

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

October 2014



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

Year 5

Issue 7

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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 5

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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)

SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

Cutting across party lines and socio-economic identities, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or the 'Clean India Mission' has had a massive civic impact on people on a pan-India scale. Apart from direct issues like cleanliness, sanitation and environment, it also covers a wide ambit of causes, such as socio-economic development or well-being, social justice, economic growth, health and community rights. First visualized by the PM in his Independence Day speech when talking about the issue of open defecation and linking it to a violation of women's rights, the Clean India Mission struck a similar chord when it was launched on October 2nd and vowed to make India clean by 2019. Launched by the PM from the Valmiki Colony in New Delhi, its inception was marked by an overarching message of equal inclusion on one hand and hopes of uniting people in civic nationalism on the other hand.

This is an important message, as the issues of open defecation, waste mismanagement and lack of public hygiene and sanitation have crept in like cancer in our system and become a foundation for national shame. Not only has this dissuaded both foreign tourists and Non Resident Indians from visiting India and investing in opportunities here, but has also become a source of discomfort for India at various international forums, despite all its progress in various fields. The lack of cleanliness in India is one of the major stumbling blocks to our international policy and, in turn, to the economic growth prospects that may be utilized with international outreach. This is particularly crucial at a time when the PM is trying to attract foreign tourists to India through various incentives, like the Visa-on-arrival facility for the US nationals, who are the most extravagant globe-trotters, visiting India.

A COMPARISON WITH PAST INITIATIVES: BEST PRACTICES AND FAILURES

Prior to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, there have been related government policies which have been instituted over the years, but

have largely been ineffective. The financing for these schemes has been massive, as, since 1986, more than Rupees 18,000 crore have been spent on sanitation policies. However, the abysmal performance of the previous governments' Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, the Total Sanitation Campaign and the Central Rural Sanitation Programme, resonated with the general failure of the issues of cleanliness and sanitation in public policy priorities, which tended to focus on grand and electorally-exploitable issues. Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan failed mainly because of improper policy implementation and plan; its financing was linked to the MNREGA programme which was itself ineffective. This failure was further compounded by a lack of awareness and mobilization which kept the public alienated from these concerns.

The present Clean India Mission may mark a clean break from these past programmes for the following reasons:

First, unlike the past programmes which were treated merely as an obligatory government policy, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has been launched both as a policy and a campaign. Thus, it encourages active involvement of the people which can, in turn, make the government officials more accountable.

Second, a major drawback of previous programmes was that they were confined to a decentralized approach enclosed within communities and were, thus, characterized by problems of supply and meeting completion targets and compounded by the huge scope of corruption that such a confined approach entailed. This impaired their utilization and coverage. However, the present Swachh Bharat Abhiyan will likely avoid these pitfalls if the spirit of nation-wide concern fuelling local-level accountability and direct intervention, from time-to-time, by the central administration is maintained.

However, there have also been examples of successful implementation and lessons from these best practices can be taken for this mission. A case in this regard was the Nandigram II block (West Bengal) which, in 1990s, became the first block to provide all rural households with toilets. The case was a community-led

programme which encouraged social cooperation among people to ensure attitudinal change and also effective political coordination between the block and district levels and reasonable technical assistance. Apart from this, various other community-led programmes, conceived through a campaign mode, in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Sikkim, were also successful.

Thus, to sum up, important features of successful programmes include:

- A practical roadmap for implementation.
- Strong and exemplary political leadership at all the three levels – centre, state and local.
- Mobilizing people and encouraging change and cooperation among them through various ways, including by spreading the programme through the campaign mode rather than the policy mode. This will also help to create demand for sanitation services.
- Optimal financing of the programme.

The need of the hour is to ensure a sound roadmap through which the Swachh Bharat campaign can be made successful and sustainable.

FROM SYMBOLS TO REALITY: ENSURING IMPLEMENTATION:

The government has succeeded considerably in mobilizing people for the Clean India cause, both by seeking to raise awareness among people through various campaigns and educational initiatives and by setting symbolic examples by roping in various popular personalities. The Ministry of Culture has directed its institutes of art and culture to come up with innovative ideas on mobilizing people for this cause, and the government has also directed hospitality institutes to include this issue in their course curriculums. The government has also roped in religious leaders to generate

awareness.

However, the public spirit is often transitional and prone to relapse. Already there were reports of heaps of waste beginning to appear just two days after the cleaning drive was launched on October 2nd.

Therefore, what is needed is a clear roadmap of this mission which can be sustained effectively. We need to recognize that the solutions to the problem of waste are not limited to having public spaces which appear to be clean and enhance our national prestige, but need to improve our quality of health and minimize the impact of environmental degradation.

An important factor which will help in the implementation of the Clean India Mission is that it is not confined to a single or a group of ministries. Almost all government departments are trying to contribute to it in their own ways. While some Ministries such as those related to sanitation, health, social justice and rural and urban development would be directly involved with the implementation report of the mission, other government ministries/departments too are identifying with this mission. The Culture Ministry has directed the Archaeological Survey of India to clean up all its sites and arrange for proper toilet facilities.

The government has laid out clear guidelines for assessing the implementation of this programme. It will bring out a Swachhta Status Report every year from 2016 onwards after carrying out extensive surveys, in order to assess the progress made on the ground. Apart from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the other key ministries who would be consulted in developing this implementation assessment plan include Ministries of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Health, Social Justice, Rural Development, and Urban Development.

However, beyond laying down the structure for assessing implementation, how the actual implementation process will proceed is not very clear, as there are a variety of debated views in the fray.

The critical point to note is that the availability of physical infrastructure alone will not ensure its utilization or the effectiveness of the programme. The issues involved in cleanliness, sanitation, environment and psychological well-being are highly interconnected and neglect of any one issue will have spill-overs in all other areas as well. Moreover, the government will be spending a massive amount of money on this programme – Rupees 2 lakh crore over the next five years – thereby, making it important that it succeeds.

In this regard, it is important to take note of the following:

First, the issue of sanitation needs to be looked at holistically, rather than simply a matter of constructing toilets to prevent open defecation. Studies have shown that despite Kerala's high sanitation coverage, diseases continue to prevail, since there are insufficient treatment mechanisms when pits fill up.

Second, apart from addressing the provision of physical infrastructure, it has to be ensured that this infrastructure is utilized and does not remain dysfunctional.

Third, it is important to note that the problem of waste cannot be addressed without the reduction of the source of waste. The production of e-waste and the use of plastic should especially be discouraged and strict laws must be put in place to ensure that both manufacturers and consumers comply with them. Internationally too, India must negotiate contracts to prevent the dumping of e-waste and chemical waste in its territory. Instead, biodegradable waste which can be used for composting or as a fuel through incineration, is much more manageable in solving the problem of waste. Mechanisms to ensure management of biodegradable waste should not be allowed to remain lax, however, as it produces methane which is the most dangerous greenhouse gas.

Fourth, to cement the relations between higher and local-level authorities, the disbursement of funds should be regulated. Regular inspection of implementation should be conducted from time-to-time and if, upon monitoring, gaps are found, then grants to the local

level authorities should be strictly withheld.

Fifth, it should be recognized that stray animals are one of the biggest hurdles to public cleanliness. The issue of stray animals is also a politically sensitive issue, with several large animal activism organizations involved. It would be extremely costly and unproductive to clean up every time a stray animal relieves itself in a public space. Instead, it is much less costly to take care of this problem once-and-for-all, by creating a separate sanctuary for stray animals where they could be fed as well as taken care of. This also takes care of the political opposition coming from organizations like PETA.

Finally, it must be recognized that forms of pollution which cannot be seen but exercise a strong impact on us, also need to be tackled.

This is particularly true of noise and air pollution. Psychological well-being and mental balance forms an important aim of cleanliness. Noise pollution, through its disruption, and air pollution, through the diseases it causes, impairs this aim. Strict implementation of laws is required to ensure that people and organizations do not perpetuate noise pollution, and these laws should be applied to all, including religious organizations.

Air pollution in waste management needs to be dealt with by substitution of inorganic waste and proper management of biodegradable waste.

These aims are just the tip of the iceberg. Without them and in the absence of a host of cooperative social and administrative mechanisms, the dream of Swachh Bharat will simply remain a rhetoric and will lose strength over time. However, if this plan is successfully implemented, it will develop the civic and national consciousness tremendously and will also go a long way in strengthening India's global role.

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CHANGING TIMES

India's foreign policy has acquired a decisive expression with the coming to power of the new government. During the previous UPA regime, India's foreign policy was passive and non-ambitious. This passivity was not similar to India's post-Independence policy of Non-Alignment, which was a product of attempts by the economically weak, newly decolonized nations to keep all sources of foreign aid open and to assert an alternative political vision. However, the policy of Non-Alignment gave way to an activist foreign policy seeking to establish India's role in South Asia right from the time of Indira Gandhi. Even though the majority of intervening years under the UPA government were passive, the Modi-led NDA government has now given a new life to the country's foreign policy.

In this article, we will look at the new foreign policy themes heralded by the government and major challenges emerging in India's bilateral relationships.

MARGINALIZING BUREAUCRATIC INTERVENTION

One of the weaknesses afflicting the previous government's foreign policy was the excessive role of the bureaucrats sitting in the Ministry of External Affairs. The Devyani Khobragade episode last year, because of which the Indo-US relations reached a staining limit, is a case in point. Another weakness lay in poor implementation due to lack of coordinated functioning among different ministries. Clinching important economic deals has always formed a crucial part of bilateral and multilateral foreign policy engagements. However, non-implementation of these partnerships due to lethargy in the Indian bureaucratic establishment and inability of the PMO to extract accountability from it, has prevented foreign policy from moving beyond diplomatic engagement to actual implementation.

This mode of functioning is now undergoing substantial changes. The Ministry of External Affairs is directly under the control of the PMO and the PMO also exercises great deal of leverage over

other ministries and bureaucrats. This has considerably centralized authority and made translation of foreign policy commitments in various sectors more likely.

PRIORITIZATION OF BILATERAL PARTNERS

The new government has actively engaged in a series of bilateral dialogues with key countries like China, Japan, US, Australia and Vietnam.

There are three levels to the government's bilateral engagements, pertaining to the neighbourhood and international policy.

At the government's first level of engagement, the major agenda, as highlighted by the PM in one of his initial speeches, includes building a 'peaceful, stable and economically interlinked' neighbourhood in order to achieve collective development in South Asia. This was confirmed by Modi's independent visits first to Bhutan and then to Nepal, instead of Japan, which officially marked the beginning of his proactive foreign policy.

The second level of engagement further seeks to grow India's strategic international role through engagements with countries like China, Japan and Russia. This is seen by the fact that the government gained assurance from China, recently, that its membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will be considered.

Finally, at the third level of engagement, countries like the US, Australia and Europe would be prioritized from the point of view of economic partnerships.

ACTIVE ROLE IN REGIONAL BLOCS AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

The government's prioritization of bilateral partners clearly shows that an active neighbourhood policy, within the context of rising importance of Asia, is the defining direction of the government's foreign policy. To this effect, India's pivotal role in a

revived SAARC will play a key role in the government's approach towards regional blocs. It is clear from the experience of long-enduring regional blocs like EU and even ASEAN that the revival of a regional bloc requires not just a shared heritage and culture, but also a building up of political trust, to ensure cooperation. As a symbolic first step, Modi's invitation to SAARC leaders and Mauritius in his swearing-in ceremony was a beginning in this direction. India's active role in SAARC will also represent a fulfillment of its immediate neighbourhood policy.

Beyond SAARC, the new Indian foreign policy also seeks a greater role in other regional blocs. These include purely economic blocs like BRICS and mainly security/military blocs like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). PM Modi's address at the recent BRICS summit in Brazil affirmed the usual agenda of socio-economic development and the independence of the BRICS from the financial turmoil in the Western economies by encouraging autonomous institutions like the New Development Bank. The success of the BRICS depends greatly upon the extent to which it succeeds in establishing strong independent institutions as a viable alternative to Western structures like World Bank and IMF.

SETTING GROUNDWORK PRECEDENTS

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been continuously engaged in an active, albeit low-key, agenda of reaching out to countries such as Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Vietnam. This has served an important political purpose, by acting as a realistic balancing force to the larger level diplomatic engagements. As a part of its ever-progressive decades-old Look East Policy, the President recently visited Vietnam and the military cooperation between the two countries was given further boost, as India extended a \$100 million defense credit deal to Vietnam and also signed a joint oil-exploration pact in the South China Sea with the country. This is significant as China's claim over the South China Sea has always been contested by countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

SECURITY CHALLENGES: PAKISTAN, CHINA AND NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

Military security remains one of the key challenges of India's current foreign policy. Even as the government continues to institutionalize a strong foreign policy, the magnitude of security challenges also keeps mounting. This is especially so vis-à-vis the relations with Pakistan and China, which will exercise a great impact on India's position in South Asia.

While the border dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir has been the root of cross-border terrorism bred in Pakistan, even the anticipated thawing of tensions due to a temporary goodwill between the two countries, when the new government came to power, did not materialize. Over the last few weeks, due to frequent ceasefire violations, the relations have become even more hostile. There is nothing new in this, as Pakistan engages in this routine around this time every year, in order to enable the militants to infiltrate in India.

The only thing different around this time was a tough and measured response from India. This has led to a lot of debate whether Modi was right to have authorized retaliation against Pakistan. The questioning of India's tough stand misses the point that India-Pakistan relations can never be normalized by ignoring the diseases at the root, the continuous border tension and by focusing only on artificial goodwill through diplomatic dialogue, which is what we have been doing over the years. At the same time, India has not been rash in its response. The policy of the government has been to respond in proportion to the Pakistani aggression and any further escalation in tension has been left at the door of Pakistan.

Thus, India is not playing into Pakistan's hand, yet, at the same time, it has signaled that Pakistan's regular aggression will no longer be accommodated. Pakistan is, thus, now back to trying to internationalize the Kashmir issue and is demanding the revival of UNMOGIP, a United Nations Observer Mission, in Kashmir. Coupled with the rising influence of ISIS among the Kashmiri youth, the

government has a serious external and internal security challenge on its plate.

The problem in Pakistan is not isolated. Stable relations with Pakistan are crucial to maintaining peace and India's rising authority in South Asia. In order to assert this authority, India needs to skillfully wield its soft power to convey its position. That is why it has taken the present approach to China. Ever since Xi Jinping's recent visit, much has been made of how the diplomatic engagement failed to palliate mounting tensions along the LAC and speculations about China's possible motives. The fact that India has unveiled a special policy for the Northeast and continues to invest in infrastructure in that region and is also sending positive overtures to Vietnam and Japan, is seen to further add to the stand-off and has evoked a sharp response from China.

However, in the case of China, unlike Pakistan, the border issue is largely delinked with other issue-areas, as China's favorable response to India's request for induction into the SCO shows. As a Chinese official foreign office spokesperson, Hong Lei, recently explained, the border question dates back to the colonial era, therefore, it is likely to involve a complex resolution of the dispute. Both the countries are driven by this implicit understanding which does not have too many adverse effects in other issue-areas of engagement.

Relations with China will also have a great impact on India's position in South Asia. In the near future, China aims to increase its bilateral trade with South Asian countries to USD 150 billion and its overall investments to USD 30 billion, apart from announcing a series of cultural exchange and educational programmes. As China seeks to increase its presence to leverage opportunities in the region, India would do well to cooperate actively and take a lead in helping to promote these initiatives.

Not only will it lead to a more consolidated and powerful role for Asia in international affairs, but India can spearhead these

changes. While East Asia is already a powerful economic engine, the World Bank's recent report also predicted that South Asia will become the second fastest growing region in the world. The rising power of Asia in global affairs is inevitable and India would do well to take an assume active leadership of this process.

THE ECONOMIC FRONT

One of the major focus areas of the government's foreign policy has been the economic. In order to avoid the grubbing received by the previous government over economic mismanagement and archaic economic-legal institutions, the new government is keen to counter-balance economic vulnerability stemming from global and internal factors, by attracting investments to the country.

This was highlighted in the PM's recent visit to the US. The PM signed a range of agreements on smart cities, digital infrastructure, collaboration in infrastructure projects and further push to science and technology and health cooperation between the two countries. More importantly, his symbolic overtures such as providing Visa-on-arrival to US nationals and a range of benefits for the NRI community, were underlined by clear economic logic of promoting tourism and ensuring that NRIs invested in financial instruments back home. An important highlighting factor of his visit was his positive interaction with the US-India Business Council and efforts to attract foreign investors.

However, India's engagements with the US have largely been transactional. On the other hand, India has also actively engaged with Japan and China on the economic front and shares also a more strategic relationship with them. However, engagements with China over economic deals has been largely disappointing. While both the countries have agreed to correct the large trade imbalance which has been unfavorable to India, the economic deals signed were largely disappointing due to the not-so-large amount of Chinese investment decided for the next 5 years, even though a much larger amount had been pledged.

More than the US, India needs to focus on developing its economic cooperation with China, as this would have implications for India's political and military role in South Asia and beyond. Instead of dragging its feet on the BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) economic corridor, India needs to take active part in such multilateral regional initiatives, especially since Afghanistan has become even more vulnerable after the US and NATO withdrawal in 2014.

THE ASIATIC RESURGENCE: INDIA'S ROLE

The dream of Asiatic resurgence throughout the world, expressed by Sri Aurobindo, is now taking the shape of a more concrete reality. The revival of Asia has been viewed differently from various perspectives. One of the most prevalent ways of approaching it views Asia's revival as entailing the economic and military revival of the various Asiatic countries.

On the economic front, the power of 'emerging markets' and regional blocs like ASEAN, BRICS and SCO, rather than the hierarchical idea of 'developing countries', is seen as representing one of the important forms of this revival. On the military front, Asia's revival is seen to have occurred through the shifting balance of global power towards Asia, with the increasing marginalization of Europe and US. Not so long ago, during the 1990s and before that, US was accepted as a global hegemon. It was seen as being powerful and capable enough to lead international cooperation in all major issues. However, this is no longer true. After the Global Financial Crisis, despite the economists' predictions of a rebound, it now appears that USA's economic decline is here to stay. USA's permanent military decline has also become clear by the self-determining politics of Afghanistan and Middle East. This further reinforced by the fact that the developed countries' defence budget is becoming increasingly impaired by the economic crisis afflicting them.

Under these changed conditions, the resurgence of Asia is being seen as determining factor in global politics. However, with resurgence come challenges. Security challenges are especially

preventing the fostering of regional unity in Asia. And underlying these security challenges are differences of culture which foster distrust. This, underlined by politics of religion, was one of the major causes of weakness of SAARC. Here organizations like ASEAN and APEC would provide commendable models of cooperation which need to be replicated across Asia. India can play a leading role in this. Military and political expansionism in international and regional affairs is only a surface necessity. However, in order to bring about deep-rooted changes in Asia, India needs to revive and promote its cultural heritage, since Indian culture, continuously replenishing itself through the universality of the true Sanatana Dharma, is the only light that can provide the much-needed cultural mediation that can ensure Asia's political resurgence in the world.

AFGHANISTAN: ELECTIONS, SECURITY DEAL AND BEYOND

Afghanistan is at the centre of a controversy surrounding an uncertain future. The deal brokered skillfully by the US after the declaration of the election results to ensure the continuation of its interests in the region will have far reaching implications for domestic and international politics as well as regional security.

PUTTING THE ELECTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE: PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE BROKER US

Much has been made of the controversies surrounding the withdrawal of US from Afghanistan, the Bilateral Security Agreement and the two phases of Afghanistan elections. The desired peaceful and democratic outcome of the elections never materialized as domestic and international power politics took precedence over the voters' hope for transparency. Given the US history in Afghanistan, this was to be expected. After the 2001 attack by the US forces on the Taliban regime, which had ruled Afghanistan from 1996-2001, the US consolidated the rule of its chosen 'democratic' government led by Hamid Karzai and supervised the formulation of a new Constitution. The 'warlords', who ruled the country from 1992-96 and had opposed the Taliban, were partially re-incorporated into the new government in 2001 by giving them positions of power in the legislature. The politics of the country that followed thereafter has followed a dark route. After winning a doubted election in 2009, Hamid Karzai asked the UN to stop supervising elections in the country and the US and NATO agreed to this proposal.

Thus, beyond military consolidation, the US had taken over the constitutional and institutional process in the country too, while leaving the social process untouched. As a result, despite the institutional changes that had occurred over the years, there was very little change in the behavior of important domestic actors who were bound to come to the fore once the US left. Institution of Mr.

Karzai by the US and failure to engage with other actors was a part of this incomplete process. It was the result of this that was seen in the questionable election process recently.

Despite the attempts to botch the elections by the Taliban, the first phase of voting and election results were fairly clear. The first round of voting in April 2014 saw Abdullah Abdullah winning 45% of the vote, while Ashraf Ghani cornered only 31.56% vote share. However, it was in the second round of voting in June that the controversy began. The results which should have been announced in July, were delayed, but when they were announced, Mr. Ghani cornered 56.44% of the vote while Mr. Abdullah got only 43.56%, with the latter refusing to accept the results which he saw as manipulated.

The process of negotiation that followed thereafter clearly revealed the teetering democratic foundations of the new Afghan government. Its politics is clearly revealed in the following factors:

First, the lack of transparency was clearly revealed as the results of the UN-supervised audit of the election results was never made public. This was clearly a part of the agreement brokered by the US between the two contenders in order to break the deadlock.

Second, defying the democratic mandate entirely, the US, in order to preserve its own interests in a stable Afghan government, brokered an agreement for power-sharing between the contestants, making Ashraf Ghani the President and Abdullah Abdullah the 'Chief Executive Officer' – a new post created especially for this purpose. It was as a part of this agreement that Mr. Abdullah demanded that the election results not be made public. The four-page agreement between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah also called for convening a loya jirga, a traditional gathering of tribal representatives and elected district councilors, in the next two years in order to amend the Constitution to reflect the recent creation of the chief executive post.

ECONOMY AS THE ACHILLES' HEEL

The recent events are bound to create a deep upheaval in

Afghanistan's vulnerable economy. Prior to the 2014 withdrawal, two characteristics marked the Afghan economy:

First, the US ensured that the Afghan economy would be modelled on a neo-liberal NGO-driven model, which favored decentralized private/NGO activity over direct government intervention, since 2001.

Second, economic planning was closely linked with the military sector. The US and its allies in NATO were the guiding force behind the choice of economic model, even when that model was an apparently decentralized one. Thus, this clearly did not pertain to the conventional model of overseas development investment which could guarantee successful outcomes.

Despite the fact that the US invested nearly \$640 billion in direct spending in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2013, the process of economic stabilization has failed to take root. This because Karzai failed to utilize these resources and instead engaged in crony economic and political policies which accumulated the power of the warlords.

According to The Washington Post's estimates, the nearly broke Afghan government needs an emergency \$537 million bailout. It was not even in a position to service more than half a million government employees this month. While spending on schools and hospitals has improved, these services remain dependent on foreign funding. There has been very little large-scale investment in agriculture or basic industry. Instead, the bulk of the economy has focused on servicing foreign troops.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the Kabul bank crisis and the blacklisting of the Afghan financial sector due to delayed action on money laundering laws compounds further Afghanistan's economic woes.

POLITICAL AND MILITARY TRANSFORMATION: BSA AND BEYOND

Since 2001, Afghanistan has been heavily dependent on, not

just support, but direct military intervention of US and its NATO allies. They lost no time in launching the offensive against Taliban, by conducting air strikes in southern Afghanistan and in Pakistan's border areas. This heavy dependence should not have come to an abrupt point at the prospect of the US withdrawal, which had been known for years, yet this was what happened briefly last year, when Mr. Karzai resisted signing the deal on account of national casualties which resulted from US control since 2001. On the other hand, the US too faced costs of its own in terms of trillions of dollars, over 2,000 lives and a domestic and public perception of failure in Afghanistan.

Now, however, in the aftermath of the finalization of the election results and the agreement between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah, the US and Afghanistan officially signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) on 30th September 2014. The agreement permits the continuation of US forces in Afghanistan into 2015, even though the US's combat mission officially finishes in 2014. Around 12,000 troops will continue in Afghanistan. This includes 10,000 US troops and 2000 NATO troops. The purported objective of the US in signing the agreement is two-fold:

First, to provide military training to Afghanistan troops and make its military self-reliant.

Second, to continue to fight the international war against terrorism.

While these may be the stated US objectives, it is clear that the exercises entailed within the BSA will potentially act as a means for consolidating the power of the US in the region for years to come. This consolidation will extend beyond BSA and formal institutions. Covering a wide ground, the agreement makes way for developing Afghanistan's military capacity to be aligned to the US, not only to prevent its misuse by terrorists, but also, according to US's agenda, seeks to cover areas such as health care, human rights and economic opportunity.

However, beyond the uplifting language of the agreement, dark doubts continue to linger on how it will eventually work out within Afghanistan's new post-poll political establishment. The central question is whether and how the development envisioned by the BSA will really be implemented. After the declaration of the election results and the agreement appointing various individuals to different posts, it is clear that the military question has become deeply interlinked with the political question. The selection of Abdul Rashid Dostum as Afghanistan's new Vice-President proves this point. Known as a feared warlord, Dostum was speculated by US historian Brian William in his piece 'The Last Warlord' to have been a C.I.A agent who had killed up to 2000 Taliban prisoners of war in a 2001 massacre. Thus, beyond military control, the US is also seeking to maintain its control over the institutional system in the new Afghanistan government.

INTERNAL SECURITY AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The Afghan political process post-election has shown that the US has wasted little time in securing its own interests, while internal security challenges continue to persist and have compounded after the elections.

The primary challenge is that of the impact of the new political establishment on social unrest that threatens to explode in the country. The new appointments have been mirroring the existing ethnic rift in the Afghan society. Despite the power sharing agreement between Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani, there is concern that Mr. Abdullah would be elbowed out of power. This is because while Mr. Abdullah hails from the northern region of the country consisting of majority of Tajiks and has a massive support base there, Mr. Ghani is an ethnic Pashtun who has support bases in the eastern and southern regions of the country.

Thus we see a snowballing of this internal ethnic tension onto the political stage, along with the presence of purported US agents such as Dostum in powerful political offices, which are already

teetering under the burden of a precarious and unlikely post-poll alliance engineered by the US. This will have adverse implications, not just for internal security, but also for regional security. This is especially the case since, Taliban attacks have intensified after elections. India's stakes will be particularly high.

Perceiving a vacuum in Afghanistan due to shifting position of the West, countries like China and India first publicly expressed pursuing joint interests in the country in April 2013 and reiterated the same during Xi Jinping's recent visit to India. Part of investments in Afghanistan are fuelled by India's state enterprises and Chinese companies. While China's interest verges more on the purely economic, India is in a particularly vulnerable geographic position and this dictates its economic interest also. For India, the biggest threat comes from the fact that Taliban's Islamic Emirate may try to fill in the vacuum in Afghanistan. This would likely be compounded by the continuing social and political precariousness in the country despite the BSA, due to factors highlighted above.

Strategically, if India finds ways to combat this vulnerability, Afghanistan holds a lot of future promise. Afghanistan figures prominently in India's "Connect Central Asia" economic policy which envisions Afghanistan as a regional trade hub crossed by energy pipelines and air, rail and road links that will connect the resource-rich Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent.

However, before that promise becomes a reality, there is a complex web of economic, political and security challenges to navigate.

HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (4)

II. THE ARYAN INVASION THEORY

B. SRI AUROBINDO ON THE ARYAN INVASION THEORY

“I do not hold myself bound by European research & European theories. My skepticism of nineteenth century results goes farther than is possible to any European skepticism. The Science of comparative religion in Europe seems to me to be based on a blunder. The sun & star theory of comparative mythology with its extravagant scholastic fancies & lawless inferences carry no conviction to my reason. **I find in the Aryan & Dravidian tongues, the Aryan and Dravidian races not separate & unconnected families but two branches of a single stock. The legend of the Aryan invasion & settlement in the Panjab in Vedic times is, to me, a philological myth. The naturalistic interpretation of the Vedas I accept only as a transference or adhyaropa of European ideas into the Veda foreign to the mentality of the Vedic Rishis & Max Muller’s discovery of Vedic henotheism as a brilliant & ingenious error.**”¹

The nineteenth century European Aryan Invasion Theory was apparently – only apparently, for, in truth, as we shall see latter, it was highly motivated – based on the scientific theories of early human cultures and the European sciences of Comparative Mythology and comparative Philology which were in vogue at that time. Commenting on the interpretation of the Veda based on these European sciences, Sri Aurobindo wrote, “This interpretation is in entire harmony with the scientific theories of early human culture and of the recent emergence from the mere savage which were in vogue throughout the nineteenth century and are even now dominant. But the increase of our knowledge has considerably shaken this first and too hasty generalisation. We now know that remarkable civilisations existed in China, Egypt, Chaldea, Assyria many thousands of years ago, and it is now coming generally to be agreed that Greece and India were no exceptions to the general high culture of Asia and the Mediterranean races. If the Vedic Indians do not get the benefit of

this revised knowledge, it is due to the survival of the theory with which European erudition started, that they belonged to the so-called Aryan race and were on the same level of culture with the early Aryan Greeks, Celts, Germans as they are represented to us in the Homeric poems, the old Norse Sagas and the Roman accounts of the ancient Gaul and Teuton. Hence has arisen the theory that these Aryan races were northern barbarians who broke in from their colder climes on the old and rich civilisations of Mediterranean Europe and Dravidian India.

But the indications in the Veda on which this theory of a recent Aryan invasion is built, are very scanty in quantity and uncertain in their significance. There is no actual mention of any such invasion. The distinction between Aryan and un-Aryan on which so much has been built, seems on the mass of the evidence to indicate a cultural rather than a racial difference.^a The language of the hymns clearly points to a particular worship or spiritual culture as the distinguishing sign of the Aryan, – a worship of Light and of the powers of Light and a self-discipline based on the culture of the “Truth” and the aspiration to Immortality, – Ritam and Amritam. There is no reliable indication of any racial difference. ...

Nor is it a certain conclusion from the data we possess that the early Aryan cultures – supposing the Celt, Teuton, Greek and Indian to represent one common cultural origin, – were really undeveloped and barbarous. A certain pure and high simplicity in their outward life and its organisation, a certain concreteness and vivid human familiarity in their conception of and relations with the gods they worshipped, distinguish the Aryan type from the more sumptuous and materialistic Egypto-Chaldean civilisation and its solemn and occult religions. But those characteristics are not inconsistent with

^a It is urged that the Dasyus are described as black of skin and noseless in opposition to the fair and high-nosed Aryans. But the former distinction is certainly applied to the Aryan Gods and the Dasa Powers in the sense of light and darkness, and the word anÀsaU does not mean noseless. Even if it did, it would be wholly inapplicable to the Dravidian races; for the southern nose can give as good an account of itself as any “Aryan” proboscis in the North.

a high internal culture. On the contrary, indications of a great spiritual tradition meet us at many points and negate the ordinary theory. The old Celtic races certainly possessed some of the highest philosophical conceptions and they preserve stamped upon them even to the present day the result of an early mystic and intuitional development which must have been of long standing and highly evolved to have produced such enduring results. In Greece it is probable that the Hellenic type was moulded in the same way by Orphic and Eleusinian influences and that Greek mythology, as it has come down to us, full of delicate psychological suggestions, is a legacy of the Orphic teaching. It would be only consonant with the general tradition if it turned out that Indian civilisation has throughout been the prolongation of tendencies and ideas sown in us by the Vedic forefathers. The extraordinary vitality of these early cultures which still determine for us the principal types of modern man, the main elements of his temperament, the chief tendencies of his thought, art and religion, can have proceeded from no primitive savagery. They are the result of a deep and puissant prehistoric development.

Comparative Mythology has deformed the sense of man's early traditions by ignoring this important stage in human progress. It has founded its interpretation on a theory which saw nothing between the early savage and Plato or the Upanishads. It has supposed the early religions to have been founded on the wonder of barbarians waking up suddenly to the astonishing fact that such strange things as Dawn and Night and the Sun existed and attempting in a crude, barbaric, imaginative way to explain their existence. And from this childlike wonder we stride at one step to the profound theories of the Greek philosophers and the Vedantic sages. Comparative Mythology is the creation of Hellenists interpreting un-Hellenic data from a standpoint which is itself founded on a misunderstanding of the Greek mind. Its method has been an ingenious play of the poetic imagination rather than a patient scientific research.

If we look at the results of the method, we find an extraordinary

confusion of images and of their interpretations in which there is nowhere any coherence or consistency. It is a mass of details running into each other, getting confusedly into each other's way, disagreeing yet entangled, dependent for their validity on the licence of imaginative conjecture as our sole means of knowledge. This incoherence has even been exalted into a standard of truth; for it is seriously argued by eminent scholars that a method arriving at a more logical and well-ordered result would be disproved and discredited by its very coherency, since confusion must be supposed to be the very essence of the early mythopoeic faculty. But in that case there can be nothing binding in the results of Comparative Mythology and one theory will be as good as another; for there is no reason why one particular mass of incoherence should be held to be more valid than another mass of incoherence differently composed.”²

In the light of the above, the only remaining basis for the Aryan Invasion Theory is the apparent similarity between certain European languages and Sanskrit but this need not necessarily imply any invasion or settlement of the so called European barbaric hordes into ancient India. It may be the result of a common culture covering a great part of the globe with India as a centre.

In a letter to “The Hindu” published in its 27 August 1914 issue and written in response to certain remarks about the “Secret of the Veda” that had appeared in this paper’s review of the “Arya”, Sri Aurobindo wrote “I do not claim that mine is the first attempt to give an adhyatmic interpretation of the Veda. It is an attempt – the first or the hundredth matters little – to give the esoteric and psychological sense of the Veda based throughout on the most modern method of critical research. Its interpretation of Vedic vocables is based on a re-examination of a large part of the field of comparative Philology and a reconstruction on a new basis which I have some hope will bring us nearer to a true science of Language. This I propose to develop in another work, the ‘Origins of Aryan Speech’. I hope also to lead up to a recovery of the sense of the ancient spiritual

conceptions of which old symbol and myth give us the indications and which I believe to have been at one time a common culture covering a great part of the globe with India, perhaps, as a centre.”³

That which was perceived by Sri Aurobindo one hundred years ago has been proved beyond any shadow of reasonable doubt by the studies based on modern genetic science. One important recent book on such studies is by Stephen Oppenheimer of Oxford University who is a world-recognised expert in the synthesis of DNA studies with archeological and other evidence to track ancient mysteries. In the Preface to his book entitled “The Real Eve”, he writes, “Imagine an Airline Check-in Queue in Chicago or London. Seven people stand there, looking in different directions. One is a solicitor of Afro-Caribbean origin, another a blonde-haired girl whose family come from northern Europe, another a computer expert who was born in India. The fourth is a Chinese teenager listening to music on a Walkman. The fifth, sixth, and seventh are all attending a conference on rock art and come respectively from Australia, New Guinea, and South America. All seven are quiet, and avoid eye contact because they neither know one another nor feel related in any way. Yet it can be proved they are all related and ultimately all have an African female and male ancestor in common.

In all our cells we have genes. Genes are made up of DNA, the string-like code of life that determines what we are, from our fingernails to our innate potential for playing the piano. If we analyse the genes of any one of these seven people, we can trace the geographic route taken by their ancestors back to an ultimate birthplace in Africa, at the dawn of our species. Further, if we take any pair of them and compare their genes, we will find that they share a more recent ancestor – living, in all probability, outside Africa. ...What is more, I believe that we can now prove where those ancestors lived and when they left their homelands. This remarkable proof has become fully possible only within the last decade, as a result of pioneering work by a number of people.

Many of us have wondered what we would find if we could

perhaps board a time machine and travel back through the generation of our ancestors. Where would it take us? Would we find ourselves to be distantly related to some famous or notorious person? How many generations would we pass through before we arrived at the first humans? Does our line continue back to monkeys, and beyond to worms and single-celled creatures, as Darwin maintained? We know from dry biology lessons at school that this ought to be so, but as with the uncertainty of what happens to us after we die, it is hard to grasp.

We are now so used to the pace of technical advances that the sense of wonder fades with each new one. Yet, until very recently, geneticists could only dream of using our genes to trace the detailed history of how we conquered the world. The reason for their pessimism was that the majority of the genes they examined shuffled themselves around at each generation and were common to most populations anyway. Their task was like trying to reconstruct a previously played card game from the pack of cards after it has been shuffled. So it was nearly impossible to draw an accurate genetic family tree going back even a few hundred years, let alone back to the beginning of our species. Most human populations look very similar beneath the skin, so where could one start?

The use of gender-specific gene lines, the so-called Adam-and-Eve genes, has in the last ten years changed all that. In contrast to all other genes, mitochondrial DNA (a collection of genes outside the cell nucleus) is inherited only through our mothers, and the Y chromosome is inherited only by men. These two sets of gender-linked genes are passed on unchanged from generation to generation, with no shuffling, and can therefore be traced right back to our ancestors, to the first mammals, and even beyond to worms and worse. We can thus construct two family gene trees, one for our fathers and one for our mothers. As a result, in any population, of whatever size, we can trace any two individuals through one of these two gene trees back to a most recent shared ancestor on the tree. Such an ancestor may have lived 200, 5,000, or 150,000 years ago,

but all ancestors can be assigned a place on the newly constructed Adam-and-Eve genetic trees. These are real family trees of modern human gene lines, with real branches. Each branch on each tree can be dated, although the accuracy of such dating still leaves much to be desired.⁴

(To be continued...)

References:

1. *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, December 1984, Page 136*
2. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 15, Pages 25-28*
3. *Ibid, Page 596*
4. *Oppenheimer, Stephen, The Real Eve: Modern Man's Journey Out of Africa, Carroll and Graf, 2004, Pages xvii-xix*

THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (3)

II. INDIAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

A. The Fundamental Idea and the Essential Spirit

(3) "A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *dharma*. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter develops its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings,

to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world.”¹

(4) “...there is a great difference between the spiritual and the purely material and mental view of existence. The spiritual view holds that the mind, life, body are man’s means and not his aims and even that they are not his last and highest means; it sees them as his outer instrumental self and not his whole being. It sees the infinite behind all things finite and it adjudges the value of the finite by higher infinite values of which they are the imperfect translation and towards which, to a truer expression of them, they are always trying to arrive. It sees a greater reality than the apparent not only behind man and the world, but within man and the world, and this soul, self, divine thing in man it holds to be that in him which is of the highest importance, that which everything else in him must try in whatever way to bring out and express, and this soul, self, divine presence in the world it holds to be that which man has ever to try to see and recognise through all appearances, to unite his thought and life with it and in it to find his unity with his fellows. This alters necessarily our whole normal view of things; even in preserving all the aims of human life, it will give them a different sense and direction.”²

(5) “There can be no great and complete culture without some element of asceticism in it; for asceticism means the self-denial and self-conquest by which man represses his lower impulses and rises to greater heights of his nature. Indian asceticism is not a mournful gospel of sorrow or a painful mortification of the flesh in morbid penance, but a noble effort towards a higher joy and an absolute possession of the spirit. A great joy of self-conquest, a still joy of inner peace and the forceful joy of a supreme self-exceeding are at the heart of its experience. It is only a mind besotted with the flesh or too enamoured of external life and its restless effort and inconstant satisfactions that can deny the nobility or idealistic loftiness of the ascetic endeavour. But there are the exaggerations and deflections that all ideals undergo. Those which are the most

difficult to humanity, suffer from them most, and asceticism may become a fanatic self-torture, a crude repression of the nature, a tired flight from existence or an indolent avoidance of the trouble of life and a weak recoil from the effort demanded of our manhood. Practised not by the comparatively few who are called to it, but preached in its extreme form to all and adopted by unfit thousands, its values may be debased, counterfeits may abound and the vital force of the community lose its elasticity and its forward spring. It would be idle to pretend that such defects and untoward results have been absent in India. I do not accept the ascetic ideal as the final solution of the problem of human existence; but even its exaggerations have a nobler spirit behind them than the vitalistic exaggerations which are the opposite defect of Western culture.”³

References:

1. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 20, Pages 56-57*
2. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 20, Pages 34-35*
3. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 20, Pages 131-32*

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“There must be a group forming a strong body of cohesive will with the spiritual knowledge to save India and the world. It is India that can bring Truth in the world. By manifestation of the Divine Will and Power alone, India can preach her message to the world and not by imitating the materialism of the West. By following the Divine Will India shall shine at the top of the spiritual mountain and show the way of Truth and organise world unity.”

– **The Mother**

(Collected works of the Mother 13, page 361)

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