

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

January 2020



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

- The Mother

Year 10

Issue 10

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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 10

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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, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

ANOTHER FAILURE OF THE US: THE ASSASSINATION OF QASSEM SOLEIMANI

The recent assassination of Qassem Soleimani – the head of Iran’s Quds force or the foreign arm of Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Corps (IRGC) – has worsened the delicate political balance in an already deteriorating West Asia. The assassination was carried by the United States on Iraqi soil in a drone-targeted attack that also killed an Iraqi commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), who worked with Soleimani in an anti-terror Shiite military front, with the PMF being regarded as an extension of Iraqi Army. This was not just an attack on Iran, but on Iraq as well, occurring on Iraqi soil on an international airport and killing an Iraqi commander. It is no wonder that Iraqi Parliament passed a non-binding vote, boycotted by Sunni parties, to expel US troops in Iraq.

While, Iran – in a retaliatory attack – bombed two US military bases in Iraq and claimed that it had killed 80 ‘American terrorists’, the US did not strike back and maintained that there were no casualties although the material damages were significant and there were some injuries.

There is a climbdown in hostilities from both sides for now, as Iran – a master in proxy regional warfare – would never have preferred to engage in direct warfare with the US, but the killing of Soleimani may have other far-reaching implications in the regional situation.

AS IT HAPPENED

The killing of Soleimani on January 3, 2020 occurred as a precipitation of series of immediate events starting December 27, 2019. On December 27, a US military base in Iraq was

attacked, killing an American contractor and injuring other Americans. In retaliation, on December 29, the US attacked five bases and the headquarters of Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria, which is a key Iraqi Shia militant outfit, owing its loyalty to Iran. The strikes killed 25 Iraqis and wounded many more. These were perceived as a big offensive against Iraq and Iran, and in response, pro-Iran Iraqi protestors stormed the US embassy in Baghdad on December 31, causing material damage and setting its perimeter on fire.

While there were no deaths, the storming of the US embassy was bound to be perceived as a major transgression by the US, bringing back memories of how the US embassy was attacked by the Islamist protestors in Iran in 1981, after which US and Iran have never had diplomatic relations. It also brought back memories of the 2012 storming of US embassy in Benghazi leading to the killing of the American ambassador to Libya. The US also believed that the heavily fortified US embassy in Iraq could not have been breached by the protestors without some facilitation or laxity on the part of Iraqi government.

The siege of the embassy was the final straw for the US and provoked it to attack Soleimani, on January 3, as he landed at Baghdad's airport in a precision targeted attack. The reason US gave after killing Soleimani was that it was an act of preemptive 'self-defense', as they had information that Soleimani was planning to attack US interests. While preemptive action has been authorized under armed conflict by the UN Charter, in reality, it all depends on the perceptions of the countries. More relevant than international law was the US Congress' invocation of the War Powers Act of 1973 by the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives against the Trump administration, under which the Congress notifies whether US can go to war, or,

if the US has already engaged in armed conflict, the government should apprise the Congress of it within 48 hours. US actions in Afghanistan after 9/11 and invasion of Iraq in 2003 were all authorized by the Congress.

However, this case – which reflects more of a partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans – neither falls under such exceptional circumstances of ‘war’ and neither can it be termed as sustained armed conflict, since US and Iran have continued to engage in indirect low-level proxy warfare rather than in a direct armed confrontation. The killing of Soleimani was a one-off, but here also US acted shrewdly, as by killing Soleimani on Iraqi soil they did not directly attack Iran. Moreover, while Iran threatened to retaliate, the actual retaliation in form of missile strikes on US bases in Iraq was much less impressive and quite disproportionate to US’s daring act.

This means that Iran’s intentions are to continue with proxy warfare against the US, by attacking US interests in the Middle East or its allies (like Israel and Saudi Arabia), rather than engage in a direct confrontation for which it has inferior military capabilities. While Iran would prefer to – and is also expected to – engage in a much more heightened and intensified proxy warfare, this may not be likely for some time, as Soleimani was the key person who coordinated communications and unity among Iranian proxies spread across countries like Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and even Afghanistan. Soleimani’s death will deal a blow to these coordination networks.

SOLEIMANI AND THE IRANIAN POWER

The US-Iran confrontation leading to the assassination of Soleimani has played out like a chess game. Ever since the US withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018, there has been no

respite in US-Iran hostilities, yet there has been no direct confrontation either. There have been continuous low-level skirmishes and indirect confrontations. Last year, US and Iran declared each other's militaries as 'terrorist organizations', while Iran persistently blocked shipping routes from the Strait of Hormuz, taking hostages from foreign shipping vessels, and, bombing Saudi oil infrastructure. It also continued to systematically violate the 2015 nuclear accord – after giving advance warnings each time – due to the failure of Europe to circumvent the US sanctions.

Iran received support from Russia, China, Iraq and Syria, while keeping strategic channels with other countries like Turkey and India also open. Europe and UK were looked upon with suspicion due to their subservience to the US. Even with its 'allies', Iran has had to play a tricky game. ***Iran's policy has been of 'forward defence', masterminded by the IRGC since the 1980s, much before Soleimani started heading the Quds force in 1998 and perfected this strategy to a tee. The four key regional proxies created and masterminded by Iran include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad movement (PIJ) in Palestine, the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen*** (Goel, 2020).

The Iranian strategy involved making up for Iran's deficiencies in direct confrontational offensive warfare by spreading Iran's sphere of influence in the Middle East and parts of Asia. The central idea behind this strategy was to indirectly export the Iranian Islamic Revolution (of 1979) by consolidating Shia Muslims in various countries, and, consequently, raising and training Shiite armed militias and political factions through which Iran can influence politics and security in other countries. The Shia community, forming only 10-15% of the global Muslim

community, sees itself as a persecuted minority within the Muslim world, with Iranian power as the only epicenter and chief support of Shia Muslims (Shah 2020).

Prominent examples include how Iranian strategy to export Shia Islamic Revolution managed to establish a strong presence in Lebanon's politics through the Hezbollah since 1982 – which performs the dual role of being a Shiite militia as well as contesting elections and being a part of government in the Lebanese system where governmental power is equally shared between Sunni, Shia and Christians. The powerful Hezbollah has served Iran well, by weakening the US and Israel.

Similar to Lebanon, Iran has established a foothold in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, Iran left no stone unturned in exploiting US's failure to build 'democracy' in Iraq after 2003, with the vacuum left by US's ineptitude providing a wide latitude to Iran to consolidate the Shia majority and start influencing the political system through its own people. Iran perfected this to such an extent that now it is well-known that no government in Iraq can be elected without Iran's blessings, despite its political tussles with US and western proxies.

In Syria too, Iran used Hezbollah and IRGC and a combination of various Shiite militia factions to defeat the ISIS. At a time when, Assad's regime was continuously losing territories to both ISIS and to the West-funded anti-regime 'rebels', Soleimani turned the balance in Iran's favour by sending Shia militias to support the Syrian Army. While the broad support came from Russia, the ground support was entirely Iranian. For Iran, Syria's regime had to survive as Syria served as a crucial link between Iran and the Hezbollah based in Lebanon.

Iran's monumental success in Syria and Iraq and the re-

establishment of the 'Shia Crescent', stretching from Lebanon to Iran, was entirely Soleimani's game, defeating the Syrian rebels who controlled the Syria-Lebanon border and ISIS which controlled the Syria-Iraq border, posing a vital threat to Iran (Goel 2020).

It also temporarily struck a deal with the US to defeat the common enemy in the form of Islamic State, although the lines were always blurred. While Iran proved its capability in proxy wars by defeating the ISIS, it also showed that it was a master in the playing of the regional political game.

It struck deals with Russia and Turkey to help defeat the ISIS and, later, to help oust the US-Saudi-UAE alliance also that was also supporting the rebels against the Assad regime. Thus, Iran successfully ensured that Assad remained. As things stand, Iran and Russia – despite being allies – continuously jostle for influence in Syria. Iran has left no stone unturned in building economic infrastructure and controlling key cities like Damascus, while Russia is also competing to do the same, often subtly ejecting military factions close to Iran from the cities where Russians have influence.

Iran has perfected this strategy of Shia mobilization as far as India, since the aim of Iranian regime was to support the Shia everywhere. In India, Iranian clerics frequent Kashmir and preach to Shia Muslims. Just like the Sunni Muslims' allegiance to Saudi Arabia, for Shia Muslims, Iran comes first. On a recent visit to India (a few days after Soleimani's assassination), the Iranian Foreign Minister's statement that Shia Muslims protested in 430 Indian cities against the US, was meant to indicate Iran's religious reach. India is home to the world's second largest Shia Muslim population, after Iran.

The Iranian strategy has been so successful up till now that even US and its regional allies (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain) have not been able to defeat it. In the Yemen civil war, Iranian-funded Houthi rebels won for years the ethnic warfare against the government that was supported by Saudi Arabia and its regional and Western allies.

The mastermind who perfected this strategy, often through personal involvement, was Qassem Soleimani, who has been very close to Iran's Supreme Leader. He joined, at the age of 22, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in 1979 when the Islamic Revolution toppled US-run Shah's regime in Iran. ***He symbolized the Shia fightback – in the form of Islamic Revolution – against the radical Sunni-Wahabi Islam across the region. Indeed, the raison d'être for the transformation in Iran in 1979, in the form of the Islamic Revolution, should be seen as a Shia consolidation against Sunni terrorism – a problem that India could also relate to, having seen the results of Sunni radicalization in Kashmir and the rest of India, where Sunni Muslims live segregated lives but consolidate with a vengeance whenever needed, in form of riots and terror attacks. Shias, on the other hand, have been more or less natural allies of the Indian state.***

From being given the responsibility of supplying water to soldiers during the Iran-Iraq war, he became the head of Quds Force of IRGC in 1998. ***In a way, then, the trajectory of Iran since 1979 has been the trajectory of Soleimani's own life during the same period. Even though the systems Soleimani has built up will remain in place and the material and political setback may be temporary, yet, from a psychological point of view, Soleimani's death would be an unparalleled blow to Iran and cannot be emphasized enough. It is as good as US achieving the first step towards the desired regime change in Iran.***

Soleimani had become the personification of the Iranian regime and America's personal enemy. Political analysis will not be able to capture the psychological blow dealt to Iran by Soleimani's assassination.

He had begun to come into public eye, becoming an important and popular public personality, who used to respond directly to Trump's barbs. ***For the US, killing Soleimani was a major achievement, as it has weakened Iran considerably, politically in the short-run and psychologically in a near-permanent way. A United States Military Academy (USMA) dossier of 2018 expounded on the importance of Soleimani thus: "... To say that today's Iran cannot be fully understood without first understanding Qassem Soleimani would be a considerable understatement. More than anyone else, Soleimani has been responsible for the creation of an arc of influence — which Iran terms its 'Axis of Resistance' — extending from the Gulf of Oman through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea."***

Soleimani was the architect for the development of Iran's capabilities for asymmetric and covert warfare and the training of Shia militant proxies in numerous countries where Iran developed an unparalleled political and military influence. He cooperated with US in a temporary manner on two occasions viz. post-9/11 in Afghanistan as he wanted the Taliban defeated, and, more recently, to defeat the ISIS in Syria and Iraq. However, both these cooperative ventures were short-lived and despite them, Soleimani has been the chief strategist behind the killing of Americans throughout the Middle East, especially in Iraq where Soleimani began to direct attacks against Americans since 2003 and resulted in a complete failure of America's policy in Iraq.

Symbolically, one man alone – manifesting the power of Iranian Islamic regime – has been responsible for bringing the world’s superpower – the US and its powerful allies from the West like France and UK and from Middle-east – to its knees in the Middle East, ensuring that history will term the entire US policy in the region a failure and generations of Middle-eastern studies will be a scathing critique of US’s policy of unsuccessful regime changes throughout the region. Among others, the US policy has failed in Iraq, got badly exposed in Libya and took the life of its own ambassador, failed in Syria without accomplishing regime change, failed the Kurds in the most mercantile manner, failed in Yemen and could not take credit for defeat of ISIS. All this under Soleimani’s leadership. It is no wonder that the importance of Soleimani’s assassination for the US cannot be emphasized enough.

A SUPERFICIAL US VICTORY

Politically, the killing of Soleimani was one episode in the US-Iran tensions – albeit a heightened aggression by the US, but still an indirect one, which is unlikely to change the proxy game and certainly does not bode prospects of a war. It was a huge setback to Iran, but one against which Iran cannot do anything. For US, it is more of a personal national achievement – akin to satisfying the ego and irrational bloodlust by harming its own long-term interests. For, Soleimani’s leadership of the Quds Force was the chief force which led to the defeat of terrorist organizations like ISIS or Daesh, Al Nusrah and Al Qaeda, among other Sunni terrorist groups, which had wreaked havoc as far as India. ***It was the Shia zeal for the cause of Islamic Revolution in Iran that checked these Sunni terror groups. With Soleimani’s death and the weakening of Iran, the epicenter holding together and boosting Shia solidarity is bound to suffer temporarily.***

With Soleimani's death and the temporary weakening of Quds Force of IRGC, these terror groups are bound to revive with a vengeance. ISIS threat especially looms large. It was not the US-Saudi-UAE-France alliance that led to the defeat of ISIS from Syria, but a combination of lethal force manifested by the Kurds and IRGC. The US – through its mercantile, brutal and backstabbing policies – has weakened both Iran (understandably so) and bartered Kurdish interests off to Turkey (irrationally so, for uncertain domestic election mileage).

Besides the potential revival of terrorist groups, regional instability will likely increase over the coming months and years. This will weaken the US in the region. What the US fails to realize is the nature of Iranian power and Soleimani's role. ***Accustomed to a selfish understanding of role of political power, the US assumed that Soleimani was the epicenter of Iranian power. The reality is more complex. Soleimani was the epicenter of Iranian power, and yet he was not. He manifested, strategized and executed the collective impulse of Shia unity that went beyond him. The US is accustomed to thinking of figures like him as dictators fulfilling selfish interests, as the Western idea of reason for politics is based on pursuit of competitive selfish interests – conceptions which do not apply to countries like Iran and China. Therefore, the US assumed that by killing Soleimani it was clipping the roots of the Iranian revolution.***

Iran has already signaled that it is going to wage a 'long war' against the US, while Hezbollah commander, Hassan Nasrallah, has called it the start of a new US war in the region. These Shia groups based in other countries are seeing Soleimani's death as a turning point in their struggle against the US. Already, the plan may be in the process of being executed, as after Soleimani's death, Iran's Supreme Leader tasked Hezbollah's

Nasrallah with the work of uniting clashing Shia units in organizations such as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)* as well as the Shia political parties in Iraq, which resulted in success. Houthis in Yemen are also seeing a new gusto of anti-America energy, as are Shia groups spread across Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

While a war is unlikely, the developments would result in new and more lethal forms of technological warfare, which may make things difficult for the US and may bring Israel into the line of fire from Iranian militias.

STAKES FOR INDIA

From India's perspective, a difficult balancing act has to be undertaken. Economically, rising oil prices due to increasing Gulf tensions will be the biggest immediate problem for India, leading to inflation and fuel price rise – a political predicament – and forcing India to strengthen diversified sources of energy, such as Russia and US. India will also have to balance out its growing close economic ties with Iran's enemies like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel and US, while maintaining good relations with Iran. India still cooperates with Iran on Chabahar port – which was exempted by the US from the sanctions regime – but business and trade incentives to make the port operational are difficult to come by.

* PMF – a Shia outfit – was formed in 2014 to fight alongside Iraqi army to defeat the ISIS. The PMF's factions are divided into three main groups – “The first is linked to the supreme religious authority in Najaf (Southern Iraq) represented by Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani; the second is associated with Iraqi cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr; while the last group, which represents the most numerous and best armed, is associated with Iran directly” (Goel 2020).

Politically, Iran has, in recent times, taken a subtle stand against India in Kashmir – which India has preferred to ignore and overlook – and has participated in the Malaysia-led Islamic conference held some weeks back. ***Whatever Iran does, it is a Shia country and has not instigated India's Shias, who have largely supported the Indian government on key issues, including the Ayodhya dispute and the Kashmir issue. India and Iran share a common enemy in the form of Sunni Wahabi Islamism, and India even recognizes that Iran's verbal support to causes like Kashmir – driven by Sunni movements – is just a facile gesture to show leadership in the Muslim world rather than any action against India.***

India has severely dealt with Malaysia for commenting on Kashmir and India's Citizenship Amendment Act, forcing Malaysia to acknowledge that they are too 'small' to retaliate. Iran's participation in Malaysian Islamic conference was not directed against India, however, but against Saudi Arabia and UAE which saw the conference as an affront to the Emirati and Saudi-led Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Throughout most of the last year and since 2018, thanks to the Indian closeness with US and compliance with US sanctions against Iran, India-Iran relations have been limited to just a formality. China and Russia have instead developed close strategic ties with Iran, although they too are complying with US sanctions. However, ever since Soleimani's death, there has been a subtle upswing in India-Iran relations. Immediately after Soleimani's killing, the foreign ministers of India and Iran exchanged a series of phone calls and, despite the turbulence in Iran due to people's protests against the regime and the killing of Soleimani, the Iranian foreign minister did not call off his India visit for the Raisina Dialogue.

The Iranian foreign minister's visit was meant to show to the world that India and Iran are good friends, at a time when Iran is getting increasingly isolated. Iran also signaled to India, more than once, to mediate with the US on their behalf. They know that – more than their any other ally like China or Russia – India is best placed to talk to the US.

Even as Iran will wage proxy warfare against US in the Gulf region, its immediate critical concern is to prop up the economy, curb rising unemployment and tackle the growing protests against the regime since last year – many of which have, allegedly, seen a Western hand. India will be an important partner in achieving these economic aims, while politically Iran continues to be well-placed to weaken the US in the Gulf region. India has been cautious thus far. While India will maintain good relations with Iran, it will also not antagonize US, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

CONCLUSION

The assassination of Soleimani and its significance highlights an important point viz. US's ruthless model is failing. While the immediate victory may be US's, in the long run, if Shia militias succeed in uniting in an unprecedented manner (as they are now trying), the US days in the Gulf will be numbered. In many ways, Iran has been the undoing of the all-powerful US, since 1979. During the days of Shah, US and Israel were supposed to have supported Shah's brutalization of his own people through secret services like SAVAK, and led to the Shia Islamic Revolution of 1979. The events that followed – US embassy siege in Tehran in 1979, Iran's upper hand in Iran-Iraq war with Iraq supported the US and Sunni states, and recent developments in the region post-9/11 – show that not even once US has been able to gain upper hand over Iran.

Historically, the US has acted more out of frustration. This was the case even when Bush declared Iran as a part of 'Axis of Evil' in 2003 despite Iran's help to the US in Afghanistan. The US has found itself trapped in successive political failures, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya (which is currently disturbed), Lebanon and Syria. The killing of Soleimani was again out of frustration, based on deriving crude satisfaction even while being aware that it will further reinforce Shia solidarity against the US.

Thus, the history of Middle east, in a way, has been the history of the US and West's international failures – exposing a country that regards itself as a superpower. Culturally, it has been a failure of the Western mission of imposing human rights and democracy and western model of 'development' in different cultures and countries. This particular failure extends beyond Middle east to Eurasia and Asia also, especially China. Despite funding protests in the name of 'democracy', the US's failure in non-Western countries is glaring. It's missionary zeal to impose Western culture and dominance in the name of democracy has not only resulted in a backlash, but has produced a mess worse than the original situations of the non-Western countries.

As Sri Aurobindo had written, "***Democracy is by no means a sure preservative of liberty; on the contrary, we see today the democratic system of government march steadily towards such an organised annihilation of individual liberty as could not have been dreamed of in the old aristocratic and monarchical systems...there is a deprivation of liberty which is more respectable in appearance, more subtle and systematised, more mild in its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading***" (CWSA 25, 1997, p. 508).

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THE INDIAN SPIRITUAL HERITAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – 2

INTRODUCTION

I. THE PROBLEM OF DEVELOPMENT

“This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected. What thou art within, that outside thee thou shalt enjoy; no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.”¹

“At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a **stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.** A structure of the external life has been raised up by man’s ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. **Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites.** For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for

a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being: but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego.”²

A. The Materialistic Ideal and the Utilitarian Spirit of the Present Socio-economic System

The whole modern socio-economic system is geared towards meeting only the vital and physical needs of man, for the material perfection and well-being has become the sole recognised Dharma of modern societies – all else being considered either a pretentious falsity or a thing of minor and dependent consequence. The overriding concern that the modern societies show for the fulfilment of the vital and the physical desires of man, and the prominent part that money plays in the fulfilment of such desires, has brought the economic science to the forefront. **The economic science and its calculations confine themselves to only those parts of individual and social activities which are squared (or squarable) against the measuring rod of money. Thus, Economics addresses itself to only a fraction of what would be considered relevant to a person’s welfare even by a materialist. Still, important policy decisions having profound implications for all aspects of life are continuously being taken, almost wholly, on the basis of narrow economic calculations alone. This is the spirit of “utilitarianism”. As if the materialistic view of man was not narrow enough for a speedy disaster; this made matters go from bad to worse.**

“For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call ‘utilitarianism’. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful. Certainly something that is useful is better than something that is not. But first we must agree on what we describe as useful – useful to whom, to what, for what? For, more and more, the races who consider themselves civilized describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle. That is what I call utilitarianism. And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it.”³

The gospel of utilitarianism seems to permeate modern societies; debasing by its touch all that has opened to it consciously or unconsciously. Virtually nothing seems to have escaped completely its distorting influence. Politics, education, medicine, art, music, religion, friendships, relations, love, etc., all seem to have come under its sway. The spirit of duty, commitment, service seems to be fast losing ground to it even in areas such as education, medicine, social service, etc., which have traditionally been its strongholds.

At present the whole of the human race has come more or less completely under the sway of the materialistic ideal. To start with, the safety of the present civilization has to be sought not only in the explicit recognition of the spiritual aim of existence but in its application to all the problems faced by it. Today all the countries, the world over, are enamoured of and altogether enslaved by the “development ideal” which concentrates on achieving an ever greater and greater volume of goods and

services as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP)*. The menacing giant of religious fundamentalism and intolerance has been raising its head since the beginning of this century and still seems to be unabated and even growing. However, even this giant – even in areas and cultures most under its sway – has to play “second fiddle” to the mightier and seemingly invincible titan named “development” which is put forward by the “wise thinkers”, the world over, as the one thing that really matters and as the very condition of survival.

However, this titan – in spite of its very impressive performance in developing material infrastructure and changing the physical appearance of things – has not really been able to deliver in terms of the real well-being. As we have seen earlier, the deeper reason for this is that, basically, it is impossible to bring about a real improvement on this front without a corresponding improvement in the consciousness in which people live. For example, the quality of a service depends

* The GDP is – more and more – becoming rather a measure of “human deprivation” than anything else. For example, when one walks to work at an office nearby, one does not, through this simple and enjoyable act, contribute anything to the GDP. However, if one has to take a high-speed bullet train – spending hours getting to and back from work – one (indirectly) contributes enormously to the GDP; initially by way of expenses incurred in building and then in operating and maintaining such an expensive means of transportation. As the number of people who get subjected to such deprivations goes up, the GDP also goes up. The GDP also increases as conflicts (or their future likelihood), crimes, corruption, epidemics and diseases increase, because to maintain peace, safety and health, the public expenditure on these things – which enters directly into the GDP accounting – has also to be increased proportionately with the proportion ever growing higher due to ever declining real value of the services (per unit of money) in these fields due to the relentless working of the utilitarian spirit.

critically on the consciousness of people, especially in the case of the areas such as health, education and administration. As consciousness rises, we open more and more to a feeling of fraternity leading eventually to the consciousness of unity and oneness with all when spiritual levels of consciousness are approached. **To the extent we fail to identify with other people and their sufferings and joys (as our own), we fail to truly serve them***. Since everyone, without exception, must be on the receiving end in the case of (at least) some services, therefore, as the quality of services begins to continually deteriorate, everyone must become progressively worse off in real terms. In an economy consisting only of services (and no goods), one person's spending on a service is another one's income from performing it. Even if we were to multiply the nominal amounts involved in the above process by a factor of hundred and thus nominally increase everyone's income a hundredfold – as to a large extent we have been unconsciously doing during the process of economic development – nothing would have really changed unless during this process the quality of service also changes. Even if enormous improvements in the technology of performing services were to take place during the above process

* The source of all sympathy and concern for others in our surface being – the real basis of all true service – springs from the deepest truth of our being where we are all one and enjoy and entire identity with the One without a second of the Veda and Vedanta. No selfish materialistic tendency, however acute, can really shut us completely from this truth – which in spite of our myopia – keeps things going and saves us from a complete collapse. Oblivious of all this, humanity has often tried in certain ages – as it seems to be doing at present with its slogans of happiness and enjoyment for all through growth and development directed entirely to the service of the animal self – to shut itself from this deeper truth and had come to grief by behaving like the proverbial fool who hacks at the very branch of the tree he is sitting on.

– as have actually taken place during the past few decades due to rapid advancements achieved in science and technology – it need not have affected the real value of services because all advancements in technology are a double edged sword and can equally help or hurt depending on the motivation of the performers (of services). For example, the quality of educational and health services seems to have remained unaffected by the tremendous technological improvements that have been registered in these fields during past few decades. Actually, according to the experience of a good many, it has been – in spite of the appearances to the contrary – really getting progressively worse during this period, as doctors shown an increasing tendency to use the new advances in technology invariably to frighten and cheat their customers.

If we look at the development statistics, the aggregate volume of services in nominal terms has been growing faster than that of the goods. As a result, services which accounted for only about one third of the GDP in the 1950s now account for almost four-fifths of the GDP in the case of materially advanced countries like the US and about two-thirds in the case of the growing economies like India and China. If the quality of “services” declines – as it seems to have been for some time now – then the real GDP must also decline unless compensated by more than proportionate (almost double or triple compared to the fall in the real value of the “services”) increase in the real value of the volume of goods produced. We have seen earlier how the utilitarian spirit has been progressively eating at the core of quality in both goods and services. Now, certainly, technology has brought about a very significant increase in the volume of goods produced but the quality in the case of a good number of things – even of such essentials as food, water and air – has been deteriorating all along with disastrous

consequences for human health and well-being.

Because of a cut-throat competition in a market economy the producers tend to concentrate on the improvements in the appearance of products while (to cut costs) taking out all that can be taken out – without the risk of the consumers easily finding out – from the products in terms of quality and durability. The movement is increasingly tending towards a scenario where more and more producers are busy developing and practicing (without compunction) ever novel ways and means for bewitching and cheating the consumers. The result is that the markets are flooded with lots of worthless goods of bewitching appearance.

The upshot of all the above is that the well-being of people – even when narrowed to the satisfaction of the external being – has been declining in real terms. We must realise once for all, that, “The conditions in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera....”⁴

B. The One Key for the Resolution of the Present Problems

Essentially, there are hardly any world problems that cannot be traced to human agency and which could not be overcome, to a great extent, by appropriate changes in human behaviour brought about from within. The root cause of all our problems – even of the most external – are the severe inner constraints on our vision and values which are, to a great extent, the byproducts of our acute selfish concentration on our surface selves. As things stand at present, we contemplate changing almost everything on this earth – the whole media is full of the

deafening noise of intellectuals and political and social leaders about such changes – but ourselves wherein lies the only key to the solution of all our problems. There is not a single country – out of an aggregate of more than 200 on the globe – which at all concerns itself with real “man-making”. The present day education, whether “secular” or otherwise, hardly addresses this problem and is geared only to provide students with diplomas and skills which may be used to pursue their narrow selfish ends for which they had been amply groomed by the psychological atmosphere prevailing at these institutions and in the society at large.

What all this is leading to – and already has to a good extent – is obvious **if one impassively looks at the present scenario where one finds oneself surrounded by, to use Yogi Sri Krishna Prem’s eloquent words, “...an aggregate of meaningless individuals determinedly pursuing their contemptible aims.”**⁵

The one way out of this problem is that an increasing number of people becomes conscious of this deeper aspect of our problems and makes a determined move in its own way to address them. **As the evolutionary crisis deepens – especially in relation to ethical and moral infrastructure – it may lead to a real awakening to this need intense and critical enough to enable it to become at least one of the most important goals to be pursued by the governments across the world.**

(To be continued.....)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

I. UTTARAKHAND'S RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS BILL:

The Uttarakhand government passed the 'Uttarakhand Devasthanam Management Bill' on December 10, 2019 and it has received the signature of the Governor. The law seeks to form a trust for the regulation and management of 51 shrines in the state, including the Char Dham (viz. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri).

The law met with protests from temple priests, figures like Baba Ramdev, RSS functionaries and the Opposition. From the government's perspective, the law will ensure better management of the temples and better facilities for the visiting pilgrims.

It is not the first of its kind. Prior to formulating it, the state government studied other existing models such as Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, Somnath Trust, Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust and others.

Moreover, the government has also insisted that nothing in the law takes away from traditional roles and rights of other stakeholders.

Interestingly, protests have been muted and are more about competing vested interests trying to gain an upper hand. Instead of arguing against future implications of state intervention in Hindu religious places, the detractors are more concerned about income and revenue coming from the millions of pilgrims, which would now be utilized fully by the government, while others are concerned about their 'job' status and are attacking the government for not clarifying the role of existing priests and 'pandas' in the new management.

The selfish language in which objections have been articulated has not even once touched upon issues regarding interference in Hindu places of worship, which could be an issue if a minority-appeasing government were to come to power in the state. But this has not been raised. All objections are related to money, revenues, land control, livelihood/employment issues etc.

Indeed, the government itself has taken care to ensure that misuse of Hindu temples won't be possible under different administrations, by incorporating that the CM will be the chairperson of the shrine board – the highest governing body – and if the CM is not a Hindu, he or she will nominate a senior minister from the council of ministers. The Minister in-charge of culture and religious matters shall be the vice-chairperson of the board, and if he or she is not a Hindu, then the CM shall nominate a member from the cabinet. This may not be much of a protection against a hostile administration, but is just a superficial assurance.

The last time such a controversy had erupted was in 2005 when the then Congress Chief Minister tried to pass a similar bill but backtracked due to revolt by the Congress MLAs themselves.

2. BRU SETTLEMENT:

A historic agreement has been signed between the Government of India, governments of Mizoram and Tripura, and, the representatives of Bru-Reang refugees, to end the refugee crisis facing the Bru community since 1997.

Tensions between Brus and Mizos in Mizoram turned serious as powerful Mizo organizations attempted to leave the Brus out of electoral rolls of the state in 1995. The Brus, in turn,

formed the Bru National Liberation Front and demanded the creation of an autonomous district council protected under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

In 1997, around 37000 Bru people living in Mizoram had to flee the state due to persecution and ethnic genocide in Christian-dominated Mizoram. While discrimination against them, deprivation of voting rights, segregation, violence and pressure to convert to Christianity had been going on for years, their militant resistance against it in 1997 led to a heavy reaction and all-out genocide from the Mizo people. As a result, in 1997, they fled to neighbouring Tripura.

The refugees are known as Bru in Mizoram and Reang in Tripura. They belong majorly to Hindu religion. In Tripura, since 1997, they have not been living in much better conditions, residing in camps and dependent on state largesse.

Much like the Kashmiri Pandits, these people too have been regarded as stateless refugees and displaced minorities in their own country. Attempts to send them back to Mizoram have failed, as neither their rights nor their safety could be guaranteed. In 2018, the latest attempt was made to send them back to Mizoram, but only about 328 families accepted the offer and the aid.

Conversely, before the ascent to power of a BJP-ruled government in Tripura, ***repeated appeals to the former CPI (M) government to allow the Bru people to settle in Tripura were rejected.*** CPI (M)'s non-tribal followers are still not very happy with the agreement. Similarly, many NGOs and 'intellectuals' feel the compulsive need to play devil's advocate by trying to find faults where there are none.

Their primary contention is that Bru settlement in Tripura

will pave the way for similar models to be adopted for all cases of refugee crisis – such as Kashmiri Pandits – wherein it would set a precedent where it will not be necessary to settle the refugees in their ‘homeland’. These are bogus arguments and purely theoretical conjectures for two reasons:

First, they ignore the fact that the will of the refugees also have to be taken into account. While Kashmiri Pandits are larger in number and have full intention of returning to Kashmir, the Bru people – numbering just 30,000 – have rejected multiple attempts to send them back to Mizoram despite all monetary incentives being offered.

Second, what is a homeland in this case? Bru history itself is complex. According to traditions, the Queen of Tripura belonged to the Bru community and Bru were traditional people of Tripura, having migrated to Mizoram after 1947, where they began to be treated as second-class citizens. Therefore, to say that the agreement deprives the Bru of their homeland or legitimizes ethnic cleansing is irrational. If the government were to follow intellectuals’ advice and imagination, Bru would be left to languish stateless in camps for some more decades.

In the wake of the deal, Mizoram is acting magnanimously and claiming that Bru left on their own and were always welcome to return. Mizos also claim that a lot of Brus are staying happily in Mizoram. But the catch here is that ***most of the Brus in Mizoram have already been converted to Christianity, while Brus living in Tripura are still Hindus. Thus, this agreement has not only given them a homeland, but also protected this minority’s religion and culture.***

Under the present agreement, the Bru-Reang refugees will be given formal residence, voting rights and be made eligible

for all central government programmes within Tripura itself. The Home Ministry has allotted a Rs. 600 crore package for the same. The Bru people who are already residing in Mizoram will not be eligible.

The key offers of the package include: Rs. 4 lakh per family to be withdrawn after 2 years; 40x30 sq ft residential plots to each family; Rs. 5,000 cash per month for two years for each family; free ration for two years and aid of Rs. 1.5 lakh to build their houses.

The settlement of this crisis is seen as a major milestone, not only in Tripura and Mizoram, but for the entire North-east. It signals the Centre's thorough approach towards resolving all problems of the region and making it not only a part of 'mainstream', but an active reflection and symbol of India's culture.

3. BODO SETTLEMENT:

Following close on the heels of the Bru settlement, the Union Home Ministry also signed the Bodo Settlement Agreement – yet another milestone in resolving the decades-old problems of the Northeast – with all the three factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), six other Bodo groups and the government of Assam. Having NDFB on board is an achievement as it was not a part of previous agreement, and wanted complete secession from India.

The Bodo crisis is more than 40 years old and centers around the demand for a separate homeland for the Bodos and has been led by All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) since 1972, through violence and militancy.

According to the agreement, the Bodoland Territorial Area

District (BTAD) in Assam will be redrawn and renamed. BTAD is currently spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. The BTAD will be renamed Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The agreement will include villages with dominant Bodo population within the BTR, while those with non-Bodo population will be excluded. Bodos living in the hills would be conferred a Scheduled Hill Tribe status.

Without acceding to the demand for a separate Bodoland state, the agreement gives more powers to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The Centre will provide a Rs 1,500-crore-assistance-package over the next three years for the development of Bodo areas, and more than 1500 armed militants have surrendered.

Previously, attempts were made to resolve the Bodo crisis by signing agreements in 1993 and 2003, but these left considerable gaps and did not satisfy all Bodo groups. While the 1993 agreement led to the creation of the BTC, the 2003 agreement gave the BTC more financial powers.

4. WHAT THE JNU PROTESTS SHOW:

Protests have been going on at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi for the last two months. They intensified since early January after unprecedented mob violence in the university on the evening of 5th January.

On the evening of 5th January, masked mobs entered the campus from outside, armed with sticks and rods and started attacking students in various hostels. Both ABVP (BJP's student wing) as well as Leftist student groups were involved.

Media created a one-sided picture where only the evening violence was reported. In reality, the events of 5th January were

a precipitation of the virtual hostage situation that had been created by the Left-dominated JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) since the preceding week.

In line with the agitation against fee hike, going on for the last two months, the JNUSU gave a call to boycott the registration and admission for the upcoming semester – whose registration started from December 31st – as well as a boycott of examinations.

Students who wanted to register did so secretly, while Leftist goons physically roughed them up and prevented them from registering. While various faculty members – across the ideological spectrum – were critical of the racket and ruckus being enacted by JNUSU, they did not openly oppose it. Faculty members from various departments protested – in barely audible voices – against the complete forceful lockdown on all centers/departments and closure of classes. Anyone who tried to teach was harassed by JNUSU.

On 5th January, in the afternoon, Leftist goons – led by none other than the JNUSU President Aishe Ghosh – clashed with ABVP members at the site where registrations were going on. Ghosh was seen with some masked people then. A few ABVP members were roughed up. In the evening, the masked mobs that perpetrated violence supposedly came from outside the campus and consisted of, both, Left and ABVP people, since both Leftist and ABVP students were injured in the violence and admitted to AIIMS hospital.

Therefore, as video-graphic evidence started emerging, it became evident that both sides were involved in the violence, but the Left started it. If culpability is to be extended further, as it should, the near hostage situation and illegally forcing of the

students to forgo registration since the preceding week was also perpetrated by the JNUSU.

While the media sensationalized this to a great extent, the resolution of the problem was quick. In the next few days, the JNUSU held meetings with the HRD ministry and started giving mixed signals to the students, asking them to register but not pay the fees. Student community and student councilors from various centres soon turned against the JNUSU and exposed their double-speak, besides heavily criticizing the JNUSU for its arbitrary and dictatorial methods.

The tensions are very much visible. The JNUSU has backtracked and students to continue to boycott registration, but it's of no use now. ***Despite the ongoing boycott, around 88% students have already registered and paid the full fees.*** The university is acting lenient and continuously extending deadlines for registration – well into February – so that all students can register.

The entire episode has ended with the JNUSU and Left without any credibility and exposed. The motivations were clear all along – it was not just the fee hike, but also the resignation of the VC that the students wanted. Interestingly, this VC – whose record of management is considered to be poor – was appointed by former President Pranab Mukherjee in 2016 by overriding the choice of then HRD minister, Smiriti Irani's candidate, VS Chauhan, since the Congress party had protested against the latter.

The JNUSU lost credibility further when its President gave public statements saying that their protest was also against government actions in Kashmir. This was followed by the unsavoury spectacle and revelations of how JNU activists had

organized the anti-CAA Shaheen Bagh protests in Delhi.

For now, the matter has been resolved. It is very evident that even Leftists were among the 88% students who have registered, as they could no longer afford to pay the late fee fine and realized that the court case they had filed in Delhi High Court will not resolve this confrontation any time soon.

5. UNMASKING OF ANTI-CAA PROTESTS: FUNDING TRAILS, ISLAMIST ICONOGRAPHY, ANTI-INDIA VOCABULARY:

In last few weeks, there has been a complete unmasking of the anti-CAA agitation, especially in Delhi, due to four recent developments:

First, it has been revealed, through various sting operations, that the whole protest – led majorly by Muslim women – has been funded by paying the protestors 500-700 rupees per day.

Second, the symbols used in the protest – the sloganeering, posters etc. – have been exposed to be extremely anti-Hindu. Small Muslim children have been video-graphed inciting the crowds to kill PM Modi and Amit Shah for being anti-Muslim. This pathological hatred is further reinforced by posters showing disrespect to Hindu religious symbols or insinuating conversions to Islam (such as posters with women in bindi wearing burkha or Goddess Kali wearing a burkha or smashing of Swastik etc.).

Third, rabidly self-exposing speeches coming from Shaheen Bagh – which has started to resemble a mini-Kashmir – have shocked the wider society. Most recent was a speech made by JNU PhD student of History, Sharjeel Imam, who said that it is the duty of Muslims to separate Assam and the rest of Northeast from India. He proceeded to identify that this could be done by

blocking Chicken's Neck (small strip connecting India with Northeast) as it was Muslim-dominated. He – as well as famous Muslim journalists and intellectuals before him – insisted that secular people have simply 'used' the Muslims and that if they wanted to ally with Muslims, they should do so on latter's terms by accepting the use of Islamic religious slogans.

Fourth, in the most damning revelation so far, it was revealed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) that the Islamic organization, Popular Front of India (PFI), has not only spent millions to fund anti-CAA protests all across the country (especially UP), but also that they gave money to Congress's Kapil Sibal, advocate Indira Jaising and many others to fight cases of love jihad and organize anti-government agenda. Sibal admitted that he had received money for fighting the Hadiya case (love jihad case in Kerala), but denied getting paid for anti-CAA agitations. As per ED revelations, Sibal received 77 lakh rupees.

These latest developments have been the final nail in the coffin of anti-CAA agitators. Their agenda of perpetrating an anti-India and anti-Hindu protect, under the protection of the Constitution and the National Flag, is now crystal clear to the public. None of the anti-CAA lobby members have been able to justify these developments. The polarization is unprecedented, as Muslims – through several public speeches – have made it clear that this was not about CAA, but about perceived anti-Muslim actions of Modi government, such as the Kashmir issue, triple talaq Act and Ram Janmabhoomi verdict.

The degree of polarization is increasing, as it is becoming clear that Muslims of the city are trying to bring it to a stand-still. Journalists perceived to be right-wing were roughed up or not allowed to enter Shaheen Bagh, further reinforcing how a

part of Delhi has literally been hijacked. Furthermore, Muslim activists and people have attempted to sit on protests in other community-dominated areas too, such as Seelampur, Jaffrabad, Hauz Rani, etc. although they are being continuously disrupted by the police to avoid creating a situation similar to Shaheen Bagh.

Immortal India

“What was the force that enabled India beaten down & trampled by mailed fist & iron hoof ever to survive immortally, ever to resist, ever to crush down the conqueror of the hour at last beneath her gigantic foot, ever to raise her mighty head again to the stars? It is because she never lost hold of religion, never gave up her faith in the spirit. Therefore the promise of Srikrishna ever holds good; therefore the Adyashakti, the mighty Chandi, ever descends when the people turn to her and tramples the Asura to pieces.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 17, p. 159)