

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

August 2020



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

– The Mother

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Successful Future

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

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

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A DECLARATION

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

— The Mother

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

THE NEW NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY: A DEEPER PERSPECTIVE

“The aim of education is not to prepare a man to succeed in life and society, but to increase his perfectibility to its utmost” The Mother (CWM 12, 2002, p. 120).

The new National Education Policy (NEP) was promulgated on July 29th, 2020. It is a broad policy vision for India’s education system – a framework to serve as a guide to the further development of education in the country. This is India’s third national education policy since Independence and replaces the National Policy on Education, 1986 (which was revised in 1992)¹.

The present paper will provide an overview of the key provisions of the policy and an analysis of where it stands in the present times.

NEP’S VISION FOR INDIA’S EDUCATION

The NEP states that, “The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyan), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for the complete realization and liberation of the self...Instilling knowledge of India and its varied social,

¹ India’s first education policy came into being in 1968.

As a part of the newly promulgated policy, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has been renamed as the Ministry of Education.

cultural, and technological needs, its inimitable artistic, language, and knowledge traditions, and its strong ethics in India's young people is considered critical for purposes of national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation, and integration" (MHRD, 2020, p. 4).

The policy highlights that its fundamental principles in elementary and higher education space will be based on promoting,

- A rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions;

- Education as a public service

- Unique capabilities of each child

- Flexibility and ability of students to choose their own learning trajectories

- No hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, and, between vocational and academic streams.

- Emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning, and emphasis on character building

- Creativity, critical thinking, ethics and values

- Multilingualism and power of language

- Formative, rather than present summative, assessment, so that 'coaching culture' is discouraged

- Extensive use of technology

- Teachers at the heart of learning process

- A 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the

educational system through audit and public disclosure

In its overall vision, the NEP elaborates that its perspective is based on an “education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower...develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one’s country, and a conscious awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds” (MHRD, 2020, p. 6).

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NEP

NEP contains broad key provisions on how it envisages to change India’s education system by 2040.

I. SCHOOL EDUCATION

A. STRUCTURAL

i. Replacing the existing structure of 10+2, covering age group 6 to 18 years, in school education, by 5+3+3+4 structure, which will cover age group 3 to 18 years.

Stages of Schooling	Classes	Age group
Foundational	3 years of pre-school Class 1 & 2	3 to 8 years
Preparatory	Classes 3 to 5	8 to 11 years
Middle	Classes 6 to 8	11 to 14 years
Secondary	Classes 9 to 12	14 to 18 years

The purpose of this change is to include children within the age bracket of 3 to 6 years also in formal school system. This

age group (3 to 6 years) will be included in the foundational rung of pre-school learning based on 'Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)'.

ii. Instead of small individual schools that make it difficult to augment resources, school complexes – consisting of various schools within a 5-10 km radius – will be formed.

B. EXAMINATIONS:

i. Exams will be held only for 3 levels viz. Classes 3, 5 and 8. The reason is to ensure that assessment of students is based not on summative assessment (testing students at the end of the year through final exams), but on formative assessment (paying attention to students' performance throughout the education). According to the policy, this approach would help to develop higher-order thinking abilities and conceptual clarity among students.

ii. Board exams will be held, but the hype surrounding it will be diluted and the stakes in these exams would be lesser. Students will also be allowed to take the board exams twice – one would be the main exam and one for practice and improvement, if they feel so.

iii. Examination – and entrance examination – systems will be reformed to mitigate the need for coaching classes and focus less on narrow learning for the sake of exams.

C. FUNCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

i. Attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025.

ii. Achieving 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in pre-school to secondary level by 2030. GER is the percentage of population of corresponding age group enrolled in education. Currently, the NEP acknowledges that while the Right To

Education Act, 2009 had managed to ensure near universal enrolment in elementary education, yet, the drop-out rates have not been curtailed. Thus, as one progresses further in school education, drop-out rates increase.

GER IN SCHOOL EDUCATION:

Grade	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)
Grades 6-8	90.9%
Grades 9-10	79.3%
Grades 11-12	56.5%

Source: Vaishnav (2020)

D. LANGUAGE

i. Making mother tongue the medium of instruction till Grade 5, wherever possible, and encouraging its use at later stages.

ii. Greater flexibility in implementation of three-language formula, with no imposition on any state. The three languages can be decided by the states and students themselves, as long as 2 of the 3 languages are native to India.

iii. In Grades 6 to 8, the policy states, “every student in the country will participate in a fun project/activity on ‘The Languages of India’...under the ‘Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat’ initiative. In this project/activity, students will learn about the remarkable unity of most of the major Indian languages, starting with their common phonetic and scientifically-arranged alphabets and scripts, their common grammatical structures, their origins and sources of vocabularies from Sanskrit and other classical languages, as well as their rich inter-influences and differences” (MHRD, 2020, p. 14).

E. CULTURE:

- i. Courses and competitions on 'Indian Knowledge Systems' will be made available at secondary school levels.
- ii. Reduction in curriculum content to concepts and ideas that enhance critical and creative thinking.

F. TEACHER REFORM:

- i. Extensive provisions for teacher recruitment, training and development have also been highlighted. The entire process for awarding degrees and taking examination of teachers would be overhauled and made more transparent. Teachers would be required to devote 50 hours to professional training every year. Teachers will also be expected to cease electioneering or political activism and such activities, so that full focus could be on teaching (Roy, 2020).
- ii. Ensuring a Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) of 30:1 for all public schools.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION

A. STRUCTURAL & REGULATORY

- i. The policy envisages a 'complete overhaul' of higher education.
- ii. Existent institutes like University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) will be replaced by Higher Education Commission for India (HECI).
- iii. Establishment of a National Research Foundation.
- iv. Special Education Zones will be formed, to focus on the education of underrepresented groups in disadvantaged regions.

v. "Light but tight" regulation by a single regulator for higher education. A complete overhaul of higher education

regulation is envisaged. By establishing the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), the policy seeks to ensure that “a few important matters, particularly financial probity, good governance, and the full online and offline public self-disclosure of all finances, audits, procedures, infrastructure, faculty/staff, courses, and educational outcomes will be very effectively regulated” (MHRD, 2020, p. 47).

vi. A Board of Governors (BoG) will be established for every accredited institute. BoG will be the key decision-making body in the institute and will also be held accountable for meeting regulatory standards.

B. FUNCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

i. The NEP states that a “key priority” of the higher education regulatory system will be to **curb “commercialization” of education**, by treating public and private institutes at par and **by instituting a fee determination regime for private institutes** also so as to ensure that they do not operate like business entities but discharge educational functions in a public-spirited manner.

ii. Promoting multi-disciplinarity, invoking the tradition of universities in ancient India.

iii. Merit-based appointments.

iv. Increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.

v. Foreign universities would be encouraged to set up campuses in India, while Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses abroad.

C. SYSTEM OF DEGREES:

i. A 4-year undergraduate course, with multiple exit

options – a certificate after completing 1 year, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor’s degree after a 3-year programme.

ii. Creation of a digital ‘Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)’ for every individual, which would store credits (scores/marks) earned from each institution.

iii. M.Phil. shall be abolished. For undertaking a PhD, either a 4 years Bachelor’s degree or a Master’s degree will be required.

D. OTHER DEGREES:

Besides school education and higher education, the NEP also envisages changes in professional education and degrees, lays emphasis on promoting vocational training and digital education, and talks about revival of agricultural education and improving quality in healthcare, legal and other technical fields. In the field of healthcare, the NEP emphasizes that “our healthcare education system must be integrative meaning thereby that all students of allopathic medical education must have a basic understanding of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), and vice versa” (MHRD, 2020, p. 50).

OTHER ASPECTS OF NEP: SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON INDIAN CULTURE AND LANGUAGES

The NEP places great emphasis on the revival of Indian languages, arts, and other cultural knowledge, including indigenous/tribal languages and cultures. **In particular, throughout the policy, emphasis is laid on revival of Sanskrit.** The policy states that Sanskrit is not only a modern language, but also has a classical tradition vaster than Greek and Latin put together. Thus, **“Sanskrit will thus be offered at all levels**

of school and higher education as an important, enriching option for students, including as an option in the three-language formula” (MHRD, 2020, p. 14). Other classical – such as Pali and Prakrit – and regional languages will also be actively promoted. National Institutes for Pali, Persian and Prakrit will also be set up within every university campus.

Further, the NEP envisages that **instead of being restricted to Sanskrit Pathshalas and Universities, Sanskrit will be mainstreamed across all universities and schools, and, will not be taught in an isolated way but by linking it to other subjects of study. Conversely, Sanskrit universities too will become interdisciplinary. 4-year integrated multidisciplinary B.Ed. dual degrees in education and Sanskrit will be provided** so as to increase the Sanskrit teachers across the country.

Proficiency in these languages will be encouraged as an **important parameter in employment assessments**. Scholarships, competitions and other incentives are envisaged to regularize the use of these languages in daily life.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the NEP will depend a lot on state governments, since education is a concurrent subject in the Indian Constitution. While the NEP has set a broad target between 2030 to 2040 for fully implementing the NEP, the policy acknowledges that the actual implementation will require passage of series of legislative Acts and planning in various fields in order to change the present system. The government also targets to spend 6% of GDP on education.

The policy commits to instituting various committees which will meet yearly to review the implementation. Further, in order to operationalize the new syllabus in line with the NEP,

the NCERT will formulate a comprehensive National Curricular Framework for School Education, NCFSE 2020-21 based on principles in the NEP, 2020. The framework is expected to be ready by March 2021.

Key provisions	Provisional timelines for implementation
Multiple entry and exit points in higher education institutions	2020-21
Four-year programme in higher education	2021-22
Academic Bank of Credits (Higher education)	2020
Common entrance tests	2021
Establishment of Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)	2022
National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCFSE)	2021
National Professional Standards for Teachers	2022
New assessment system for schools	2022-23

While the NEP professes a largely decent vision on paper, its implementation is likely to be hamstrung by lack of government capacity and by unbridled corruption in the bureaucratic ranks. The shortage of resources is likely to hamper many aspects of the NEP. There is excessive reliance on NCERT to evolve a robust programme of study for schools in line with NEP vision. Similarly, other substantive aims like improving teacher quality, providing classical and contemporary multi-lingual capacities to students, improving universal basic numeracy and others, require a lot more capacity and political and bureaucratic efficiency and goodwill than exists at present.

Separately of these issues, the financial bottlenecks will also hamstring the implementation of the NEP. The impact of COVID19 lockdowns on the country's financial and economic resources has left very little leverage for the government to mobilize finances to implement some of the more radical changes of this policy.

NEP AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT STATE OF EDUCATION

“National education cannot be defined briefly in one or two sentences, but we may describe it tentatively as the education which starting with the past and making full use of the present builds up a great nation. Whoever wishes to cut off the nation from its past, is no friend of our national growth. Whoever fails to take advantage of the present is losing us the battle of life. We must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that Europe can give her and assimilate it to her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonise into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self reliance so as to build up men and not machines — national men, able men, men fit to carve out a career for themselves by their own brain power and resource, fit to meet the shocks of life and breast the waves of adventure. So shall the Indian people cease to sleep and become once more a people of heroes, patriots, originators, so shall it become a nation and no longer a disorganised mass of men” – Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 7:895).

As we have seen, the broad vision and plan of the NEP seeks

to mark a departure from the present system of education in India. The policy mentions that it seeks a ‘complete overhaul’ of the higher education system. There is also a credible attempt to introduce what have, by now, become alien elements in our extant framework of education viz. emphasis on Indian culture, Sanskrit and other classical languages and on values and duties as citizens.

If these aspects are managed to be implemented despite the great political and bureaucratic obstructionism, it will certainly mitigate, to some extent, some of the most obvious harmful existent pillars of our education system. It is interesting to note that while the public reception to the policy has ranged from positive to neutral, the clutch of powerful Left-wing academicians who have been instrumental in developing curriculum for NCERT school books and text books for higher education, have expressed their angst.

Their major objections shed renewed light on the most obvious things that are wrong with the present educational framework. These academicians have objected to the fact that while ‘Fundamental Duties’ and ethics find a place in the policy, there is no reference to Fundamental Rights – a fact that would naturally subvert the agenda of anti-national forces to create disunity by donning the selfish mask of ‘rights’. They also object to the so-called ideological agenda of promoting Sanskrit and Indian culture. Similarly, the mere provision for allowing foreign universities to establish campuses in India has been scorned as commercialization of education – as if the dual tendencies of unmitigated commercialization and utilitarianism have not already eaten the core of our society through a mediocre and narrow educational system over the decades.

Indeed, it is due to the existent educational system and the skewed commercial spirit, narrow approach and moral degradation that motivated it that we see a complete and rapidly progressing decomposition of the present system. The extent of rot in the education system is visible in the quality of citizens we are producing today. This is borne out, both, in terms of statistics and in terms of subjective issues. Despite the fact that since 2009, 96% children have been brought under the net of elementary education, there has been a steadily widening increase in drop-out rates in the public education system and successively falling standards of basic reading and writing abilities. This has happened despite the fact that infrastructural provisions have been ample and continuously new ones made available.

In private schools, the situation may be better in terms of higher enrolment and less drop-out rates, yet the overall condition is one of stagnation. Despite the fact that nearly 50% of enrolment is in private schools, the condition of the students even in terms of reading and writing – especially in small areas – is no better or only marginally better than in public schools. In private schools , “60% of rural private school students in Class V cannot do a three-digit division, 35% of rural private school students in Class V cannot read a basic Class II level paragraph and average score for Class X students in private schools was below 50% in 4 out of 5 subjects” (Gohain, 2020).

Besides these basic statistical facts, subjectively also, **instead of producing people who can consciously work for a higher purpose, be aware of the nation-soul and work for it, and, discover their real, deeper selves, the present education system is geared towards the homogenized mass production of living machines, best suited to meet the needs of the modern economic system.** As a result, the present

educational system – at a fundamental level – may produce certain specific attributes that are seen as being conducive to the modern utilitarian economy, but the last thing it does is impart real education.

While the vision of the NEP states that the purpose of India's civilizational approach towards education was not only to cultivate mental faculties but also the liberation of the self, yet, the present education system has completely ensnared the students within the confines of a soulless, commercialized machinery of the education sector and, subsequently, of the related 'career' fields. The new education policy, while making space for certain important aspects of education so as to prevent young minds from being mediocre and poisoned, is yet not based on deeper foundations of what an education system should be.

Embedded within the policy is the near universal presumption that by providing infrastructural improvements, technological fixes and aides, teacher training, and increasing the number of teachers and schools, it can increase participation (enrolment) in the education system and improve educational outcomes. This myth has been dispelled time and again, as even common data would show.

The policy also gives us an opportunity to raise another important question viz. the limitations and futility of a system that claims to impart 'education' in name only, while, in reality, whose main focus is on honing and expressing the vital ambition of students so as to shape them into career-driven machines that can contribute their mechanistic human capital to the economy.

As the Mother had written, **“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 civilised 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.

At an age when they should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense, children now dream of money and worry about how to earn it.

So when they think of their studies, they think above all about what can be useful to them, so that later on when they grow up they can earn a lot of money.

And the thing that becomes most important for them is to prepare themselves to pass examinations with success, for with diplomas, certificates and titles they will be able to find good positions and earn a lot of money.

For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself in order

to become master of oneself, to overcome one's weaknesses, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and more true... they hardly give it a thought and consider it all very utopian. The only thing that matters is to be practical, to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money." (CWM 12, 2002, pp. 351-352).²

It is this kind of education that forms the crux of our education system – right from school level up till the levels of higher education. In the case of the present policy also, aping the structures of Western education system, while making a few minor changes here and there – as the NEP does – marks no great shift in the present education system. The deeper view of the role of education is completely alien even to the present nationalistic government.

A DEEPER VIEW OF EDUCATION

"When we first received a European education, we allowed ourselves to be misled by the light of science. Science is a light within a limited room, not the sun which illumines the world. The Apra Vidya is the sum of science but there is a higher Vidya, a mightier knowledge. When we are under the influence of the lower knowledge, we imagine that we are doing everything and try to reason out the situation we find ourselves in, as if our intellect were sovereign and omnipotent. But this is an attitude of delusion and Maya. Whoever has once felt the glory of God within him can never again believe that the intellect is supreme. There is a higher voice, there is a more unfailing oracle. It is in the heart where God resides. He works through the brain, but the brain is only one of His instruments. Whatever the brain may plan, the

² See End Note

heart knows first and whoever can go beyond the brain to the heart, will hear the voice of the Eternal.” – Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 7: 891-892).

A complete education – such as was seen in the ancient Aryan system – is based on the cultivation of all parts of the individual being, that is, spirit, soul, mind, vital and the physical. While the NEP mechanically invokes ancient Indian universities, it fails to grasp the Indian spirit and impulse. In the present system, **excessive intellectualization and mentalization geared towards selfish ends has come at the cost of educating other parts of the being, and has increased the perversity at the root of the system.** But, at present, we are too far, psychologically, from such views and can only label them as chimeras, for, we do not really seem to have any capacity left for a sound or deeper national pursuit in education or in any other important field. The apparent reason for this, as pointed out before, is the all pervasive and still growing spirit of utilitarianism. The overriding concern that the modern societies show for the fulfillment of the physical desires of man, and the prominent part that money plays in the fulfillment of such desires has brought in this spirit of utilitarianism in which everything is judged from the monetary angle. Money has become the supreme lord in fact, if not in name.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have repeatedly told us that in our surface human nature we are usually the unconscious slaves of many undivine and anti-divine powers of the vital and mental worlds whose very purpose is to block the descent of Divine Love, Light and Force so that they can continue to keep this evolving earth-nature subject to their yoke of falsehood, suffering and death. A person or a society which blindly pursues – as we have been doing ever since we have

been in a position to do so – a surface vital-mental objective comes increasingly under the influence of these powers with predictable consequences. This has always been well understood and recognized in India, but under the influence of the Western materialistic and utilitarian spirit we have nationally forgotten it and as a result have gotten ourselves into the present precarious and dangerous situation. **The hostile powers not only invade and try to bring under their sway the life of the individuals but also the psychological infrastructure of the collectivity which under such an influence progressively loses its capacity to distinguish between right and wrong or true and false³.** A successful possession of the collective infrastructure makes them virtually irresistible for individuals – even for such individuals who have a developed inner being and who, in a normal collective atmosphere, would have been successful in countering the evil influence of these beings to a large extent. Fear and Desire are the two powerful levers that the hostile powers use to take increasing possession of individuals in a utilitarian society.

In appearance the action of the utilitarian spirit is like that of a canker which leaves the outside appearance of a fruit practically unscathed even while eating the core. In reality the action of this spirit is much more like the rust which not only spreads or expands laterally but also digs into ever deeper and deeper layers of the metal and stops only when it has turned it to dust. It has already made deep inroads in the area of services that practically must remain – as they traditionally have been – free from the commercial spirit if they are at all going to be able to perform their sacred task. Education, health and medicine, justice and not

³ This has been amply brought out in the open by the response of our governments and people in general to a minor health threat of Corona, SARS-CoV-2.

even philanthropy and religion are any longer immune from the corrosive action of this rust of the human soul. Politics and Government has become so thoroughly contaminated with this spirit that modern politicians and leaders have only a one point program – to somehow or anyhow acquire power and to keep it at any cost. In all the areas where the utilitarian octopus spreads its tentacles, it starts digging deeper and deeper and consequently more and more ingenious discoveries are made in ways to cheat others for one's personal gain.

In the most important field of education it has so seriously affected the actors – parents, teachers, students and management that it has become practically very very difficult – except in a few exceptional institutions and most of these are also on their way to pay homage to the growing utilitarian spirit – to impart any education worth the name. In the class rooms, a worthwhile meeting and interaction between teachers and students is becoming more and more uncommon. In fact, in the case of a great number of institutions, particularly the government run institutions, the teachers and students may see each other only a few times – in some cases never – during the whole academic year. In the case of courses with lucrative job prospects the teachers – some of whom may be receiving a regular salary from the government – teach students only at privately owned or rented accommodations after charging high tuition fees in advance.

In India, the process of determining whether the student has acquired enough proficiency in the prescribed courses, consists of the setting of question papers, organizing examinations to enable the students to answer these question papers, getting the answer books of copies examined by an examiner, preparing marksheets and delivering these to the

students. Each of these stages requires many micro-steps to get completed and such is the genius of modern India that each micro-step in this journey has been subjected to such corruption, outright deception, cheating and fabrication that the whole scenario is utterly disgusting, very painful to look at or even hear about.



This viral image of a mass cheating in exam happened somewhere in Bihar in 2015 promptly shows the present state of education.

Even if all the above were alright or even organised with excellence – as it is in some dedicated institutions – still, the whole thing is so permeated with the spirit of utilitarian materialism that the education is bound to be soulless and, therefore, inoperative for anything worthwhile.

A DEEPER VIEW OF THINGS AND A POSSIBLE WAY OUT

If human beings are ever going to truly come out of the repeated rounds of wasted efforts, emotions, untold suffering and useless strivings, they must first realize that the working of things in this universe is such that all works from within without and that nothing can really manifest unless it is already within. Therefore, what they (human beings) are within that alone they shall enjoy outside. It can never be otherwise. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “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.”(CWSA 12: 468)

In the Indian conception of man, man is a soul flowering (manifesting?) in mind, life and body—a conscious manifestation in terrestrial nature of the truth of the spiritual being. We commit a gross error when we confuse our outer person (mask) with this our true self and most of our problems – individual and collective – may be traced to this gross error. For example, in the present intellectual age most deliberations on problems concerning individual and collectivities are focused on how to utilize all the resources and outer living creatures (including human beings) for one’s (the surface self’s) best advantage. Such a habit of thinking and the spirit of approaching others is responsible for much selfishness, insensitiveness and cruelty in our lives. We must first discover and then learn to take our stand on our real Self where we are inseparably one with all. Until this is done we can never really solve any of our problems but only convert them into a different set of problems. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “...the radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover

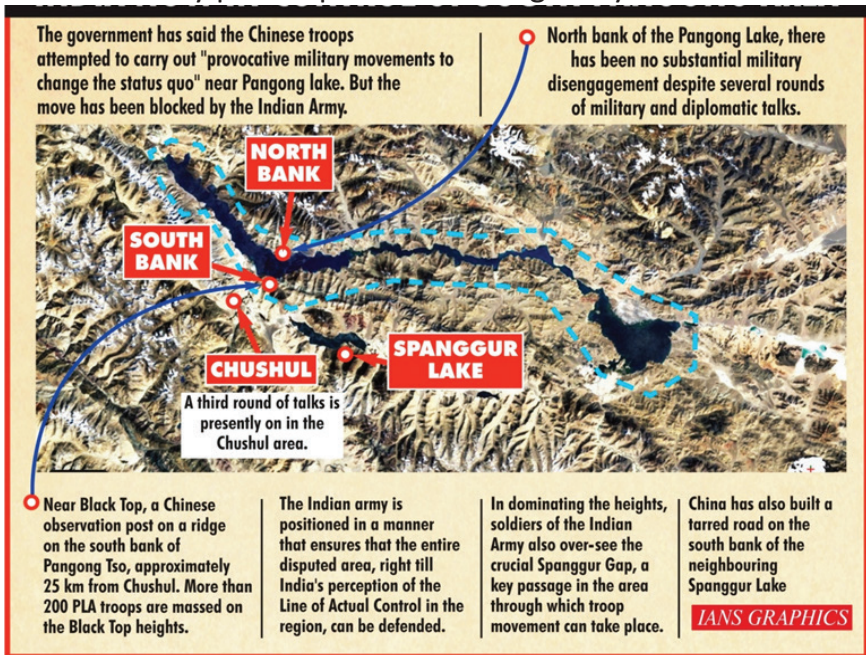
till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline. Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered, —unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere: they do not escape from the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by the illusion of a series of experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul.”(CWSA 25: 224)

The upshot of all this is that **we have been trying to solve our problems from a centre of focus other than the one to which they belong. This insolubility of our problems is a grace in disguise because humanity in its present state, especially in its surface physical nature, is very crude and will not make the necessary effort for self-discovery in any other way.**

HIGHLIGHTS

THE CONTINUING CHINA-INDIA STAND-OFF:

The stand-off between China and India continues despite consistent military talks to restore normalcy. Most recently, this stand-off took another negative turn when military tensions between the two countries escalated on the night of August 29-30th. Indian Army released a statement on August 31st alleging that the Chinese side had sought to escalate tensions on the southern bank of the Pangong Tso lake, but was effectively pre-empted from doing so by the Indian side.



There have been mixed reports of physical violence – with some claiming that there was no violence, while others claimed that there was some hand-to-hand combat. As per the Indian side, the Chinese movements were noticed closer to the southern bank of Pangong Tso. The Chinese, under the

cover of night, had attempted to violate the status quo by altering the Chushul gap, in an attempt to push the LAC further towards India's side. The Indian Army, in response, occupied the southern heights of the lake – a crucial strategic point. India also sent its special operations battalion – consisting of Tibetan Special Frontier Forces – to repulse the Chinese.

The heights were lying dormant and could give advantage to the side occupying them, in terms of controlling the southern bank of Pangong Tso and areas around it. While the Indian side claims that the area now occupied lies on the Indian side of the LAC, China claims the opposite. The result is that India has much greater advantage as of now than China. India has managed to catch China by surprise.

The Indian army has emphasized that there was no incursion into Chinese territory and that they had occupied only Chushul heights which fell within India's perception of the LAC, since mountain warfare involves occupying dominating heights. After the current stand-off, there have been continuous talks between the military commanders to defuse tensions and restore status quo, but they have ended in a deadlock.

It is also interesting to note that the northern and not the southern bank of Pangong Tso has been under contention. India has always exercised sovereignty over the southern bank and Chinese activities indicate their attempt to open a new disputed front. In follow-up to the latest stand-off, Indian forces further moved swiftly to occupy the heights at Finger 4 of the northern bank of the Pangong Tso lake. The resulting configuration from the occupation of mountain heights has given India considerable advantage, enabling it to survey Chinese movements more effectively.

Chinese response has mirrored the Indian response

in balance and moderation, but this time Chinese are on backfoot, releasing 8 statements within 12 hours. Immediately after the Indian Army statement, China merely said that its troops did not cross the LAC. It was only by evening that the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) released an accusatory statement saying that Indians crossed the LAC and violated the consensus reached at military level talks. The Chinese Foreign Minister also said in a statement that India-China border is not demarcated and there will always be problems and that consensus reached between leaders should be implemented to prevent differences from becoming conflicts. The Chinese foreign ministry further released another statement saying that, "China never provoked any war or conflict and never occupied an inch of other country's territory. China border troops never crossed the line. Perhaps there are some communication issues."

In contrast, India has not issued many statements, apart from the Indian Army statement and one by Minister of External Affairs. However, India has undertaken yet another round of banning of Chinese social media apps. 118 apps were banned, which also included the world-famous game, PUBG, which has been like a drug for young children and teenagers and even adults. This too evoked a Chinese response, with China saying that it was concerned about India banning legal apps in this manner. Many critics of Modi government, as well as, Chinese state-owned media have wondered at the guts of the Indian government to defy the logic of economic consequences and go ahead with such app bans.

THE CONGRESS ROUT

Dramatic events occurred within the Congress party in the last week of August. The leadership crisis and the conflict

between the Rahul-Priyanka Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi camps intensified further. 23 senior leaders of the party, including former Congress Chief Ministers, wrote a scathing letter to Sonia Gandhi on the disarray within the Congress and its dissipating national relevance. Letter signatories included old Congress leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Sibal, Anand Sharma, Manish Tewari, Shashi Tharoor and many others.

Rahul Gandhi also accused many of these senior leaders of working at the behest of the BJP. Kapil Sibal reacted strongly to these allegations, without hesitating to attack Rahul Gandhi.

In a subsequent Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, it was expected that Sonia Gandhi would step down. Sonia Gandhi even indicated as much and communicated a letter saying that she had stepped down. However, this turned out to be a gimmick. In the meeting, leaders supposedly overwhelmingly requested her to continue. Hence, it was decided that she would continue as Congress President for 6 more months.

Despite these decisions and subsequent reaching out to the 23 signatories of the letter, things continue to be tense within the Congress. Ghulam Nabi Azad has since raised the issue many times that there ought to be elections within the Congress. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi continue to be at loggerheads with the senior leaders.

In Uttar Pradesh, a fight has openly broken out within Congress ranks. JitinPrasada, a senior UP Congress leader, who was a signatory to the letter, has seen protests staged against him by Congress workers, demands for his expulsion and silence of the UP Pradesh Congress Committee over the issue. Further, Congress members have even rounded up UP Congress chief with accusations of ignoring the upper castes

at the cost of OBCs. Many have also demanded Ghulam Nabi Azad's ouster from Congress.

Another state where ripples have been felt is Maharashtra, where a fourth of 44 Congress legislators are gearing up for a rebellion, accusing the Maharashtra government of doling out step-motherly treatment to their constituencies. There is rebellion against Maharashtra Congress chief, Balasaheb Thorat. Congress is also disgruntled that it is being ignored by both Shiv Sena and NCP and excluded from major policy decisions that are taken. Major posters and policy advertisements that are displayed, often exclude the Congress. There is also rebellion against 3 Maharashtra Congress signatories to the infamous letter viz. Prithviraj Chavan, Mukul Wasnik and Milind Deora.

All in all, it is a virulent atmosphere within the Congress with various factions attacking each other.

RAM MANDIR BHUMI POOJA

The Ram Mandir Bhumi Pooja was conducted on August 5th – a day recharged with nationalistic fervour, since it also coincided with the first anniversary of the revocation of Article 370. In his speech, PM Modi mentioned that the temple will unite the entire nation, and guide and inspire humanity for years to come. He referred to various versions of Ramayana and forms of Lord Rama, not only across India, but in Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and even Iran and China.

The day also had political significance. In the follow-up to August 5th, there was a grand display from Ramayana at New York's Times Square. Further, the secular-Leftist elements had been attempting to put public pressure to ensure that the PM does not go to Ayodhya in his official capacity, as it would symbolize clearly that India is no longer a secular state.

However, on the day of August 5th, reverberations were felt across the political spectrum.

Every major political party and leader across the country felicitated the construction of Ram Mandir, with the exception of some like Mamata Banerjee. In Uttar Pradesh – the seat of the temple and the state currently leading the Hindutva resurgence across the country – all ‘secular’ leaders made sure they fervently invoked Lord Rama, with Priyanka Gandhi writing a long message describing Lord Rama, and, Akhilesh Yadav invoking both Rama and Krishna. The current situation in UP – a state whose politics has usually been dominated by national issues rather than local ones – is that the politics has become decisively nationalist with a strong touch of Hindutva, so much so that the opposition is now following this very framework and attempting to outdo BJP in it.

Ironically, these were the same parties – SP and BSP – which during their 1990s alliance had won the election despite using the cheap slogan ‘Mile Mulayam Kanshiram, Hawa Men Ud Gaye Jai Shri Ram’. Today these parties cannot even dream of saying anything like that. An OBC leader of SP who recently said that he did not believe in Lord Rama was immediately removed from his post by a panicked SP leadership.

Today, Congress, SP and BSP are busy competing for Hindu votes in UP, with SP and BSP trying to outdo each other in promising grand statues of Parashuram, invoking Lord Krishna, etc. The irony of then and now exposes the bygone political reality and consciousness of India during the secular era – it also brings home the fact that we still have a long way to go before this nationalistic resurgence becomes stable and permanent in our surface collective consciousness.

BANGALORE RIOTS

Riots in Bangalore occurred on the night of August 11th, when a Muslim mob attacked and completely burnt down the house of a Dalit Congress MLA, Akhand Srinivasamurthy, whose nephew had posted an Internet content about Prophet Mohammed which was objected to by Muslims. Stones were pelted at police and the KJ Halli and DJ Halli police stations were also damaged, resulting in at least 3 deaths and several injuries, as a result of attacks on journalists and general public.

While police arrested more than 150 people and the government is also following the example of Uttar Pradesh in confiscating property of rioters, the police, at the outset, cleared that this was not a spontaneous mob violence but a pre-planned riot. The name of Islamic Fundamentalist outfit, Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) – an outfit belonging to Muslim extremist backed Popular Front of India (PFI) – has come to the fore. Both are Kerala-based outfits, with previous allegations of terrorism, conversion and Love Jihad against them.

The attack happened in a reserved constituency of Pulakesinagar with almost 50% Muslim population. The house of the Congress MLA which was burnt down was the very same person who had been elected with a resounding majority with major Muslim support.

Riots in Bangalore are not a new occurrence. Politically, the pre-planned attack indicates that SDPI is spreading its wings in Karnataka and especially in Bangalore, becoming the new voice of Muslims and snatching the traditional Muslim support base of Congress. The key accused arrested for these riots is an SDPI leader who had unsuccessfully tried to contest the local elections.

Some of the accused have links also to the terror group, Al Hind. Instead of treating it merely as a communal riot, the government has invoked anti-terror laws and charged the accused under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

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ENDNOTE

** An open letter of Sri Aurobindo written at the beginning of the last century to those who despair of their country is very much instructive in showing the infection of the utilitarian spirit even then in the country. It has not changed a bit ever since, it has only become all-pervasive.*

“To the sons of our mother Bharat who disclaim their sonhood, to the children of languor and selfishness, to the wooers of safety & ease, to the fathers of despair and death—greeting.

To those who impugning the holiness of their Mother refuse to lift her out of danger lest they defile their own spotless hands, to those who call on her to purify herself before they will save her from the imminent & already descending sword of Death,—greeting.

Lastly to those who love & perhaps have striven for her but having now grown themselves faint and hopeless bid others to despair and cease,—to them also greeting.

Brothers,—for whether unwise friends or selfish enemies of my Mother, you are still her children,—there is a common voice among you spreading dismay and weakness in the hearts of the people; for you say to each other and to all who would speak to you of their country, “Let us leave these things and look to our daily bread; this nation must perish but let us at least and our children try to live while live we can. ... It may be five decades or it may be ten, but very soon this great and ancient nation will have perished from the face of the earth and the negro or the Malay will inherit the homes of our fathers & till the fields to glut the pockets & serve the pleasure of the Englishman or the Russian. Meanwhile it is well that the Congress should meet once a year & deceive the

country with an appearance of life; that there should be posts for the children of the soil with enough salary to keep a few from starving, that a soulless education should suck the vigour & sweetness out of body & heart & brain of our children while flattering them with the vain lie that they are educated & enlightened; for so shall the nation die peacefully of a sort of euthanasia lapped in lies & comforted with delusions and not violently & in a whirlwind of horror and a great darkness of fear & suffering.

With such Siren song do you slay the hearts of those who have still force and courage to strive against Fate and would rescue our Mother out of the hands of destruction. Yet I would willingly believe that matricides though you are, it is in ignorance. Come therefore, let us reason calmly together.”
(CWSA 6: 68-69)

THE KEY TO THE WHOLE PROBLEM

The key to the whole problem lies, as India has always known, in a transition to a higher level of consciousness. For, at present level of consciousness, no matter how ingeniously and efficiently we organize our society, we cannot basically do too much better than the other materially advanced societies. In fact, this evolutionary world has been so planned as to have a built-in incentive for rising into ever higher and higher planes of consciousness, because the problem and difficulties at any level of consciousness – and they are different at different levels – are really solvable only at a higher level of consciousness