of our searching and finding, the presumed existence of which is the sole justification for the long labour of the intellect to arrive at truth. In Veda drishti and sruti illumine and convey, the intellect has only to receive and understand. Experience by the mind and body is necessary not for confirmation, but for realisation in the lower plane of consciousness on which we mental and physical beings live. We see a truth self-existent above this plane, self-existent in the satyam ritam brihat of the Veda, the True, the Right, the Vast which is the reality behind phenomena, but we have to actualise it on the levels on which we live, levels of imperfection and uncertainty, striving and seeking; otherwise it does not become serviceable to us; it remains merely a truth seen and does not become a truth lived. But when we moderns attempt to repeat the Vedic revelatory processes, experience by the mind and body becomes an indispensable confirmatory process, even a necessary preliminary process for their

acquisition; for the use of these supreme instruments of intuitive and revelatory knowledge is naturally attended, for those to whom the intellect is and has always been the chief and ordinary mental organ, by dangers and difficulties which did not to the same extent pursue the knowledge of the ancient Rishis. To them it was natural in its possession, easily purified in its use; to us it is a difficult acquisition, hampered in its use by the interference of the lower movements. Experience is, for us, indispensable; we may not be certain of excluding by its means all false sight and false intuition, but we can correct much that has been imperfectly seen and confirm beyond the possibility of all intellectual scepticism that which does clearly come down to us as illumination from our Higher self to be confirmed in life and experience, constantly and regularly, by our lower instruments.

We have, for instance, the remarkable passages in the Isha Upanishad about the sunless worlds, the luminous lid concealing Truth, the marshalling and concentration of the rays of Surya and his goodliest form of all, that form which, once seen, leads direct to the supreme realisation of oneness, So'ham asmi. Our intellect sees in these expressions a brilliant poetry, but no determinable philosophical sense; yet no one can follow thoughtfully the succession of the phrases without feeling that the Seer of the Upanishad did not really intend to lead up to the direct clarity of his supreme philosophical statement by a flight of vague poetical images; he has a more serious meaning, detailed, definite, precise, pregnant, in the carefully arranged procession of these splendid images. How are we to discover it? Using the scholastic method we may hunt for a clue in the other Upanishads; we may find it or imagine we have found it and by the aid of speculative inference and a liberal dose of fancy we may construct a brilliant or even a plausible theory of the Rishi's meaning. Or, without any such clue, by the aid of a clear intelligence and putting together of the ascertainable ideas of Veda or Vedanta, we may fix a meaning which will adequately explain the text, fit into the course of the argument and, in addition, justify itself by shedding light on other

passages where there is a reference to the Sun, to its rays or to its revelatory function. These means, however, can only conduct us to a plausible hypothesis, a twilight certainty, or at most a convincing probability. Nor, in this passage at least, will the metaphysical methods of Shankara at all assist us; for it is a question not of metaphysical logic but of the meaning of an ancient symbol, the connotation of certain antique figures. On the other hand, if we have been able to revive by Yoga the old methods used by the ancients themselves, we may, either in the ordinary course of our experiments or guided by the suggestion of the Upanishad, arrive at the actual experiences on which, in Vedic times, the use of this symbol and these figures was founded. We may perceive in our own selves the interposition of the golden vessel, the action of the rays, their disposition, their concentration; we may have the vision of the goodliest form of all, tejo yat te rupam kalyanatamam, and know, by luminous experience, the link between that vision and the realisation of the supreme Vedantic truth, So'ham asmi. We shall then be certain of our knowledge, our unity with the one and only existence. If the ancient ideas of our psychology are correct, by process of revelation and intuition we could have arrived at the same results; the old Rishis, accustomed to use that process habitually and follow its progressive action with as much surety and confidence as we follow the steps of a logician, would have needed nothing more for certainty, though much more for realisation; but we, habitually intellectual, pursued into the higher processes, when we can arrive at them, by those more brilliant and specious movements of the intellect which ape their luminosity and certainty, could not feel entirely safe and even, one might say, ought not to feel entirely safe against the possibility of error. The confirmation of experience is needed for our intellectual security.

**This method, by which, as I hold, the meaning of Veda can alone be entirely recovered, is, then, a process of psychological experiment and spiritual experience aided by the higher intuitive or revelatory faculties, – the vijñāna of Hindu psychology,**

– of which mankind has not yet, indeed, anything but a fitful and disordered use, but which are capable of being, within certain limits, educated and put into action even in our present transitional and unsatisfactory stage of evolution. It differs from the method by which the ancient Rishis received Vedic truth, – revelation confirmed by experience, – only by the side of approach which must be for us from below, not from above, and the weight of the emphasis which must rest for a mentality preponderatingly intellectual and only subordinately intuitional, on experience more than on intuition. For the rest, the common consent of humanity has agreed that only by higher than intellectual faculties can the truths of a supra-human or supra-sensuous order, if at all they exist, be really known. Religion, except in ethical and rationalistic creeds like Buddhism and Confucianism which have put aside all such questionings as outside the human domain, has always insisted that revelation is the indispensable angel and intermediary and the intellect at best only its servant, assistant and pupil. Science and rationalism have virtually agreed to this distinction; they have accepted the idea that all knowledge, which does not reach us through the doors of the senses and, on its arrival, submit its pretensions to the judgment of the reason, is incapable of solution by the intellect; but they add that, for this very reason, precisely because the senses are our only doors of experience and the reason our only safe counsellor, the questions raised by religion and metaphysics are utterly vain and insoluble; they relate either to the unknowable or the non-existent; either the material only exists, or, if there is any other existence, the material only can be known and therefore alone exists for the purview of humanity. As man marches upon the dust and is circumscribed by the pressure of the terrestrial atmosphere, so also his thought moves only in the material ether and is circumscribed within the laws and results of material form and motion. Recently we see, even in Europe or chiefly in Europe, – for Asia is too busy imitating Europe of yesterday to perceive whither Europe of today is tending, – a revolt against this arbitrary denial of the rarest parts of human experience. The

existence of the supra-sensuous and the infinite is reconquering belief and, at the same time, it is coming again to be admitted that there are faculties of intuitive and supra-rational knowledge which answer in the domain of Consciousness to these supra-sensuous facts of the domain of Being. The belief and the admission go together rationally. For **to every order of facts in Nature there should be in the same Nature, inevitably, a corresponding order of faculties in knowledge by which they can be comprehended;** if we have no certain knowledge of the facts, it is because we have not as yet the clear and steady use of the faculties.

In three of **the external aids by which Veda has been perpetuated in India, religion, Yoga, the guru-parampara**, this fundamental principle is amply admitted. Religion starts from revelation; it rests upon spiritual and moral experience. Yoga, admitting the truth of verbal revelation, the word of God and the word of the Master, yet starts from experience and rises, as a result of experimental development by fixed methods, to the use of intuitive and revelatory knowledge. The Guru-parampara starts with the word of the Guru, accepted as the knowledge of one who has seen, and proceeds to personal mastery by the experience of the disciple who may indeed go beyond his master and even modify his knowledge, but is not allowed to disown his starting-point.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, those higher faculties which alone can enable one to have the truer knowledge are to be developed by the pursuit of Yoga. In the words of the Gita;

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।

तत्त्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥ 4.38 ॥

This may be rendered in English thus, “There is nothing in the world equal in purity to knowledge, the man who is perfected by Yoga, finds it of himself in the self by the course of Time.”

“The Gita in describing how we come by this knowledge, says that we get first initiation into it from the men of knowledge who have *seen*, not those who know merely by the intellect, its

essential truths; but the actuality of it comes from within ourselves: 'the man who is perfected by Yoga, finds it of himself in the self by the course of Time,' it grows within him, that is to say, and he grows into it as he goes on increasing in desirelessness, in equality, in devotion to the Divine. It is only of the supreme knowledge that this can altogether be said; the knowledge which the intellect of man amasses, is gathered laboriously by the senses and the reason from outside. To get this other knowledge, self-existent, intuitive, self-experiencing, self-revealing, we must have conquered and controlled our mind and senses, *sa-yatendriya*, so that we are no longer subject to their delusions, but rather the mind and senses become its pure mirror; we must have fixed our whole conscious being on the truth of that supreme reality in which all exists, *tat-para*, so that it may display in us its luminous self-existence."<sup>3</sup>

"Always in this sense of a supreme self-knowledge is this word *jñāna* used in Indian philosophy and Yoga; it is the light by which we grow into our true being, not the knowledge by which we increase our information and our intellectual riches; it is not scientific or psychological or philosophic or ethical or aesthetic or worldly and practical knowledge. These too no doubt help us to grow, but only in the becoming, not in the being; they enter into the definition of Yogic knowledge only when we use them as aids to know the Supreme, the Self, the Divine, – scientific knowledge, when we can get through the veil of processes and phenomena and see the one Reality behind which explains them all; psychological knowledge, when we use it to know ourselves and to distinguish the lower from the higher, so that this we may renounce and into that we may grow; philosophical knowledge, when we turn it as a light upon the essential principles of existence so as to discover and live in that which is eternal; ethical knowledge, when by it having distinguished sin from virtue we put away the one and rise above the other into the pure innocence of the divine Nature; aesthetic knowledge, when we discover by it the beauty of the Divine; knowledge of the world, when we see through it the

way of the Lord with his creatures and use it for the service of the Divine in man. Even then they are only aids; the real knowledge is that which is a secret to the mind, of which the mind only gets reflections, but which lives in the spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

To acquire real knowledge faith is necessary, “if faith is absent, if one trusts to the critical intelligence which goes by outward facts and jealously questions the revelatory knowledge because that does not square with the divisions and imperfections of the apparent nature and seems to exceed it and state something which carries us beyond the first practical facts of our present existence, its grief, its pain, evil, defect, undivine error and stumbling, *añubham*, then there is no possibility of living out that greater knowledge. The soul that fails to get faith in the higher truth and law, must return into the path of ordinary mortal living subject to death and error and evil: it cannot grow into the Godhead which it denies. For **this is a truth which has to be lived, – and lived in the soul’s growing light, not argued out in the mind’s darkness. One has to grow into it, one has to become it, – that is the only way to verify it. It is only by an exceeding of the lower self that one can become the real divine self and live the truth of our spiritual existence. All the apparent truths one can oppose to it are appearances of the lower Nature.** The release from the evil and the defect of the lower Nature, *añubham*, can only come by accepting a higher knowledge in which all this apparent evil becomes convinced of ultimate unreality, is shown to be a creation of our darkness. But to grow thus into the freedom of the divine Nature one must accept and believe in the Godhead secret within our present limited nature. For the reason why the practice of this Yoga becomes possible and easy is that in doing it we give up the whole working of all that we naturally are into the hands of that inner divine Purusha. The Godhead works out the divine birth in us progressively, simply, infallibly, by taking up our being into his and by filling it with his own knowledge and power, *jñānadāpena bhāsvat*; he lays hands on our obscure ignorant nature and transforms it into his own light and wideness. What with entire faith and without egoism we believe

in and impelled by him will to be, the God within will surely accomplish. But the egoistic mind and life we now and apparently are, must first surrender itself for transmutation into the hands of that inmost secret Divinity within us.”<sup>5</sup>

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# THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (12)

## 2. INDIAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

### IV. The Greatest Accomplishment of Indian Culture – the Web of the Sanatana Dharma

#### *E. The Combination of a Firm Spiritual Order with an Untrammelled Spiritual Freedom*

“The necessity of a firm spiritual order as well as an untrammelled spiritual freedom was always perceived; but it was provided for in various ways and not in any one formal, external or artificial manner. It was founded in the first place on the recognition of an ever enlarging number of authorised scriptures. Of these scriptures some like the Gita possessed a common and widespread authority, others were peculiar to sects or schools: some like the Vedas were supposed to have an absolute, others a relative binding force. But the very largest freedom of interpretation was allowed, and this prevented any of these authoritative books from being turned into an instrument of ecclesiastical tyranny or a denial of freedom to the human mind and spirit. Another instrument of order was the power of family and communal tradition, *kuladharmā*, persistent but not immutable. A third was the religious authority of the Brahmins; as priests they officiated as the custodians of observance, as scholars, acting in a much more important and respected role than the officiating priesthood could claim, – for to the priesthood no great consideration was given in India, – they stood as the exponents of religious tradition and were a strong conservative power. Finally, and most characteristically, most powerfully, order was secured by the succession of Gurus or spiritual teachers, *paramparā*, who preserved the continuity of each spiritual system and handed it down from generation to generation but were empowered also, unlike the priest and the Pundit, to enrich freely its significance and develop its practice. A living and moving, not a rigid continuity, was the characteristic turn of the inner religious mind of India. The evolution of the Vaishnava religion from very early times,

its succession of saints and teachers, the striking developments given to it successively by Ramanuja, Madhwa, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya and its recent stirrings of survival after a period of languor and of some fossilisation form one notable example of this firm combination of age long continuity and fixed tradition with latitude of powerful and vivid change. A more striking instance was the founding of the Sikh religion, its long line of Gurus and the novel direction and form given to it by Guru Govind Singh in the democratic institution of the Khalsa. The Buddhist Sangha and its councils, the creation of a sort of divided pontifical authority by Shankaracharya, an authority transmitted from generation to generation for more than a thousand years and even now not altogether effete, the Sikh Khalsa, the adoption of the congregational form called Samaj by the modern reforming sects indicate an attempt towards a compact and stringent order. But it is noteworthy that even in these attempts the freedom and plasticity and living sincerity of the religious mind of India always prevented it from initiating anything like the overblown ecclesiastical orders and despotic hierarchies which in the West have striven to impose the tyranny of their obscurantist yoke on the spiritual liberty of the human race.

**The instinct for order and freedom at once in any field of human activity is always a sign of a high natural capacity in that field, and a people which could devise such a union of unlimited religious liberty with an always orderly religious evolution, must be credited with a high religious capacity, even as they cannot be denied its inevitable fruit, a great, ancient and still living spiritual culture.** It is this absolute freedom of thought and experience and this provision of a framework sufficiently flexible and various to ensure liberty and yet sufficiently sure and firm to be the means of a stable and powerful evolution that have given to Indian civilisation this wonderful and seemingly eternal religion with its marvellous wealth of many-sided philosophies, of great scriptures, of profound religious works, of religions that approach the Eternal from every side of his infinite Truth, of Yoga-systems of psycho-spiritual discipline and self-finding, of suggestive forms, symbols and

ceremonies which are strong to train the mind at all stages of development towards the Godward endeavour. Its firm structure capable of supporting without peril a large tolerance and assimilative spirit, its vivacity, intensity, profundity and multitudinousness of experience, its freedom from the unnatural European divorce between mundane knowledge and science on the one side and religion on the other, its reconciliation of the claims of the intellect with the claims of the spirit, its long endurance and infinite capacity of revival make it stand out today as the most remarkable, rich and living of all religious systems. The nineteenth century has thrown on it its tremendous shock of negation and scepticism but has not been able to destroy its assured roots of spiritual knowledge. A little disturbed for a brief moment, surprised and temporarily shaken by this attack in a period of greatest depression of the nation's vital force, India revived almost at once and responded by a fresh outburst of spiritual activity, seeking, assimilation, formative effort. A great new life is visibly preparing in her, a mighty transformation and farther dynamic evolution and potent march forward into the inexhaustible infinities of spiritual experience.

**The many-sided plasticity of Indian cult and spiritual experience is the native sign of its truth, its living reality, the unfettered sincerity of its search and finding; but this plasticity is a constant stumbling block to the European mind.** The religious thinking of Europe is accustomed to rigid impoverishing definitions, to strict exclusions, to a constant preoccupation with the outward idea, the organisation, the form. A precise creed framed by the logical or theological intellect, a strict and definite moral code to fix the conduct, a bundle of observances and ceremonies, a firm ecclesiastical or congregational organisation, that is Western religion. Once the spirit is safely imprisoned and chained up in these things, some emotional fervours and even a certain amount of mystic seeking can be tolerated – within rational limits; but, after all, it is perhaps safest to do without these dangerous spices. Trained in these conceptions, the European critic comes to India and is struck by the immense mass and intricacy of a polytheistic cult crowned at its

summit by a belief in the one Infinite. This belief he erroneously supposes to be identical with the barren and abstract intellectual pantheism of the West. He applies with an obstinate prejudgment the ideas and definitions of his own thinking, and this illegitimate importation has fixed many false values on Indian spiritual conceptions, – unhappily, even in the mind of “educated” India. But where our religion eludes his fixed standards, misunderstanding, denunciation and supercilious condemnation come at once to his rescue. The Indian mind on the contrary is averse to intolerant mental exclusions; for a great force of intuition and inner experience had given it from the beginning that towards which the mind of the West is only now reaching with much fumbling and difficulty, – the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic vision. Even when it sees the One without a second, it still admits his duality of Spirit and Nature; it leaves room for his many trinities and million aspects. Even when it concentrates on a single limiting aspect of the Divinity and seems to see nothing but that, it still keeps instinctively at the back of its consciousness the sense of the All and the idea of the One. Even when it distributes its worship among many objects, it looks at the same time through the objects of its worship and sees beyond the multitude of godheads the unity of the Supreme....”<sup>1</sup>

**“Indian religion founded itself on the conception of a timeless, nameless and formless Supreme, but it did not feel called upon, like the narrower and more ignorant monotheisms of the younger races, to deny or abolish all intermediary forms and names and powers and personalities of the Eternal and Infinite.** A colourless monism or a pale vague transcendental Theism was not its beginning, its middle and its end. The one Godhead is worshipped as the All, for all in the universe is he or made out of his being or his nature. But Indian religion is not therefore pantheism; for beyond this universality it recognises the supracosmic Eternal. Indian polytheism is not the popular polytheism of ancient Europe; for here the worshipper of many gods still knows that all his divinities are forms, names, personalities and powers of the One; his gods proceed from the one Purusha, his goddesses are energies of the

one divine Force. Those ways of Indian cult which most resemble a popular form of Theism, are still something more; for they do not exclude, but admit the many aspects of God. Indian image-worship is not the idolatry of a barbaric or undeveloped mind; for even the most ignorant know that the image is a symbol and support and can throw it away when its use is over. The later religious forms which most felt the impress of the Islamic idea, like Nanak's worship of the timeless One, Akala, and the reforming creeds of today, born under the influence of the West, yet draw away from the limitations of Western or Semitic monotheism. Irresistibly they turn from these infantile conceptions towards the fathomless truth of Vedanta. The divine Personality of God and his human relations with man are strongly stressed by Vaishnavism and Shaivism as the most dynamic Truth; but that is not the whole of these religions, and this divine Personality is not the limited magnified-human personal God of the West. **Indian religion cannot be described by any of the definitions known to the occidental intelligence. In its totality it has been a free and tolerant synthesis of all spiritual worship and experience.** Observing the one Truth from all its many sides, it shut out none. It gave itself no specific name and bound itself by no limiting distinction. Allowing separative designations for its constituting cults and divisions, it remained itself nameless, formless, universal, infinite, like the Brahman of its agelong seeking. **Although strikingly distinguished from other creeds by its traditional scriptures, cults and symbols, it is not in its essential character a credal religion at all but a vast and many-sided, an always unifying and always progressive and self-enlarging system of spiritual culture.<sup>a</sup>**

It is necessary to emphasise this synthetic character and embracing unity of the Indian religious mind, because otherwise we

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<sup>a</sup> The only religion that India has apparently rejected in the end, is Buddhism; but in fact this appearance is a historical error. Buddhism lost its separative force, because its spiritual substance, as opposed to its credal parts, was absorbed by the religious mind of Hindu India. Even so, it survived in the North and was exterminated not by Shankaracharya or another, but by the invading force of Islam.

miss the whole meaning of Indian life and the whole sense of Indian culture. It is only by recognising this broad and plastic character that we can understand its total effect on the life of the community and the life of the individual.”<sup>2</sup>

#### ***F. The Total Movement of Indian Spirituality – the Transmutation of All the Instruments of the Human into Instruments of a Divine Living***

**“The task of religion and spirituality is to mediate between God and man, between the Eternal and Infinite and this transient, yet persistent finite, between a luminous Truth-consciousness not expressed or not yet expressed here and the Mind’s ignorance.** But nothing is more difficult than to bring home the greatness and uplifting power of the spiritual consciousness to the natural man forming the vast majority of the race; for his mind and senses are turned outward towards the external calls of life and its objects and never inwards to the Truth which lies behind them. This external vision and attraction are the essence of the universal blinding force which is designated in Indian philosophy the Ignorance. Ancient Indian spirituality recognised that man lives in the Ignorance and has to be led through its imperfect indications to a highest inmost knowledge. Our life moves between two worlds, the depths upon depths of our inward being and the surface field of our outward nature. The majority of men put the whole emphasis of life on the outward and live very strongly in their surface consciousness and very little in the inward existence. Even the choice spirits raised from the grossness of the common vital and physical mould by the stress of thought and culture do not usually get farther than a strong dwelling on the things of the mind. The highest flight they reach – and it is this that the West persistently mistakes for spirituality – is a preference for living in the mind and emotions more than in the gross outward life or else an attempt to subject this rebellious life-stuff to the law of intellectual truth or ethical reason and will or aesthetic beauty or of all three together. But spiritual knowledge perceives that there is a greater thing in us; our inmost self, our real being is not the intellect, not the

aesthetic, ethical or thinking mind, but the divinity within, the Spirit, and these other things are only the instruments of the Spirit. A mere intellectual, ethical and aesthetic culture does not go back to the inmost truth of the spirit; it is still an Ignorance, an incomplete, outward and superficial knowledge. To have made the discovery of our deepest being and hidden spiritual nature is the first necessity and to have erected the living of an inmost spiritual life into the aim of existence is the characteristic sign of a spiritual culture.

This endeavour takes in certain religions the form of a spiritual exclusiveness which revolts from the outward existence rather than seeks to transform it. The main tendency of the Christian discipline was not only to despise the physical and vital way of living, but to disparage and imprison the intellectual and distrust and discourage the aesthetic thirsts of our nature. It emphasised against them a limited spiritual emotionalism and its intense experiences as the one thing needful; the development of the ethical sense was the sole mental necessity, its translation into act the sole indispensable condition or result of the spiritual life. Indian spirituality reposed on too wide and many-sided a culture to admit as its base this narrow movement; but on its more solitary summits, at least in its later period, it tended to a spiritual exclusiveness loftier in vision, but even more imperative and excessive. A spirituality of this intolerant high-pointed kind, to whatever elevation it may rise, however it may help to purify life or lead to a certain kind of individual salvation, cannot be a complete thing. For its exclusiveness imposes on it a certain impotence to deal effectively with the problems of human existence; it cannot lead it to its integral perfection or combine its highest heights with its broadest broadness. A wider spiritual culture must recognise that the Spirit is not only the highest and inmost thing, but all is manifestation and creation of the Spirit. It must have a wider outlook, a more embracing range of applicability and, even, a more aspiring and ambitious aim of its endeavour. Its aim must be not only to raise to inaccessible heights the few elect, but to draw all men and all life and the whole human being upward, to spiritualise life and in the end to divinise human nature. Not only must it be able

to lay hold on his deepest individual being but to inspire too his communal existence. It must turn by a spiritual change all the members of his ignorance into members of the knowledge; it must transmute all the instruments of the human into instruments of a divine living. The total movement of Indian spirituality is towards this aim; in spite of all the difficulties, imperfections and fluctuations of its evolution, it had this character. But like other cultures it was not at all times and in all its parts and movements consciously aware of its own total significance. This large sense sometimes emerged into something like a conscious synthetic clarity, but was more often kept in the depths and on the surface dispersed in a multitude of subordinate and special stand-points. Still, it is only by an intelligence of the total drift that its manifold sides and rich variations of effort and teaching and discipline can receive their full reconciling unity and be understood in the light of its own most intrinsic purpose."<sup>3</sup>

***References:***

- 1. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, pp.188-92, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
- 2. Ibid., pp.192-93**
- 3. Ibid., pp.196-98**



*“Slowly the light grows greater in the East,  
Slowly the world progresses on God’s road.  
His seal is on my task, it cannot fail:  
I shall hear the silver swing of heaven’s gates  
When God comes out to meet the soul of the world.”*

**– Sri Aurobindo**

*(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.34, Page.510)*