

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

April 2016



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

Year 7

Issue 1

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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 7

Issue 1

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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)

TAKING STOCK: MAJOR POLICY INITIATIVES OF THE MODI GOVERNMENT

In the last few months, we have been so blinded by the blaring media publicity tarnishing the image of the current government – highlighting issues like JNU, Rohith Vemula and secularism and nationalism – that we have failed to notice the substantive policy measures that this government has got underway. In this comment, we propose to take stock of all these policy measures.

The governance approach of this government is clear-cut. It has identified four main areas of thrust – foreign policy, national and internal security, social sector and the environment. Foreign policy is an area where the government has always held forte easily and has expanded its engagement by adopting a unique, nuanced approach towards Pakistan recently. Paradoxically, all political parties adopted hardliner positions – even though on issues like JNU, they took an anti-national stand – with Kejriwal even venturing to say that Modi had insulted Bharat Mata by allowing the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) from Pakistan access to Indian airbase in the Pathankot probe. This proves their double standards on issues like nationalism, exposing their politics of convenience.

Even though the outcome of the JIT visit was fruitless, with Pakistan turning its back on us, as usual, what needs to be highlighted is that it was the government's approach and the mature signal it sent out that mattered – with Pakistan, the outcomes have always been fruitless, so what is the harm in changing our approach?

This brings us to how seriously this government is taking domestic security. Besides hardening its position on Bangladeshi immigration, the government has implemented a slew of policy measures, the most prominent ones revolving around mapping people's identities and criminal affiliations closely. The Home Ministry conducted this exercise in J&K recently, where the J&K police was conducting a survey seeking personal details, such as specific details

of married daughters and sectoral affiliations within a religious community, to gauge ties with militant groups, being conducted exclusively in the Kashmir region of the state and monitored by the Indian army, with the aim of providing a separate 10-digit number to the Kashmir residents, independent of the Aadhar number.

In a related nation-wide measure, the government has started the preparation of the National Sex Offenders Registry under the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), due to be released in 2017, of all the individuals charge-sheeted for various sexual offences against women. This is a landmark measure which was already long implemented in countries like the USA and the UK.

The idea of National Sex Offenders Registry was proposed in the aftermath of the 'Nirbhaya' gang-rape case^a and was revived in the year 2015 by the Ministry of Home Affairs. In December 2015, the Ministry released a draft note for consultation which proposed to include individuals charge-sheeted for all cognizable and non-cognizable sexual offences under a sex offender register. Furthermore, the Minister for Women and Child Development (WCD) also suggested that offenders be included on the register irrespective of age and that even a 10 year old juvenile, "should have to report to the police where he is, and a watch should be kept on him for the rest of his life. He should report to the police every month, he should be required to say where he is working, where he is traveling."

The only argument against these proposals is that they are seen by social activists as constituting a violation of the Fundamental Rights of individuals and also violation of the Rights of a Child. However, the fact that the registry will be available in open access will act as a major deterrent in dealing with crimes against women. In terms of monitoring, it has already been proposed that local police officers will remain informed about the movements of the charge-sheeted. And there is also a proposal to shield the identity of the minors charge-sheeted.

^a Zee Media Bureau 2015

With the Juvenile Justice Bill now in place and the rising crimes committed by minors, the sex offenders registry will actually create conditions where, due to monitoring and deterrence, the potential accused juveniles might be spared the fate of going to dark reform-houses and undergoing the tortures of the modern prison system. It is a right corrective measure.

As far as corrective measures go, the greatest degree of restructuring has been done by government in the social and environmental sectors – particularly in education, healthcare and climate change. In education, the government has faced the maximum number of challenges – the JNU controversy, the Rohith Vemula suicide at the University of Hyderabad, the decision to withdraw the non-NET fellowship, the decision to bring in credit based course system, to re-orient education to include more from Hindu cultural history and the signing of a WTO agreement to allow private players in higher education. Since last year, there have been maximum number of student protests against the HRD Minister, Smriti Irani.

What the vested intellectual interests wanted was basically for the old, subsidized and inefficient education system to continue and preach the old Leftist, anti-Hindu values that it has always stood for. In JNU too, the support for terrorists was nothing new. The campus has been famous for such politics since the last 6 decades. The protestors – from JNU, Hyderabad, DU and Allahabad, who have now joined various political parties like the SP and CPI (M) – represent a force that opposes new changes. In the name of protecting secularism and democracy, these youth are actually protecting the old political interests.

They represent a minor community based on fleeting interests, paying lip service to big words – throw them freebies and they become quiet. Just like Ms. Irani did recently when she took the decision to scrap NET as a compulsory employment criterion.

The picture in the health sector is much more complex. While the government started with the ambition to implement the National

Health Policy. The policy has been stuck in a frozen mode since October last year, because NITI Aayog is putting pressure to give more power to private insurance companies, while the government is looking at giving the public more benefits. The extremes of both approaches would be harmful. For, globally, health has become a sector that is now beyond repair. It is rife with the maximum degree of internal corruption and decay and institutional efforts of this government, while appreciated in sending out a strong signal to the world, will not do much to reverse the decline. What healthcare requires is a fundamental treatment of the psychology of corruption that has permeated every level, instead of more futile expenditure and investment in infrastructure, which will only worsen the problem.

The best efforts of the government have been in the field of environment. India is about to ratify COP 21 on April 22nd, 2016, and it has taken a variety of initiatives in the field of climate change. Based on the global political compulsions, India will try to ensure that it is able to protect its interests in the field of solar energy after losing the dispute settlement case against US at WTO. Modi also has an ambitious energy policy and is ruthlessly combining the development (via coal use) and climate protection agenda. The government has tackled all the obstructionist NGOs and is instead itself overtaking the entire environmental agenda.

All these measures – spanning all sectors – show that the approach of the government is ruthless in achieving its objectives. These issues – not based on political gossip – are often glossed over by the media, which simply wants victims to bash. Yet they count in the progress report of a government. That is why even though the BJP may be facing challenges, but, as even critics admit, Modi's image remains untarnished. Instead of being dictated by experts, this government has reposed more faith in what is perceived to be intuitively correct, even though it may go against the complicated technical arguments of the expert advisors.

THE DISEASE OF FALSE SECULARISM IN INDIA: THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

With the Indian nation standing at the centre of a polarizing contest between forces new and old, we conclude our series exposing the disease of false secularism in India at this opportune time. Having deconstructed the bogey of false secularism in the country with its roots in political appeasement of the minorities, West-backed academic intellectuals and the sold-out media houses, it is worth questioning whether India had ever really internalized secularism as it is understood today. Had secularism – a Western import – really become a part of India's collective consciousness, we would have been destroyed long ago. India is a country that harbours the third largest Muslim population in the world, is exceptionally prejudiced in favour of the minorities and is home to states like Kerala, Goa, Assam and Kashmir where elite Christians and Muslims are holders of the state power and Hindu communities and ideologues are routinely massacred without any publicization by the media.

These conditions are the consequences of false secularism that we had imposed on ourselves since the time of the freedom struggle. But if we had, in spirit, culturally adopted the idea of secularism, we would have been long finished. We would have degenerated into a Bangladesh or a Pakistan or the present Europe – burning centres of conflict. Our biggest misconception about secularism – embedded in the minds of the youth – is that India's culture of diversity and pluralism flows from the secular ethos of our Constitution, from our freedom movement, and, to an extent, from our religious tradition. There could be no bigger misconception. As even many experts from the academic community have begun to recognize, **secularism is among the most violent doctrines of modern times and is the parent of communalism.**

As the data provided in the second article of this series has

shown, the history of communal riots in India is closely bound up with the rule of the Indian National Congress and other 'secular' political parties. In fact, the rise and decline of secularism in India is a reflection of the trajectory followed by the Congress party. The party has often been designated as a movement since the time of freedom struggle – a movement which eventually transited to evolve broad-based organization and institutions that incorporated all diverse interests within its political fold – and shaped, at some point or the other, by famous leaders of all hue from Sri Aurobindo and Tilak to Gandhi and Nehru and Sardar Patel.

Yet, today, the party is staring at a bleak future, hurtling towards its own inevitable end. Regardless of all the immediate superficial reasons being bandied about, the real cause lies in the party's deceitful policy of dividing and ruling the country for decades, through both physical oppression and appeasement through harmful ideas – mostly through a propagation of ideas that we find permanently embedded in our education system.

These ideas have destroyed our understanding of what true religion is supposed to mean. As Sri Aurobindo had said,

"It is true in a sense that religion should be the dominant thing in life, its light and law, but religion as it should be and is in its inner nature, its fundamental law of being, a seeking after God, the cult of spirituality, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the indwelling Godhead, the eternal Omnipresence. On the other hand, it is true that religion when it identifies itself only with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms, may well become a retarding force and there may therefore arise a necessity for the human spirit to reject its control over the varied activities of life. There are two aspects of religion, true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some

narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they must be unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, they are needed by man because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law.”¹

Secularism, while striking at the roots of religiousism, made the mistake of itself becoming dogmatic and trying to finish religion itself. This is exactly what happened in the West. And now a vacuum has been created, unfilled by the modern, orthodox Christianity and the secular ideal, which Europe is unable to fulfil. And, as a result of its flawed practise of tolerance and multiculturalism, it is now staring at its own end due to multiple crises from all sides. Even the threat of Islamic terrorism that has overtaken the world is just another side of our universal practise of secularism, including in the Gulf states.

India has largely remained untouched by the extent of global degeneration of secularism. Despite the best efforts of some elements of secular political parties and the Indian academia, India could never internalise secularism. Due to the pervasive influence of the Indian culture, even the internal structures of parties like the Congress, at lower levels, continued to remain insulated from the damning secular commandments of the modern times. Yet, these parties were able to propagate a diffused idea of secularism nation-wide through the medium of vote-bank and politics of division.

A NEW CHANGE NEEDED

This phase lasted for more than 6 decades, right from the time of freedom struggle. At the time, Sri Aurobindo had written that the first necessity for the youth of this country was to cultivate

the habit of thinking and reflecting. We were so immersed in inertia and so enmeshed in our religious rituals that the entire social and religious outer crust of the Hindu system were crumbling and threatening the inner spirit.

But as Sri Aurobindo had said,

“These hollow worm-eaten outsides of Hinduism crumbling so sluggishly, so fatally to some sudden and astonishing dissolution, do not frighten me. Within them I find the soul of a civilisation alive, though sleeping. I see upon it the consoling sentence of God, ‘Because thou hast believed in me, therefore thou shalt live and not perish’.”²

The colonial rule, with its onslaught of modern, secular ideas, shaped the contours of the Congress-led national movement. As Sri Aurobindo had written,

“A Church or a dominant sacerdotal caste remaining within its own function cannot form the organised political unity of a nation; for it is governed by other than political and administrative considerations and cannot be expected to subordinate to them its own characteristic feelings and interests. In India, the dominance of a caste governed by sacerdotal, religious and partly by spiritual interests and considerations, a caste which dominated thought and society and determined the principles of the national life but did not actually rule and administer, has always stood in the way of the development followed by the more secular-minded European and Mongolian peoples. It is only now after the advent of European civilisation when the Brahmin caste has not only lost the best part of its exclusive hold on the national life but has largely secularised itself, that political and secular considerations have come into the forefront, a pervading political self-consciousness has been awakened and the organised unity of the nation, as distinct from a spiritual and cultural oneness, made possible in fact and not only as an unshaped subconscious tendency.”³

The Congress, catering initially only to a small, urban elite

population, wore the cloak of 'moderation' and sought to mimic the colonial masters and adopt their ideas and culture, leading to the enmeshing of the 'secular' parlance. With the advent of Gandhi, the party base spread to rural areas as well, but the language of Gandhi's discourse projected Christian values like non-violence, cooperation and a Christian ideal of society, only superficially cloaked in Hindu terminology. The development of our national culture after Independence too was shaped by the Gandhi-Nehru legacy. With the gradual political fragmentation of power and the rise of regional parties from the 1970s, this discourse kept getting more and more vitiated. The mere language of secularism, representation and tolerance gave rise to the worst form of politics where division of society was encouraged on the basis of reservations and minority vote-banks became the new mode of acquiring political power.

While the repercussions of both communal and reservation politics is visible in the violence of today which is threatening to break-down what had been conveniently embedded since Independence, the movement towards such polarisation was also partially necessary. The credit for encouraging much-needed thinking, reforming of the ritualistic bounds of Hindu religion and ensuring greater democratization goes to the temporary and superficial movement of politics of division, on which Indian secularism was based.

Historically, this was because of our social order which could never be subordinated to a secular administrative agency. As Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"The different result in India, apart from other causes, was due to the different evolution of the social order. Elsewhere that evolution turned in the direction of a secular organisation and headship; it created within the nation itself a clear political self-consciousness and, as a consequence, either the subordination of the sacerdotal class to the military and administrative or else their equality or even their fusion under a common spiritual and secular

head. In mediaeval India, on the contrary, it turned towards the social dominance of the sacerdotal class and the substitution of a common spiritual for a common political consciousness as the basis of the national feeling. No lasting secular centre was evolved, no great imperial or kingly head which by its prestige, power, antiquity and claim to general reverence and obedience could over-balance or even merely balance this sacerdotal prestige and predominance and create a sense of political as well as spiritual and cultural oneness.

Even in India the people which first developed some national self-consciousness not of a predominantly spiritual character were the Rajputs, especially of Mewar, to whom the Raja was in every way the head of society and of the nation; and the peoples which having achieved national self-consciousness came nearest to achieving also organised political unity were the Sikhs for whom Guru Govind Singh deliberately devised a common secular and spiritual centre in the Khalsa, and the Mahrattas who not only established a secular head, representative of the conscious nation, but so secularised themselves that, as it were, the whole people indiscriminately, Brahmin and Shudra, became for a time potentially a people of soldiers, politicians and administrators.

In other words, the institution of a fixed social hierarchy, while it seems to have been a necessary stage for the first tendencies of national formation, needed to modify itself and prepare its own dissolution if the later stages were to be rendered possible.”⁴

Hence, the partial necessity of secularism and the decades of Nehruvian idealism after Independence that India has gone through. But even as this process of modernisation and secularisation was underway, it could not touch the cultural roots of the country. Despite the best efforts of the secular movement even at its peak and the politicisation of the worst injustices of the ancient system of caste, there could never be any large-scale secularisation of the Dalits and the OBCs. The communities continue to stick to their

identity rooted in the Hindu religion. In fact, the rise of the BJP during the 1980s and its culmination in the Babri Masjid demolition, mainly by the Dalits, effectively consolidated the BJP's lower caste base. It still relies on getting more than 40 percent of its projected votes from these castes. Similarly, despite the best efforts of the Indian academics to project otherwise, the basic unity between Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism has ensured their status as sub-parts of the eternal religion, the sanatana dharma.

It is, thus, clear that there was a necessary, albeit temporary purpose behind the rise of secularism in India, through the medium of the Congress party and the academic intellectuals. That purpose has now been served. When Modi came to power in 2014 he painted the finishing touches on the project of secularism by bringing in his development agenda. He ensured that the process of thinking and reflection that was supposed to have been cultivated by years of toil will now culminate in the actual involvement of people in politics. Thus, as is widely acknowledged even by his most rabid critics, Modi is the first political leader of this country who has actually got people talking about politics.

And, now that the people are actually involved in politics, secularism has just become another issue of debate – contrary to the belief of intellectuals and the discourse being projected by the Congress party, secularism and tolerance are no longer at the centre of a contest. The idea of a secular and an anti-secular front – like during the mid-1990s – is no longer relevant, because the idea has lost its power.

THE FUTURE

If secularism, as practised in Indian politics, has lost its relevance, then what are the factors that will shape the country's future? It is clear that India, with the permanent decline of the Congress party and the secular front, has inevitably been hurled into a new phase. Our politics and nationhood will take a new shape or there may be more painful periods of transition, but an idea

whose time is up will not come back now.

The future will be based on shaping our ideal of nationhood on the basis of the central principles of our civilisation, so that India can now take her place in the world. The current environment reflects conditions that are ripe for this.

The country is rife with debate on secularism, tolerance and nationalism, with people getting more and more vocal and aware, and India is taking strides in her domestic economy and foreign policy, stumping even neighbours like Pakistan by completely changing her approach under Modi's leadership. And even as these struggles go on, Modi's personal popularity remains untouched. All the occasional negative publicity is directly implicating only the BJP or the RSS, but not people's faith in Modi. At the same time, the Congress has taken a severe beating politically and culturally. Its identity now stands completely dissolved. There are a million mutinies within that party and it is clear that the party can recover its identity, if at all, only through the exclusion of the Gandhi family.

Modi is bringing in sweeping changes within both the country and the BJP's backbone, the RSS. It is now felt even at the highest critical political levels that RSS is increasingly becoming more democratic, with its traditional Maharashtrian Brahmin support base being ruthlessly upended by Modi to ensure that Gujarati Baniyas and lower castes get more voice. This is finishing the traditional religious rigidity of the RSS and, if you may, making it more secular and democratic, thereby influencing the ground-work which prepares it for national politics.

As Sri Aurobindo had written,

"The direction needed was a change from the spiritual authority of one class and the political authority of another to a centralisation of the common life of the evolving nation under a secular rather than a religious head or, if the religious tendency in the people be too strong to separate things spiritual and temporal,

under a national head who shall be the fountain of authority in both departments. Especially was it necessary for **the creation of a political self-consciousness, without which no separate nation-unit can be successfully formed***, that the sentiments, activities, instruments proper to its creation should for a time take the lead and all others stand behind and support them.”⁵

At the national level, under Modi, we are for the first time, seeing the unification of the religious and the secular authority that Sri Aurobindo had talked about. Our secular administration and policies remain the same, even as, through the instrumentality of Modi, it is ensured that India embraces her traditional Hindu culture, which itself shaped the practise of secularism and prevented it from degenerating as in the West.

The uniqueness of this Hindu culture and its relationship with nationalism is reflected in Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of the state of Hindu-Muslim relations and the nature of Hinduism as the eternal religion:

“The Mahomedans base their separateness and their refusal to regard themselves as Indians first and Mahomedans afterwards on the existence of great Mahomedan nations to which they feel themselves more akin, in spite of our common birth and blood, than to us. Hindus have no such resource. For good or evil, they are bound to the soil and to the soil alone. They cannot deny their Mother, neither can they mutilate her. **Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions, because the Hindu made the land and the people and persists by the greatness of his past, his civilisation and his culture and his invincible virility, in holding it, but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself.**”⁶

Under the present conditions, it is this nature of the Hindu culture that is coming to the fore and shaping the ideal of Indian

*Bold letters in the quoted text are from the writer and are not there in the original.

nationhood. **The writing on the wall is clearer than ever. The conflicts that are happening all over the country – secularism, JNU issue, cow slaughter, nationalism etc. – are, without anyone realizing it, actually breaking the back of the traditional secular forces that have vitiated the political discourse of the country.** The alternative is emerging in the form of a secular polity based on strong nationalism and reclaiming of the fundamental principles of the Hindu religion.

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- 3. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.25, p.378, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
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INDIA'S ECONOMY DURING THE BRITISH RULE (2)

A. THE BENGAL FAMINE OF 1770

“... British control of India started with a famine in Bengal in 1770 and ended in a famine – again in Bengal – in 1943. Working in the midst of the terrible 1877 famine that he estimated had cost another 10 million lives, Cornelius Walford calculated that in the 120 years of British rule there had been 34 famines in India, compared with only 17 recorded famines in the entire previous two millennia. One of factors that explained this divergence was the Company's abandonment of the Mughal system of public regulation and investment. Not only did the Mughals use tax revenues to finance water conservation, thus boosting food production, but when famine struck they imposed ‘embargos on food exports, anti-speculative price regulation, tax relief and distribution of free food’. More brutally, if merchants were found to have short-changed peasants during famines, an equivalent weight in human flesh would be taken from them in exchange.

Like previous failures of the natural cycle, the inadequate monsoon of 1769 in Bengal could have been managed without great loss of life. But the Company had significantly increased Bengal's vulnerability to natural disaster. Bengal had been picked clean by the Company and its executives in the preceding decade. Revenue collection had increased dramatically from just £606,000 the year before the Company took over the diwani to a peak of £2,500,000 two years later. Flows of bullion into Bengal fell from £345,000 in 1764 to £54,000 in 1765, and ceased entirely in 1766. Instead, silver started leaving Bengal to pay for the Company's tea trade. By 1769, Richard Becher, the Company's Resident at Murshidabad, admitted with some shame that ‘the condition of the people of this country has been worse than it was before’, arguing that ‘this fine country, which flourished under the most despotic and arbitrary government, is verging towards its ruin while the English have so great a share in the Administration’.

Throughout 1769, the Company monitored the situation, and in November, the Calcutta Council wrote back to London that revenues would be reduced in the year ahead. A harrowing letter published under the name of J.C. in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in September 1771 reveals the unrelenting pursuit of self-interest that governed the Company's approach to the crisis. Rather than take action to curb price speculation in grain, 'as soon as the dryness of the season foretold the approaching dearness of rice', wrote J.C., 'our Gentlemen in the Company's service were as early as possible in buying up all they could lay hold of'. The peasants quickly complained to the Nawab that the English had 'engrossed all the rice'. But when these accusations were put before the Company's Calcutta Council, the complaint was met with howls of laughter and thrown out. Huge fortunes were made as Company staff cornered the market. One junior executive accumulated over £60,000, as rice prices soared from 120 seers of rice per rupee at the beginning of the famine to just three seers a rupee in June 1770. At the time, a seer was equivalent to about 2 lb in weight. The Nawab and other Bengali nobles tried to respond in the traditional way and distributed rice free of charge. But because of the hoarding by the Company's executives, their stocks were soon depleted.

As the famine intensified, thousands flocked to Calcutta, many dying in the streets. Whoever he was, J.C. clearly had humanitarian feelings and would hand out food to the starving who gathered near his Calcutta residence. But he was also squeamish. On one occasion, he sent his servants to get the starving to move away from his house. But one of the near-dead rebelled, and cried out: 'Baba! Baba!, my Father, My Father! This affliction comes from the hands of your countrymen, and I am come here to die, if it pleases God, in your presence.' J.C. concludes his letter by describing Calcutta's good fortune of having both vultures and dogs to deal with the dead – the first to take out the eyes and intestines, and the latter to gnaw the feet and the hands.

With no pictures or photographs to drive home the horror of the

event, we are left with eye-witness accounts of the living feeding off the dead, of the Hugli full of swollen bodies and, in the words of Karim Ali, author of *Muzaffarnamah*, of whole families being yielded up to the ‘talons of the wrath of the godless’. However, the Company’s first concern was to feed its army and then to ensure that its taxes were secure. Not only did the Company continue to collect its land revenues throughout the famine – instead of introducing some form of relief in the Mughal fashion – it actually increased the rate. In February 1771, Calcutta reported back to the directors that ‘notwithstanding the great severity of the late famine and the great reduction of people thereby, some increase has been made’ in revenue collection. Many of the Company’s leading executives used their position to purchase grain by force – even seed for the next year’s planting – and then sold this at famine prices in the big cities of Calcutta and Murshidabad. Eventually, the Company did act, providing Rs90,000 in relief, a pittance in a land of some 30 million people with annual revenues of over Rs17 million. Even later imperial historians admitted that the Company did not even ‘attempt to cope with the disaster’. This was a man-made catastrophe.

The absence of comprehensive records means that it is impossible to calculate accurately the numbers of those who died in the famine. In 1772, Warren Hastings estimated that 10 million Bengalis had starved to death, equating to perhaps a third of the population. Hastings also concluded that the famine was caused by an artificial shortage of food supplies caused by market manipulation. For this, Hastings blamed the local merchants, ignoring the role of the Company executives themselves.”¹

“Mortality was highest among low-income groups, the rural artisans and urban poor, neither of whom had direct access to food stocks. In Purnea, one of the worst-affected districts, the Company’s agent reported that ‘on the high and sandy soils, more than half the ryots are dead’. Mortality in Malda also approached 50 per cent, while in Rajshahi between a third and a half of the people died, and in Birbhum up to a quarter perished. Re-

examining the data, Rajat Datta has recently argued that the accepted estimate of 10 million deaths is inflated, suggesting a death toll of 1.2 million instead. Yet, even if this more conservative figure is taken, the terrible outcome of the famine can still be barely understood. This was a time when the population of London was well under a million.

All of these and more would have been wiped out if the famine had hit the Company's home town, instead of far-off Bengal. In effect, London would have been left a ghost town. Instead, it was Bengal that was depopulated, with one-third of the Company's territory lying 'as jungle inhabited only by wild beasts'. The sheer barbarity of the Company's conduct during the 1770 famine lies in its refusal to temper its demands for taxes with a sense of responsibility for the people of Bengal. As Warren Hastings acknowledged in a letter to the Company's directors in November 1772, 'it was naturally to be expected that the diminution of the revenue should have kept an equal pace with other consequences of so great a calamity'. The reason that revenues were maintained was 'owing to its being violently kept up to its former standard'.²

"The Bengal Famine stands out as perhaps one of the worst examples of corporate mismanagement in history. Yet, the preconditions for such a disaster had been in place for decades. The onrush of easy money from coups and corruption extinguished the scrupulous concern for trade that had previously characterized the Company's management. While those in England squabbled over how to divide the spoils, in India all systems of administrative control broke down, allowing abuse to flourish at the expense of both the people of Bengal and the Company itself. William Bolts captured this dual collapse perfectly when he wrote in 1772, 'while this nation is gazing after the fruit, the Company and their substitutes are suffered to be rooting up the tree'. Remittances home from the Company's executives stood at just £79,000 in 1756. But following the victory at Plassey, they would average an annual £500,000 in

the years to 1784. In 1770-71, in the midst of the Bengal Famine, a staggering £1,086,255 was transferred home by the Company's executives – equivalent to nearly £100 million in twenty-first-century terms.

Executives in India lost sight of their commercial purpose, and observers in London lamented the declining quality of the textiles that were now sent back from Bengal, which exhibited 'no assortment, no taste, nothing new either to furnish variety to the old or to engage new markets'. Added to this, embezzlement became widespread. Writing much later, Warren Hastings would complain in 1782 that 'every article of the investment is provided for the Company at 30 or 40 or even 50 per cent beyond its real cost'. All notions of cost control evaporated as military force became a vital part of the Company's operations, and membership of the officer corps purchased a share of the plunder following a successful military adventure. While the numbers of soldiers under Company command grew four times during the 1760s, the numbers of officers expanded ten-fold to take advantage of the plunder of war. By 1770-71, the Company's military and commercial spending in Bengal had reached £3,210,000, 50 per cent more than its revenues.

Far-sighted observers quickly concluded that the scale of the Company's acquisitions overwhelmed its management capabilities. Even before the acquisition of the diwani, Charles Jenkinson was writing that 'the affairs of this Company seem to become much too big for the management of a body of merchants'. Crucially, the boardroom battles in London had made the Company a plaything of competing shareholder forces, sending a clear signal to the management of its subsidiaries in the East that the Company was now ripe for liquidation from within. In a revealing minute written by Clive in September 1766, the hero of Plassey traced the problem to 'the conduct of governors, who, too eager in the pursuit of private interest, have involved themselves in affairs which could not be reconciled to the strict principles of integrity' – as ever, excusing his own conduct from criticism.

What had allowed the ‘get rich-quick’ appetites of the Company’s executives to take hold so disastrously was the removal of the Nawab’s regulatory authority. Just as a great oak or deodar provides valuable shade in a forest, so strong regulation provides the framework within which the economic ecosystem can flourish; weaken or remove it and anarchy and oppression will follow. In so many ways, the long term interests of the Company as a trading concern would have been better served through partnership with a strong local ruler rather than market domination. By the end of the 1760s, the Company’s directors were recognizing that Bengal had been a hollow acquisition. Instead of the untold riches they had expected, the Company had ‘only exchanged a certain profit in commerce for a precarious one in revenue’.

In London, news of the famine generated a genuine sense of horror and humanitarian concern. The first inklings of what was taking place reached London in December 1770, when the Gentleman’s Magazine reported that ‘provisions were so scarce in the Company’s new acquisitions that parents brought their children to sell them for a morsel of bread’. When the full story became known, horror turned to outrage at the Company’s negligence. As Horace Walpole said at the time, ‘we have murdered, deposed, plundered, usurped – nay, what think you of the famine in Bengal, in which three millions perished, being caused by a monopoly of provisions by the servants of the East Indies’.”³

B. THE TRUE CAUSES OF INTENSE POVERTY AND REPEATED FAMINES IN INDIA: THE RUTHLESS AND SELFISH POLICIES OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT

In his book “The Economic History of India under the Early British Rule” Romesh Chandra Dutta, writes that “What are the causes of the intense poverty and repeated famines in India? Superficial explanations have been offered one after another, and have been rejected on close examination. It was said that the population

increased rapidly in India, and that such increase must necessarily lead to famines; it is found on inquiry that the population has never increased in India at the rate of England, and that during the last ten years it has altogether ceased to increase. It was said that the Indian cultivators were careless and improvident, and that those who did not know how to save when there was plenty, must perish when there was want; but it is known to men who have lived all their lives among these cultivators, that there is not a more abstemious, a more thrifty, a more frugal race of peasantry on earth. It was said that the Indian money-lender was the bane of India and by his fraud and extortion kept the tillers of the soil in a chronic state of indebtedness; but the inquiries of the latest Famine Commission have revealed that the cultivators of India are forced under the thralldom of money-lenders by the rigidity of the Government revenue demand. It was said that in a country where the people depended almost entirely on their crops, they must starve when the crops failed in years of drought; but the crops in India, as a whole, have never failed, there has never been a single year when the food supply of the country was insufficient for the people, and there must be something wrong, when failure in a single province brings on a famine, and the people are unable to buy their supplies from neighboring provinces rich in harvests.

Deep down under all these superficial explanations we must seek for the true causes of Indian poverty and Indian famines. The economic laws which operate in India are the same as in other countries of the world; the causes which lead to wealth among other nations lead to prosperity in India. Does agriculture flourish? Are industries and manufactures in a prosperous condition? Are the finances properly administered, so as to bring back to the people an adequate return for the taxes paid by them? Are the sources of national wealth widened by a Government anxious for the material welfare of the people? These are questions which the average Englishman asks himself when inquiring into the economic condition of any country in the world; these are questions which he will ask himself in order to ascertain the truth about India.

It is, unfortunately, a fact which no well-informed Indian official will ignore, that, in many ways, the sources of national wealth in India have been narrowed under British rule. India in the eighteenth century was a great manufacturing as well as a great agricultural country, and the products of the Indian loom supplied the markets of Asia and of Europe. It is, unfortunately, true that the East Indian Company and the British Parliament, following the selfish commercial policy of a hundred years ago, discouraged Indian manufacturers in the early years of British rule in order to encourage the rising manufactures of England. Their fixed policy, pursued during the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, was to make India subservient to the industries of Great Britain, and to make the Indian people grow raw produce only, in order to supply material for the looms and manufactories of Great Britain. This policy was pursued with unwavering resolution and with fatal success; orders were sent out to force Indian artisans to work in the Company's factories; commercial residents were legally vested with extensive powers over villages and communities of Indian weavers; prohibitive tariffs excluded Indian silk and cotton goods from England; English goods were admitted into India free of duty or on payment of a nominal duty.

The British manufacturer, in the words of the historian, H. H. Wilson, 'employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms;' millions of Indian artisans lost their earnings; the population of India lost one great source of their wealth. It is a painful episode in the history of British rule in India; but it is a story which has to be told to explain the economic condition of the Indian people, and their present helpless dependence on agriculture. The invention of the power-loom in Europe completed the decline of the Indian industries; and when in recent years the power-loom was set up in India, England once more acted towards India with unfair jealousy. An excise duty has been imposed on the production of cotton fabrics in India which disables the Indian manufacturer from competing with the manufacturer of Japan and China, and which

stifles the new steam-mills of India.

Agriculture is now virtually the only remaining source of national wealth in India, and four-fifths of the Indian people depend on agriculture. But the Land Tax levied by the British Government is not only excessive, but, what is worse, it is fluctuating and uncertain in many provinces. In England, the Land Tax was between one shilling and four shillings in the pound, i.e., between 5 and 20 per cent, of the rental, during a hundred years before 1798, when it was made perpetual and redeemable by William Pitt. In Bengal the Land Tax was fixed at over 90 per cent, of the rental, and in Northern India at over 80 per cent, of the rental, between 1793 and 1822. It is true that the British Government only followed the precedent of the previous Mahomedan rulers, who also claimed an enormous Land Tax. But the difference was this that what the Mahomedan rulers claimed they could never fully realize; what the British rulers claimed they realized with rigor. The last Mahomedan ruler of Bengal, in the last year of his administration (1764), realized land revenue of £817,553; within thirty years the British rulers realized land revenue of £2,680,000 in the same Province. In 1802 the Nawab of Oudh ceded Allahabad and some other rich districts in Northern India to the British Government.

The land revenue which had been claimed by the Nawab in these ceded districts was £1,352,347; the land revenue which was claimed by the British rulers within three years of the cession was £1,682,306. In Madras, the Land Tax first imposed by the East India Company was one-half the gross produce of the land. In Bombay, the land revenue of the territory conquered from the Mahrattas in 1817 was £800,000 in the year of the conquest; it was raised to £1,500,000 within a few years of British rule; and it has been continuously raised since. 'No Native Prince demands the rent which we do,' wrote Bishop Heber in 1826, after travelling all through India, and visiting British and Native States. 'A Land Tax like that which now exists in India,' wrote Colonel Briggs in 1830, 'professing to absorb the whole of the landlord's rent, was never known under any

Government in Europe or Asia.’

The people of Bengal and of Northern India gradually obtained some relief from the heavy land assessment of the early years of British rule. In Bengal the assessment was made permanent; and as it has not been raised with the extension of cultivation, it now bears (including Road and Public Work cesses, which have been since imposed on the rental) a ratio of about 35 per cent, on the rental. In Northern India the assessment was not made permanent, but it was reduced to slightly over 50 per cent., including all cesses, in 1855. But new cesses were added; calculations were made, not on the current, but on the prospective rental, until the tax rose to close upon 60 per cent, on the rental.

In Madras and Bombay things are worse. There the Land Tax is paid generally by the cultivators of the soil, there being, in most parts of those provinces, no intervening landlords. The British Government declared its intention in 1864 of realizing as Land Tax about one-half of the economic rent. But what the British Government does take as Land Tax at the present day sometimes approximates to the whole of the economic rent, leaving the cultivators little beyond the wages of their labor and the profits of their agricultural stock. The Land Tax is revised once every thirty years; the cultivator does not know on what grounds it is enhanced; he has to submit to each renewed assessment, or to leave his ancestral fields and perish. This uncertainty of the Land Tax paralyses agriculture, prevents saving, and keeps the tiller of the soil in a state of poverty and indebtedness.

It will appear from the facts stated above that the Land Tax in India is not only heavy and uncertain, but that the very principle on which it is raised is different from the principle of taxation in all well administered countries. In such countries the State promotes the accumulation of wealth, helps the people to put money into their pockets, likes to see them prosperous and rich, and then demands a small share of their earnings for the expenses of the State. In India the State virtually interferes with the accumulation of wealth from

the soil, intercepts the incomes and gains of the tillers, and generally adds to its land revenue demand at each recurring settlement, leaving the cultivators permanently poor. In England, in Germany, in the United States, in France and other countries, the State widens the income of the people, extends their markets, opens out new sources of wealth, identifies itself with the nation, and grows richer with the nation. In India, the State has fostered no new industries and revived no old industries for the people; on the other hand, it intervenes at each recurring land settlement to take what it considers its share out of the produce of the soil. Each new settlement in Bombay and in Madras is regarded by the people as a wrangle between them and the State as to how much the former will keep and how much the latter will take. It is a wrangle decided without any clear limits fixed by the law – a wrangle in which the opinion of the revenue officials is final, and there is no appeal to judges or Land Courts. The revenue increases and the people remain destitute.

Taxation raised by a king, says the Indian poet, is like the moisture of the earth sucked up by the sun, to be returned to the earth as fertilizing rain; but the moisture raised from the Indian soil now descends as fertilizing rain largely on other lands, not on India. Every nation reasonably expects that the proceeds of taxes raised in the country should be mainly spent in the country. Under the worst governments that India had in former times, this was the case. The vast sums which Afghan and Moghal Emperors spent on their armies went to support great and princely houses, as well as hundreds of thousands of soldiers and their families. The gorgeous palaces and monuments they built, as well as the luxuries and displays in which they indulged, fed and encouraged the manufacturers and artisans of India. Nobles and Commanders of the army, Subadars, Dewans, and Kazis, and a host of inferior officers in every province and every district, followed the example of the Court; and mosques and temples, roads, canals and reservoirs, attested to their wide liberality, or even to their vanity. Under wise rulers, as under foolish kings, the proceeds of taxation flowed back to the people and fructified their trade and industries.

But a change came over India under the rule of the East India Company. They considered India as a vast estate or plantation, the profits of which were to be withdrawn from India and deposited in Europe. They reserved all the high appointments in India for their own nominees seeking a lucrative career in the East. They bought their merchandise out of the revenues of India, and sold it in Europe for their own profit. They vigorously exacted from India a high interest on their stock-in-trade. In one shape or another all that could be raised in India by an excessive taxation flowed to Europe, after paying for a starved administration.

The East India Company's trade was abolished in 1833, and the Company was abolished in 1858, but their policy remains. Their capital was paid off by loans which were made into an Indian Debt, on which interest is paid from Indian taxes. The empire was transferred from the Company to the Crown, but the people of India paid the purchase-money The Indian Debt, which was £51,000,000 in 1857, rose to £97,000,000 in 1862. Within the forty years of peace which have succeeded, the Indian Debt has increased continuously, and now (1901) amounts to £200,000,000. The 'Home Charges' remitted annually out of the Indian revenues to Great Britain have increased to sixteen millions. The pay of European officers in India, virtually monopolizing all the higher services, comes to ten millions. One-half of the net revenues of India, which are now forty four millions sterling, flows annually out of India. Verily the moisture of India blesses and fertilizes other lands."⁴

"The whole of Bengal was considered as an estate, a source of profit to the East India Company. The taxes raised from thirty millions of people were, after deduction of expenses and allowances, not to be spent in the country and for the benefit of the country, but to be sent to England as profits of the Company. An annual remittance of over a million and a half sterling was to be made from a subject country to the shareholders in England. A stream of gold was to flow perennially from the revenues of a poor nation to add to the wealth of the richest nation on the face of the earth.

We thus find that the very first scheme which was framed by British rulers for the administration of India involved that fatal Economic Drain which has now swelled to an annual remittance of many millions sterling. The victory of British arms in India, the organised rule introduced into that country by the British, the maintenance of peace, the dispensation of justice, and the spread of western education, deserve all the praise which has been bestowed upon them. But the financial relations between India and England have always from the very commencement been unfair and India, with her vast resources, her fertile soil, and her industrious population, is now the poorest country on earth after a century and a half of British rule.”⁵

References:

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- 2. Ibid.**, p. 93
- 3. Ibid.**, pp. 94-95
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- 5. Ibid.**, pp. 25-26

GOLDEN DAY

All I see is golden,
The illuminating light of above,
Descending onto the land of yours,
Where you walked and leaded all.

The time could fade not your footsteps,
But engrave them deep and hard,
In the heart that sees your smile,
And the soul that seek your height.

You saw a liberating dream,
You inspired the prisoners of desire,
To live beyond the fence of offensive mind,
And touch the cloudless sky where you reside.

To look upward towards your blue sky,
Eyes open up towards the inner insight,
Your fields are bright with golden sunshine,
And you're radiating face, solace for aching eyesight.

O Dreamer of this golden dream,
Alone you could have hailed in your ship,
But indeed, deep is the sea of your love,
That feeds the life to all those in the seabed.

You arrived in a form that we could see,
You descended in hearts of flaming faith,
You saw the coming time as newer world,
You are ruler of the time that's yet to come.

It's your dream that manifests into reality,
Blessing the age old cosmos a golden youth,
You seek the change, You bring the change,
We seek you and you happen to us as our Golden Day!

In Remembrance of my Lord
29th February 2016, Puducherry
Ragni chandrethia

“All fanaticism is false, because it is a contradiction of the very nature of God and of Truth. Truth cannot be shut up in a single book, Bible or Veda or Koran, or in a single religion. The Divine Being is eternal and universal and infinite and cannot be the sole property of the Mussulmans or of the Semitic religions only, – those that happened to be in a line from the Bible and to have Jewish or Arabian prophets for their founders. Hindus and Confucians and Taoists and all others have as much right to enter into relation with God and find the Truth in their own way. All religions have some truth in them, but none has the whole truth; all are created in time and finally decline and perish. ... God and Truth outlast these religions and manifest themselves anew in whatever way or form the Divine Wisdom chooses. You cannot shut up God in the limitations of your own narrow brain or dictate to the Divine Power and Consciousness how or where or through whom it shall manifest; you cannot put up your puny barriers against the divine Omnipotence.”

- Sri Aurobindo

(Complete works of Sri Aurobindo 32, p. 109)