

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

September 2016



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

Year 7

Issue 6

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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

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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 ATTACK IN URI: NEED TO QUESTION THE SECURITY SET-UP

A number of developments have taken place rapidly in the aftermath of the attack on an Indian Army base in Uri in Northern Kashmir, killing 18 soldiers and injuring 19 others. The national mood has precipitated into disgust for India's complacent policy towards Pakistan, even though this government has been much less conciliatory towards the latter than the previous governments of A.B. Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. However, with the dramatic increase in cross-border terrorist offensive, infiltration and ill-will in Kashmir since Modi government assumed office – combined with the rise of global Islamic terrorism – the mood of the entire country, including the media and the intelligentsia, dictates that India should settle Pakistan and the Kashmir issue once and for all.

India has already mounted a blunt diplomatic offensive on the neighbouring country in forums like the UN, pushing Pakistan into a corner and compelling the latter to skip the SAARC meet on security and terrorism. There have also been suggestions that India should revoke the 1960 Indus Water Treaty signed by Nehru with Pakistan, which gives India only about 20% of Indus water system and channels the rest for Pakistan, and allows Pakistan to prevent India from building hydropower projects on the eastern rivers given to it via blackmail. On the military front, the government has considered strikes across terrorist camps in Pakistan, but with the latter on high alert that is not immediately possible. India is still in the deliberation mode.

THE IMMEDIATE NECESSITY

But while India deliberates and as the stream of investigation reports and news surrounding the attack come in, the government needs to act fast on the immediate priority of strengthening the border security.

It is clear that Uri attack was not a product of intelligence failure, but of security lapse, since intelligence reports about a possible attack

had already been conveyed. Yet, a serious security breach took place.

The aftermath of the Uri attack has raised uncomfortable questions about how such an attack could be carried out without either complicity of a local insider or extreme lack of preparedness and alertness on the part of the Indian Army. Even if there was insider involvement – which is obvious and is being probed – the issue still remains of how an Army base situated in a sensitive border area of Kashmir could have been overpowered by just four terrorists who mounted a gun attack rather than a blast. And the Uri regiment was also in a transition of a change of guard – which calls for further alertness. The question becomes especially damning if we consider the fact that the Army was supposed to have been on high alert with the ongoing conflict in Kashmir.

Additionally, it is common knowledge that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of infiltration attempts since the Modi government came to power in 2014, because the terrorists have been trying to derail Modi's nationalist working. This year alone there were 100 such attempts, while in the week preceding the attack, there were four incidents of attack on Army personnel, including the one at Baramulla where four militants were killed. This should have called for heightened security.

The table 1 on the next page gives information on infiltration across the Indo-Pak border on the number of cases, apprehensions and killed terrorists, for the years 2013 till March 2016. However, it must be remembered that after March 2016 too, there have been a series of cross-border incidents of attacks and infiltration.

For the snapshot of infiltration and terrorist activities in J&K specifically, the tables 2 and 3 on the next page give a bird's eye view of the same.

The information in tables shows that while the government has consistently been able to check the infiltration attempts by terrorists, since the number of terrorists killed while crossing the border has gone up, there has been a big increase in the number of terrorist

(Table 1) Border: Indo-Pakistan

State	2013			2014			2015			2016 (upto 31.01.2016)		
	Cases	Apprehensions	Killed	Cases	Apprehensions	Killed	Cases	Apprehensions	Killed	Cases	Apprehensions	Killed
Jammu and Kashmir	277	16	38	222	4	52	121	7	46	3	0	0
Punjab	27	30	10	23	29	14	23	25	7	2	2	1
Rajasthan	13	13	2	10	13	0	12	15	0	1	1	0
Gujarat	15	86	0	11	14	0	9	17	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	332	145	50	266	60	66	165	64	53	6	3	1

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 909 for 1.3.2016

(Table 2) Infiltration in J&K

	2013	2014	2015	2016 (upto May)
No. of incidents	277	222	121	51
Terrorists killed	38	52	46	5
Terrorists arrested/surrendered	-	-	1	-

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 301 for 19.7.2016

(Table 3) Terrorist incidents in J&K

Year	No. of terrorist incidents	Civilians			Security personnel		
		Killed	Injured		Killed	Injured	
2013	170	15	31		53	74	
2014	222	28	71		47	84	
2015	208	17	70		39	103	
2016 (upto 10 th July)	138	4	10		29	77	

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 301 for 19.7.2016

incidents across the border. This rise in terrorist incidents has actually claimed the lives of security personnel more than the lives of terrorists, although the number of security personnel dying has gone down since 2013.

While this immediate context of rising cross-border terrorist incidents itself was reason enough for the security forces to have been on alert, even without any of this, it is always the basic duty of the Army to protect the country. Our brave jawans have sacrificed their lives, especially in wars against Pakistan and the terrorists, to keep the country safe, and this sacrifice cannot be compromised with.

No matter what war of words the government unleashes with Pakistan at diplomatic fora, the basic vulnerability of the country is the critical issue here, and if that can be compromised with such ease, one should shudder to think about the future and what can happen to civilians even beyond Kashmir.

This should also teach a security lessons to our maritime forces, because post-26/11 and with the recent suspected terrorist sightings in Maharashtra, we should be conscious of our vulnerability to terrorist infiltration through coastal areas. Here even Gujarat has been a target in the recent past, after 2014.

LESSONS NOT LEARNT

The Pathankot terrorist attack should have taught us to prioritize security more than anything else, especially given the deteriorating situation in Kashmir and with Pakistan. The outcome of the Pathankot review clearly stated that there was a serious security lapse, whereby Jaish terrorists infiltrated our critical airbase.

The Campose Panel on the Pathankot attack had said in its report that the security set-up was poor, there were vague Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that could not designate responsibilities well, and, the guards were poorly-equipped using outdated rifles (as compared to the advanced ones of the terrorists) and not possessing bullet-proof jackets and night-vision devices.

Yet, little corrective actions were taken after Pathankot. There are reports that even though the government had promised to undertake a security review of Army bases after the Pathankot attack, it has not delivered on that promise.

Moreover, this is not the first time that Uri has been attacked. It was also attacked in December 2014, when nine soldiers were killed.

At Uri, the aftermath of the attack identified a two-point breach through which the attack was executed. One, the terrorists infiltrated through Uri which is located not too far from the LoC by crossing the border. Two, they cut the fence of the perimeter wire near the Army base at two points – this is being seen as a serious breach, since they were able to cut the fence at more than one point. This was enabled through careful planning, since the terrorists had reportedly been surveying their targets for several days by staying in an abandoned house, in order to familiarize themselves with the routine and timings of the soldiers. This enabled them to carry out the attack with deadly precision. They knew they had to attack the less guarded rear of the base and not the front, they knew about the internal arrangements in the base and knew where the soldiers would be sleeping so that they can set the fire; for, **majority of soldiers died due to fire when they were sleeping and not through bullets.**

The security lapse was clear. It should be questioned how terrorists got an easy, unchallenged pass for so many kilometers inside the Indian territory, since Uri is 19 km inside the LoC. It is also amongst the closest towns to the border, where security should always have been double. At the LoC itself, it is not as if there is any dearth of technology. There are laser sensors near the barbed wire to detect any movement – which means that crossing over was due to human and not technological failure or that the technology was not bothered to be updated or checked.

Moreover, the terrorists not only got ample time to do a recce of the target area, but were also successful in identifying the perimeter fence positions that were not properly manned by the Army

personnel, thus, making the entire exercise comfortable for them over several days.

This calls into question why the LoC, and then, the Army base perimeter were not manned properly and allowed the breach to take place, and how there was no internal detection for such a long distance after crossing the LoC and when the terrorists were doing a recce of the base.

In the interests of security, it also calls for more responsibility on how the functions of Armed forces should be divided. The conflict in South Kashmir should not have taken up the majority of personnel, especially at the cost of leaving the border and Army base completely vulnerable.

There are endless such possibilities and options, yet the security failure is too simplistic to be taken at face value.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

Based on previous terrorist attacks at Pathankot and Gurdaspur and the rising terrorist entry via Punjab, it is being suggested that illicit cross-border drug trade could be the major reason. If drug dealers could enter in, then even terrorists and militants can utilize the same route.

Moreover, the government is spending hefty amount of money on defence procurement every year. The defence sector has seen some of the most high profile international and bilateral deals. Where is all this money going? Because if the Campose Panel report was anything to go by, then this money is certainly not going into beefing up the border security systems. While Pakistan had erected an embankment after the 2002 ceasefire agreement along the International Border (IB), India has not yet acquired the 135 feet wide land along the length of the border to erect its embankment. The country's Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS) – consisting of concertina wire and sensors – is also not foolproof, as it gets buried under snow in winters. There is also no certain technology to detect underground tunnels.

It is surprising that despite so much money being spent on defence, the reality of the Indo-Pak border leaves much government action to be desired.

If these are the kind of reasons for the increasingly lax security that is making these attacks possible, then it simply points to the deplorable rise of psychological corruption. Corruption – the inevitable offshoot of our selfish society – can change anyone and make anything possible. And now, it is compromising our national security. If the laxity at border combines with possible ill-will arising out of corruption, the result will be a national disaster.

ARUNACHAL CRISIS: ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS CONGRESS WIPE-OUT

Barely two months after the Congress party smugly reinstated its government in Arunachal Pradesh when the Supreme Court declared the President's Rule imposed by the centre unconstitutional, the party is in the most unbelievable bind yet again. And this time, even the Court cannot do anything about it. In a bizarre turn of events, 43 of the 44 MLAs of the Congress party – including the Chief Minister, Pema Khandu – in the Arunachal Pradesh state assembly have left the party to join the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA). The only MLA left is former Chief Minister, Nabam Tuki, who was dismissed by Congress after the Court verdict in July.

This is a direct victory for the BJP and the NDA government at the centre, since the PPA is a part of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) floated by the BJP and of which PPA is a member. In fact, the original motivation for the MLAs was a desire to become a part of the NEDA. As the events unfolded, Mr. Khandu made a call to NEDA's convener and BJP's famous face of Assam – and another Congress defector – Himanta Biswa Sarma, and expressed a desire to become a part of NEDA.

This development marks another goalpost in the wipe-out of the Congress – and even if not the Congress, then certainly the inevitable wipe-out of the Gandhi family. The MLAs and the Chief Minister cited the increasing debt of the state and the need to secure more support as the reasons for leaving. Not surprising given the current elite stature of the party 'high command'. With this development in Arunachal, it seems that BJP's promise of a 'Congress-mukt' Bharat is being fulfilled at a rather fast pace. The NEDA is working intensively in the North-East to expand its footprint. Combined with the cluelessness, disinterest, selfishness and lethargy of the Congress, the conditions were already ripe for Congress to be removed in the state. In fact, when the Court had

pronounced its verdict two months back reinstating the Congress government, the BJP had promised that the 'Arunachal story is not yet over'. This should also have been apparent to anyone who had followed the Arunachal story closely through last year.

HOW THE ARUNACHAL STORY UNFOLDED

The Arunachal crisis started in 2014. In April 2014, the results of the assembly elections were declared, in which Congress won 42 out of 60 seats, BJP won 11 seats, PPA won 5 seats and independents won 2 seats. When PPA MLAs joined the Congress, the latter's tally went up to 47 seats in the assembly.

The real crisis started in December 2014, when Kalikho Pul was dropped as the Minister for Health and Family Welfare. Later, he led the rebel faction against Congress, after being dismissed from the party for 'anti-party' activities in April 2015. The dropping of Pul shows that any other party – such as the BJP – could not have had an overt hand till that point of time. It was only after a new Governor, J.P. Rajkhowa, was appointed in June 2015, that the centre could have got some space to engineer its own way. It is a common fact, proven time and again in Indian political history, that in a state where the ruling party is in opposition to the party at the centre, the Governor normally acts as an agent of the centre, since the latter's constitutional role is that of a representative of the centre.

However, the way the events unfolded in Arunachal Pradesh clearly shows that it all started with dictatorship and mismanagement by the state Congress leadership and apathy of the central leadership and the AICC. The 14 MLAs of the Congress rebelled against the party in October-November 2015 only after their members were forced to sign 'irrevocable resignation letters' by the then CM, Nabam Tuki, for promoting dissidence within the party.

In response to this dictatorial act, in November 2015, 21 MLAs led by Pul rebelled against the Congress.

And that is when BJP moved in. Seeking to ally with the rebel MLAs, they passed a resolution to remove the Speaker. That is when the intervention of the Governor actually started, in favour of the BJP and the rebels. He advanced the date of the assembly session from January 2016 to December 2015, while the Speaker in a counter-attack disqualified the rebel MLAs.

The rebel MLAs elected Pul as the CM and their disqualification was also stayed by the High Court, making the outcome turn in their favour. But just when the intervention of the Supreme Court started, the centre intervened to introduce President's Rule in the crisis-hit state, in January itself. Subsequently, in February, the Court decided to allow the President's Rule to continue, but in July – about two months back – it reinstated the Congress government.

The reinstated government had the rebel faction at its head – who decided to come back within the Congress fold – under the leadership of Pema Khandu, rather than Kalikho Pul. Soon thereafter, last month, Pul committed suicide, steeping the state politics further in mystery.

THE CURRENT STATUS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

There is no doubt that not a single political player is guilt-free in what has happened in the state. The reality will be deeply shrouded in mystery and underhanded manipulations. But this is exactly the message that should be conveyed to us through the state politics. As things currently stand, with the latest development, issues like democracy and elections are looking like a weak sham – not because Congress has been reduced from a so-called 'democratically elected government' to a defeated loser, but because democracy never existed, right from the beginning.

When the Congress government was dismissed and President's Rule imposed earlier this year, intellectuals and legal pundits spent their time lamenting the historically draconian use of Article 356 (Imposition of President's Rule) by the centre. With

Congress portraying itself as a weak victim, this class lamented the demise of democratically elected governments under the Modi regime.

But what democracy are we talking about? Our current Parliamentary system of democracy and the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) election system is an organized sham. Under the current system of elections, we elect our government – at the centre or the state – only once in every five years and then the government follows its own agenda, while the FPTP system ensures that governments with plurality vote-share get elected even if the combined vote-share of the opposition is a lot more. This may have changed very slightly in the recent years, with rising awareness and disillusionment among people and their holding the governments accountable, but the change has been too slow and slight and has not impacted the system. What more, this change has led to a commensurate setback in another area – governments have become apathetic centers of mismanagement and joblessness, and this trend is implicit and is as bad as a government that is explicitly twisted in its motives.

Does the Congress in Arunachal Pradesh deserve any sympathy or does it have a right to paint itself as a victim? The answer is no. For, the government and the party were epitomes of weakness and mismanagement, and by being that they were no more fulfilling the “democratic mandate” of the people than the rebel factions that manipulated the events. When the latest developments took place, the Congress “high command” – and the party’s AICC leader in-charge of the state, C.P. Joshi – were unbelievably clueless about what was going to happen.

This apathy has afflicted all ranks of the party and the Congress government. Arunachal rebel leaders – and even those from other states – have been particularly indignant over the fact that they have had to wait 4-5 days in Delhi to meet the ‘high command’ and even then many MLAs do not have access. Just recently, a senior Congress leader from West Bengal has also been contemplating

exiting the party. Other state leaders have also rebelled against the party high command since the past one year.

While this rebellion against the party leadership may lead to more intra-party democracy, it translates into anarchy for the larger public, as is the case with Arunachal presently, which is reeling under financial stress and had no support from the Congress party.

Moreover, how do we define democracy in a state whose electoral politics has always been manipulated from above and marred by warring factions and community and tribal rivalries? The state has a tribal population of more than 65% which feels threatened by the Chakma and Hajong refugees from Bangladesh, a sizeable Christian population of more than 30%, with the latter spewing negative campaign about the BJP and the VHP, and, active presence of both militant groups of NSCN and National Liberation Front of Arunachal (NLFA). Electoral democracy came late to the tribal people, with the first elections being held in 1977. Moreover, recent election trends over the years show that people do not freely exercise their democratic rights and are influenced by dictates of militants in districts where the latter are active. According to reports, Congress even joined hands with NSCN militants in 1999.¹ Was that democratic?

Electoral politics in Arunachal has been influenced more by alliances, ethnicity and bottom-up or top-down manipulations rather than by free or informed choice of the tribal people. It is easy for us, sitting in Delhi, to make generalizations about the death of democracy, but such generalizations are not based on reality.

When the Congress was not supporting the 'democratically-elected' MLAs from the state and the party leadership was refusing to meet them and pay attention to them, then nobody decried it as an insult to democracy. If the party were that sincere about democracy, shouldn't it have respected the people's mandate by respecting its elected MLAs or does it think that the unelected high command leadership should rule the people? Did the Congress

government then not subvert the meaning of democracy?

The current crisis in the state has just broken out, and Congress has already started crying about the subversion of democracy. The intellectual and legal experts will soon follow and lament the dirty politics in the state. We should be prepared for this political routine.

But the questions raised above are uncomfortable facts about the sham argument of democracy that is again being revived in Arunachal Pradesh and needs to be exposed for what it really is.

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THE CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT INDIA AND THE DATE OF THE MAHABHARATA WAR – II

**A. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM: THE EUROPEAN
MISUNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN LITERATURE AND,
BASED ON IT, OF ITS SOCIETY, HISTORY, POLITY,
RELIGION AND CULTURE**

**B. THE BASIC REASON BEHIND THE TENDENCY OF
THE WESTERN OR WESTERNIZED MENTALITY TO
LOOK AT THE EPICS AND PURANAS AS SENSELESS
AND BARBARIC FICTION**

According to Sri Aurobindo "...the Indian mind is always compelled by its master impulse to reduce all its experience of life to the corresponding spiritual term and factor and the result was a transfiguring of even these most external things into a basis for new spiritual experience. The emotional, the sensuous, even the sensual motions of the being, before they could draw the soul farther outward, were taken and transmuted into a psychical form and, so changed, they became the elements of a mystic capture of the Divine through the heart and the senses and a religion of the joy of God's love, delight and beauty. In the Tantra the new elements are taken up and assigned their place in a complete psycho-spiritual and psycho-physical science of Yoga. Its popular form in the Vaishnava religion centres round the mystic apologue of the pastoral life of the child Krishna."¹ As a result of this tendency there is a mixture of facts, tradition, psychic experiences as well as history in the Puranas which, according to Sri Aurobindo, "are essentially a true religious poetry, an art of aesthetic presentation of religious truth."² The Puranas and Tantras "contain in themselves the highest spiritual and philosophical truths, not broken up and expressed in opposition to each other as in the debates of the thinkers, but synthetised by a fusion, relation or grouping in the way most congenial to the catholicity of the Indian mind and spirit. This is done sometimes expressly, but most often in

a form which might carry something of it to the popular imagination and feeling by legend, tale, symbol, apologue, miracle and parable. An immense and complex body of psycho-spiritual experience is embodied in the Tantras, supported by visual images and systematised in forms of Yogic practice. This element is also found in the Puranas, but more loosely and cast out in a less strenuous sequence. This method is after all simply a prolongation, in another form and with a temperamental change, of the method of the Vedas. The Puranas construct a system of physical images and observances each with its psychical significance. Thus the sacredness of the confluence of the three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, is a figure of an inner confluence and points to a crucial experience in a psychophysical process of Yoga and it has too other significances, as is common in the economy of this kind of symbolism. The so-called fantastic geography of the Puranas, as we are expressly told in the Puranas themselves, is a rich poetic figure, a symbolic geography of the inner psychical universe. The cosmogony expressed sometimes in terms proper to the physical universe has, as in the Veda, a spiritual and psychological meaning and basis. It is easy to see how in the increasing ignorance of later times the more technical parts of the Puranic symbology inevitably lent themselves to much superstition and to crude physical ideas about spiritual and psychic things. But that danger attends all attempts to bring them to the comprehension of the mass of men and this disadvantage should not blind us to the enormous effect produced in training the mass mind to respond to a psycho-religious and psycho-spiritual appeal that prepares a capacity for higher things.”³

In the deeper view of our own past that emerges from the work of Sri Aurobindo shows that “the Puranic religions are only a new form and extension of the truth of the ancient spirituality and philosophy and socio-religious culture. In their avowed intention they are popular summaries of the cosmogony, symbolic myth and image, tradition, cult, social rule of the Indian people continued, as the name Purana signifies, from ancient times. There is no essential change, but only a change of forms. The psychic symbols or true images of

truth belonging to the Vedic age disappear or are relegated to a subordinate plan with a changed and diminished sense: others take their place more visibly large in aim, cosmic, comprehensive, not starting with conceptions drawn from the physical universe, but supplied entirely from the psychic universe within us. The Vedic gods and goddesses conceal from the profane by their physical aspect their psychic and spiritual significance. The Puranic trinity and the forms of its female energies have on the contrary no meaning to the physical mind or imagination, but are philosophic and psychic conceptions and embodiments of the unity and multiplicity of the all-manifesting Godhead. The Puranic cults have been characterised as a degradation of the Vedic religion, but they might conceivably be described, not in the essence, for that remains always the same, but in the outward movement, as an extension and advance. Image worship and temple cult and profuse ceremony, to whatever superstition or externalism their misuse may lead, are not necessarily a degradation. The Vedic religion had no need of images, for the physical signs of its godheads were the forms of physical Nature and the outward universe was their visible house. The Puranic religion worshipped the psychical forms of the Godhead within us and had to express it outwardly in symbolic figures and house it in temples that were an architectural sign of cosmic significances. And the very inwardness it intended necessitated a profusion of outward symbol to embody the complexity of these inward things to the physical imagination and vision. The religious aesthesis has changed, but the meaning of the religion has been altered only in temperament and fashion, not in essence. The real difference is this that the early religion was made by men of the highest mystic and spiritual experience living among a mass still impressed mostly by the life of the physical universe: the Upanishads casting off the physical veil created a free transcendent and cosmic vision and experience and this was expressed by a later age to the mass in images containing a large philosophical and intellectual meaning of which the Trinity and the Shaktis of Vishnu and Shiva are the central figures: the Puranas carried forward this appeal to the intellect and imagination

and made it living to the psychic experience, the emotions, the aesthetic feeling and the senses. A constant attempt to make the spiritual truths discovered by the Yogin and the Rishi integrally expressive, appealing, effective to the whole nature of man and to provide outward means by which the ordinary mind, the mind of a whole people might be drawn to a first approach to them is the sense of the religio-philosophic evolution of Indian culture.”⁴ A modern intellectual scholar who, being rooted in the sense mentality, is unaware – as practically most are – of the profound object and the complex nature and method of the Puranas and the Epics and their unique approach to the Spirit – will find them – when he approaches them in the spirit of intellectual criticism to gather facts on history, polity, society and religion – almost entirely unintelligible and full of senseless and barbaric imagination. Thus the aversion towards them and treatment of them as almost pure fiction by the modern scholars oriental or occidental is quite understandable even without any other motive and cultural differences entering into the account. The basic reason is the impoverished modern mentality’s imprisonment into the surface appearances of things and, as a result, its tendency to mistake such appearances for reality.

In the Indian spiritual tradition it has been known from times immemorial that the picture of the world as perceived and presented to us by the Manas using the senses and its own direct perception is not at all reliable. And this unreliability extends equally to all the superstructure of thinking and understanding built on this deceptive base. This whole thing is such a mixed and distorted image of the true truth of existence that it led the Vedic seers to openly declare that the apparent facts of sensation and experience are deceptive and full of falsehoods. As a result, when rooted in sense mentality, the central idea of life and ourselves from which we start is a sheer falsehood and all else is falsified by it. All our thoughts, feelings and actions spring from a surface consciousness which is a mixture of the predominant element of the huge falsehoods of our subconscious sense-mentality – with the Inconscient at its base – and an element of the Truth arriving through the deeper and higher

levels of our being. The former is the seat of hostile beings termed Asuras, Rakshasas and Pisachas in the Epics and the Puranas and the latter are the seats of what are termed Devas or gods and along with these there are some other kinds of beings termed Gandharvas, Yakshas and Kinnaras whose seats lie somewhere in-between. All these beings and the planes they belong to were real to the subtle perception and sight of the ancient Indian seers (Rishis). Yoga enabled the Rishis to get inside the object by dissolving the artificial barriers of the bodily experience and the mental ego-sense in the observer and thus get over the great stumbling block that has stood in the way of the materialistic science – the inability to get inside its object and, therefore, the necessity of building inferences from external study. Or, in other words, all ordinary modern sciences are dependent, almost exclusively, on the use of indirect contact as the means of knowledge which is the lowest of the three means of knowledge – the knowledge through indirect contact, through direct contact and through identity. The free and unhindered use of the latter two is not possible without an entry into the higher, deeper and vaster layers of our being termed the subliminal by Sri Aurobindo. Yoga took the Rishis out of the hold of personal experience and cast them into the great universal currents; took them out of the personal mind sheath and made them one with universal self and universal mind and prepared them to break into the Transcendent. The Rishis clearly saw that the main purpose of human life was to journey towards Truth, Light and Immortality from the normal human condition of Falsehood, Darkness and Death and were moved from within to chart the route and guide all those who aspired – the so called Aryans – to undertake this great journey which has been the real object of the Veda and Vedanta and all the sacred literature of India.

The purpose of Indian religious and spiritual poetry in the Epics and Puranas has been to give expression to the integral Truth – which gets fragmented when approached through intellect – of the Divine by the means of rich and profound psychological images expressed in the forms of legend, tale, symbol, apologue, miracle, cult, social rule, tradition, etc. A historical element is also often implicit and often comes

out clearly as it does in the Puranas in the form of genealogies – even though there is often an admixture of other elements even in these. Even in the Epics which are explicitly termed Itihasas, there is this admixture and the historical element is not easily extricable because, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo in one of his talks, “The poet was not writing history, he was only writing poetry. He may have got his materials from the psychic intuitive plane, and from his own imagination, or from the psycho-mental or any other plane.

Disciple: I have a question. The poet describes the form of Sri Krishna. Now, is it the description of his psychic body or his physical body — because we see that form of his in our own psychic vision even today.

Sri Aurobindo: What on earth does it matter whether he lived on the physical plane or not? If the thing is true on the psychic and spiritual plane it is all that matters. As long as you find Krishna as a divine Power on the psychic, or on the spiritual plane nothing else matters. He is true for us. The physical is merely the shadow of the psychic.”⁵

The disciple wanted to know “whether the incidents related by the poet about Krishna’s life are psychic representations or do they present facts that occurred during his lifetime?

Sri Aurobindo: What do you mean by that?

Disciple: For instance, the killing of the Asuras — the Titans.

Sri Aurobindo: From the reading of the description itself you can know whether the act of killing is a physical fact or not. You can’t take everything physically. There is a mixture of facts, tradition and psychic experience as well as history.”⁶

It is entirely understandable that when faced with such a literature – which still remains the only real source of ancient Indian history beyond 500 B.C. – the European historians and their Indian protégés – the so called Macauley’s children – would throw up their arms in despair and put aside such a source to look for other sources

such as the account of the foreign travellers, inscriptions, coins, archaeological excavations, etc. – most of which do not go much beyond 500 B.C. – to serve as a more reliable basis for generating historical accounts. However, on a close scrutiny of these one finds that, in the field of the history of ancient India, these sources have been so much prone to the error of misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misplacement that they have provided a fertile ground for a play of conjecture, fancy, speculation and presumption to the historians. A scholar can, in good conscience, use these sources to assure himself – and those who share his inclination – of the genuineness and correctness of his own cherished or preferred version of the character and sequence of events. This becomes apparent to anyone who cares to dig a little deeper into this field and finds that each historian has had, behind the outer display of genuine objectivity – something impossible for any man to achieve given the inherent fundamental subjectivity of his perceptions and which can, therefore, deceive no one with a deeper perception – his own inclination and way of looking and understanding and with all his skills uses the available or dug up evidence to justify and prove it. In truth, as Sri Aurobindo points out, the problem is very deep-rooted and basic and there is always the danger of one's intellectual predilections thrusting out Truth. "Logic claims & even honestly attempts to get rid of predilection and to see things in the sure light of truth, but it is not equal to its task; our nature is full of subtle disguises and, the moment we form an opinion, attaches itself to it & secretly takes it under its protection under pretence of an exclusive attachment to Truth or a militant zeal for reason & the right opinion. We come to our subject with a predisposition towards a particular kind of solution established either in our feelings, in our previous education & formed ways of thinking or in our temperament & very cast of character. We seize passionately or we select deliberately & reasonably the arguments that favour our conclusion; we reject, whether with impatience or after scrupulous & fair attention, the arguments that would shake it. Logic, a malleable & pliant servitor behind all its air of dry & honest rigidity, asks only that it should be

provided with suitable premises, unsuitable premises excluded or explained away, & its conscience is entirely satisfied. We perform the comedy with perfect sincerity, but it is still a comedy which Nature plays with us; our garb of intellectual stoicism has concealed from ourselves, the epicure of his own dish of thoughts, the mind enamoured of its favourite ideas. Shankara comes to the Upanishads with a judgment already formed; he is an Adwaitin, his temperament predisposes him to Mayavada. But the Sruti does not contain the Mayavada, at least explicitly; it does contain, side by side with the fundamental texts of Adwaita, a mass of texts which foster the temper & views of the Dualist. But the Sruti is the supreme & infallible authority; it contains nothing but truth; it can inculcate, therefore, nothing but Adwaita. Obviously, then, these dualistic texts must have a meaning & a bearing different from their surface meaning or their apparent bearing; it is Shankara's business, as a commentator in search of truth, to put always the right, that is to say always the Adwaitic interpretation on Sruti. Watch him then seize the text in his mighty hands and, with a swift effort, twist & shape & force it to assume a meaning or a bearing which will either support or at least be consistent with Adwaita, – a giant victoriously wrestling with & twisting into a shape a mass of obstinate iron! There is no insincerity in the process, rather the fervour of a too passionate sincerity. Still, Truth often veils her face with a tear or a smile, when Shankara comments on the Sruti. He is the greatest; the others are not likely to escape from the snare into which he casts himself headlong. Nor do I think the philosopher has yet been born who has escaped from these original meshes of intellectual preference, predestined belief & ineffugable personal temperament.”⁷

Thus, however great the appearance of objectivity, the constructed web of sequences and their supporting “facts” is always, at its roots, almost entirely subjective. For example, in the English translation of the Minor Rock Edict of Asoka by the celebrated historian Vincent A. Smith we find, “Thus saith his Sacred Majesty:–

For more than two years and a half I was a lay disciple, without,

however, exerting myself strenuously. But it is more than a year since I joined the Order and have exerted myself strenuously. During that time the gods who were regarded as true all over India have been shown to be untrue.

For this is the fruit of exertion. Nor is this to be attained by great man only, because even by the small man who exerts himself immense heavenly bliss may be won.”⁸ The underlined portion gives the impression that Asoka found the gods of the Hindu Brahminical tradition to be false – a thing very pleasing to the Christian Missionary Spirit.

The same (underlined) passage translated by Parameshwarilal Gupta* conveys that during this period those who were opposed to gods have been turned into devotees. A translation of the same Minor Rock Edict I by V.S. Dhammika reads, “But now that I have visited the Sangha for more than a year, I have become very zealous. Now the people in India who have not associated with the gods do so.”⁹ How different from V.A Smith is the message that one gets from the above two.

The value of a person’s work depends much more on the depths and heights of his seat of subjectivity from which he perceives than on the capacities of his outer instrument through which it is expressed. With a much greater availability and easier accessibility – thanks to the Internet – of the old and new found source materials, this tendency – of almost an exclusive dependence on the outer instrument – has increased considerably and an increasing number of Indian scholars are beginning to question, even at their roots, the commonly accepted views of India’s past based on the work of nineteenth and twentieth century European scholarship. For example, contrary to the established view, professor Dikshitar, an eminent historian from Chennai had come to a startling conclusion in his book on The Mauryan Polity that “the extant Arthashastra is genuine work of the chancellor of Chandragupta Maurya and that neither Asoka was a Buddhist nor Chandragupta a Jain.”¹⁰ One cannot be moved too much, one way or the other, by such surface intellectual

* Gupta, P., “प्राचीन भारत के प्रमुख अभिलेख”, विश्वविद्यालय प्रकाशन, वाराणसी, 2004, p.48

excursions – or even by a whole galaxy of such as these which one finds in this field – in our ancient past if one wishes to dig deeper. Even though they are increasing, the dissenting voices such as the one above are still not heeded in the established official circles of Indian history where the stamp that the prestige, the resourcefulness and colossal labours of the European scholarship had put on it during the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century when the country was in no position to subject it to any scrutiny, still remains practically uneffaced even though it was all along the product of what Sri Aurobindo has termed, “the Teutonic sin of forming a theory in accordance with their prejudices and then finding facts or manufacturing inferences to support it.”¹¹

In the nineteenth century the subject people were told what kind of ignoble past they have had and what their founding fathers had been like. Sri Aurobindo commenting on the labours of the European scholars on the Veda, made the following remark, “The old Rishis are revealed to us as a race of ignorant and lusty barbarians who drank & enjoyed and fought, gathered riches & procreated children, sacrificed and praised the Powers of Nature as if they were powerful men & women, and had no higher hope or idea. The only idea they had of religion beyond an occasional sense of sin and perpetual preoccupation with a ritual barbarously encumbered with a mass of meaningless ceremonial details, was a mythology composed of the phenomena of dawn, night, rain, sunshine and harvest and the facts of astronomy converted into a wildly confused & incoherent mass of allegorical images and personifications. Nor, with the European interpretation can we be proud of our early forefathers as poets and singers. The versification of the Vedic hymns is indeed noble and melodious, – though the incorrect method of writing them established by the old Indian scholars, often conceals their harmonious construction, – but no other praise can be given. The Nibelungenlied, the Icelandic Sagas, the Kalewala[,] the Homeric poems, were written in the dawn of civilisation by semibarbarous races, by poets not superior in culture to the Vedic Rishis ; yet though their poetical value varies, the nations that possess them, need not

be ashamed of their ancient heritage. The same cannot be said of the Vedic poems presented to us by European scholarship. Never surely was there even among savages such a mass of tawdry, glittering, confused & purposeless imagery; never such an inane & useless burden of epithets; never such slipshod & incompetent writing; never such a strange & almost insane incoherence of thought & style; never such a bald poverty of substance. The attempt of patriotic Indian scholars to make something respectable out of the Veda, is futile. If the modern interpretation stands, the Vedas are no doubt of high interest & value to the philologist, the anthropologist & the historian; but poetically and spiritually they are null and worthless. Its reputation for spiritual knowledge & deep religious wealth, is the most imposing & baseless hoax that has ever been worked upon the imagination of a whole people throughout many millenniums. Is this, then, the last word about the Veda? Or, and this is the idea I write to suggest, is it not rather the culmination of a long increasing & ever progressing error? The theory this book is written to enunciate & support is simply this, that our forefathers of early Vedantic times understood the Veda, to which they were after all much nearer than ourselves, far better than Sayana, far better than Roth & Max Muller, that they were, to a great extent, in possession of the real truth about the Veda, that that truth was indeed a deep spiritual truth, karmakanda as well as jnanakanda of the Veda contains an ancient knowledge, a profound, complex & well ordered psychology & philosophy, strange indeed to our modern conception, expressed indeed in language still stranger & remoter from our modern use of language, but not therefore either untrue or unintelligible, and that this knowledge is the real foundation of our later religious developments, & Veda, not only by historical continuity, but in real truth & substance is the parent & bedrock of all later Hinduism, of Vedanta, Sankhya, Nyaya, Yoga, of Vaishnavism & Shaivism & Shaktism, of Tantra & Purana, even, in a remoter fashion, of Buddhism & the later unorthodox religions. From this quarry all have hewn their materials or from this far of source drawn unknowingly their waters ..."¹²

According to Rajaram & Frawley (Vedic Aryans and origins of Civilization) the nineteenth century linguists indulged in a fatal fallacy. “They confused the linguistic age of the texts with the historical age of the contents. Since the language of the *Rigveda* is undeniably older than the language of the Purāṇas, they assumed that the episodes found (or imagined) in the *Rigveda* necessarily had to be earlier than those found in the Purāṇas. This can be compared to assuming the characters and episodes in Shakespeare’s history plays to be older than those described in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; after all Shakespeare’s English too is older than Gibbon’s. This is a perverse example of “linguification of history” introduced by nineteenth century philologists trying to be historians. They looked at everything with language-tinted glasses. The whole paradigm was erected on this colossal delusion. The result we know was chaos.

The fact of the matter is: Indian tradition does not recognize any history in the *Rigveda*; the Indian historical tradition is to be sought in the Purāṇas and the epics, not the Vedas. The whole problem was created, as we have seen many times, when nineteenth century scholarship tried to interpret the *Rigveda* as a historical account of invading nomadic people called the Aryans. Indian tradition – the Vedas, the Purāṇas and the epics – knows of no Aryan homeland but India. ... a century of scholarship – Indian and Western – has been chasing a mirage looking for accounts of colonial wars of an invading people in the *Rigveda*. In other words, they sought an ancient replica of nineteenth century European colonization in the *Rigveda*. Finding none, they imagined one and called it the Aryan invasion.”¹³

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HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (22)

XIII. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THE HISTORICAL BASES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDA

B. THE BASIC APPROACH AND THE BEGINNINGS

In Sri Aurobindo's view, in the first Sukta of the opening Mandala (I.1) of the Rig Veda, there are four verses, the fifth to the eighth (I.1.5-8), in which the psychological sense of the Veda comes out with a great force and clearness breaking through the veil of the symbol. These are:

*“Agnir hot kavikratu, satya citra ravastama;
devo devebhir gamat.
Yad a ga d u e tvam, agne bhadra kari yasi;
tavet tat satyam a gira.
Upa tv gne dive dive, do vastar dhiy vayam;
namo bharanta emasi.
R jantam adhvar , gop m tasya d divim;
vardham na sve dame.”¹*

Sri Aurobindo rendered these in English as follows:

“May Agni, priest of the offering whose will towards action is that of the seer, who is true, most rich in varied inspiration, come, a god with the gods.

‘The good that thou wilt create for the giver, that is that truth of thee, O Angiras.

‘To thee day by day, O Agni, in the night and in the light we by the thought come bearing our submission, –

‘To thee who shinest out from the sacrifices (or, who governest the sacrifices), guardian of the Truth and its illumination, increasing in thy own home.”²

“Who, then, is this god Agni to whom language of so mystic a fervour is addressed, to whom functions so vast and profound are ascribed? Who is this guardian of the Truth, who is in his act its illumination, whose will in the act is the will of a seer possessed of a divine wisdom governing his richly varied inspiration? What is the Truth that he guards? And what is this good that he creates for the giver who comes always to him in thought day and night bearing as his sacrifice submission and self-surrender?”³

“Agni is the most important, the most universal of the Vedic gods. In the physical world he is the general devourer and enjoyer. He is also the purifier; when he devours and enjoys, then also he purifies. He is the fire that prepares and perfects; he is also the fire that assimilates and the heat of energy that forms. He is the heat of life and creates the sap, the *rasa* in things, the essence of their substantial being and the essence of their delight.

He is equally the Will in Prana, the dynamic Life-energy, and in that energy performs the same functions. Devouring and enjoying, purifying, preparing, assimilating, forming, he rises upwards always and transfigures his powers into the Maruts, the energies of Mind. Our passions and obscure emotions are the smoke of Agni’s burning. All our nervous forces are assured of their action only by his support.

If he is the Will in our nervous being and purifies it by action, he is also the Will in the mind and clarifies it by aspiration. When he enters into the intellect, he is drawing near to his divine birthplace and home. He leads the thoughts towards effective power; he leads the active energies towards light.”⁴

“It is not the sacrificial Fire that is capable of these functions, nor can it be any material flame or principle of physical heat and light. Yet throughout the symbol of the sacrificial Fire is maintained. **It is evident that we are in the presence of a mystic symbolism to which the fire, the sacrifice, the priest are only outward figures of a deeper teaching and yet figures which it was thought necessary to maintain and to hold constantly in front.**”⁵

Behind the outward figures of the sacrifice, the psychological conception is that of “a truth which is **truth of divine essence, not truth of mortal sensation and appearance. It is *satyam*, truth of being; it is in its action *īram*, right, – truth of divine being regulating right activity both of mind and body; it is *brahmat*, the universal truth proceeding direct and undeformed out of the Infinite.** The consciousness that corresponds to it is also infinite, *brahmat*, large as opposed to the consciousness of the sense-mind which is founded upon limitation.”⁶ The sense mentality which is at the root of the **apparent facts of sensation and appearance which are full of falsehoods**, has for its instruments the senses, the sense mind (manas) and the intellect working on their evidence. The truth-consciousness on the other hand, has for its instruments the faculties of *dīpīti* – the direct vision of the truth, *śruti* – the direct hearing of its word and *viveka* – the direct discrimination of the right. Whoever is in possession of the truth-consciousness or open to those faculties is called a Rishi or Kavi, sage or seer. It is in the light of these conceptions of truth, *satyam* and *īram* that Sri Aurobindo interprets the opening Sukta of the Veda.

“Agni in the Veda is always presented in the double aspect of force and light. He is the divine power that builds up the worlds, a power which acts always with a perfect knowledge, for it is *īdāvedas*, knower of all births, *vīṇīni vayunīni vidvān*, – it knows all manifestations or phenomena or it possesses all forms and activities of the divine wisdom. Moreover it is repeatedly said that the gods have established Agni as the immortal in mortals, the divine power in man, the energy of fulfilment through which they do their work in him. It is this work which is symbolised by the sacrifice.”⁷

“The Vedic sacrifice is, psychologically, **a symbol of cosmic and individual activity become self-conscious**, enlightened and aware of its goal. The whole process of the universe is in its very nature a sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary. Self-fulfilment by self-immolation, to grow by giving is the universal law. That which refuses to give itself,

is still the food of the cosmic Powers. 'The eater eating is eaten' is the formula, pregnant and terrible, in which the Upanishad sums up this aspect of the universe, and in another passage men are described as the cattle of the gods. It is only when the law is recognised and voluntarily accepted that this kingdom of death can be overpassed and by the works of sacrifice Immortality made possible and attained. All the powers and potentialities of the human life are offered up, in the symbol of a sacrifice, to the divine Life in the Cosmos."⁸

"Psychologically, then, **we may take Agni to be the divine will perfectly inspired by divine Wisdom, and indeed one with it**, which is the active or effective power of the Truth-consciousness. This is the obvious sense of the word *kavikratu*, he whose active will or power of effectivity is that of the seer, – works, that is to say, with the knowledge which comes by the truth-consciousness and in which there is no misapplication or error. The epithets that follow confirm this interpretation. Agni is *satya*, true in his being; perfect possession of his own truth and the essential truth of things gives him the power to apply it perfectly in all act and movement of force. He has both the *satyam* and the *ītam*. ...Therefore it is the power of Agni to apply the Truth in the work (*karma* or *apas*) symbolised by the sacrifice, that makes him the object of human invocation. **The importance of the sacrificial fire in the outward ritual corresponds to the importance of this inward force of unified Light and Power in the inward rite by which there is communication and interchange between the mortal and the Immortal.** Agni is elsewhere frequently described as the envoy, *dūta*, the medium of that communication and interchange.

We see, then, in what capacity Agni is called to the sacrifice. 'Let him come, a god with the gods.' The emphasis given to the idea of divinity by this repetition, *devo devebhir*, becomes intelligible when we recall the standing description of Agni as the god in human beings, the immortal in mortals, the divine guest. We may give the full psychological sense by translating, 'Let him come, a divine power with the divine powers.' For in the external sense of the Veda the

Gods are universal powers of physical Nature personified; in any inner sense they must be universal powers of Nature in her subjective activities, Will, Mind, etc. **But in the Veda there is always a distinction between the ordinary human or mental action of these puissances, *manuṣyat*, and the divine. It is supposed that man by the right use of their mental action in the inner sacrifice to the gods can convert them into their true or divine nature, the mortal can become immortal.** Thus the Ribhus, who were at first human beings or represented human faculties, became divine and immortal powers by perfection in the work, *sukṛtyayā*, *svapasyayā*. **It is a continual self-offering of the human to the divine and a continual descent of the divine into the human which seems to be symbolised in the sacrifice.**

The state of immortality thus attained is conceived as a state of felicity or bliss founded on a perfect Truth and Right, *satyam* *ṛitam*. We must, I think, understand in this sense the verse that follows. 'The good (happiness) which thou wilt create for the giver, that is that truth of thee, O Agni.' In other words, the essence of this truth, which is the nature of Agni, is the freedom from evil, the state of perfect good and happiness which the Ritam carries in itself and which is sure to be created in the mortal when he offers the sacrifice by the action of Agni as the divine priest. *Bhadram* means anything good, auspicious, happy and by itself need not carry any deep significance. But we find it in the Veda used, like *ṛitam*, in a special sense. It is described in one of the hymns (V.82) as the opposite of the evil dream (*duṣṣvapnyam*), the false consciousness of that which is not the Ritam, and of *duritam*, false going, which means all evil and suffering. *Bhadram* is therefore equivalent to *suvitam*, right going, which means all good and felicity belonging to the state of the Truth, the Ritam. It is Mayas, the felicity, and the gods who represent the Truth-consciousness are described as *mayobhuva*, those who bring or carry in their being the felicity. Thus **every part of the Veda, if properly understood, throws light upon every other part. It is only when we are misled by its veils that we find in it an incoherence.**

In the next verse there seems to be stated the condition of the effective sacrifice. It is the continual resort day by day, in the night and in the light, of the thought in the human being with submission, adoration, self-surrender, to the divine Will and Wisdom represented by Agni. Night and Day, *Nakto*॥५॥, are also symbolical, like all the other gods in the Veda, and the sense seems to be that in all states of consciousness, whether illumined or obscure, there must be a constant submission and reference of all activities to the divine control.

For whether by day or night Agni shines out in the sacrifices; he is the guardian of the Truth, of the Ritam in man and defends it from the powers of darkness; he is its constant illumination burning up even in obscure and besieged states of the mind. The ideas thus briefly indicated in the eighth verse are constantly found throughout the hymns to Agni in the Rig Veda.”⁹ For example in the second Rik of the 77th Sukta in the first Mandala we have, “He who in the sacrifices is the priest of the offering, full of peace, full of the Truth, him verily form in you by your surrenderings; when Agni manifests for the mortals the gods, he also has perception of them and by the mind offers to them the sacrifice.”¹⁰

“When we are obscure and revolt against the Truth and the Law, our progress seems to be a stumbling from ignorance to ignorance and is full of pain and disturbance. By constant submission to the Truth, surrenderings, *namobhi*॥, we create in ourselves that image of the divine Will which is on the contrary full of peace, because it is assured of the Truth and the Law. Equality of soul created by the surrender to the universal Wisdom gives us a supreme peace and calm. And since that Wisdom guides all our steps in the straight paths of the Truth we are carried by it beyond all stumblings (*durit*॥*ni*).

Moreover, with Agni conscious in our humanity, the creation of the gods in us becomes a veritable manifestation and no longer a veiled growth. The will within grows conscious of the increasing godhead, awakens to the process, perceives the lines of the growth. Human action intelligently directed and devoted to the universal

Powers, ceases to be a mechanical, involuntary or imperfect offering; the thinking and observing mind participates and becomes the instrument of the sacrificial will.”¹¹

“...it is this Will which annihilates all forces commissioned to destroy the effort, this strongest of all the divine Puissances in which the supreme Purusha has imaged Himself, that must bestow its presence on these human vessels. There it will use the mind as instrument of the sacrifice and by its very presence **manifest those inspired and realising Words which are as a chariot framed for the movement of the gods**, giving to the Thought that meditates the illuminative comprehension which allows the forms of the divine Powers to outline themselves in our waking consciousness.”¹²

“Agni is finally described as increasing in his own home. We can no longer be satisfied with the explanation of the own home of Agni as the ‘fire-room’ of the Vedic householder. We must seek in the Veda itself for another interpretation and we find it in the 75th hymn of the first Mandala.

*Yajñ no mitrāvaruṇā, yajñ devān ītaṁ bṛhat;
agne yakṣi svaṁ damam.*

‘Sacrifice for us to Mitra and Varuna, sacrifice to the gods, to the Truth, the Vast; O Agni, sacrifice to thy own home.’

Here *ītaṁ bṛhat* and *svaṁ damam* seem to express the goal of the sacrifice and this is perfectly in consonance with the imagery of the Veda which frequently describes the sacrifice as travelling towards the gods and man himself as a traveller moving towards the truth, the light or the felicity. It is evident, therefore, that the Truth, the Vast and Agni’s own home are identical. Agni and other gods are frequently spoken of as being born in the truth, dwelling in the wide or vast. The sense, then, will be in our passage that Agni the divine will and power in man increases in the truth-consciousness, its proper sphere, where false limitations are broken down, *urūv anibaddhe*, in the wide and the limitless.”¹³

“Agni is, preeminently, the Immortal in mortals. It is this Agni by whom the other bright sons of Infinity are able to work out the manifestation and self-extension of the Divine (*devavṛtti, devatṛtti*) which is at once aim and process of the cosmic and of the human sacrifice. For he is the divine Will which in all things is always present, is always destroying and constructing, always building and perfecting, supporting always the complex progression of the universe. It is this which persists through all death and change. It is eternally and inalienably possessed of the Truth. In the last obscuration of Nature, in the lowest unintelligence of Matter, it is this Will that is a concealed knowledge and compels all these darkened movements to obey, as if mechanically, the divine Law and adhere to the truth of their Nature. It is this which makes the tree grow according to its seed and each action bear its appropriate fruit. In the obscurity of man’s ignorance, – less than material Nature’s, yet greater, – it is this divine Will that governs and guides, knows the sense of his blindness and the goal of his aberration and out of the crooked workings of the cosmic Falsehood in him evolves the progressive manifestation of the cosmic Truth. **Alone of the brilliant Gods, he burns bright and has full vision in the darkness of Night no less than in the splendours of day. The other gods are uṣarbudhaḥ, wakers with the Dawn.**

Therefore is he the priest of the offering, strongest or most apt for sacrifice, he who, all-powerful, follows always the law of the Truth. We must remember that **the oblation (*havya*) signifies always action (*karma*) and each action of mind or body is regarded as a giving of our plenty into the cosmic being and the cosmic intention. Agni, the divine Will, is that which stands behind the human will in its works.** In the conscient offering, he comes in front; he is the priest set in front (*puro-hita*), guides the oblation and determines its effectiveness.

By this self-guided Truth, by this knowledge that works out as an unerring Will in the Cosmos, he fashions the gods in mortals. Agni manifests divine potentialities in a death-besieged body; Agni brings them to effective actuality and perfection. He creates in us the luminous forms of the Immortals.

This work he does as a cosmic Power labouring upon the rebellious human material even when in our ignorance we resist the heavenward impulse and, accustomed to offer our actions to the egoistic life, cannot yet or as yet will not make the divine surrender. But it is in proportion as we learn to subjugate the ego and compel it to bow down in every act to the universal Being and to serve consciously in its least movements the supreme Will, that Agni himself takes form in us. **The Divine Will becomes present and conscient in a human mind and enlightens it with the divine Knowledge.** Thus it is that man can be said to form by his toil the great Gods.”¹⁴

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, in the four verses of the opening Sukta (I.1.5-8) of the Veda **we get the first indications of the principal ideas of the Vedic Rishis, “– the conception of a Truth-consciousness supramental and divine, the invocation of the gods as powers of the Truth to raise man out of the falsehoods of the mortal mind, the attainment in and by this Truth of an immortal state of perfect good and felicity and the inner sacrifice and offering of what one has and is by the mortal to the Immortal as the means of the divine consummation.** All the rest of Vedic thought in its spiritual aspects is grouped around these central conceptions.”¹⁵

References:

1. **Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.15, p.61, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
2. **Ibid, pp.63-64**
3. **Ibid, p.64**
4. **Ibid, pp.277-78**
5. **Ibid, p.64**
6. **Ibid, p.65**
7. **Ibid, p.65**
8. **Ibid, pp.278-79**
9. **Ibid, pp.65-68**
10. **Ibid, p.276**
11. **Ibid, p.282**
12. **Ibid, p.283**
13. **Ibid, p.68**
14. **Ibid, pp.280-81**
15. **Ibid, pp.68-69**

THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (22)

4. THE GREATNESS OF INDIAN ART

VI. INDIAN ART

B. Indian Architecture

“Indian architecture especially demands this kind of inner study and this spiritual self-identification with its deepest meaning and will not otherwise reveal itself to us. The secular buildings of ancient India, her palaces and places of assembly and civic edifices have not outlived the ravage of time; what remains to us is mostly something of the great mountain and cave temples, something too of the temples of her ancient cities of the plains, and for the rest we have the fanes and shrines of her later times, whether situated in temple cities and places of pilgrimage like Srirangam and Rameshwaram or in her great once regal towns like Madura, when the temple was the centre of life. It is then the most hieratic side of a hieratic art that remains to us. These sacred buildings are the signs, the architectural self-expression of an ancient spiritual and religious culture. Ignore the spiritual suggestion, the religious significance, the meaning of the symbols and indications, look only with the rational and secular aesthetic mind, and it is vain to expect that we shall get to any true and discerning appreciation of this art.”¹

“Indian sacred architecture of whatever date, style or dedication goes back to something timelessly ancient and now outside India almost wholly lost, something which belongs to the past, and yet it goes forward too, though this the rationalistic mind will not easily admit, to something which will return upon us and is already beginning to return, something which belongs to the future. **An Indian temple, to whatever godhead it may be built, is in its inmost reality an altar raised to the divine Self, a house of the Cosmic Spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite. As that and in the light of that seeing and conception it must in the first**

place be understood, and everything else must be seen in that setting and that light, and then only can there be any real understanding. No artistic eye however alert and sensible and no aesthetic mind however full and sensitive can arrive at that understanding, if it is attached to a Hellenised conception of rational beauty or shuts itself up in a materialised or intellectual interpretation and fails to open itself to the great things here meant by a kindred close response to some touch of the cosmic consciousness, some revelation of the greater spiritual self, some suggestion of the Infinite. These things, the spiritual self, the cosmic spirit, the Infinite, are not rational, but suprarational, eternal presences, but to the intellect only words, and visible, sensible, near only to an intuition and revelation in our inmost selves. An art which starts from them as a first conception can only give us what it has to give, their touch, their nearness, their self-disclosure, through some responding intuition and revelation in us, in our own soul, our own self. It is this which one must come to it to find and not demand from it the satisfaction of some quite other seeking or some very different turn of imagination and more limited superficial significance. This is the first truth of Indian architecture and its significance which demands emphasis and it leads at once to the answer to certain very common misapprehensions and objections. All art reposes on some unity and all its details, whether few and sparing or lavish and crowded and full, must go back to that unity and help its significance; otherwise it is not art. Now we find our Western critic telling us with an assurance which would be stupefying if one did not see how naturally it arose, that in Indian architecture there is no unity, which is as much as to say that there is here no great art at all, but only a skill in the execution of crowded and unrelated details. We are told even by otherwise sympathetic judges that there is an overloading of ornament and detail which, however beautiful or splendid in itself, stands in the way of unity, an attempt to load every rift with ore, an absence of calm, no unfilled spaces, no relief to the eye.”²

“Now it may readily be admitted that the failure to see at once

the unity of this architecture is perfectly natural to a European eye, because unity in the sense demanded by the Western conception, the Greek unity gained by much suppression and a sparing use of detail and circumstance or even the Gothic unity got by casting everything into the mould of a single spiritual aspiration, is not there. And the greater unity that really is there can never be arrived at at all, if the eye begins and ends by dwelling on form and detail and ornament, because it will then be obsessed by these things and find it difficult to go beyond to the unity which all this in its totality serves not so much to express in itself, but to fill it with that which comes out of it and relieve its oneness by multitude. An original oneness, not a combined or synthetic or an effected unity, is that from which this art begins and to which its work when finished returns or rather lives in it as in its self and natural atmosphere. Indian sacred architecture constantly represents the greatest oneness of the self, the cosmic, the infinite in the immensity of its world-design, the multitude of its features of self-expression, *lakṣaṇa*, (yet the oneness is greater than and independent of their totality and in itself indefinable),....”³

“...I would invite those Indian minds who are troubled by these criticisms or partly or temporarily overpowered by the Western way of seeing things, to look at our architecture in the light of this conception and see whether all but minor objections do not vanish as soon as the real meaning makes itself felt and gives body to the first indefinable impression and emotion which we experience before the greater constructions of the Indian builders.”⁴

“Not absence of unity, but a tremendous unity is revealed. Reinterpret intimately what this representation means in the terms of our own spiritual self-existence and cosmic being, and we have what these great builders saw in themselves and reared in stone. All objections, once we have got at this identity in spiritual experience, fall away and show themselves to be what they really are, the utterance and cavil of an impotent misunderstanding, an insufficient apprehension or a complete failure to see. To appreciate

the detail of Indian architecture is easy when the whole is thus seen and known; otherwise, it is impossible.”⁵

“This method of interpretation applies, however different the construction and the nature of the rendering, to all Dravidian architecture, not only to the mighty temples of far-spread fame, but to unknown roadside shrines in small towns, which are only a slighter execution of the same theme, a satisfied suggestion here, but the greater buildings a grandiose fulfilled aspiration. The architectural language of the north is of a different kind, there is another basic style; but here too the same spiritual, meditative, intuitive method has to be used and we get at the same result, an aesthetic interpretation or suggestion of the one spiritual experience, one in all its complexity and diversity, which founds the unity of the infinite variations of Indian spirituality and religious feeling and the realised union of the human self with the Divine. This is the unity too of all the creations of this hieratic art. The different styles and motives arrive at or express that unity in different ways. The objection that an excess of thronging detail and ornament hides, impairs or breaks up the unity, is advanced only because the eye has made the mistake of dwelling on the detail first without relation to this original spiritual oneness, which has first to be fixed in an intimate spiritual seeing and union and then all else seen in that vision and experience. When we look on the multiplicity of the world, it is only a crowded plurality that we can find and to arrive at unity we have to reduce, to suppress what we have seen or sparingly select a few indications or to be satisfied with the unity of this or that separate idea, experience or imagination; but when we have realised the self, the infinite unity and look back on the multiplicity of the world, then we find that oneness able to bear all the infinity of variation and circumstance we can crowd into it and its unity remains unabridged by even the most endless self-multiplication of its informing creation. We find the same thing in looking at this architecture. The wealth of ornament, detail, circumstance in Indian temples represents the infinite variety and repetition of the worlds, – not our world only, but all the planes, – suggests the infinite multiplicity in the infinite oneness. It is a

matter of our own experience and fullness of vision how much we leave out or bring in, whether we express so much or so little or attempt as in the Dravidian style to give the impression of a teeming inexhaustible plenitude. The largeness of this unity is base and continent enough for any superstructure or content of multitude.”⁶

“The objection that the crowding detail allows no calm, gives no relief or space to the eye, falls under the same heading, springs from the same root, is urged from a different experience and has no validity for the Indian experience. For this unity on which all is upborne, carries in itself the infinite space and calm of the spiritual realisation, and there is no need for other unfilled spaces or tracts of calm of a lesser more superficial kind. The eye is here only a way of access to the soul, it is to that that there is the appeal, and if the soul living in this realisation or dwelling under the influence of this aesthetic impression needs any relief, it is not from the incidence of life and form, but from the immense incidence of that vastness of infinity and tranquil silence, and that can only be given by its opposite, by an abundance of form and detail and life.”⁷

“The Indian thinking and religious mind looks with calm, without shrinking or repulsion, with an understanding born of its agelong effort at identity and oneness, at all that meets it in the stupendous spectacle of the cosmos. And even its asceticism, its turning from the world, which begins not in terror and gloom, but in a sense of vanity and fatigue, or of something higher, truer, happier than life, soon passes beyond any element of pessimistic sadness into the rapture of the eternal peace and bliss. **Indian secular poetry and drama is throughout rich, vital and joyous and there is more tragedy, terror, sorrow and gloom packed into any few pages of European work than we can find in the whole mass of Indian literature. It does not seem to me that Indian art is at all different in this respect from the religion and literature. The Western mind is here thrusting in its own habitual reactions upon things in the indigenous conception in which they have no proper place. Mark the curious misreading of the dance of Shiva as a dance of Death**

or Destruction, whereas, as anybody ought to be able to see who looks upon the Nataraja, it expresses on the contrary the rapture of the cosmic dance with the profundities behind of the unmoved eternal and infinite bliss. So too the figure of Kali which is so terrible to European eyes is, as we know, the Mother of the universe accepting this fierce aspect of destruction in order to slay the Asuras, the powers of evil in man and the world. There are other strands in this feeling in the Western mind which seem to spring from a dislike of anything uplifted far beyond the human measure and others again in which we see a subtle survival of the Greek limitation, the fear, gloom and aversion with which the sunny terrestrial Hellenic mind commonly met the idea of the beyond, the limitless, the unknown; but that reaction has no place in Indian mentality. And as for the strangeness or formidable aspect of certain unhuman figures or the conception of demons or Rakshasas, it must be remembered that the Indian aesthetic mind deals not only with the earth but with psychic planes in which these things exist and ranges freely among them without being overpowered because it carries everywhere the stamp of a large confidence in the strength and the omnipresence of the Self or the Divine.”⁸

References:

1. **Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo**, Vol.20, p.272, *Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry*
2. *Ibid*, pp.273-74
3. *Ibid*, p.275-76
4. *Ibid*, pp.276
5. *Ibid*, p.277-78
6. *Ibid*, p.278-79
7. *Ibid*, p.280
8. *Ibid*, pp.281-82

“The Gods constantly stand out in their psychological functions; the sacrifice is the outer symbol of an inner work, an inner interchange between the gods and men, – man giving what he has, the gods giving in return the horses of power, the herds of light, the heroes of Strength to be his retinue, winning for him victory in his battle with the hosts of Darkness, Vritras, Dasyus, Panis. When the Rishi says, ‘Let us become conscious whether by the War-Horse or by the Word of a Strength beyond men’, his words have either a mystic significance or they have no coherent meaning at all.”

- Sri Aurobindo

(Complete works of Sri Aurobindo 16, pp. 12-13)