

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

August 2023



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

– The Mother

Year 14

Issue 5

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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 14

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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 GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (38)

(Continued from the April 2023 Issue)

7. INDIAN RELIGION – THE SANATANA DHARMA

V. Evolution and Religion

“...the world is not either a creation of Maya or only a play, Illū, of the Divine, or a cycle of births in the ignorance from which we have to escape, but a field of manifestation in which there is a progressive evolution of the soul and the nature in Matter and from Matter through Life and Mind to what is beyond Mind till it reaches the complete revelation of Sachchidananda in life.”¹³

At the foundation of the Sanatana Dharma lies the idea of the One without a second who is the Eternal, the Infinite and ineffable and unthinkable Existence (or Non-Existence) or, in other words, the Absolute. The world and all that is existent or non-existent is nothing but that Supreme and Absolute Reality. All the many theories and philosophies about the nature of the world are therefore nothing but so many ways of looking at it; each revealing something – an aspect or a facet – of the Supreme Reality. Sri Aurobindo takes an evolutionary view of terrestrial existence because it seems to him to best explain the terrestrial phenomena. According to Sri Aurobindo, a spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter is the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence. The consciousness first houses herself in forms of Matter which appear to be altogether unconscious. It struggles towards mentality in the guise of living Matter and attains to it imperfectly in the conscious animal. It slowly develops further and reaches its climax

in Man, the thinking animal. Man, although carrying the burden of his inconscient and animal origin, is yet destined to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine manhood or a supramental or spiritual supermanhood which shall be the next product of the evolution. Religion has an important role to play in this evolution. The true work of the religions instinct in man is to lead him towards the Divine Reality by providing each human being, whatever his position in life or stage in evolution, a mould of spiritual discipline, a way of seeking the Divine Truth – a way proper to the potentialities of his nature. The development of religion in India has been entirely in consonance with the true work of the religious instinct. It has followed a course which, preserving the true intention of the religious seeking of the human being, not only allowed but encouraged any number of religious formulations, cults and disciplines to exist side by side and left each man free to accept and follow that which was congenial to his thought, feeling, temperament, build of the nature. It is the failure to understand the process of terrestrial evolution and the true intention of the religious seeking in man that is at the root of the secular westernized mind's misunderstanding of Sanatana Dharma. **Hinduism is the form that Sanatana Dharma assumed during the development of religion in India.**

A. The Four Necessities of Man's Self-expression and the Four Lines Followed by Nature

With the emergence of mind in terrestrial evolution, the beginning of an evolution of the inner being, the occult subliminal and spiritual nature becomes possible. In the achieved course of the evolution of the spiritual being, **Nature has followed four main lines in her attempt to open up the inner being, – religion, occultism, spiritual thought and an inner spiritual realisation and experience : the first three are approaches, the last is the decisive avenue of entry.** These four correspond to the “...four necessities of man's self-expansion if he is not to remain this being

of the surface ignorance seeking obscurely after the truth of things and collecting and systematising fragments and sections of knowledge, the small limited and half-competent creature of the cosmic Force which he now is in his phenomenal nature. He must know himself and discover and utilise all his potentialities: but to know himself and the world completely he must go behind his own and its exterior, he must dive deep below his own mental surface and the physical surface of Nature. This he can only do by knowing his inner mental, vital, physical and psychic being and its powers and movements and the universal laws and processes of the occult Mind and Life which stand behind the material front of the universe: that is the field of occultism, if we take the word in its widest significance. He must know also the hidden Power or Powers that control the world: if there is a Cosmic Self or Spirit or a Creator, he must be able to enter into relation with It or Him and be able to remain in whatever contact or communion is possible, get into some kind of tune with the master Beings of the universe or with the universal Being and its universal will or a supreme Being and His supreme will, follow the law It gives him and the assigned or revealed aim of his life and conduct, raise himself towards the highest height that It demands of him in his life now or in his existence hereafter; if there is no such universal or supreme Spirit or Being, he must know what there is and how to lift himself to it out of his present imperfection and impotence. **This approach is the aim of religion: its purpose is to link the human with the Divine and in so doing sublimate the thought and life and flesh so that they may admit the rule of the soul and spirit.** But this knowledge must be something more than a creed or a mystic revelation; his thinking mind must be able to accept it, to correlate it with the principle of things and the observed truth of the universe: this is the work of philosophy, and in the field of the truth of the spirit it can only be done by a spiritual philosophy, whether intellectual in its method or intuitive. But all knowledge and endeavour can reach its fruition only if it is turned into experience and has become a part of the consciousness and its established operations; in the spiritual field all this religious, occult

or philosophical knowledge and endeavour must, to bear fruition, end in an opening up of the spiritual consciousness, in experiences that found and continually heighten, expand and enrich that consciousness and in the building of a life and action that is in conformity with the truth of the spirit: this is the work of spiritual realisation and experience.”¹⁴

B. Evolution and the True Work of Religion

“In the very nature of things all evolution must proceed at first by a slow unfolding; for each new principle that evolves its powers has to make its way out of an involution in Inconscience and Ignorance. It has a difficult task in pulling itself out of the involution, out of the hold of the obscurity of the original medium, against the pull and strains, the instinctive opposition and obstruction of the Inconscience and the hampering mixture and blind obstinate retardations of the Ignorance. Nature affirms at first a vague urge and tendency which is a sign of the push of the occult, subliminal, submerged reality towards the surface; there are then small half-suppressed hints of the thing that is to be, imperfect beginnings, crude elements, rudimentary appearances, small, insignificant, hardly recognisable quanta. Afterwards there are small or large formations; a more characteristic and recognisable quality begins to show itself, first partially, here and there or in a low intensity, then more vivid, more formative; finally, there is the decisive emergence, a reversal of the consciousness, the beginning of the possibility of its radical change: but still much has to be done in every direction, a long and difficult growth towards perfection lies before the evolutionary endeavour. The thing done has not only to be confirmed, secured against relapse and the downward gravitation, against failure and extinction, but opened out into all the fields of its possibilities, its totality of entire self-achievement, its utmost height, subtlety, riches, wideness; it has to become dominant, all-embracing, comprehensive. This is everywhere the process of Nature and to ignore it is to miss the intention in her works and get lost in the maze of her procedure.

It is this process that has taken place in the evolution of religion

in the human mind and consciousness; the work done by it for humanity cannot be understood or properly appreciated if we ignore the conditions of the process and their necessity. It is evident that the first beginnings of religion must be crude and imperfect, its development hampered by mixtures, errors, concessions to the human mind and vital part which may often be of a very unspiritual character. Ignorant and injurious and even disastrous elements may creep in and lead to error and evil; the dogmatism of the human mind, its self-assertive narrowness, its intolerant and challenging egoism, its attachment to its limited truths and still greater attachment to its errors, or the violence, fanaticism, militant and oppressive self-affirmation of the vital, its treacherous action on the mind in order to get a sanction for its own desires and propensities, may very easily invade the religious field and baulk religion of its higher spiritual aim and character; under the name of religion much ignorance may hide, many errors and an extensive wrong-building be permitted, many crimes even and offences against the spirit be committed. But this chequered history belongs to all human effort and, if it were to count against the truth and necessity of religion, would count also against the truth and necessity of every other line of human endeavour, against all man's action, his ideals, his thought, his art, his science."¹⁵

C. The Development of Religion in India

“The wide and supple method of evolutionary Nature providing the amplest scope and preserving the true intention of the religious seeking of the human being can be recognised in the development of religion in India, where any number of religious formulations, cults and disciplines have been allowed, even encouraged to subsist side by side and each man was free to accept and follow that which was congenial to his thought, feeling, temperament, build of the nature. It is right and reasonable that there should be this plasticity, proper to an experimental evolution: for religion's real business is to prepare man's mind, life and bodily existence for the spiritual consciousness to take it up; it has to lead him to that point

where the inner spiritual light begins fully to emerge. It is at this point that religion must learn to subordinate itself, not to insist on its outer characters, but give full scope to the inner spirit itself to develop its own truth and reality. In the meanwhile it has to take up as much of man's mentality, vitality, physicality as it can and give all his activities a turn towards the spiritual direction, the revelation of a spiritual meaning in them, the imprint of a spiritual refinement, the beginning of a spiritual character. It is in this attempt that the errors of religion come in, for they are caused by the very nature of the matter with which it is dealing, – that inferior stuff invades the very forms that are meant to serve as intermediaries between the spiritual and the mental, vital or physical consciousness, and often it diminishes, degrades and corrupts them: but it is in this attempt that lies religion's greatest utility as an intercessor between spirit and nature. Truth and error live always together in the human evolution and the truth is not to be rejected because of its accompanying errors, though these have to be eliminated, – often a difficult business and, if crudely done, resulting in surgical harm inflicted on the body of religion; for what we see as error is very frequently the symbol or a disguise or a corruption or malformation of a truth which is lost in the brutal radicality of the operation, – the truth is cut out along with the error. Nature herself very commonly permits the good corn and the tares and weeds to grow together for a long time, because only so is her own growth, her free evolution possible.”¹⁶

“In India... there has been a persistence of the original intuition and total movement of evolutionary Nature. For **religion in India limited itself by no one creed or dogma; it not only admitted a vast number of different formulations, but contained successfully within itself all the elements that have grown up in the course of the evolution of religion and refused to ban or excise any: it developed occultism to its utmost limits, accepted spiritual philosophies of all kinds, followed to its highest, deepest or largest outcome every possible line of spiritual realisation, spiritual experience, spiritual self-**

discipline. Its method has been the method of evolutionary Nature herself, to allow all developments, all means of communication and action of the spirit upon the members, all ways of communion between man and the Supreme or Divine, to follow every possible way of advance to the goal and test it even to its extreme. All stages of spiritual evolution are there in man and each has to be allowed or provided with its means of approach to the spirit, an approach suited to its capacity, *adhikāra*. Even the primitive forms that survived were not banned but were lifted to a deeper significance, while still there was the pressure to the highest spiritual pinnacles in the rarest supreme ether. Even the exclusive credal type of religion was not itself excluded; provided its affinity to the general aim and principle was clear, it was admitted into the infinite variety of the general order.”¹⁷

“...the principle of this great and many-sided religious and spiritual evolution was sound, and by taking up in itself the whole of life and of human nature, by encouraging the growth of intellect and never opposing it or putting bounds to its freedom, but rather calling it in to the aid of the spiritual seeking, it prevented the conflict or the undue predominance which in the Occident led to the restriction and drying up of the religious instinct and the plunge into pure materialism and secularism. A method of this plastic and universal kind, admitting but exceeding all creeds and forms and allowing every kind of element, may have numerous consequences which might be objected to by the purist, but its great justifying result has been an unexampled multitudinous richness and a more than millennial persistence and impregnable durability, generality, universality, height, subtlety and many-sided wideness of spiritual attainment and seeking and endeavour. It is indeed only by such a catholicity and plasticity that the wider aim of the evolution can work itself out with any fullness. The individual demands from religion a door of opening into spiritual experience or a means of turning towards it, a communion with God or a definite light of guidance on the way, a promise of the hereafter or a means of a happier supraterrrestrial

future; these needs can be met on the narrower basis of credal belief and sectarian cult. But there is also the wider purpose of Nature to prepare and further the spiritual evolution in man and turn him into a spiritual being; religion serves her as a means for pointing his effort and his ideal in that direction and providing each one who is ready with the possibility of taking a step upon the way towards it. This end she serves by the immense variety of the cults she has created, some final, standardised and definitive, others more plastic, various and many-sided. **A religion which is itself a congeries of religions and which at the same time provides each man with his own turn of inner experience, would be the most in consonance with this purpose of Nature: it would be a rich nursery of spiritual growth and flowering, a vast multiform school of the soul's discipline, endeavour, self-realisation.** Whatever errors Religion has committed, this is her function and her great and indispensable utility and service, – the holding up of this growing light of guidance on our way through the mind's ignorance towards the Spirit's complete consciousness and self-knowledge.”¹⁸

VI. Certain Apparent Features and Practices of Hinduism and the Deeper Rationale Behind These

“These hollow wormeaten outsides of Hinduism crumbling so sluggishly, so fatally to some sudden and astonishing dissolution, do not frighten me. Within them I find the soul of a civilisation alive, though sleeping. I see upon it the consoling sentence of God, ‘Because thou hast believed in me, therefore thou shalt live and not perish.’”¹⁹

“All love, indeed, that is adoration has a spiritual force behind it, and even when it is offered ignorantly and to a limited object, something of that splendour appears through the poverty of the rite and the smallness of its issues. For love that is worship is at once an aspiration and a preparation: it can bring even within its small limits in the Ignorance a glimpse of a still more or less blind and partial but

surprising realisation; for there are moments when it is not we but the One who loves and is loved in us, and even a human passion can be uplifted and glorified by a slight glimpse of this infinite Love and Lover. It is for this reason that **the worship of the god, the worship of the idol, the human magnet or ideal are not to be despised; for these are steps through which the human race moves towards that blissful passion and ecstasy of the Infinite which, even in limiting it, they yet represent for our imperfect vision when we have still to use the inferior steps Nature has hewn for our feet and admit the stages of our progress.** Certain idolatries are indispensable for the development of our emotional being, nor will the man who knows be hasty at any time to shatter the image unless he can replace it in the heart of the worshipper by the Reality it figures.”²⁰

“In any cult the symbol, the significant rite or expressive figure is not only a moving and enriching aesthetic element, but a physical means by which the human being begins to make outwardly definite the emotion and aspiration of his heart, to confirm it and to dynamise it. For if without a spiritual aspiration worship is meaningless and vain, yet the aspiration also without the act and the form is a disembodied and, for life, an incompletely effective power. It is unhappily the fate of all forms in human life to become crystallised, purely formal and therefore effete, and although form and cult preserve always their power for the man who can still enter into their meaning, the majority come to use the ceremony as a mechanical rite and the symbol as a lifeless sign, and because that kills the soul of religion, cult and form have in the end to be changed or thrown aside altogether. There are those even to whom all cult and form are for this reason suspect and offensive; but few can dispense with the support of outward symbols and, even, a certain divine element in human nature demands them always for the completeness of its spiritual satisfaction. Always the symbol is legitimate in so far as it is true, sincere, beautiful and delightful, and even one may say that a spiritual consciousness without any aesthetic

or emotional content is not entirely or at any rate not integrally spiritual. In the spiritual life the basis of the act is a spiritual consciousness perennial and renovating, moved to express itself always in new forms or able to renew the truth of a form always by the flow of the spirit, and to so express itself and make every action a living symbol of some truth of the soul is the very nature of its creative vision and impulse. It is so that the spiritual seeker must deal with life and transmute its form and glorify it in its essence.”²¹

* * *

“A principle of dark and dull inertia is at its base; all are tied down by the body and its needs and desires to a trivial mind, petty desires and emotions, an insignificant repetition of small worthless functionings, needs, cares, occupations, pains, pleasures that lead to nothing beyond themselves and bear the stamp of an ignorance that knows not its own why and whither. This physical mind of inertia believes in no divinity other than its own small earth-gods; it aspires perhaps to a greater comfort, order, pleasure, but asks for no uplifting and no spiritual deliverance. At the centre we meet a stronger Will of life with a greater gusto, but it is a blinded Daemon, a perverted spirit and exults in the very elements that make of life a striving turmoil and an unhappy imbroglio. It is a soul of human or Titanic desire clinging to the garish colour, disordered poetry, violent tragedy or stirring melodrama of this mixed flux of good and evil, joy and sorrow, light and darkness, heady rapture and bitter torture. It loves these things and would have more and more of them or, even when it suffers and cries out against them, can accept or joy in nothing else; it hates and revolts against higher things and in its fury would trample, tear or crucify any diviner Power that has the presumption to offer to make life pure, luminous and happy and snatch from its lips the fiery brew of that exciting mixture. Another Will-in-Life there is that is ready to follow the ameliorating ideal Mind and is allured by its offer to extract some harmony, beauty, light, nobler order out of life, but this is a smaller part of the vital nature

and can be easily overpowered by its more violent or darker duller yoke-comrades; nor does it readily lend itself to a call higher than that of the Mind unless that call defeats itself, as Religion usually does, by lowering its demand to conditions more intelligible to our obscure vital nature. All these forces the spiritual seeker grows aware of in himself and finds all around him and has to struggle and combat incessantly to be rid of their grip and dislodge the long-entrenched mastery they have exercised over his own being as over the environing human existence. The difficulty is great; for their hold is so strong, so apparently invincible that it justifies the disdainful dictum which compares human nature to a dog's tail, – for, straighten it never so much by force of ethics, religion, reason or any other redemptive effort, it returns in the end always to the crooked curl of Nature. And so great is the vim, the clutch of that more agitated Life-Will, so immense the peril of its passions and errors, so subtly insistent or persistently invasive, so obstinate up to the very gates of Heaven the fury of its attack or the tedious obstruction of its obstacles that even the saint and the Yogin cannot be sure of their liberated purity or their trained self-mastery against its intrigue or its violence. All labour to straighten out this native crookedness strikes the struggling will as a futility; a flight, a withdrawal to happy Heaven or peaceful dissolution easily finds credit as the only wisdom and to find a way not to be born again gets established as the only remedy for the dull bondage or the poor shoddy delirium or the blinded and precarious happiness and achievement of earthly existence.”²²

“This hampering, this obstacle of the mind, life and body, – the heavy inertia and persistence of the body, the turbid passions of the life-part, the obscurity and doubting incertitudes, denials, other-formulations of the mind, – is an impediment so great and intolerable that the spiritual urge becomes impatient and tries rigorously to quell these opponents, to reject the life, to mortify the body, to silence the mind and achieve its own separate salvation, spirit departing into pure spirit and rejecting from it altogether an undivine and obscure Nature. Apart from the supreme call, the natural push of the spiritual part in us to return to its own highest element and status, this aspect

of vital and physical Nature as an impediment to pure spirituality is a compelling reason for asceticism, for illusionism, for the tendency to other-worldliness, the urge towards withdrawal from life, the passion for a pure and unmixed Absolute. A pure spiritual absolutism is a movement of the self towards its own supreme selfhood, but it is also indispensable for Nature's own purpose; for without it the mixture, the downward gravitation would make the spiritual emergence impossible. **The extremist of this absolutism, the solitary, the ascetic, is the standard-bearer of the spirit, his ochre robe is its flag, the sign of a refusal of all compromise, – as indeed the struggle of emergence cannot end by a compromise, but only by an entire spiritual victory and the complete surrender of the lower nature. If that is impossible here, then indeed it must be achieved elsewhere; if Nature refuses submission to the emerging spirit, then the soul must withdraw from her.**"²³

* * *

"..Vedic imagery throws a clear light on the similar symbolic images of the Puranas, especially on the famous symbol of Vishnu sleeping after the pralaya on the folds of the snake Ananta upon the ocean of sweet milk. It may perhaps be objected that the Puranas were written by superstitious Hindu priests or poets who believed that eclipses were caused by a dragon eating the sun and moon and could easily believe that during the periods of non-creation the supreme Deity in a physical body went to sleep on a physical snake upon a material ocean of real milk and that therefore it is a vain ingenuity to seek for a spiritual meaning in these fables. My reply would be that there is in fact no need to seek for such meanings; for these very superstitious poets have put them there plainly on the very surface of the fable for everybody to see who does not choose to be blind. For they have given a name to Vishnu's snake, the name Ananta, and Ananta means the Infinite; therefore they have told us plainly enough that the image is an allegory and that Vishnu, the all pervading Deity, sleeps in the periods of non-creation on the coils of the Infinite. As for the ocean, the Vedic imagery shows us that it

must be the ocean of eternal existence and this ocean of eternal existence is an ocean of absolute sweetness, in other words, of pure Bliss.”²⁴

* * *

“If anyone thinks that we are merely intellectual beings, he is not a Hindu. Hinduism leaves the glorification of intellectuality to those who have never seen God. She is commissioned by Him to speak only of His greatness and majesty and she has so spoken for thousands of years. 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 heart knows first and whoever can go beyond the brain to the heart, will hear the voice of the Eternal.”²⁵

* * *

“..it may be said that a complete act of divine love and worship has in it three parts that are the expressions of a single whole, – a practical worship of the Divine in the act, a symbol of worship in the form of the act expressing some vision and seeking or some relation with the Divine, an inner adoration and longing for oneness or feeling of oneness in the heart and soul and spirit.”²⁶

“I have not understood the .. two parts very well.

There is a purely physical form of the act, like those forms in cults in which a particular gesture, a particular movement is meant

to express the consecration. That is purely material, as for example, lighting incense, arranging offerings, or even looking after a temple, decorating an idol, indeed all such purely physical acts.

The second part is a sort of mental consecration which makes the act that is performed a symbol. One is not satisfied with merely lighting the incense, but while lighting the incense one makes this gesture symbolic – for example, of the aspiration burning in the body or of self-giving in a dissolution, in the purification of the fire. That is to say, first the act, then the symbol in this act and the symbolic understanding of what is done.

And finally, behind these two, an aspiration for union; that all this, these acts and the symbol you make of them, may be only a means of drawing closer and closer to the Divine and making yourself fit to unite with Him.

These three things must be there for the act to be complete: that is, something purely material, something mental, and something psychic, the psychic aspiration. If one of the three is there without the other two, it is incomplete. As a rule, very rarely are the three consciously combined. That produces beings of exceptional sincerity and consecration: the entire being, in all its parts, participates in the action.”²⁷

“All this is based on the old idea that whatever the image – which we disdainfully call an ‘idol’ – whatever the external form of the deity may be, the presence of the thing represented is always there. And there is always someone – whether priest or initiate, sadhu or sannyasi – someone who has the power and (usually this is the priest’s work) who draws the Force and the Presence down into it. And it’s true, it’s quite real – the Force and the Presence are THERE; and this (not the form in wood or stone or metal) is what is worshipped: this Presence.

Europeans don’t have the inner sense at all. To them, everything is like this (gesture), a surface – not even that, a film on the surface. And they can’t feel anything behind. But

it's an absolutely real fact that the Presence is there – I guarantee it. People have given me statuettes of various gods, little things in metal, wood or ivory; and as soon as I take one in my hand, the god is there. I have a Ganesh* (I have been given several) and if I take it in my hand and look at it for a moment, he's there.... I have always felt what's behind, the presences behind."²⁸ (The Greatness of India and Its Culture in the Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, The Resurgent India Trust, 2016, pp. 324-340)

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HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

The Russia-Ukraine war continues to advance at a tepid pace, witnessing its ups and downs. Following are some of the recent developments:

First, despite multiple attempts by third parties to initiate mediation (such as the peace conference in Jeddah in July and recent attempt by Turkey to re-start the Black Sea grain export deal), every such attempt has resulted in a failure. Recently, Putin made it clear that there will be no negotiation unless the West meets all of Russia's demands. Under such conditions, the war may be set to continue in the foreseeable future.

Second, while Ukraine's counter-offensive is continuing and has been instrumental in liberating some villages occupied by Russia, yet the significant feature of the counter-offensive is the display of Ukrainian capability to conduct drone strikes deep within Russia, in major cities such as Moscow, with rising frequency. Whether these strikes will become a game-changer and force Russia to retreat is yet to be seen.

Third, the Wagner uprising that had shaken Russia and surprised the world has finally seen closure. The death of Wagner chief, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in an airplane crash in Russia, has dealt a blow to the group. Reports reveal that Russian military had shot down the small private jet in which Prigozhin was travelling, killing all the passengers. It is now likely that either the Wagner paramilitary group will be disbanded or reorganized in another form or will be substantially controlled

by the Russian defence ministry directly. With the group having a wide footprint across Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Russia will have to evaluate its options accordingly.

Fourth, at the same time, Russia is also expanding ties with North Korea and arms supply deal from North Korea to Russia is almost final. The US has already warned that North Korea should be prepared to pay a heavy price if it supplies weapons to Russia.

Finally, Ukraine has witnessed an internal power shake-up, with Zelensky firing his defence minister and appointing a Muslim defence minister from Crimea instead. The earlier defence minister was dismissed as the defence ministry was facing various allegations of corruption in the procurement of defence deals. However, other than dismissal, no other action would be taken against the former defence minister, and he may even be re-assigned to a new position.

DEVELOPMENTS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The following major developments have taken place in the field of science and technology in recent times:

First, the big tech company, Microsoft, has filed a patent for an interesting new technology it has developed. It is called an AI-powered smart backpack. The concept of wearable technology is not new. We already have smart watches, smart rings, etc. However, this invention is much more revolutionary in scope compared to existing wearable technologies. It can utilize artificial intelligence to identify objects, perform contextual tasks, access cloud-based information, and seamlessly interact with other devices. According to the patent,

Microsoft's smart backpack is equipped with a camera, microphone, speaker, network interface, processor, and storage. It serves as a hands-free digital assistant that is context-aware and capable of understanding and responding to user commands based on their surroundings. This groundbreaking technology operates through a six-step process, beginning with user input and culminating in a comprehensive AI-driven response.

This innovation has the potential to reshape the way we interact with our surroundings and is poised to be a game-changer in the world of wearable AI, offering users a glimpse into a future that once seemed confined to the realm of science fiction.

Second, in an increasing indication of big firms adopting the Metaverse, India-based technology company, Flipkart, has announced the launch of its metaverse-powered immersive virtual shopping feature, Virtual Worlds. Virtual Worlds are 3D-rendered metaverse environments where users of the platform can engage with different brands and try out products. While brands will be able to create dedicated and customized Virtual Worlds on the Flipkart app for their products to attract and engage shoppers, they will also be able to simply list on a 'co-tenancy' basis within Flipkart's own Virtual World called Flipverse. The company also announced the launch of its 'Laptops Virtual Showroom', which enables buyers to explore laptops in an immersive setting.

These technological adaptations and breakthroughs show that despite the fact that the hype around Metaverse may have subsided, advancements in this field are steadily being made in a way that brings us closer to this technology. The technology has already shaped out from the world of online gaming to

more diverse platforms like Metaverse-powered children's parks, Metaverse-powered shopping, Metaverse-powered classrooms etc.

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY IN PUNJAB

Conversion lies at the heart of Christianity. With its Western financial backers, the religion rarely faces any challenge in spreading like wildfire wherever it takes hold. The Indian case has been no different, with parts of India being converted to have substantive Christian population wherever the religion has been historically strong. For example, Goa, Kerala, and majority of northeast India are a case study in how quickly the religion spread due to factors like patronage or the policy of non-interference by secular governments and little resistance by locals. In Andhra Pradesh too, it is a similar story, where the YSR government is actively patronizing Christianity.

However, in recent times, one of the most curious and unlikely cases in this regard has been that of Punjab where Christianity, especially among the Sikhs, has spread at an alarming rate in the last 10-15 years alone – a fact that has not been flagged in mainstream media much. The target groups for conversion have been Valmiki Hindu and Mazahabi Sikhs, both belonging to Dalit categories. While the 2011 census puts the Christian population in the State at about one or two per cent, there is a perception that the percentage has now risen to 15% and is rapidly rising even further, reaching up to 22-23% in Christian-dominated districts like Gurdaspur (where there were around 7% Christians as per 2011 census).

The modus operandi through which such spread has occurred is also not new. The religion has come to the Dalit

sections of Hindu and Sikh communities with the promise of equal treatment and a range of material benefits (such as distribution of ration, medicines, school access, jobs, and other needs) as well as psychological machinations through dubious healing practices.

The way the people are converted is also interesting. It is done through stealth, so that it escapes notice. The converted people neither change their name, nor discard symbols of their old religion (such as turban) and nor do they show conversion officially on papers (so that they can continue getting reservation benefits that accrue to Dalits). Much like a consistent marketing scheme, first a family gets converted, then they convert four others and then the four new Christian families would convert four new families. That way targets are met.

Hindu organisations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal have been voicing against the rampant conversions in Punjab for a long time. Initially, Dalits were getting converted at a mass scale, and Sikh leaders were not bothered that much. The situation took a drastic change in the last 2-3 years after videos of several Pastors dressed as Sikhs started circulating on social media platforms, and locally, it became visible that Sikhs, especially Dalit Sikhs, were converting. Last year, Shri Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) announced a program to put a stop to the rampant conversion in the state, but the Sikh leadership has not achieved much in breaking the chain, although local Sikh bodies and Nihang Sikhs have clashed with Christian missionaries.

Some examples of major Christian bodies operating in Punjab are bodies like the United Christian Front, a group that has committees in 8,000 of Punjab's 12,000 villages. According

to the body's representatives, there are 600-700 churches in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts that belong to four Christian denominations, with around 60-70 per cent of these having sprung up in the past five years.

This rapid rise of Christianity and the stealth with which it is being done is indeed alarming. Parties like AAP and Congress also have Christian leaders engaged in conversion, while the government has turned a blind eye to the phenomenon. As it is, the state is witnessing a decline – afflicted with drugs problem, economic crisis and a psychological crisis among the youth. This phenomenon further cements these multiple crises, raising questions over the future of Sikh community.

LAC DISENGAGEMENT TALKS

The 19th round of India-China Corps Commander-level talks between Indian and Chinese militaries took place in the middle of last month, prior to the BRICS summit. The talks went on for two days and discussed disengagement along the remaining friction points at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). However, the talks, while successfully producing a joint statement stressing the need to keep up the momentum of disengagement and maintaining peace along the border, were not able to agree on any disengagement. The Indian side was persistent in its demands that disengagement should take place at Depsang Plains and Demchok, and pre-May 2020 status of Indian patrolling rights be restored.

With the joint statement being produced and the two sides acknowledging that the talks had taken place in a positive and constructive atmosphere, it was expected that an icebreaker between Modi and Xi would be in order in the subsequent

BRICS summit. That, however, did not happen in any significant way. Much like an informal and brief Modi-Xi meeting in Bali last year, the BRICS summit too saw the two leaders meeting briefly on the sidelines sans any formal bilateral setting. In the meeting, Modi reportedly conveyed Indian concerns that de-escalation needs to take place and the two leaders agreed to expedite the process. Whether there will be any upshot of such meetings remains to be seen, and the persistent negativity in relations does not bode well for both the countries.

EXPANSION OF BRICS

The 15th BRICS summit held last month betrayed the image of an organization whose political divisions are now rapidly becoming evident. The polarization in world politics was also reflected at BRICS – a grouping that, till a few years ago, was mainly a non-controversial economic grouping, which had sought to project a non-western viewpoint in the world. However, in recent years, due to intensification of competition and hostilities between US and China, Russia-Ukraine war and a series of mass-supported coups in Africa, the BRICS is beginning to reflect this divisiveness. The unity of outlook within the Russia-China axis and the friendly relations of these two countries with pariahs like Iran and North Korea, is beginning to give an anti-western (rather than a merely non-western) tinge to the grouping. In the grouping, moderate countries like India, Brazil and South Africa have resisted such attempts. In particular, India has been targeted by several Chinese state media outlets for playing a spoiler in groupings like BRICS and SCO. More than Brazil and South Africa, India is perceived as being a strong strategic partner of western countries like France and USA.

However, the common ground among all BRICS countries is definitely their commitment to a world order in which the Western dominance can be suitably balanced. Disenchantment with the West has grown among countries of Asia and Africa after witnessing the West's proclivity to deploy unilateral financial sanctions, abuse international payments mechanisms, renege on climate finance commitments, and accord scant respect to food security and health imperatives of the Global South during the pandemic.

This was the background in which the latest BRICS summit took place. The key issue at the summit was expansion of BRICS, suffusing more funding into the BRICS-sponsored New Development Bank and attempting to ground an alternative financial architecture to upend the dominance of the dollar. The key outcome achieved at the summit was the expansion of BRICS to BRICS+. The grouping added six new members to its fold viz. Argentina, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. These countries will join from January 2024. The choice of new members is interesting in the following ways:

First, six of the ten major oil producing nations of the world are now part of BRICS. Among other geopolitical implications of this development in making BRICS more powerful, it is also likely to suffuse funding into New Development Bank and make trading in national currencies feasible on a limited scale at least.

Second, the addition of new countries has made BRICS more representative of large developing countries which are also powerful in their own right. This is increased the weight of BRICS and can make it a realistic counter-weight to a

developed country grouping like G7 in future.

Third, the addition of new members instead of consolidating the grouping might, possibly, produce an opposite effect too – that of dispersing the grouping further, especially if Russia-China polarization against the West persists. The new BRICS+ has evened out pro-West and anti-West groupings, with countries like India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, South Africa and Brazil being largely moderate. The addition of Iran will consolidate the China-Russia-Iran axis. These divisions may make the organization a divided house. Conversely, if other developing countries move away from the West, then the unity of BRICS may present a powerful alternative grouping to the West.

Fourth, the addition of new members shows how delicate a balance of power has been struck by existing members. It is well-known that Iran was added at the behest of Russia and China, while UAE was added at India's insistence. The result is that, within BRICS, there are pairings of small rival groupings in form of Saudi Arabia and UAE versus Iran, Brazil versus Argentina, Egypt versus Ethiopia, and India versus China. Such a balance of power will make it interesting to see whether the future BRICS+ will be a divided house or an alternate to the West.

CHANDRAYAAN-3

India has scripted history with its moon mission, Chandrayaan-3, successfully landing on the surface of the moon. This was India's second attempt, the first attempt being in 2019 when India had crash landed on the polar region of the moon. This makes India the fourth country to land on the moon and, even more

significantly, the first ever country to do a soft-landing on the polar or dark or south side of the moon. Soft landing simply means landing at a gentle, controlled speed to not sustain damage to a spacecraft.

In the past, countries that have landed on the Moon have landed in the region near the Moon's equator because it is easier and safer here. The terrain and temperature are more conducive for a long and sustained operation of instruments. Sunlight is also present, offering a regular supply of energy to solar-powered instruments.

The polar regions of the Moon, where India became the first country to soft-land, however, are different. Many parts lie in a completely dark region without sunlight, and temperatures can go below 230 degrees Celsius. This creates difficulty in the operation of instruments. In addition, there are large craters all over the place. Yet, India has not only successfully landed, but all of the instruments of the mission are working at an excellent pace, suggesting technological thoroughness and perfection.

The significance of exploring the unexplored polar region of the moon is immense. The mission is slated to conduct a series of studies to determine the presence of crucial elements on the moon. From a geopolitical perspective, the success of Chandrayaan-3 cements India's prime position among space-faring nations. That the Indian government has opened up the space sector to collaborative projects with the private sector has also opened up scope for space exploration at a time when leading private companies and governments of the world are exploring options of habitations beyond earth.

VIOLENCE AT NUH, HARYANA

Communal violence at Nuh, in Mewat district of Haryana, erupted on July 31st and escalated into a series of incidents between the Hindu and Muslim communities, across Delhi-NCR, especially Gurugram, Sohna and Faridabad. The flare-up started with the horrifying attack at Nuh by Islamists on the annual Brij Mandal Jalabhishek Yatra. The attack and the accompanying violence forced around 2500 Hindus including women and children to take shelter in a local Mahadev temple.

During the attack, the Islamist rioters disrupted the Hindu procession and set the police vehicles on fire. Stones were pelted and several shops were set on fire. Firings were reported outside the temple as people were trapped. Several police personnel also had to be admitted to the hospital due to injuries during stone-pelting. The scale of the attack can be gauged from the fact that two Home Guards personnel of Haryana police died after sustaining gunshot injuries during the attack.

In retaliation to the horrifying hostage-like situation and attack on Hindus, very soon the Hindu organizations of Haryana grouped together and began a counterattack. While the hostages at Nuh were successfully rescued by the police, on the evening of the same day as the Nuh attack, Hindus in Gurugram set ablaze a mosque and an Imam was killed in the process. Further, over the next four to five days, it was reported that Muslim shops and other commercial settlements were attacked in parts of Gurugram and Sohna. Reports also came in of Muslim migrants attempting to flee Gurugram. Over the next few days, the situation settled down and due to interventions of the police status-quo was restored.

The counterattack by Hindus was a rare one, as witnessed in this case. Most usually in such incidents of communal violence, Hindus are either passive victims of violence or rely on the dubious system of law to get some justice. Rarely have they organized to defend themselves in a manner which would make miscreants think twice about doing something like this in the future. The Nuh counter-reaction was one such significant moment.

What led to the Nuh attack?

The violence at Nuh can be set apart from other incidents of communal violence that have erupted from time-to-time. This is because the attack on the Hindus at Nuh was meticulously pre-planned. After the attack, subsequent investigations in the field, as well as seized evidence, revealed chilling details of how this attack was planned. Subsequent investigations show:

First, transcripts of phone calls between Islamists which showed how the attack was pre-planned. Some transcripts even showed a Muslim man exhorting his peers to kill at least a minimum number of Hindus – numbering 20-25 – for the attack to be successful.

Second, evidence reveals that it was not a spontaneous attack led by local Muslims of Nuh. Muslims from outside the state – such as from Rajasthan – were brought in as well. Furthermore, a substantial number of illegal Rohingya immigrants have also been arrested by the police for their involvement in the attack.

Third, involvement of Muslim MLAs of Congress and AAP has also come to light in this incident. They had threatened of dire consequences if an individual named, Monu Manesar, dared to join the Yatra. Thus, a concerted social media campaign was

undertaken in which the supposed presence of Monu Manesar – a cow vigilante accused of killing two Muslims – was used to provoke Muslims which allegedly led to the Islamist attack on Hindus. The reality is that Monu Manesar never joined the Yatra. The entire attack was pre-planned based on an assumption. It is also worth questioning that even if Monu Manesar had joined the Yatra, would this have justified this horrendous Islamist attack on Hindus?

Fourth, the Yatra was thoroughly recced and minute-by-minute updates were shared with the rioters via social media. Rioters shared their live locations with each other and asked other rioters to assemble at certain places. Information regarding which roads should be blocked was also shared in advance.

Finally, the attack and the entire pre-planning reveals an interesting piece of information about the Meo Muslims of Mewat region who were involved. This needs to be clarified due to misinformation regarding Meo Muslims as being moderate. They began getting radicalized during the colonial rule. During Partition violence, the Muslim Meos first demanded Meostan, a Muslim nation. After the Partition riots, Meos were almost moved to Pakistan, but Gandhi asked them to stay back in India.

This significant trove of information reveals how the Nuh attack was pre-planned. It also has implications for the nation as a whole. For, Nuh was hardly an isolated incident. It is a microcosm of the future in store for the majority community if they continue to adhere to the path of tamasic selfishness and materialism.

SANATANA DHARMA – THE ONLY TRUE NATIONALISM

Sri Krishna said to Sri Aurobindo “When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word that it is for the Sanatana Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *dharma* and by the *dharma* that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country....” (CWSA 8: P. 10)

“I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatana Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatana Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanatana Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatana Dharma it would perish. The Sanatana Dharma, that is nationalism.” (CWSA 8: P. 12)

– Sri Aurobindo