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Editorial

INDIA HAS ENTERED its 75th year of freedom and celebrations are being organized by the government and the civil organisations across the country. It is an occasion to remember the thousands of freedom fighters, both men and women, and their sacrifices and suffering for the cause of independence. Our polity has stood the test of time despite many setbacks. This is a matter of consolation for all Indians. Many countries that became free around the same time are struggling to demonstrate their democratic credentials. Our hard-won freedom needs to be protected and sustained from attacks by powerful forces in society and the state. In the process of overcoming his own fear and weakness, Gandhi reassured Indians that they need not fear the colonisers. India's freedom was equally reassuring to the rest of the colonial world, particularly the African countries. Since obtaining freedom, India has been a staunch supporter of all decolonisation movements.

One of the major challenges to our democracy came during the period of emergency. We have come a long way from that dark chapter in our history. Democracy is a project in the making and is not a one-shot phenomenon. The quality of our democracy has suffered. Many political parties are personality-oriented rather than programmatic in nature. Many of them thrive by garnering votes through polarisation centred around particularistic loyalties. Remnants of dynastic politics continue in the country. Wendell Phillips, the American abolitionist said, 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. It means that our freedom has to be zealously guarded from encroachments of any kind and alertness to such moves become the duty of a citizen.

Freedom brought hope to millions of Indians. Many thought it would usher in an era in which social and economic inequalities would disappear and a certain level of social well-being would be made available to all. We adopted an insular economic policy initially aimed at self-reliance to be replaced by a liberal one in the nineties. We have made strides in several areas, but remain entrapped in many other

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fields from which we are still struggling to get free. While liberalisation ensured growth in several sectors, the benefits of growth have not percolated down to the ordinary people.

India is now the most heterogeneous country in the world, and has remained so this far is a testament to the vision of the founders who envisaged a polity where one's religion, caste, region and language would not stand in the way of one's identification with the nation and one's progress. Although attacks have been launched against this feature of our polity, it is this very diversity that makes India a marvel to the rest of the world.

There is a nexus between crime and politics. There is an overcentralisation of power by some leaders. Indian federalism, despite the rhetoric on cooperative federalism, is under severe strain. Institutions are found to be wanting in their ability to check executive excesses. There has also been a turn towards majoritarianism in Indian politics. A sort of informal consociationalism or power-sharing, which used to be a feature of our polity, has also suffered damage in recent times.

When we celebrated the 50 years of our independence, there was a discussion of the difference between Bharat and India, with the middle and techno-savvy classes identifying themselves with modern India, and large mass of people representing the ordinary citizens for whom freedom has not meant redemption identifying themselves with Bharat. This chasm between the two notions of India seemed to have only widened in the era of market economy.

Ultimately, more than the abstract symbols associated with patriotism and nationalism, we need to love our fellow Indians. In a hierarchically laden society, every Indian relates to every other in hierarchical terms, in terms of high and low. We should gradually pull down such structures and let ordinary Indians develop a stake in the country as rightful citizens. In these times of COVID-19, our ability to reach out to the less privileged members of the society is the real test of patriotism.

This issue of the journal carries the backlog of the section on Gardens of God from the earlier issue, and two off-theme articles, a shorter article in the notes and comments section and a book review. I thank Ananta Kumar Giri of Madras Institute of Development Studies for the short introduction to the special section.

JOHN S. MOOLAKKATTU
Chief Editor

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Gardens of God: An Introduction to the Special Section

Ananta Kumar Giri

THIS SPECIAL SECTION continues our journey with this theme from the last issue of Gandhi Marg. It begins with Christian Bartolf's essay, "Thoreau's 'Lakes of Light', Tolstoy's 'Kingdom of God' and Gandhi's 'Ramarajya.'" In his essay, Bartolf presents utopian visions of Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and King to understand the vision and practice of Gardens of God. Bartolf discusses Thoreau's stay and work near Walden, the pond near Concord, Massachusetts. He discusses Tolstoy's vision and practice of Kingdom of God at the core of which is the practice of love and non-violence. He then discusses Gandhi's vision of Ramrajya which builds upon both Thoreau and Tolstoy. Critical self-introspection, respect for all and taking self-control of oneself as well as helping others to have self-control are at the core of Gandhi's vision of Ram Rajya. Bartolf then discusses Martin Luther King's vision and realization of Kingdom of God as realization of the Beloved Community in self, society and the world.

Bartolf's essay is followed by Richard Hartz's essay, "From Eden to Vrindavan: Exploring the Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo," in which Hartz discusses the political philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and its implication for rethinking Gardens of God. Taking into account the heights to which human beings can rise as well as the depths to which they can sink, his approach often converges with the political thinking of others in both East and West who acknowledge our capacity for self-transcendence, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and the New Confucianists. From this point of view, political systems are best understood and assessed according to the opportunities they provide

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for human growth. Humanity progresses, individually and collectively, from infra-rational beginnings through a long stage of rational development toward a supra-rational fulfillment foreshadowed prophetically in many of the world's religions. Drawing on Judeo-Christian and Indian mythologies, this growth could be described as an evolution that began in the carefree Eden of a pre-rational existence. Exiled from that unreflective paradise by the emergence of the thinking mind, human life proceeds through various attempts at a rational ordering of society toward its eventual culmination in a kind of spiritual anarchism when politics has served its purpose. To symbolize that consummation, Sri Aurobindo often uses imagery associated with another "garden of God," the groves of Vrindavan where Krishna's sports embody the play of divine delight in this world.

Hartz's essay is followed by Muhammad Maroof Shah's essay, "This Very Garden is the Garden of Eden: Participating with Wittgenstein and Mystical Philosophers in Heaven Here and Now." Pursuit of eudomonia or peace that passeth all understanding or a land of no sorrow or repose of being or the silence that drown all existential fever is what has been the overriding theme of human odyssey. The world is a vale of soul making as Keats noted and we can be sustained in our hard struggle to live by virtue of glimpsing higher horizons or deeper depths of heart. This far off horizon which, however, colours all our endeavours, may be called Heaven. The task of philosophy, poetry and mysticism is to make this more accessible. Heaven is a space to be nurtured or cultivated and very few succeed in the task. Every small act of gratitude and love and attention to beauty is nurturing this space. Whether one is religious or secular, grace is available though we may not be able to receive it. Shah tells us how challenging it is to feel this when one strolls in one's garden. Philosophers like Wittgenstein open us to the wonder of being and make it possible to appreciate heavenly dimension of ordinary life.

Shah's essay is followed by Felix Padel and Malvika Gupta's essay, "Faultlines in Paradise: Indigenous People and Conservation Areas." Padel and Gupta tell us how it can be illusive to look at the beautiful habitats where indigenous people of the world live as paradise, but these are being taken away by both forces of industry and conservation, destroying both biodiversity and cultural diversity. These forces of destruction create faultlines in paradise. Padel and Gupta critique one-sided industrialization and conservation and plead for dialogues with the indigenous people for both industries and conservation. Building of conservation parks such as wild life sanctuaries strive to conserve wild life and bio-diversity but evict the indigenous people inhabiting the land. This is not sustainable. To build

Gardens of God here calls for a middle ground of conservation of both Nature and people, wild life and people. For cultivating Gardens of God in self, culture and society, Padel and Gupta urge us to “relearn a sense of sacredness in nature characteristic of indigenous societies.” They also write: “Can we begin to transcend our violent human past to start to understand *How Forests Think*? Many indigenous peoples understand non-human species as relatives, through myth and ritual. Can we conceive of Nature’s surviving wild places no longer in terms of gated compounds, but as Gardens of God in a far more expansive sense, in basic harmony with the perceptions and needs of today’s surviving Indigenous Peoples?”

I hope the above papers help us in rethinking existing conceptions of God, self, religion, society, politics and spirituality. They also prompt us to cultivate manifold pathways of transformations—self, religious, political, economic and spiritual—for cultivating Gardens of God in our world.

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Paradise of Conscience: Thoreau's "Lakes of Light", Tolstoy's "Kingdom of God" and Gandhi's "Ramrajya"

Christian Bartolf

ABSTRACT

This essay's topic is the utopian vision of an ecologically sound, peaceful and just society in the works of Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi. Starting with Thoreau's beautiful "Lakes of Light" beacons to renew the revolutionary element in his democracy for the emancipation of the downtrodden, suppressed from slavery or even "semi-slavery" (Gandhi), we face the "Kingdom of God is Within You" as rediscovery of humanist ethics and the individual's moral conscience as soul force through "careful observation" (Greek: παρατηρήσεως - paratērēseōs, according to the gospel of Luke) of the inner voice. Gandhi expanded this vision of emancipation from slavery, violence and war by referring to the Ramayana in his concept of a federation of village republics (gram swarajya) caring for the weakest, a model for a new political world republic (Ramrajya).

Key words: Thoreau, Emerson, Tolstoy, Ramrajya, Garden of Eden

Introduction

IN THE WORKS of our four modern prophets of nonviolent resistance - Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and King - you find utopian visions of a just and peaceful society, ecologically sound and ethically good, and – in addition – concepts of a paradise on earth, "gardens of god", but all these visions reflect the transformed soul of human beings who bethink themselves and listen to their voices of conscience. When Dr

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Martin Luther King Jr., the U.S. American prophet of nonviolence of the twentieth century, recalls his “Beloved Community” in a “World House”, he is fully aware and “cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states” as he explained in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963), and when he names “The World House” a chapter of his 1967 book “Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?”, then it is based on his Nobel Peace Prize lecture, delivered at the University of Oslo on December 11, 1964, describing three basic challenges to humanity: 1. “racial injustice” – 2. “poverty” – 3. “war” and “weapons of mass destruction”.

But where did King get his inspiration from and whose writings meant his inspirations? Let us give a brief review, starting with the last “Book of Revelation” from the New Testament and ending with the first of Old Testament and Thora: Genesis.

*The god
Is near, and hard to grasp.
But where there is danger,
A rescuing element grows as well.*

—Friedrich Hölderlin, *Patmos*

This 1803 hymn of the German poet-philosopher Hölderlin refers to the enigma of an absent or at least obscure God in the times of death and distress. But it also refers to the author of the final apocalyptic, revealing or unveiling, vision of the New Testament, John the Apostle on Patmos, in the centre of Christian eschatology: In the end, the New Heaven and Earth, and the New Jerusalem replace the old heaven and old earth, with no more distress, suffering or death and the God dwelling in humanity in New Jerusalem¹: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” With the God speaking²: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

But how does the utopian New Jerusalem look like, “the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”³:

“Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three

gates on the west.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass."

For Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., this was the vision of a "World House"⁴ based on the principle of Equality and Equal Rights for all human beings. The three dimensions were equal, that is why there would be no more high and low, no more poor and rich, no more up and down, no more first or second, no more hierarchy or pyramid, no more domination and suppression.

And the Book of Revelation concluded with an allusion to the allegorical imagery of the genesis: the River of Life and the Tree of Life appear for the healing of the nations and peoples⁵:

... a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations....

All political theology dealt with the imagery of the Book of Revelations and referred, explicitly and implicitly, to its author, John the Apostle on Patmos, an Aegean Sea island which I visited in the year 1995 to meditate on El Greco's painting of Christ, the sacrificial "Lamb" sacrificing its blood. And all political theology translated such imagery into the present world replete with imperfection and misery.

Let us recollect the vision of Tolstoy's, Gandhi's and King's chief inspiration, Henry David Thoreau's description of his ecological and peaceful utopia in the context of this *Parousia* (Greek: παρουσία), the second coming of Christ, which is the core of Christian theology,

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inseparably linked with the apocalypse and the epiphany (Greek: *epipháneia*, “manifestation, striking appearance”)⁶:

“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

We consult the less known or quoted passages of Henry David Thoreau’s 1854 book “Walden; or Life in the Woods”⁷ and start with his vision of the “Lakes of Light” in his chapter on “The Ponds”⁸:

“White Pond and Walden are great crystals on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light. If they were permanently congealed, and small enough to be clutched, they would, perchance, be carried off by slaves, like precious stones, to adorn the heads of emperors; but being liquid, and ample, and secured to us and our successors forever, we disregard them, and run after the diamond of Koh-i-noor ...”

Koh-i-noor, part of the British Crown Jewels, is one of the largest cut diamonds in the world. And a descriptive passage on the familiar New England landscape transforms into a portrait of a colonialist and imperialist British empire, because this diamond might have well be mined in Kollur Mine, India, during the period of the Kakatiya dynasty, as it was acquired by Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji and became part of the Mughal Peacock Throne, before it changed hands and was ceded to Queen Victoria after the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

While Thoreau continues to refer to the ponds⁹: “... They are too pure to have a market value; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they! We never learned meanness of them ...” While making his transcendental point in the final sentence of the chapter: “Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth.”

For Thoreau, his wooden hut at Walden Pond meant much more than a haven of refuge of fugitive slaves, a meeting spot for the abolitionist men and women who joined a coalition against slavery, a nature resort for contemplation, meditation, and retreat. In his own words¹⁰:

A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows.

“Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no

fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; — a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush — this the light dust-cloth — which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.”¹¹

Thoreau, influenced by Indian philosophy, considered the ponds' water “as sacred as the Ganges at least”¹². He referred to the originary dwellers, the indigenous American Indians with their pow-wow social meetings¹³:

“My townsmen have all heard the tradition- the oldest people tell me that they heard it in their youth- that anciently the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been conjectured that when the hill shook these stones rolled down its side and became the present shore.”

And when observing the ice of Walden Pond in winter, Thoreau summarized in his chapter on “The Pond in Winter”¹⁴:

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

Who inspired Thoreau to his vision of ecological equilibrium, serenity and tranquillity which he associated with his “Lakes of Light”, the humility of a noble soul, the modesty of a temporary dweller upon this earth full of beauty and brilliance and colours and seasons?

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It was his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist writer of the well-known essays on “Self-Reliance”, “Spiritual Laws”, “Love”, “Friendship”, “The Over-Soul”, “Character”, “Nature” and “Politics”. In his basic 1841 essay on “The Over-Soul”¹⁵, Emerson emphasizes “... that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith.”

And in this essay of Emerson, we find the core influence on Leo Tolstoy’s world view in his later years ‘which can be illustrated in the central passage on the human being’s conscience, the “careful observation” of the inner voice (Greek: παρατηρήσεως – paratērēseōs) according to the gospel of Luke¹⁶:

“From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey. Of this pure nature every man is at some

time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colors. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that it pervades and contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man ..."

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Paradise of Conscience: Thoreau's "Lakes of Light", Tolstoy's "Kingdom of God" and Gandhi's "Ramrajya"

Christian Bartolf

ABSTRACT

This essay's topic is the utopian vision of an ecologically sound, peaceful and just society in the works of Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi. Starting with Thoreau's beautiful "Lakes of Light" beacons to renew the revolutionary element in his democracy for the emancipation of the downtrodden, suppressed from slavery or even "semi-slavery" (Gandhi), we face the "Kingdom of God is Within You" as rediscovery of humanist ethics and the individual's moral conscience as soul force through "careful observation" (Greek: παρατηρήσεως - paratērēseōs, according to the gospel of Luke) of the inner voice. Gandhi expanded this vision of emancipation from slavery, violence and war by referring to the Ramayana in his concept of a federation of village republics (gram swarajya) caring for the weakest, a model for a new political world republic (Ramrajya).

Key words: Thoreau, Emerson, Tolstoy, Ramarajya, Garden of Eden

Introduction

IN THE WORKS of our four modern prophets of nonviolent resistance - Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and King - you find utopian visions of a just and peaceful society, ecologically sound and ethically good, and – in addition – concepts of a paradise on earth, "gardens of god", but all these visions reflect the transformed soul of human beings who bethink themselves and listen to their voices of conscience. When Dr

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Martin Luther King Jr., the U.S. American prophet of nonviolence of the twentieth century, recalls his “Beloved Community” in a “World House”, he is fully aware and “cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states” as he explained in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963), and when he names “The World House” a chapter of his 1967 book “Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?”, then it is based on his Nobel Peace Prize lecture, delivered at the University of Oslo on December 11, 1964, describing three basic challenges to humanity: 1. “racial injustice” – 2. “poverty” – 3. “war” and “weapons of mass destruction”.

But where did King get his inspiration from and whose writings meant his inspirations? Let us give a brief review, starting with the last “Book of Revelation” from the New Testament and ending with the first of Old Testament and Thora: Genesis.

*The god
Is near, and hard to grasp.
But where there is danger,
A rescuing element grows as well.*

—Friedrich Hölderlin, *Patmos*

This 1803 hymn of the German poet-philosopher Hölderlin refers to the enigma of an absent or at least obscure God in the times of death and distress. But it also refers to the author of the final apocalyptic, revealing or unveiling, vision of the New Testament, John the Apostle on Patmos, in the centre of Christian eschatology: In the end, the New Heaven and Earth, and the New Jerusalem replace the old heaven and old earth, with no more distress, suffering or death and the God dwelling in humanity in New Jerusalem¹: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” With the God speaking²: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

But how does the utopian New Jerusalem look like, “the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”³:

“Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three

gates on the west.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.”

For Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., this was the vision of a “World House”⁴ based on the principle of Equality and Equal Rights for all human beings. The three dimensions were equal, that is why there would be no more high and low, no more poor and rich, no more up and down, no more first or second, no more hierarchy or pyramid, no more domination and suppression.

And the Book of Revelation concluded with an allusion to the allegorical imagery of the genesis: the River of Life and the Tree of Life appear for the healing of the nations and peoples⁵:

... a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations....

All political theology dealt with the imagery of the Book of Revelations and referred, explicitly and implicitly, to its author, John the Apostle on Patmos, an Aegean Sea island which I visited in the year 1995 to meditate on El Greco’s painting of Christ, the sacrificial “Lamb” sacrificing its blood. And all political theology translated such imagery into the present world replete with imperfection and misery.

Let us recollect the vision of Tolstoy’s, Gandhi’s and King’s chief inspiration, Henry David Thoreau’s description of his ecological and peaceful utopia in the context of this *Parousia* (Greek: παρουσία), the second coming of Christ, which is the core of Christian theology,

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inseparably linked with the apocalypse and the epiphany (Greek: *epipháneia*, “manifestation, striking appearance”)⁶:

“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

We consult the less known or quoted passages of Henry David Thoreau’s 1854 book “Walden; or Life in the Woods”⁷ and start with his vision of the “Lakes of Light” in his chapter on “The Ponds”⁸:

“White Pond and Walden are great crystals on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light. If they were permanently congealed, and small enough to be clutched, they would, perchance, be carried off by slaves, like precious stones, to adorn the heads of emperors; but being liquid, and ample, and secured to us and our successors forever, we disregard them, and run after the diamond of Koh-i-noor ...”

Koh-i-noor, part of the British Crown Jewels, is one of the largest cut diamonds in the world. And a descriptive passage on the familiar New England landscape transforms into a portrait of a colonialist and imperialist British empire, because this diamond might have well be mined in Kollur Mine, India, during the period of the Kakatiya dynasty, as it was acquired by Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji and became part of the Mughal Peacock Throne, before it changed hands and was ceded to Queen Victoria after the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

While Thoreau continues to refer to the ponds⁹: “... They are too pure to have a market value; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they! We never learned meanness of them ...” While making his transcendental point in the final sentence of the chapter: “Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth.”

For Thoreau, his wooden hut at Walden Pond meant much more than a haven of refuge of fugitive slaves, a meeting spot for the abolitionist men and women who joined a coalition against slavery, a nature resort for contemplation, meditation, and retreat. In his own words¹⁰:

A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows.

“Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no

fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; — a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush — this the light dust-cloth — which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.”¹¹

Thoreau, influenced by Indian philosophy, considered the ponds' water “as sacred as the Ganges at least”¹². He referred to the originary dwellers, the indigenous American Indians with their pow-wow social meetings¹³:

“My townsmen have all heard the tradition- the oldest people tell me that they heard it in their youth- that anciently the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been conjectured that when the hill shook these stones rolled down its side and became the present shore.”

And when observing the ice of Walden Pond in winter, Thoreau summarized in his chapter on “The Pond in Winter”¹⁴:

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

Who inspired Thoreau to his vision of ecological equilibrium, serenity and tranquillity which he associated with his “Lakes of Light”, the humility of a noble soul, the modesty of a temporary dweller upon this earth full of beauty and brilliance and colours and seasons?

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It was his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist writer of the well-known essays on “Self-Reliance”, “Spiritual Laws”, “Love”, “Friendship”, “The Over-Soul”, “Character”, “Nature” and “Politics”. In his basic 1841 essay on “The Over-Soul”¹⁵, Emerson emphasizes “... that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith.”

And in this essay of Emerson, we find the core influence on Leo Tolstoy’s world view in his later years ‘which can be illustrated in the central passage on the human being’s conscience, the “careful observation” of the inner voice (Greek: παρατηρήσεως – paratērēseōs) according to the gospel of Luke¹⁶:

“From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey. Of this pure nature every man is at some

time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colors. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that it pervades and contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man ..."

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"The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God, which can only be done by the recognition and profession of the truth by every man.

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Tolstoy's gospel of nonviolence in his ethical programme for a new universal religion condemns military conscription and all war¹⁹:

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"Every war, even the most humanely conducted, with all its ordinary consequences, the destruction of harvests, robberies, the license and debauchery, and the murder with the justifications of its necessity and justice, the exaltation and glorification of military exploits, the worship of the flag, the patriotic sentiments, the feigned solicitude for the wounded, and so on, does more in one year to pervert men's minds than thousands of robberies, murders, and arsons perpetrated during hundreds of years by individual men under the influence of passion."

And Tolstoy inspired and supported resisters world-wide, conscientious objectors to military service, anti-militarists and pacifists, who solely relied on their weapon of spirit, not at all on military brute force. He accused landowners, merchants, and government officials during that imperial Czarist age to collaborate with the hypocritical, violent regime to destroy the doctrine of Christ and keep up the armed forces of the State and dogmas of the Church.

Thus, he was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church after criticizing the dogmatic theology, but he remained firm in his speaking truth to the clergy and the worldly power. Tolstoy's firm insistence on Righteousness and Truth brought him followers all around the globe, among them young barrister-at-law and political advocate Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in South Africa.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who joined this appeal to the conscience for humanity's sake with the positive qualities of prince Rama of the Kingdom of Kosala in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana ascribed to Maharishi Valmiki. There are many poetic and narrative prose versions of this epic, now let us just consider Gandhi's understanding of *Ramarajya* or *Rama-Rajya* (or *Khudai Raj*, or the *Panch*, or: "Kingdom of God on Earth") as his utopian vision of a just and peaceful society²⁰:

"By *Ramarajya* I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by *Ramarajya* Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness. Whether the Rama of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of *Ramarajya* is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under *Ramarajya*."

It was "sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority"²¹ which Gandhi kept in his mind, nothing less than the independence of his dream, "the Kingdom of God on earth"²² with respect of all religions²³ - Gandhi emphasized²⁴: "If you want to see God in the form of *Ramarajya*, the first requisite is self-introspection. You have to magnify your own faults a thousand fold and shut your eyes to the

faults of your neighbours. That is the only way to real progress."

What Gandhi refers here as "self-introspection" is the call of conscience through the "careful observation" of the inner voice (Greek: παρατηρήσεως – paratērēseōs), according to the gospel of Luke.

"*Ramarajya* is certainly an imagery ideal, but it can also be proved that something approximating to it did exist in former times. It is true, however, that at no time in the past were untruth and poverty completely absent and they are not likely to be so at any time in the future."²⁵

"Satyagraha is an attempt to make the possible real. Truth implies justice. A just administration implies an era of truth or swaraj, dharmaraj, *Ramarajya* or the people's raj (democracy). Under such a government the ruler would be the protector and friend of his subjects. Between his way of life and that of the poorest of his subjects, there would not be such a gulf as there is today."²⁶

"*Ramarajya* means rule of the people. A person like Rama would never wish to rule. God calls Himself a servant of his servants."²⁷ Let us find the most precise description in detail of Rama Rajya in the words of Mahatma Gandhi. We find this real socialist utopia of "economic equality", of honesty, nonviolence and truth, in *The Hindu* (12 June 1945)²⁸:

"Now for Ram Rajya. It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on Earth; politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race, or creed or sex vanish; in it, land and State belong to the people, justice is prompt, perfect and cheap and, therefore, there is freedom of worship, speech and the Press – all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a State must be based on truth and non-violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities. It is a dream that may never be realized. I find happiness in living in that dreamland, ever trying to realize it in the quickest way."

Mahatma Gandhi associated his concept of *Ramarajya* with "dharmaraj", "people's raj", democracy, and his vision followed the wisdom of Laozi in his Tao-Te-King, because the rulers become servants of the people, there is no more high and low, no more poor and rich any longer – a role model for the world, a federation of nonviolent administrative entities with no more injustice or war, instead: social justice and peace between all nations.

The images he used for his utopian vision of "enlightened anarchy", of real "Independence"²⁹ were ever widening oceanic circles and the end of hierarchical pyramids: "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers.

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It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in its attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured, in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labor.

This society must naturally be based on Truth and Non-Violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, all-knowing living force which inheres every other force known to the world but which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light.

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its own from the centre. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and therefore not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. [...] If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words, none is to be the first and none the last."

Images of "Gardens of God", the beautiful city of equality, equal human rights and economic, political and social justice or a world house in an inescapable network of mutuality, mutual aid and solidarity, based on compassion and empathy – they seem to strive for an oasis in the desert or the wilderness. And they refer, like all political theology, not only to the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, the last days of mankind, but also to the Book Genesis in the beginning of the creation and the Garden of Eden.

But what is the meaning and the significance of the Garden of

in the conversation. The reasons Sri Aurobindo offers for taking it seriously cannot be lightly dismissed:

A purely rational human life would be a life baulked and deprived of its most powerful dynamic sources. . . . A purely rational society could not come into being and, if it could be born, either could not live or would sterilise and petrify human existence. The root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational.³

Yet Sri Aurobindo does not underestimate the importance of the rational stage of development. On the contrary, the role of reason as a mediator between the infrarational and the suprarational is central to his political vision.

The idea of progress which has defined the modern age is often explained as a secularized version of the Christian attitude toward history. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, in contrast to many others, history does not move in aimless cycles. It is a meaningful and divinely guided process leading irreversibly, despite all setbacks, in a single redeeming direction. For Christians, it began with the expulsion from a pre-rational, pre-ethical paradise represented by the garden of Eden before the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was tasted. It will culminate, through the agency of Grace, in the millennium of the kingdom of God. When secularized, this became the idea that out of primitive beginnings, humanity is progressing irresistibly, through the expansion of knowledge and the power over the environment it brings, toward the utopia of a prosperous, well-ordered and perfectly rational society.

Sri Aurobindo in effect re-spiritualizes from a Neo-Vedantic standpoint this secular translation of a religiously inspired worldview. He leaves the role of reason mostly intact up to a certain point. After that, another faculty must emerge in order to arrive at a higher consummation. This enlarged idea of social progress is consistent with the evolutionary metaphysics of his other writings such as *The Life Divine*, where he looks forward to a spiritual transfiguration of human life completing the long process of the gradual manifestation of consciousness in an unconscious world. This philosophy of transformation reinstates something like the Christian apocalypse, except that the imagery of a kingdom or city of God symbolizes it less appropriately than that of a garden of the divine play (*līlā*), the Vrindavan of the Indian Vaishnava tradition.

The Spiral of Progress

The theory of the ascent of human life from the infrarational to the

suprarational looks at first sight like a straightforward extrapolation from rationalistic ideas of linear progress. But *The Human Cycle* derives its revised title from a seemingly contrary theory closer to the cyclical Indian and Greco-Roman traditions. Sri Aurobindo begins the book with a “psychological theory of history” positing a series of stages through which societies tend to pass. Reinterpreting a set of terms borrowed from the German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915), whose system he does not otherwise discuss, he calls these stages the symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic and subjective ages. The logic of this sequence, as we will see, supports neither a simple notion of linear progress nor that of mere degeneration. Humanity simultaneously advances and regresses. The movement that results is best represented geometrically by the figure of a spiral, as when Sri Aurobindo describes “a spiral of nature movement, sometimes descending, sometimes ascending,” but with “an increasing subtlety, complexity, manifold development of knowledge and possibility.”⁴

Certain features of the symbolic age at the beginning of the proposed cycle partially anticipate, in this theory, the outcome toward which the intermediate stages eventually lead even when they appear to move in the opposite direction. At the same time, the elements of suprarational mysticism which Sri Aurobindo finds in humanity’s early psychosocial development do not deter him from relegating this phase to the “infrarational” age of the cycle when he introduces that term in the second half of the book. This is because in the age of mystery religions preceding the emergence of rational thought, according to the hypothesis for which he presents a detailed argument in *The Secret of the Veda*, any higher knowledge such as that cryptically expressed through Vedic symbolism would have been confined to a few and not shared by society as a whole. His explanation of how this could have been possible depends on his understanding of the workings of intuition in relation to the rational mind:

The spiritual development, arising uncurbed by reason in an infrarational society, has often a tendency to outrun at first the rational and intellectual movement. For the greatest illuminating force of the infrarational man, as he develops, is an inferior intuition, an instinctively intuitional sight arising out of the force of life in him, and the transition from this to an intensity of inner life and the growth of a deeper spiritual intuition which outleaps the intellect and seems to dispense with it, is an easy passage in the individual man. But for humanity at large this movement cannot last; the mind and intellect must develop to their fullness so that the spirituality of the race may rise securely upward upon a broad basis of the developed lower nature in man, the intelligent mental being.⁵

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An age of individualism and reason thus becomes a crucial step in a difficult evolution out of the infrarational whose culmination is envisaged as a suprarational transcendence. We can begin to see how this could provide a psychological criterion for assessing the relative value of political systems according to the opportunities they provide for human growth:

So long as the hour of the rational age has not arrived, the irrational period of society cannot be left behind; and that arrival can only be when not a class or a few but the multitude has learned to think, to exercise its intelligence actively – it matters not at first however imperfectly – upon their life, their needs, their rights, their duties, their aspirations as human beings.⁶

Human Nature and Destiny

Every political theory implies a theory of human nature. Political philosophies which view the spectrum of human possibilities similarly, whatever their other differences, are likely to show structural resemblances. The introduction of a suprarational factor in human life, even if it is only as an unrealized potential, alters the range of outcomes of historical processes that can be imagined. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find convergences in the political thinking of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds who have in common a willingness to extend our understanding of human nature beyond its normal limits.

A convergence of this kind can be found, perhaps surprisingly, if we compare Sri Aurobindo's political philosophy with that of the American Protestant social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971). Niebuhr's political theology builds its insights upon "the ultra-rational foundations and presuppositions of Christian wisdom about man."⁷ This wisdom claims "a higher stature for man" than current conceptions of human nature usually contemplate, but also takes "a more serious view of his evil."⁸ The subtlety with which Niebuhr resolved this seeming contradiction was conducive to a depth and astuteness of political perception that made him an influential public intellectual during his own time – perhaps more outside of the Church than within it – and have kept him relevant today.

Niebuhr was worried that the secular idealism which has inspired modern democracy is founded on a sentimental optimism about human nature, whose superficiality leads it to underestimate the perils democracy faces and makes it vulnerable to attack by moral cynics. His objection was not to optimism as such, however, but to a particular

type of optimism. His own optimistic tendencies were derived from a source other than intellectual idealism:

The man who searches after both meaning and fulfillments beyond the ambiguous fulfillments and frustrations of history exists in a height of spirit which no historical process can completely contain. This height is not irrelevant to the life of the community, because new richness and a higher possibility of justice come to the community from this height of awareness. . . . The problem of the individual and the community cannot be solved at all if the height is not achieved where the sovereign source and end of both individual and communal existence are discerned. . . .⁹

For Sri Aurobindo, likewise, the self-transcending and world-transcending capacity of the individual is the key to solving the problems of self and world:

Man, the mental being in Nature, is especially distinguished from her less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality, by the liberation of the mental consciousness which enables him finally to understand more and more himself and his law of being and his development . . . and by the capacity in the end to go beyond himself, beyond his mentality and open his consciousness into that from which mind, life and body proceed. He can even, however imperfectly at present, get at his highest to some consciousness of the Reality which is his true being. . . . To do this, to arrive through mind and beyond mind at the Self, the Spirit which expresses itself in all Nature and . . . to possess at once humanly and divinely – according to the law and nature of human existence, but of human existence fulfilled in God and fulfilling God in the world – both himself and the world is the destiny of man and the object of his individual and social existence.¹⁰

The Power of Evil

Any such consummation of history is far off at best, however. Meanwhile, appearances often seem to contradict the belief in its possibility. Sri Aurobindo and Reinhold Niebuhr were keenly aware of this, yet never succumbed to disillusionment. Both lived through a period when the power of evil was displayed on an extraordinary scale. Their responses to these events were informed by conceptions of human nature realistic enough to enable a clear-eyed assessment of what was happening.

“As for the hopes of the intellectual idealists,” Sri Aurobindo remarked in a letter in 1933, “I have not shared them, so I am not disappointed.”¹¹ Like Niebuhr, he saw what was at stake in World War II long before many others. Early in the war, as Heehs points

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out, "Sri Aurobindo was the only important public figure in India to come out unambiguously in favor of the Western democracies."¹² When he contributed to French and British war funds in 1940 as a gesture of solidarity with the struggle against Nazism, many of his countrymen were appalled by his support for their perceived enemy, the British. The former freedom fighter was widely condemned for taking the wrong side in the conflict. But he was not looking at the situation through nationalistic blinkers. Two years later he wrote:

There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins . . . there would be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted. . . .¹³

Niebuhr's outspoken interventionism from the beginning of the war aroused equal dismay in the United States, especially among Christian pacifists. His daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, quotes a letter of self-righteous protest from a professor of theology in Chicago: "Sir, I have come to the point where I can no longer be silent at your shocking disregard of the fundamental decencies of your Christian ministry and professorship. . . . It is apostasy, brazen and shameless. . . . You are a shocking spectacle to God, Jesus Christ and Humanity."¹⁴

Democracies built by the (relatively) virtuous but foolish "children of light," to use Niebuhr's terminology, were intellectually and morally ill-prepared to deal with the wiles and the fury of the "children of darkness."¹⁵ No less important than the "ultra-rational foundations" of Niebuhr's "Christian realism" was the frank recognition of the dark side of human nature. Niebuhr even acquired an undeserved reputation as a pessimist. Yet he regarded evil, unlike good, as ultimately "negative and parasitic in origin, even though its effect is positive."¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo came to an analogous conclusion. In the course of a long chapter entitled "The Origin and Remedy of Falsehood, Error, Wrong and Evil," which he added to *The Life Divine* in the 1940 edition of Book Two, he discussed the phenomenon of evil when it "takes forms which shock the sense of human measure, exceed the bounds of human personality, approach the gigantic, the inordinate, the immeasurable. It may then be questioned whether it is not a mistake to deny absoluteness to evil. . . . But the immeasurable is not a sign of absoluteness: for the absolute is not in itself a thing of magnitude."¹⁷

"From one point of view," he observes elsewhere, "it is well that

terrible examples of the utmost logic of these things should be prominently forced on the attention of mankind; for by showing the evil stripped of all veils the choice between good and evil instead of a halting between the two will be forced on the human conscience."¹⁸ The *argumentum ad Hitlerum*, in other words, need not always be a mere logical fallacy. Reflexively treating it as such, especially during times when strongman leaders are again on the rise, could risk blinding us to the lessons to be learned from history.

Faith and Politics

Evil, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is an inevitable concomitant of humanity's unfinished transition from an infrarational to a rational stage of development. If so, it can be eliminated only by completing the transition. The question is whether that can be done if the rational part of our nature does not ally itself with the incipient suprarational. Otherwise the gravitation toward the infrarational, which threatens to reverse the gains of progress and enlightenment, is likely to be too strong and defeat all attempts to create a rational society.

As long as the turn toward a suprarational consciousness is only an aspiration, it translates itself for practical purposes into what we call faith. But the attitude of religious faith toward the recalcitrant facts of our earthly existence has been ambiguous. "Sometimes," Niebuhr remarks, "the contrast between the real and the ideal is drawn so sharply that the religious man despairs of the achievement of the ideal in mundane history. He transfers his hopes to another world." At other times, the struggle to change what is into what ought to be finds a sustenance in faith that no other motive can rival. "Wherever religion concerns itself with the problems of society, Niebuhr continues, "it always gives birth to some kind of millennial hope, from the perspective of which present social realities are convicted of inadequacy." Under these circumstances, "courage is needed; for the task of building a just society seems always to be a hopeless one when only present realities and immediate possibilities are envisaged."¹⁹

Maintaining this courage "requires a faith which is not too easily destroyed by frustration. . . . Without it we are driven to alternate moods of sentimentality and despair; trusting human powers too much in one moment and losing all faith in the meaning of life when we discover the limits of human possibilities."²⁰ It is as a source of such faith and resilience that Niebuhr considered religion to be a valuable, even indispensable, resource for politics if it is to rise to the occasion of meeting the challenges we confront today.

Sri Aurobindo noted the same ambiguities as Niebuhr in the relationship of religion with society. Though he believed that

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spirituality holds the key to the eventual solution of the problems of life, he acknowledged that religion has in practice discouraged and opposed the striving for a better world as often as it has inspired and fortified it. His analysis of modern political systems in *The Human Cycle* is preceded by a chapter in which he examines "the historic insufficiency of religion as a guide and control of human society." He finds much to justify the secular rejection of religion:

Churches and creeds have, for example, stood violently in the way of philosophy and science, burned a Giordano Bruno, imprisoned a Galileo, and so generally miscondacted themselves in this matter that philosophy and science had in self-defence to turn upon Religion and rend her to pieces in order to get a free field for their legitimate development. . . . We see too that a narrow religious spirit often oppresses and impoverishes the joy and beauty of life. . . . In politics religion has often thrown itself on the side of power and resisted the coming of larger political ideals, because it was itself, in the form of a Church, supported by power. . . . So too it has often supported a rigid and outworn social system, because it thought its own life bound up with social forms with which it happened to have been associated during a long portion of its own history. . . . This error in its many shapes has been the great weakness of religion as practised in the past and the opportunity and justification for the revolt of the intelligence, the aesthetic sense, the social and political idealism, even the ethical spirit of the human being against what should have been its own highest tendency and law.²¹

The Soul of a Nation

The mixed record of the religious spirit in its dealings with life would seem to support the secular view that religion should be kept out of politics and confined to the private sphere for those who have not discarded or outgrown it. Even if humanity is moving toward an ultimate transcendence of the rational mind, it is doubtful whether institutional religion is on the whole more of a help or a hindrance in this evolution.

Sri Aurobindo considered himself an agnostic in his early life.²² Though he appreciated the King James Bible as literature,²³ he grew up with a strong antipathy toward the version of Christianity he encountered in his youth in England.²⁴ On his return to India, he was only slightly more impressed by the conventional Hinduism of most of his contemporaries, in contrast to the spiritual profundities he found in ancient texts such as the Upanishads and Bhagavadgita. When he became politically active, he unequivocally rejected the notion of Hindu nationalism.²⁵ At the same time, he endorsed during this period a

kind of civil religion involving the deification of the motherland. Even when he left his nationalistic phase behind, he never repudiated his former encouragement of this attitude, buttressing it in his mature political writings with a theory of the nation-soul.

The nation-idea is subordinated to the idea of humanity in Sri Aurobindo's later vision of human unity. He did not advocate its disappearance, however, but hoped to see it survive as a source of vitality and diversity. In this context, his understanding of the role of national consciousness in general was colored by his personal experience of the politics of liberation in India. In theorizing nationhood, there is little doubt that he was influenced directly or indirectly by European thinkers such as the German philosopher and critic Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). But he also drew upon specifically Indian concepts, such as that of the universal Energy, called in Sanskrit *œakti*. In 1918 he wrote in *The Renaissance in India*, referring to developments in which he himself had played a part:

Another political spirit has awakened in the people under the shock of the movement of the last decade which, vehemently national in its motive, proclaimed a religion of Indian patriotism, applied the notions of the ancient religion and philosophy to politics, expressed the cult of the country as mother and Shakti and attempted to base the idea of democracy firmly on the spiritual thought and impulses native to the Indian mind.²⁶

The scholar of Indian religion Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936), Chief Justice at the High Court of Calcutta, had written of India as “an Idea . . . which in the Cosmic Mind is . . . projected with all its variations by Its power or Shakti. The Shakti . . . appearing as India is the Bharata Shakti.”²⁷ Paraphrasing Woodroffe, Sri Aurobindo elaborated: “Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies. India is the Bharata Shakti, the living energy of a great spiritual conception, and fidelity to it is the very principle of her existence.”²⁸ But he also spoke of “the Shakti of the world,”²⁹ whose potential for diversity in unity is revealed in the souls of the nations. Increasingly, it was to this world Shakti and the unfolding of its workings in an evolving humanity that he directed his attention.

The Subjective Turn

The seeking for the nation-soul is a collective manifestation of what Sri Aurobindo calls subjectivism. In *The Human Cycle*, he introduces the subjective age as a step in the transition beyond rationalism and individualism and the precursor of a spiritual or suprarational age.

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Before proceeding further, therefore, we need to understand what he means by the subjective turn, why he considers it necessary and what its dangers are as well as the possibilities it opens up for the future. For this purpose, we must return briefly to the stages of development we passed over earlier and see how he interprets the terms he took from Lamprecht to designate these stages. The stages, it may be recalled, are: symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic and subjective.

In the earliest documented stages of society, Sri Aurobindo points out, we tend to “find a strongly symbolic mentality that governs or at least pervades its thought, customs and institutions.” What is symbolized is “something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities, – the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life.”³⁰ As the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) says of the images contained in the myths of the “Mythical Age,” they “lent their stamp to life and came to exercise a predominant influence over the whole business of living. . . . These images are susceptible of infinite interpretation and infinitely heightened meaning, yet they simply bear the awareness of Being and the self.”³¹

Richard Tarnas similarly refers to the archaic Greek vision as reflecting “an intrinsic unity of immediate sense perception and timeless meaning.”³² In the theory put forward in *The Human Cycle*, the subjective age could be said to represent a return to aspects of this ancient mentality which have faded away in the course of history, a process culminating in the modern disenchantment of the world brought about by excessive rationalism with all its psychological and sociological consequences. But humanity cannot turn back the clock, nor should it try to do so. If something has been lost which has to be rediscovered, this must happen on a higher level under the changed conditions of a more complex society.

The typical age, as described in *The Human Cycle*, can be compared to the well-known idea of the “Axial Period.” This was Jaspers’ term for a phenomenon claimed to have occurred more or less independently in widely separated locations between roughly 800 and 200 B.C. Its most conspicuous characteristic was a modification of the mythical view of things due to the advent of “rationality and rationally clarified experience.” “In this age,” Jaspers affirms, “were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today.”³³

Sri Aurobindo anticipated Jaspers by mentioning a period

“somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.” when human beings “began both in the East and West to intellectualise knowledge.”³⁴ We may suppose that relatively few then participated in such intellectual activity, distinguishing the period in question from the widespread mental stimulation of the later rational age. But other features were more pervasive, marking the phase of social development that Sri Aurobindo, following Lamprecht, calls the *typal* age. “Religion,” he writes, “becomes then a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, Dharma. . . . This *typal* stage creates the great social ideals which remain impressed upon the human mind even when the stage itself is passed.”³⁵ Jaspers notes likewise: “Religion was rendered ethical. . . . The myth . . . was turned into parable. Myths were remoulded, were understood at a new depth during this transition, which was myth-creating after a new fashion, at the very moment when the myth as a whole was destroyed.”³⁶

Eventually the new understanding of the original symbols wanes in turn, leaving behind a fossilized remnant of the outer forms of the old order as the framework of social life. This hollow shell of mechanically preserved customs defines the conventional age. Gradually the spirit is stifled in the forms that once served to express it. Finally, the suffocation becomes intolerable. Then individualism and reason arise in revolt and assert their freedom. “A partial and external freedom,” Sri Aurobindo comments, “still betrayed by the conventional age that preceded it into the idea that the Truth can be found in outsides, dreaming vainly that perfection can be determined by machinery, but still a necessary passage to the subjective period of humanity through which man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilisation.”³⁷

The Danger of False Subjectivism

Assuming history to have a meaningful direction, modern progressives have usually believed some sort of fulfilment of the possibilities of a rational age to be what things are moving towards. But if the rational mind does not represent the limit of our potential, the picture changes. Subjectivism does not stop short at the surface appearances and present actualities of human nature. “It is a step towards self-knowledge,” Sri Aurobindo observes. Yet he adds a warning: “Everything depends on how that step is taken, to what kind of subjectivity we arrive and how far we go in self-knowledge; for here the dangers of error are as great and far-reaching as the results of right seeking.”³⁸

These dangers were dramatically illustrated by events that were

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under way as he was writing these words. World War I was raging in Europe while Sri Aurobindo serialized the original version of *The Human Cycle* in monthly instalments from August 1916 to July 1918. Some of the revisions he introduced in the late 1930s reflect the world situation as another war loomed ahead and fascist and communist dictatorships menaced the globe. It was a time when "the champions of individual freedom" seemed to be "a morally defeated and dwindling army who can only fight on in the hope of a future reaction or of saving something of their principle from the wreck."³⁹ In his analysis, "false subjectivism" was to blame. Commenting on the "momentous experiment of the subjective German nationality," Sri Aurobindo attributed the disastrous outcome of what had begun with so much promise to "the historical fact of the evolution of the subjective age out of the individualistic; and the first enormous stumble has accordingly been to transform the error of individualistic egoism into the more momentous error of a great communal egoism."⁴⁰

This was written in 1916. Twenty years later, the collapse and humiliation of the first German experiment with subjective nationalism had led to a "fierce reaction towards the rigid, armoured, aggressive, formidable Nazi State."⁴¹ Moreover, Germany was not the first or the only country where such ideologies had taken hold. Revising *The Human Cycle* as he pondered these developments, Sri Aurobindo added several pages at the end of a chapter on the rational age. Here he reflected on "the totalitarianism whose swelling tide threatens to engulf all Europe and more than Europe."⁴² "Rationalisation," he observed, "is no longer the turn; its place is taken by a revolutionary mysticism which seems to be the present drive of the Time Spirit."⁴³

This "totalitarian mysticism" was not a step toward true subjectivism, but a terrible setback. In the worst case, it could lead to "the suicide or the execution . . . of the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mental being." If reason could no longer do its work under these conditions, "neither can a subjective age be the outcome; for the growth of subjectivism also cannot proceed without plasticity, without movement of self-search, without room to move, expand, develop, change." This bleak prospect was not inevitable, however. The chapter as revised when all was still hanging in the balance anticipates the survival of a "rational idealism" and ends with a more optimistic scenario:

In that case the curve of the Age of Reason, now threatened with an abrupt cessation, may prolong and complete itself; the subjective turn of the human mind and life, avoiding a premature plunge into any general external action before it has found itself, may have time and freedom to

evolve, to seek out its own truth, its own lines and so become ready to take up the spiral of the human social evolution where the curve of the Age of Reason naturally ends by its own normal evolution and make ready the ways of a deeper spirit.⁴⁴

The Idea of Humanity

The age-old tendency to form larger and larger social aggregates, from family and tribe to kingdom, nation or empire and beyond, was a major focus of Sri Aurobindo's thinking on history and politics. It is the subject of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, a book he wrote and published at the same time as *The Human Cycle* while the forces that had been drawing humanity together for centuries were busy tearing it apart again in the First World War. But *The Ideal of Human Unity*, despite its title, does not argue unconditionally for the political unification of the human race as an aim desirable in itself. On the contrary, one of its themes is the peril of a world-state in which unity might be imposed by force, sacrificing freedom and diversity for the sake of order and stability.

The kind of unity that Sri Aurobindo presents as an ideal, if not as an immediately practicable proposition, would take the outward form of "a federation of free and equal nations" based on a "harmony between the contending principles of nationalism and internationalism."⁴⁵ But in the absence of a strong centralized government to enforce it, such a world-union would be too precarious to last if brought about by purely political and administrative means without the support of a psychological factor capable of holding it together. To supply this factor, what is needed is to foster the "idea of humanity as a single race of beings with a common life and a common general interest," an idea that must grow "not only upon the intelligence but in the sentiments, feelings, natural sympathies and mental habits" of human beings everywhere:

The great necessity, then, and the great difficulty is to help this idea of humanity which is already at work upon our minds and has even begun in a very slight degree to influence from above our actions, and turn it into something more than an idea, however strong, to make it a central motive and a fixed part of our nature. Its satisfaction must become a necessity of our psychological being, just as the family idea or the national idea has become each a psychological motive with its own need of satisfaction.⁴⁶

But besides the relative weakness until now of the sense of our common humanity in comparison to narrower identities such as

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nationality, this idea in its modern form has in some parts of the world encountered resistance due to its alleged Western origins. Its most visible manifestation to date, the human rights movement, has been suspected of being just “the most recent expression of Western hegemony.”⁴⁷ In debates on this and related points, Western universalism appears to be challenged by assorted cultural particularisms or, in some cases, rival universalisms.

Sri Aurobindo’s thought suggests a way forward on these issues which has not yet received due consideration. The value of his contribution could be enhanced, moreover, by juxtaposing it with other viewpoints, both Western and non-Western. His recognition of the need to harmonize the principles of nationalism and internationalism agrees with Matthias Risse’s “pluralist internationalism.” Risse’s approach “acknowledges the normative peculiarity of the state, but also recognizes several other grounds of justice,” including our common humanity as well as “collective ownership of the earth” and “membership in the global order.”⁴⁸ His work provides a good starting point for the discussion of global political philosophy, but is limited largely to an extension of Rawlsian principles of domestic justice to questions raised by globalization.

Democracy and Asian Values

A comparative study of political philosophy in the civilizational areas centered around India and China suggests directions that could be explored through intra-Asian dialogue. The traditional Chinese concept of self-cultivation leading toward sagehood as a universally relevant ideal, for example, resonates with Indian views on the almost limitless possibilities of spiritual self-realization available in principle to all. When applied to political theory, these expanded understandings of human nature have similar implications which have been brought out by thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo and the New Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan (1909–1995).

In recent decades, especially in East and Southeast Asia, the phrase “Asian values” has often been invoked to justify authoritarianism. Liberal democracy and human rights have been prime targets of this rhetoric, whose semblance of plausibility depends on an appeal to cultural relativism. In Asian societies, it is claimed, where “the community takes precedence over individuals,” individual rights are regarded as “destructive to the social order and the harmonious function of society.”⁴⁹ Problems with this argument have frequently been pointed out, from the difficulty of identifying a common Asianness to the question of who has the right to define the values of a society on behalf of its other members. Authoritarianism and

suppression of freedom have been widespread throughout world history and can be explained better in terms of stages of social development and decline than by positing inherent and unchanging differences between East and West. But in rejecting misuse of the discourse of Asian values, we should remain open to the possibility that Asian civilizations have something distinctive to offer.

In the view of the contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang, as summarized by Stephen Angle:

An important value of Chinese philosophy is its ability to articulate a world perspective, which is rooted in the fact that unlike Greek political philosophy with its central notion of *polis*, Chinese politics was framed in terms of “all-under-heaven.”⁵⁰

In this cultural context, the idea of humanity can hardly be considered a foreign import. Chinese thought has plenty of resources from which to derive its own profound version of it. In fact, the Enlightenment humanism of figures such as Voltaire was partly inspired by the European discovery of Confucianism and its perceived contrast with the obscurantism and bigotry of ecclesiastical Christianity.⁵¹

No civilization before modern times fully conceived, let alone exemplified, our present ideals of democracy and human rights. Even in ancient Greece, as Sri Aurobindo points out, liberty and democracy meant in practice “the self-rule – variegated by periodical orgies of mutual throat-cutting – of a smaller number of freemen of all ranks who lived by the labour of a great mass of slaves.”⁵² This does not prevent us from regarding Greece as the birthplace of democracy. But the West has changed since then and so has and must the East. Asian values cannot be tied to what Asia or the world once was, which even at its best fell short of what is possible. “The ideals of the future,” Sri Aurobindo writes, “especially the ideals of freedom, equality, commonalty, unity, are demanding to be brought out from their limited field in the spiritual life or the idealism of the few and to be given some beginning of a true soul of action and bodily shape in the life of the race.”⁵³

Participation, Growth and Harmony

An exaggerated cultural pluralism, denying our common humanity, can lead to a cynical and reactionary relativism that discourages creative interaction among cultures and undermines efforts to arrive at consensus on the norms we need to live together. This has not been the attitude of the deepest thinkers of modern Asia, however. Sri Aurobindo endorsed the need for democracy in India, for example,

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in spite of its seemingly alien origins. At the same time, he suggested that its adoption in India might call for modifications in its implementation and rethinking of its philosophical foundations:

What I mean by acceptance of the effective idea of democracy, – the thing itself, never fully worked out, was present as an element in ancient Indian as in ancient European polity and society, – is that I find its inclusion in our future way of living, in some shape, to be a necessity of our growth. What I mean by assimilation, is that we must not take it crudely in the European forms, but must go back to whatever corresponds to it, illumines its sense, justifies its highest purport in our own spiritual conception of life and existence, and in that light work out its extent, degree, form, relation to other ideas, application.⁵⁴

In the Chinese cultural sphere, several leading New Confucian intellectuals issued in 1958 a lengthy statement called *A Manifesto for a Reappraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture*. On the subject of democracy, after dealing with subsidiary points, the authors wrote:

There is a more profound reason why the establishment of a democratic government is necessary for the development of China's culture and history. In the past, a monarch could, to be sure, reign with moral integrity and the people thus bathe in his morality. But the people would still be passive, and therefore unable to achieve moral selfrealization.⁵⁵

From a New Confucian standpoint, Angle observes, “personal moral growth – that is, the never-ending process of striving for sagehood – requires a participatory politics.”⁵⁶ In other words, it requires “a polity that is systematically responsive to the views of a broad range of community members, as determined through their actually, freely taking part in political activities of many kinds.”⁵⁷

This way of seeing the rationale for democratic politics prioritizes the value of individual growth. Yet it does not base itself on individualistic self-assertion of the typically conflictual Western type to justify the right of political participation. The relationship between the individual and society has been understood differently in China and India than in the West, where an unavoidable tension is usually assumed to exist between individual freedom and social harmony. In the Confucian idea of sagehood as the ultimate goal of self-development, a resolution of this tension is at least theoretically implicit in the very conception of what it means to be a sage and therefore a consciously harmonizing agent. “A commitment to sagehood,” Angle explains, “involves a commitment to harmony” as an ideal that “lies ahead of us, but is part of our world, and so it draws us on as we

strive to realize it.”⁵⁸ Free participation in democratic processes, it has been argued, provides most people with better opportunities to pursue these perennial Confucian commitments than was possible under the systems of the past.

The concept of sagehood occupies a similar place in Confucian political theorizing to the role played by our supra- or ultra-rational potential in the thought of Sri Aurobindo and Reinhold Niebuhr. But among the New Confucians, Mou Zongsan is especially insistent on the need to preserve an indirect relationship between subjective ethical cultivation and objective political institutions. Politics, he warns, must not be “swallowed” by morality.⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo’s cautioning about the pitfalls of a false or premature plunge into subjectivism reflects an analogous concern. Individualism and reason, usually adopting liberal democracy as the political model best suited to their needs, must be allowed enough time to do their work before the next stage of social development can safely be contemplated.

Liberty and Her Sisters

While the Confucian sage embodies the Chinese ideal of harmony, the ideal pursued in India has more often been that of liberation. Harmony and freedom are by no means incompatible on an ethical and spiritual level, but when translated into socio-political terms they can easily diverge. Reconciling them is a central aim of Sri Aurobindo’s political philosophy. The first step in doing so is to clarify the meaning of freedom.

Forty years before the distinction between “negative” and “positive” freedom was elaborated by the Latvian-born British political philosopher and historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) in his “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Sri Aurobindo drew a similar contrast in a 1918 essay entitled “Self-Determination.” What Berlin later called negative liberty, defined as “not being interfered with by others,”⁶⁰ is described here as “a convenient elbow-room for our natural energies to satisfy themselves without being too much impinged upon by the self-assertiveness of others.”⁶¹ While such freedom is surely a minimal condition for healthy human flourishing, by itself it does not take us very far. What, then, is true freedom according to Sri Aurobindo? Corresponding to Berlin’s positive liberty as “rational self-direction,”⁶² he finds the “highest and ultimate sense” of liberty in a spiritual self-determination which is fully possible only “if we live in the infinite, live, as the Vedanta bids us, in and from our self-existent being.”⁶³ How this relates to society and politics begins to become clear when he goes on to explain its application to the individual and collective lives of ordinary people:

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The principle of self-determination really means this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity . . . there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being.⁶⁴

These reflections on liberty are related to a broader interpretation of the “democratic trinity”⁶⁵ which figures prominently in Sri Aurobindo’s thought on history and politics. Liberty, equality and fraternity seemed momentarily united in the rhetoric of the French revolution, but in practice they have largely been at loggerheads. Individualistic democracy which gives the greatest scope to liberty has produced unbridled competition and “an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness and the magnitudes of its gulfs and distances.”⁶⁶ The reduction or elimination of these inequalities and injustices seems to require the restriction of personal freedom or its sacrifice on the altar of the State. The growth of fraternity within nations exacerbates strife between them. A strong perception of such conflicts among basic values led Berlin to conclude, “it seems to me that the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false.”⁶⁷ Sri Aurobindo agrees, in effect, that this is likely to be true so long as human beings cannot overcome their egocentrism and must rely on the rational mind to solve all problems.

Meanwhile, the effort to find “the right principle and secure foundation of a rational system of society”⁶⁸ could be expected to result in a series of ideological experiments:

If we may judge from the modern movement, the progress of the reason as a social renovator and creator, if not interrupted in its course, would be destined to pass through three successive stages which are the very logic of its growth, the first individualistic and increasingly democratic with liberty for its principle, the second socialistic, in the end perhaps a governmental communism with equality and the State for its principle, the third – if that ever gets beyond the stage of theory – anarchistic in the higher sense of that much-abused word, either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communalism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle.⁶⁹

Whether or not all these experiments are tried and regardless of their apparent success or failure, the process of lifting humanity from the infrarational to the rational plane will hopefully have advanced, bringing nearer the possibility of progressing to the next level.

The Kingdom of God and the Gardens of Paradise

Just as liberty can mean different things, so can equality and fraternity. Sri Aurobindo's recurrent focus on these three terms has less to do with an appreciation of French revolutionary idealism than with his interest in what he once called an "Asiatic reading of democracy."⁷⁰ In the West, he suggests, all three have been understood mainly in an "outward and mechanical"⁷¹ sense. But the ideals of equality and fraternity were Asian in origin, for Christianity came to Europe from the East:

Christianity was an assertion of human equality in the spirit, a great assertion of the unity of the divine spirit in man, which did not seek to overthrow the established systems of government and society but to inform them with the spirit of human brotherhood and unity.⁷²

Needless to say, Christianity as an organized religion has not always been true to the spirit in which it was founded. Thence arose in recent centuries "the curious spectacle . . . of Christian ideals struggling to establish themselves by the destruction of the very institution which had been created to preserve Christianity."⁷³ The secularization of these ideals has had its advantages, since the "religion of humanity" inspired by them could more easily act "as a constant intellectual and critical solvent, an unsparing assailant of the thing that is and an unflinching champion of the thing to be, faithful always to the future, while orthodox religion allied itself with the powers of the present, even of the past."⁷⁴ But if something has been gained, something has also been lost. Sri Aurobindo considered it necessary for the future that the spiritual content of these ideals be recovered in some form, though without undoing what rationalization has accomplished and without necessarily assigning a special role to Christianity or any other religion.

Brotherhood – or, in language more acceptable today, unity, consisting of "a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life"⁷⁵ – is, in his view, "the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity":

The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement.⁷⁶

If such a sense of unity were ever to become a widely effective

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force in human life, it would render less chimerical the prospect of the fulfilment of a “psychic prevision” that has taken various forms through the ages in different cultures, the persistent dream of “a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, . . . a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life.”⁷⁷

Accepting for the sake of argument that we as human beings may not have reached anywhere near the limits of our potential, we do not have to believe in supernatural intervention to imagine a transformation of our world ushering in a more luminous and harmonious future. It would then be reasonable to suppose that we are participating in an evolution from the infrarational to the suprarational with the rational mind as a transition between them. Sri Aurobindo speculates about what this could mean for our collective life:

It is even possible that our original state was an instinctive animal spontaneity of free and fluid association and that our final ideal state will be an enlightened, intuitive spontaneity of free and fluid association. Our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods. Our progress may be a devious round leading from the easy and spontaneous uniformity and harmony which reflects Nature to the self-possessed unity which reflects the Divine.⁷⁸

Niebuhr refers similarly to “the Christian feeling that history must move from the innocence of Adam to the perfection of Christ, from the harmony of life with life in unfree nature to the perfect love of the Kingdom of God.”⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo himself often draws on Judeo-Christian symbols in expressing his view of the origins and goal of history. But the institution of monarchy does not offer the closest parallel to his vision of the ideal as a “free and fluid association.” Better for his purpose is the more anarchical imagery connected with the Indian religio-philosophical concept of *lîlâ*, divine play, symbolized traditionally in the sports of Krishna in the groves of Vrindavan:

When will the world change into the model of heaven? When all mankind becomes boys and girls . . . playing together in the gardens of Paradise. The Semitic Eden was well enough, but Adam and Eve were too grown up and its God himself too old and stern and solemn for the offer of the Serpent to be resisted.⁸⁰

Since the Serpent’s offer of rational knowledge was accepted, we have long been banished from the carefree Eden of an infrarational existence. It remains to be seen whether we can recover the lost

harmony on a higher level. The indispensable condition for doing so is to overcome all that divides us and “to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not only ideally one divine family.”⁸¹

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This Very Garden is the Garden of Eden: Participating with Wittgenstein and Mystical Philosophers in Heaven Here and Now

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ABSTRACT

Philosophy and mysticism largely converge on the objective of overcoming alienation from reality and thus accessing or tasting, firsthand, deeper joyful dimension of life. Great mystical philosophers may be read as providing a Unitarian view of life where dualism of this world and other world, body and soul, matter and spirit is transcended. Taking Wittgenstein as a mystical philosopher, the paper seeks to show how he helps us vivify the world or unearth its deeper meaning anchored in the mystical or what transcends conceptual linguistic representations of it. Most Wittgenstein scholars have failed to put in proper perspective the primacy of the mystical leading to difficulties in approaching his views on the religious and the eschatological. Far from being antimetaphysical positivist or fideist, Wittgenstein's transtheistic mystical philosophy invokes a reading of the eschatological that echoes traditional mystical thinkers. Framing his thought in the perspective of major mystical figures and applying the same to the issue of afterlife, it is argued that Wittgenstein helps illumine certain nagging issues in dualistic exoteric religious view of afterlife while questioning simplistic this-worldly immanentist or otherworldly transcendentalist framing. Emphasizing the interface of the mystical with the ethical and the aesthetic in his fundamentally mystical approach to religion and culture, it is shown that we can read mystical philosophers and Wittgenstein in a way that faith in immortality gets a firmer foundation in the existential plane that is explored by mystics against more skeptical or secularist interpretations.

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Key words: Heaven, immortality, unity, transcendence, mystical aesthetic

...a man who lives rightly won't experience the problem as *sorrow*, so for him it will not be a problem, but a joy . . . a bright halo round his life, not a dubious background. --- Wittgenstein

Heaven will solve our problems, but not, I think, by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will all be knocked from under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem. --- C. S. Lewis

And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies, and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heaven, would have no weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good. --- C. S. Lewis

The good man's past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven. --- C. S. Lewis

WHITEHEAD HAS REFERRED to "basic insights or initial intuitions or feelings of mankind calling for explanations or justifications. Man's desire for immortality is one of these initial intuitions, or persistent dreams, or impulses." If we begin with this fundamental impulse of the human spirit, the question is not disputing their "truth" on this or that so-called scientific ground or explaining it away but how to express it. Believers and non-believers needn't dispute the matter taking all or none position but may better have a dialogue regarding how far we have succeeded in defining or understanding it correctly.

What is Paradise?

All men seek paradise or its images/shadow here on earth or its nearest approximations in this world such as innocence of childhood or freshness of youth. Frithjof Schuon, one of the foremost expositors of Tradition, has this to say in this regard:

What is paradise? It is the inward nature of pure Existence; to be in conformity with that nature is to be carried by the wave of becoming toward beatitude. To be in conformity with Existence is to submit; to submit ourselves to the celestial law, to conform to our own essence, the essence by which we exist and which is the innermost nature of things. Without Existence we would not be; how can we reasonably revolt against it and set ourselves against that by which we are, that, which makes us to be ourselves? The essence of Existence is blissful; opposition to that essence- the idolatry of contents or of accidents-leads us away from

Beatitude and encloses us in the blind alley of our own contingency and in the measureless hell of our own absurdity.¹

Man seeks Heaven

It needs just a moment's reflection to see that the issue of Heaven is neither an obsession of old schoolmen nor a subject for idle dreamers or escapists but concerns every man by virtue of being human. On it hinges the fate of people, believers and non-believers alike as it involves the question of meaning of life. If violence is a reaction to failure to finding love/being loved and agitation of spirit that fails to find repose in absence of the object it craves for by its very nature. The recent history of violence has much to do with the history of decline of understanding of Heaven in modern consciousness.

One can transpose to Islam and arguably to all transcendence centric traditions that posit our real home in the yonderland of Spirit, Kreeft's description of the medieval Christendom:

It was the world beyond the world that made all the difference in the world to this world. The Heaven beyond the sun made the earth "under the sun" something more than "vanity of vanities." Earth was Heaven's womb, Heaven's nursery, Heaven's dress rehearsal. Heaven was the meaning of the earth.²

Indeed deep down, everywhere, man refuses to believe his mortality. Besides the desire and somewhat intuitive conviction of immortality strengthened further by over a dozen rational arguments for the same we need to ask what is the harm in hoping for the best while preparing for the worst in any case. None of us can easily grant that love – whose very mention evokes supernatural or eternal aspect – can die, that beauty is merely natural phenomenon, that intelligence or that consciousness isn't somehow primordial, that the intelligence that asks the question about mortality or judges something as absurd should itself be accidental or absurd.

The essence of the idea of heaven informs every project of self transformation or search for overcoming sorrow/ignorance/alienation – the religio/philosophical-mystical quests for self-realization/enlightenment/Nirvana/Paradise of Essence/Illumination/Beatific vision. Kreeft's following words find echos traditions:

Home—that's what heaven is. It won't appear strange and faraway and "supernatural", but utterly natural. Heaven is what we were designed for. All our epics seek it: It is the "home" of Odysseus, of Aeneas, of Frodo, of E.T. Heaven is not escapist. Worldliness is escapist. Heaven is

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home.

People think heaven is escapist because they fear that thinking about heaven will distract us from living well here and now. It is exactly the opposite, and the lives of the saints and our Lord himself prove it. Those who truly love heaven will do the most for earth. It's easy to see why. Those who love the homeland best work the hardest in the colonies to make them resemble the homeland. "Thy kingdom come. ..on earth as it is in heaven."

..if we see life as a road to heaven, some of heaven's own glory will reflect back onto that road, if only by anticipation: the world is charged with the grandeur of God and every event smells of eternity.³

Mystical Philosophers on Heaven

For Socrates and Plato, philosophy is a preparation for death. Love helps us die before death or ascend higher and higher till we are face to face with the very heart of the Real. For traditional philosophers in general, the objective of philosophy was theosis, a vision of Truth and this involved some sort of access to the otherworld or transcendence of the binary of this and otherworld. For mystic-philosopher poets such as Ghalib, as for Kafka, the Judgment that is said to be a posthumous event is understood as an ongoing event or that happens every moment. For mystically inflected philosopher Levinas, this is not a last judgment but rather "the judgment of all the instants in time."⁴ For him eschatological "restores to each instant its full signification in that very instant." For him, life becomes meaningful not because of what will ultimately occur but because of how we live and act at each and every moment.⁵ For more rationalist camp – as in Spinoza, for instance,, heaven was life lived sub species aeternitatis. Dreyfus and Kelly's provocative *All Things Shining* shows how there remain a lot of entry points to certain space that partakes of Heaven – a fulfilled or meaningful life is the life giving shade of heaven we all seek here – open for those who don't know God as believers know Him. It is remembrance of heaven that sustains man's odyssey on earth.

Heaven is a space to be nurtured or cultivated – "*Ad-dunya mazra'atul aakhirah*" – and very few succeed in the task. We do have – the rich and the poor alike – access to heaven in seemingly trivial things but most are not interested to proceed further. Every small act of gratitude and love and attention to beauty is nurturing this space. Whether one is religious or secular, grace is available though we may not be able to receive it. Dreyfus and Kelly's brilliant *All Things Shining* shows how there remain a lot of entry points to heaven or what corresponds to heaven on earth – a fulfilled or meaningful life is the

life giving shade of heaven we all seek here – open for those who don't know God as believers know Him. The world is indeed a ravishing beauty -houri – that chooses to unveil before all who care to see. Dostoveskyean insight "This very garden is the Garden of Eden" is shared by saints of all traditions. How challenging it is to feel this when one strolls in one's garden. Take one's attitude to snow, for instance. Very few are able to appreciate the miracle – intoxicating, vivifying heavenly beauty of its crystals, serenity of spirit it evokes, otherworldly silence and joy it transports one to – in the first instance. It is great poets that teach us how everything can become a springboard to take flight to heaven. Take Hafiz (in Landisky's rather loose rendering), arguably the greatest ghazzal poet of the world:

Now is the time for the world to know
That every thought and action is sacred.
This is the time
For you to compute the impossibility
That there is anything
But Grace.
Now is the season to know
That everything you do
Is sacred.⁶

Heaven/God is really a state of love or attachment to the Absolute as manifested in Beauty/Joy:

In our drunkenness we were searching
The flower-garden of paradise;
Our surmise found its way through the dust
Raised by thy graceful walking.⁷

A truly liberated person is quite content and needs nothing more. And love is experiencing something of that heavenly perfection even now on earth.

Anyone who has really cultivated friendship or loved the graceful gestures and coquetry of children or spouses (and blessed are those who see God everywhere or, as Ibn Taymiyyah points out on his *Uboodiyyah*, can love all things in God or love God above everything or love everything for the sake of God the Beauty, the Most Loving or, with Abu Yazid Bistami, see God first and beloved object later in every encounter with anything) can understand Ghalib's point.

By melting down our whole existence
We have drunk our morning draught;

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The sun of Doomsday's morning
Is our brimful goblet⁸

In paradise there is a stream of wine
And a stream of honey,
But thy ruby lips are for me
Both the one and the other⁹

Those who have been blessed with a loving heart have entered
paradise of a sort here and now and since there is a stamp of eternity
on every experience of love it reverberates in every new world.

In this world one should not be absorbed
By the relishing of pleasure;
Our fly sits on sugar-candy,
And not on honey.¹⁰

Thy loving beauty, in the ways
Of heart-ravishing, has as its attributes
The waving ringlets and hair-thin waist
Of the phenomenal world.¹¹

Ghalib has called the divine displeasure a stream of honey with
the quality of wine. Since "the taste of wine is bitter to non-drunkards
and sweet and agreeable [this , incidentally is the literal meaning of
azb, the root word for *azab*, as especially emphasized in Ibn Arabi] to
drunkards so is the beloved's anger, disagreeable to non-lovers and
agreeable to lovers."

Man may be defined as transcendence oriented or perpetually
restless Heaven seeker. It is something evoking or invoking (or parasitic
on) Eternity/Heaven or semblance of it in ordinary experiences such
as sunshine and women and beaches and friends and music that keeps
us hooked to life or constitutes some sort of salvation for the laity. All
that takes us out of body, makes us dance in ecstasy, or swoon in
serenity and weep tars of love and gratitude or even just talking to
friends, sipping tea in silence, making love with spouse or kissing
one's child constitute secular man's share of life in Heaven." There is
a widespread draught of transcendence in secular cultures and
consequent exploration of various counterfeits or shortcuts. Daredevil
driving that kills thousands annually is seeking shortcut to heaven
here. Modern drug culture/ rampant alcoholism is ultimately linked
to squeezing of spaces for cultivating safer and tested methods for
tasting Heaven. In Islamic Sufi tradition it is clearly recognized *that
the life-in-immortality may be pursued here and now. In a commentary*

on discourses of Sufi Inayat Khan by Samuel Lewis we find that “once a person renounces, he is living his immortality and his life and affairs go on and on, regardless of the body or vehicle through which he functions.” In Buddhist tradition, Boddhisattav has a similar access to nirvana while in flesh. One can, without leaving the world, be detached from it and switch over to function from the standpoint of eternity as required by various philosophical and mystical traditions. Many Sufis have clearly expressed the viewpoint that the eschatological isn't to be construed as a far off event, totally divested from this world.

Heaven is only the manifestation of bliss in ourselves, and Hell is its suppression. The biblical meaning of “sin” is not so much wrong-doing, as doing that which will not merit happiness. We are our own judges and the degree of happiness or unhappiness in the end proves to be the Day of Judgment, for it is Bliss which is the final experience of deliverance. Therefore the Sufis say there is satisfaction (*Riza*) only in God, and not as the result of self-approval. ...heaven is a lasting state whose substance is at the basis of creation, but Hell is a world of fires fed by the creation, especially humanity. And so long as man is self-centered (e.g. *nufsaniat*) and has no vision of God, the forces that he has impelled or even created, build up fire by friction and abrasion and it is the friction and abrasion of our worldly behavior that sustain the Hell-fire.¹²

The Quran accuses man of heedlessness or inattention. In fact our experience of God has been identified as “attention without distraction” by Simone Weil. We haven't just heard of Heaven but we have lived it, seen it through a veil. It is thanks to Heaven's ecstasies that we continue to cherish life, sex, music, beauty. “Earth was Heaven's womb, Heaven's nursery, Heaven's dress rehearsal. Heaven was the meaning of the earth” as Kreeft notes. Heaven is symbolized in great art works and virgin nature, lived by children and simple minded and tasted by lovers. It is prophets, saints, sages, artists – messengers of love and beauty – that invite us to exchange the hell of our own making for the glory of Heaven. Indeed Heaven is accessible here and now, albeit partially, to all. And if we haven't found a semblance of heaven here, we can't get it there. It isn't a deal with insurance company that you pay premiums for life here and get returns there. Every moment is, to transpose Renan's metaphor for nation, a plebiscite for heaven or hell. God has ordained self determination. Every day we witness the Judgment, Ghalib would quip. Numerous writers including Kafka have, in their own way, expressed the same insight. This world is a shadow of heaven for those who have no greed. We all believe it is beautiful beyond

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imagination and aren't ready to exchange it for anything. If this weren't so we would consent to die. The oldest and poorest have tasted life's joys – and continue to taste it – and that is why they aren't ready to part with life. Aquinas in his *Summa* argued how the best joys life has to offer are all free.¹³

Kreeft explains our longing for heaven.

Talk about heaven and you'll get sneers. But talk about a mysterious dissatisfaction with life even when things go well—*especially* when things go well—and you'll get a hearing from man's heart, even if his lips will not agree.

No one longs for fluffy clouds and sexless cherubs, but *everyone* longs for heaven. No one longs for any of the heavens that we have ever imagined, but everyone longs for "something no eye has seen, no ear has heard, something that has not entered into the imagination of man, something God has prepared for those who love him."¹⁴

Heaven is a space to be cultivated in this world – "*Ad-dunyau mazra'atul aakhira*" – and unfortunately few succeed in the job. Every small act of gratitude and love and attention to beauty is nurturing this space. Dostoveskyean insight "This very garden is the Garden of Eden" is shared by saints of all traditions. How challenging it is to feel this when one strolls in one's garden.

Muslim Sufis have made much of the experience of ascension that gives a peep into Heaven and Muslim philosophers like Ibn Tufail have ventured to provide something analogous for philosophically inclined through the story of Hayy bin Yaqzan.

Taking Heaven Seriously

If a man succeeds in being loyal to himself or divine image on which he is created, he enters what has been called terrestrial paradise. It may, paradoxically, require not taking affairs of life too seriously as Plato would implore to take Heaven seriously. Taking affairs of life in a playful spirit – but not our assigned or chosen roles in that play as is emphasized in the notion of *svadharma* and the metaphor of life as a stage with God as Director– is taking Heaven seriously. Praying with all one's heart – praying and not petitioning for this or that boon but just praying for the sheer joy of it – is entry to heaven. Soulfully engaging in a ritual – living as if life itself is an elaborate ritual – is participating in heaven in a way. Religion is performance. To live in virtue is to be in heaven and that is why it is said that virtue is its own reward. All virtuous people know this. One here recalls Wittgenstein's insights on ethics and religion as autotelic self legitimizing language game.

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It is not that we don't have any inkling of Heaven at all or our access to it is available posthumously only. Without necessarily taking any position on posthumous Heaven or wishing to deny it or claiming Heaven is exhausted by all the good experienced here on earth, it needs to be emphasized that the deepest interest of truly religious view is not in the pleasure garden of posthumous Heaven but living a virtuous life, a life of easy conscience, a life not debased by sin and one experiences a reward in the form of sweetness or joy of *halawat-iiman/ihsan*.

Reflected Glory of Heaven

To be truly is to participate in the holy act of being, attuned to the vivifying unveilings of Being. Given things are metaphysically transparent and a flower is sufficient proof of God as Schuon has remarked, openness to nature and love are passports to heaven. There are numerous though impoverished or fragmented images of Heaven available for secular man and more efficacious symbols and methods for believers that transform the drab dense dark world into a ravishing bride. Those who have nothing, no worldly supports for contemplation of Heaven (like wives, children, parents, beautiful houses or work place) nevertheless have graces emanating from virgin nature and the world of imagination. "The sun shines in the prison as well every day," thus notes Azad in his immortal essay "The Fountainhead of Joy." "The sky showers dew" and clouds "bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers" and "bear light shade for the leaves when laid/ In their noon-day dreams." Everything can be taken away from us but not the power to contemplate, "to say I" and dwell in freedom or joy that is Spirit.

There is a heaven here and a heaven there and there is some difference between the two. If we fail to cultivate the former, we fail to win the later. Very few people are capable of overcoming despair – a life of "quiet desperation" – to live life as if heaven is its constant horizon and depth dimension and thus "reserve" their seats in otherworldly heaven. All education and religion consist in learning how to experience this world as heaven.

According to major Sufis, living a life that was pleasing to God and attaining salvation or heaven depended on "serving the needy, having a peaceful heart, feeling good will toward other Muslims, and thinking well of others. Attaining a peaceful heart assures the Sufi that even in an inchoate and confusing world, the peace of having become sublimated into God's Ultimate Reality is infinite."

Reza Shah Kazmi explains a key teaching of the illustrious Companion of the Prophet and the Pole of spirituality, Ali thus:

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It is, of course, true that the highest degree of spirituality transcends the desire for Paradise and the fear of Hell, and the moral conduct proportioned thereto. But this means that when such higher degrees of realization have been attained, the state of the soul is one that can properly be characterized as 'paradisaal', that is, as being already so utterly content with the beatific presence of God that it can desire nothing more. This state of soul is called in the Qur'ân *al-nafs al-mum ma' inna* (89: 27), 'the soul at peace in absolute certainty.'¹⁵

The mere thought of Paradise is itself a purification of the mind and heart, a means of averting from the soul the ever-present temptation to seek its ultimate happiness and well-being in this world alone.¹⁶

All joy felt here on earth is loaned from Heaven. Simone Weil, with the world fraternity of sages, noted that joy (embodied quintessentially in heaven) is contact with reality and sorrow distance from it.

The other world is better described as higher world and the two worlds – here and there – are ultimately not separated. The Beyond can be within though too deep to be accessed ordinarily. By virtue of being humans and irrespective of religious affiliations, we are not ready to go for certain sins. It means all of us live lives with some consciousness of sin – a point that haunted Wittgenstein so much – that costs us exile from heaven that is the serenity of spirit that accompanies clear conscience. It is implied in a prophetic tradition that all noble things that delight the soul are from heaven.

Wittgenstein on Heaven

In order to understand how heaven is not bought through realizing a postdated cheque or on maturation of an insurance claim, but to be participated in here and now or previewed on earth or how fulfilled life is life lived under the shade of heaven, we need to discuss how philosophy involves reflecting or seeking heavenly horizon of the world. If God is the Meaning of life, as Wittgenstein noted, and heaven is where God resides in his glory, pursuit of heaven shaped hole in human consciousness is the task of philosophy. If the question of Being is the central question as Heidegger noted and unveiling of Being is what makes life an adventure of joy and we find wonder both as the beginning and end of philosophy and mysticism – it is wonder that keeps us hooked to life or makes life worth living or meaningful – we need to explore the central quest of philosophy as one of finding heaven. Philosophy has been an endeavour to fight fear and ignorance and find the light and peace that reconciles us to life or makes affirmation of life possible. If heaven is a space where the sting of

time or sorrow or death is no more and one basks in the shade of eternity, we can see how art and philosophy converge in their tasks for recovering or unearthing our share of heavenly life.

For Wittgenstein, to be religious was not a matter of speculation or doctrine but of how one acted and oriented his or her life.¹⁷ In Ray Monk's influential biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, we find:

...For Wittgenstein, all philosophy, in so far as it is pursued honestly and decently, begins with a confession. He often remarked that the problem of writing good philosophy and of thinking well about philosophical problems was one of the will more than the intellect—the will to resist temptation to misunderstand, the will to resist superficiality. What gets in the way of genuine understanding is often not one's lack of intelligence, but the presence of one's pride. Thus: 'The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work.' The self-scrutiny demanded by such a dismantling of one's pride is necessary, not only to be a decent person, but also to write decent philosophy. 'If anyone is unwilling to descend into himself, because this is too painful, he will remain superficial in his writing.'¹⁸

Thus, as noted by Daniel Patrick Corrigan in his thesis *Wittgenstein and Religion*, we find Wittgenstein positing the need to inculcate a quasi-religious type of attitude in order to consider problems in a genuine manner, which explains his remark that he could not help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.¹⁹

While as there are methodological and doctrinal differences between religions or between religion and philosophy, there is a consensus on the point that sorrow/ignorance/fear/fleeting pleasures/ self centrism are to be overcome and the reward is a life, a fuller life, an illumined horizon, a peace, a participation in beauty and those things that heaven/proximity to God/Real embodies. Wittgenstein overcomes familiar debates on existence of God or religion vs. science or charges of incoherence or groundlessness of religious narratives including the eschatological narratives. Employing philosophy as therapy, he succeeds in battling linguistic and conceptual cobwebs and illuminating our path and delimiting from within the territory for the ethical, the aesthetic and the religious and given he considers the later more important, he pleads, like Plato, for taking them seriously. This achieves theosis or participation in the Kingdom of God. Given, for Wittgenstein, "God's reality is not one of a kind; He is not a being among beings. The word 'God' is not the name of a thing"²⁰ it follows that "God cannot be assessed by a common measure which applies to things other than God." Commitment to religious

life, living as if one takes God as absolute value or Last Judgment as something in light of which organizes every action solves the problem of suffering or ignorance or sin and one achieves a blessed life or participation in heavenly life. In Islamic tradition it is explicitly asserted that those who don't know heaven here can't access it hereafter. And as such this world is called as a space for cultivating the otherworld. As Chittick puts it:

The world after death is the awakening to the endless self-disclosures of the Real. The stages of the return to God in this life map out in broad strokes the infinite imaginal realm where disclosures will be seen for what they are. Every stage on the path to God prefigures one of the homesteads of the next world. Human nature finds the imperative to follow the path in the hunger to know the divine names and find their substance within the self, a hunger that is commonly known as love.²¹

Wittgenstein considers belief in the Last Judgment not as a hypothesis regarding a future event that some debate or dispute about or take skeptically or weigh its probability. It isn't a testable hypothesis but is an absolute for a believer in so far as it predominates and determines much of the believer's thinking. "The absolute beliefs are the criteria, not the object of assessment."²² If these beliefs provide the criteria by which other things in the believer's life are evaluated, then the character of these beliefs is falsified in so far as they are construed as hypotheses. Wittgenstein remarks, "The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business."²³

Wittgenstein's point 'The real question of *life after death* isn't whether or not it exists, but even if it does what problem this really solves' coupled with the remarks that "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death" and "If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present" and "Or life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits"²⁴ set the stage for resolving the conflict on locale of heaven and highlight the essential point informing religious quest for eternal life as concerning depth, mystery and joy of life or its unfolding.

The clarification by D.Z. Phillips that eternal life is not 'something which happens after human life on earth is over' but 'the reality of goodness, that in terms of which human life is to be assessed.' – implying that the immortality of the soul is an ethical one and not quasi-scientific or metaphysical is quite radical in bracketing objections against another posthumous life. The great fraternity of mystics and ethical philosophers have clarified that reward centric otherworldly

oriented project has some reference to the self that is ultimately to be annihilated by the truly liberated or devoted. A free man's worship or saintly worship has no reference to calculus of reward but to utter transcendence of the self that has such anxieties.

The *Tractatus* is, self avowedly, an attempt to demarcate what can be said from what cannot be said. Yet it is those things which cannot be said, which show forth themselves or summon us in a way that are for Wittgenstein the most important. For Wittgenstein, the world is

the totality of facts (states of affairs), and these are accidental. Matters of value, and here he has in mind ethical, aesthetic, and religious matters, cannot be mere accidents. They are what he calls matters of 'absolute value.' If these things cannot be mere accidents, then they must have their source outside the world of facts. Thus, 'the mystical' is the realm of 'absolute value,' outside the world of fact.²⁵

Wittgenstein's personal ethic and certain biographical facts show he had intimations of eternal life and it is in this context that we can understand his deep concern for spiritual welfare of his friends, his idea that life imposes certain duties on us and accordingly his statement that "Mind you I don't believe what Kierkegaard believed, but of this I am certain, that we are not here in order to have a good time."²⁶ and the conception of the time one has in this life as a gift, his unconventional attitude towards secular carriers or vocations, his renunciation of his property, his austerity in life and manners, his independence in thought and action, his nostalgia for peasant life in Russia, his alienation from his times that he characterized as dark ages and many puzzles in his biography.

Wittgenstein's Road to the Garden

For Wittgenstein the metaphysical self that constitutes us transcends the world – both the willing subjects and the knowing subjects are one and both are outside of the world. His invitation to transcend language and thought is invitation to participate in intimations of eternal life – to see what is, to see things *sub species aeternitatis*, to see solution in aesthetics, to live rather than think the mystery that life is. God is not a hypothesis that one needs to prove or could question – He is the ground of every perception, every imagination, every conception or thought, every experience for the mystic or in the universe of a true believer. As Wittgenstein puts it there is no answer as there is no question where nothing can be said. All such statement of Wittgenstein as "...my will is world will" "How things stand is God" "Everything is perfect" imply a deep conviction about unity

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and a vision of perfect harmony between the self and the “alien will” called God. These make comprehensible Dostoyevsky’s Zossima’s point that “We don’t understand that life is a paradise [at present], for we have only to wish to understand this and it will immediately appear before us in all its beauty” and Rabbi Heschel’s point that “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.”

Wittgenstein’s endeavor was to save the intelligence from the bewitchment of language. The very fact that things exist is mystical implies we can only gaze at it, dissolve into its primordial mystery, love it and celebrate it.

Wittgenstein had mystic experiences of both the ecstatic and nature-mystical kind. Seeing creation as wondrous is what Einstein correctly defined as religious or mystical attitude. God is attention without distraction as Simone Weil would say. He is the Mystery at the heart of everything. For Wittgenstein God is approached in all these ways and doubting our experience of wonder, of mystery, of eternity, of the ethical or unconditional goodness or his urge for it is absurd. Indeed God is the case and only the fools say in their hearts there is no God.

All of Wittgenstein’s work was dedicated to the “glory of God” as he once said to his friend Dury.²⁷ This implies he viewed everything from the pedestal of Spirit/Otherworld. When one sees that ethics and aesthetics that concern/move us most fundamentally are linked to what transcends the kingdom of self and are really powered from the above – the Kingdom of God – we find it of infinite significance to reorient our lives so that it is God/Other/non-self centric and that is our deepest interest as well. The fruit of this orientation is disappearance of what is problematic in life and experiencing the problem as a joy instead and wrapping of life by a bright halo.²⁸ It was this orientation that made Wittgenstein wonder what for are amenities. He was the monk in the true sense.

Wittgenstein has explained how the eschatological can be approached by deepening insight into ethics. For him ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the ordinary sense) and he explains that “There must be some sort of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but this must lie in the action itself.”²⁹ It has been aptly explicated here that “If we assume that it is a person’s actions and the way those actions are performed that create a life, then the ethical desert of those actions is simply that life itself, and since life and the world are said to be one, the ethical reward is nothing else but the fact with which the world looks back at you. ...your ethical reward is no more nor no less than the discovery of your own character.”

Sages from diverse traditions would concede essential insight regarding mystical ethics and the eschatological. For Swedenborg and like Ibn Arabi, for instance, people choose their stations in the other world. God only unveils their reality. People judge themselves in the light of the Absolute. Choosing to live inside the cocoon of limiting self amounts to choosing self exile from the Real or obstructing Divine Mercy as hell is self love and nothing burns there but self will as one Christian mystic has said.

There is a joy of the spirit available to a happy man who has consented to be nothing. There are no problems and the riddle gets dissolved for Wittgenstein putting thoughts or philosophy to peace and that is the end of philosophical/mystical quest.

Wittgenstein's remark "I believe the best way of describing [this feeling] is to say that when I have it *I wonder at the existence of the world*. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as 'how extraordinary that anything should exist' or 'how extraordinary that the world should exist'"³⁰ is the key to cultivating this world in a way that it unfolds as the Garden. Wonder is the key to this unfolding. Efforts at enchantment of the world involve poetry of a sort which is defamiliarization or keeping wonder alive. Wonder is what chases boredom away and makes life interesting and meaningful.

Wittgenstein's suggestion that genuinely religious utterances do not necessarily involve ontological implications may be problematic but his insistence that they express a fundamental orientation toward one's terrestrial life is valuable and helps fight nihilistic consequences of loss of certain theological narratives and modernity's secularizing critiques. Such statements as 'Christianity is not a doctrine' – that is, 'not . . . a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul' – but rather 'a description of something that actually takes place in human life.' In other words: ' "consciousness of sin" is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith,' and '[t]hose who speak of such things . . . are simply describing what has happened to them, whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it'³¹ relativize the significance of the question or belief of continuation of self beyond the demise of the body. "It is not *necessary* that anything need follow from such a conviction" or the notion of immortality appraised as a quasi-empirical hypothesis due to the very language in which it is couched.³² The assertions that 'after death a timeless state will begin' or 'at death a timeless state begins' . . . do not notice that they have used the words 'after' and 'at' and 'begins' in a temporal sense, and that temporality is embedded in their grammar³³ and thus it may well be a misunderstanding to construe the notion of immortality "quantitatively as more-of-the-same; *more* life after this life, *more* time

after death" and what separates the believer and non-believer here is not a difference in their respective *postmortem* anticipations" but "the difference is exhibited in their respective existential attitudes towards *this* life." Drury recalls Wittgenstein once remarking: "If you and I are to live religious lives, it mustn't be that we talk a lot about religion, but that our manner of life is different. It is my belief that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God."³⁴ Wittgenstein sees a connection between 'the immortality of the soul' and an experience of responsibility 'that even death couldn't stop.'³⁵

Wittgenstein is concerned, above all, with the happy life as an image of life divine and that he links with transcendence of desiring or willing self. His problem is ethical and existential and his proposed solution too is on these planes that have little to do with language or representation business. His solution involves contemplating, looking, wondering, loving rather than speculating or questioning. His object (ethical/aesthetical/religious or mystical) is not in the world, is untouched by scientific discoveries or any speculative exercise. His concern is metaphysical and metaphysical is what he calls mysterious, mystical, outside the world. He was interested in speaking without words — "conveying thoughts by themselves without words"³⁶ He thought, with Goethe, that we need to learn from contemplation of untrammelled nature rather than laboratory experiment and hypothesis that distort the truth.³⁷

It has been aptly noted that Wittgenstein's response to the petitions: 'What do you believe, Wittgenstein? Are you a skeptic? Do you know whether you will survive death?' was that he didn't know³⁸ or, more precisely, 'I can't say'³⁹ and his reluctance to either embrace or renounce belief in immortality is attributable not to agnosticism but to suspension of judgment regarding what is not to be framed in propositional terms or experiencing a particular *kind* of incomprehension due to his initial inability to apply the 'picture.'⁴⁰

Conclusion: Finding oneself in Heaven

To live life divine or in the shade of heaven is to see how, after the fog of passions and the blindness of desiring self is overcome, God constitutes all pervasive Environment (*al-Muhit* in the Quranic parlance) that normal man lives, moves and has his being in. Adam saw God, the essences before the Fall as the fog of passions and desires had not blurred his vision and this constituted the bliss of the Garden he enjoyed. Things are metaphysically transparent; only we need to possess the right view as the Buddha said and explained, paradoxically, that the right view is no view. God is there so close

and in fact the light with which the eyes see as Ghazzali said. Seeing through eyes rather than with eyes and thus bridging subject-object duality is seeing God. God is the Light of the world. The world is lighted up. This very garden is the Garden of Eden if one could see, as Father Zossima of Dostovesky would put it.

In Levinasean terms of ethical metaphysics, we may appropriate Wittgenstein for a conception of religio-mystical life that goes beyond the categories of ontology and experience in which we come to God by way of cultivating divine character and charity or welcoming the other – the stranger, the widow and the orphan (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

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Faultlines in Paradise – Indigenous People and Conservation Areas

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ABSTRACT

If the dominant strand in the approach to Nature that spread around the world from Europe was to dominate and exploit it, another strand, that has ancient roots in conceptions of paradise but increased in strength from the 19th-20th centuries, is to conserve it. If these two strands seem contradictory, in practice they often seem to work together. Are India's last 'wild ecosystems' being divided up between industries and conservation spaces? If so, what space is left for the indigenous peoples who have lived in these areas since recorded history? India has about 550 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 104 National Parks, including 51 Tiger Reserves, all set up since the 1930s. Indigenous People often see themselves as the real guardians of the land and its species. They hunt and exploit these species, but traditionally exercise restraint in what they take. Big dam and mining projects have displaced the largest extent of forest areas and tribal communities alike. But India's wildlife sanctuaries are estimated to have displaced over 100,000 tribal people, and threaten many times this number. Does conservation have to be conceived and practised in this way, by removing those people who understand forest ecosystems most deeply? Do conservationists collude in a division of India's forest areas that sacrifices many forests and their human cultures to industry, while preserving 'sanctuaries' that are 'ethnically cleansed' of their human inhabitants? Could it be that insisting on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the surest path to ensuring Rights of Nature?

Key words: Indigenous Peoples – Protected Areas – Rights of Nature – conservation - mining

WHEN WE SURVEY the world's natural beauty and fecundity of species, we confront a range of soul-searching questions. As a core

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part of our human 'management' of planet earth, our extractive economy devastates numerous ecosystems. What have we done with the beauty and vast diversity of natural species who share this earth with us, and their ecosystems?

Most religious texts view the vast web of natural life on earth as, in a fundamental sense, the fruit of divine creation. If we believe in science, and the evolution of earth's species as having followed laws of nature, we may well consider the conservation of these species as of no less fundamental value.

But are the indigenous peoples who still live alongside the majority of terrestrial species, preserving ecosystems by not over-harvesting them, of any less value? Most indigenous peoples promote a ritualised restraint in what they take from nature, and a self-image, at least, of protecting nature, which does seem fundamental to the value system of most indigenous cultures; even if it is also true that key species were exterminated by early hunters, such as the Moa (giant flightless birds) in New Zealand;¹ while in some regions the ritualised restraint has been undermined in recent years, by intense external pressures.

The ways of conserving nature practised by indigenous peoples and conservationists often differ. But by contrast to both, many professional scientists and economists, and the financial or industrial entities and politicians promoting 'extractive' projects that these experts work on, seem to view nature primarily as a 'resource', and 'development' as a matter of exploiting natural resources with greatest efficiency.

Dominating and over-exploiting nature is a shadow of western civilisation. This history emerges from patterns of mass hunts, deforestation and mining inherited from ancient times. One example is the hunting of wildlife on a large scale during the Raj (as under Hindu and Mughal rulers). The latest manifestation of this hunting syndrome is the hunting mafias that continue killing tigers and other key species today.

Another aspect is how fundamental this view of nature-as-resource is to disciplines such as Economics and Engineering. Mining projects in particular, and the proliferation of big dams and coal projects, are at the heart of an immensely rapid assault on some of India's (and the world's) best-surviving ecosystems. The impacts of hundreds of mining projects (outlined for example in CSE 2008) come under the definition of *Ecocide*.²

Those who focus only on the environmental destruction often miss a whole other dimension of related impacts, on Adivasis and others who have long lived alongside nature – especially in terms of cultural genocide, that emerges from the same source as the ecocide.

Noam Chomsky has expressed well the view that indigenous people and their movements are at the forefront of conserving nature.³ Many studies have shown that the parts of the world where indigenous people have been in control of their natural environment have preserved about 80 per cent of all terrestrial biodiversity.⁴ This applies in India too, and the cost of evicting forest communities is calculated as a thousand times the cost of supporting co-existence; evidence increasingly suggests that tribal communities are protecting the areas of forest they depend on – often against Forest Department plans.⁵

One expression of this is in Declarations on the Rights of Nature or of Mother Earth, such as the Cochabamba Declaration from Bolivia in April 2010, at a meeting presided over by indigenous leaders.⁶ Indigenous outlooks have been fundamental to these declarations, although the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) proposed a similar declaration in 2012, adopted at its World Conservation Congress at Hawaii in 2016, which puts less emphasis on co-ordinating Rights of Nature with Rights of Indigenous peoples, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2006.

In what follows, we shall ask to what extent the extractivist assault on ecosystems and indigenous peoples alike emerges from faultlines in our conception of paradise. From this conceptual overview, we shall look at recent evictions of Adivasis from India's sanctuaries; at extractivist pressures on 'paradise'; and at indigenous movements to conserve their environment.

Conceptions of paradise: garden, sacred grove, wildlife sanctuary

Creating a garden has often been a symbol of recreating paradise; and the Persian walled garden was called *paradeisos* by Greeks (Old Persian *pairidaeza*, Hebrew *pardes*). Xenophon, in the 4th century BC, as a Greek mercenary commander, witnessed the Persian Achaemenid garden, which he is first to call *paradeisos*. Mughals brought the walled garden to India, while Italian and French formal gardens epitomised at Versailles also trace back to this concept. In India, the formal layout, known in Hindi/Urdu as *char bagh* (four parts), survives in many institutional gardens; similarly in France and other countries. On the whole this kind of garden involves geometric patterns of predominantly introduced (non-native) plants, arranged around water channels and fountains. The aesthetic tends to be quite regimented and removed from 'wild' nature.

In Britain, the walled garden has rather different connotations, less regimented and more informal, surviving for example in the Chelsea Physic Garden in London, which was created in the

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seventeenth century.

For many of us who spend time cultivating gardens, paradise is an idea that inspires us, in terms of harmonising natural beauty and creating a refuge for wildlife.

But most gardens are 'walled' in the sense of fences, hedges or other structures containing them. So what do we include and exclude? Do we use chemicals to suppress local species? Is this still part of what is leading to the 'silent spring' highlighted by Rachel Carson (1962), indicating the killing of many species of insects, slugs etc, that in turn causes a decimation of songbirds? Also, our gardens and sanctuaries need understanding in relation to how we, as a species, treat wilder, remoter and vaster ecosystems that are getting devastated by industrial exploitation.

Many gardens worldwide are still extremely formal and manicured. Most gardening involves extensive weeding of unwanted local plants, including many wild flowers, perceived as 'weeds', since likely to overwhelm more sensitive introduced species. The whole effect is managed by owners and professional gardeners, often using herbicides, insecticides/pesticides and chemical fertilizers. In these ways, many gardens represent nature strictly under human management; and our customs around gardening need to be understood in relation with the ferocious domination of nature expressed by the Western model of extractivism and forced industrialisation.

This involves repeating patterns of extensive deforestation and disruption of water bodies; as well as the violent history of elite hunts, from ancient Assyria, to Norman, Hindu and Mughal aristocrats, morphing into British era 'big game' hunting in the colonies. After India's Independence, the hunting of tigers and wildlife actually increased until the Wildlife (Protection) Act curtailed this in 1972,⁷ and Project Tiger was set up in 1973, establishing the National Tiger Conservation Authority, which oversees India's Tiger Reserves.

Today's hunting mafia and wildlife trade, under a transformed political economy, represents an illegal network of illegal poaching. It is of interest that the Pardhi community, classified as a Criminal Tribe (CT) by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, and, like other CTs, in effect re-stigmatised by the Habitual Offenders Act (1952) as a Denotified Tribe (DNT), have played a prominent part in tiger poaching. Originally a specialised hunting community with no agricultural tradition, many Pardhis have lost all connection with the forest; some are urban waste disposers, in Bhopal for example. Others have used their skills for hunting tigers illegally.⁸

Many conservation organisations in India work with urban schools

to inspire a love for nature, but the idea of nature promoted is largely one of wild spaces devoid of human beings – something which has historically never existed. Among other education models, Muskaan, in Bhopal, is a democratic school that works with Pardhi and other Adivasi communities to recover their sense of identity and history.⁹

This history is relevant because a large proportion of nature reserves worldwide have their origin in hunting reserves for royalty, nobles or colonial elites. Draconian punishment of Adivasis and other indigenous peoples if they are found hunting in sanctuaries, or even outside, even in areas that have been their hunting territories over generations, seems to originate in the harsh punishment of ‘commoners’ when they were found ‘poaching’ in such reserves. As recently as the 18th century in Britain, poachers were executed or transported to Australia for hunting deer or rabbits. In India, Adivasis are often arrested for hunting, even though a forest village’s hunting territory was probably what originally defined its boundary.¹⁰

Many of India’s indigenous cultures continue an ancient custom of preserving a sacred grove near each village, where there is a taboo on taking firewood or defiling the space. This custom represents a mode of conservation that forms an intrinsic element in Adivasi cultures, and has undoubtedly helped preserve huge biodiversity.¹¹

To put it bluntly, when looking at the industrialisation angle, our tendency, considering the overall impacts of our species, seems to have been to keep nature in pretty gardens, while destroying wild ecosystems that human communities as well as countless other species depend on. A telling example is the manicured gardens close to a number of large industrial projects in India (and other countries), paid for by mining/metal-producing companies, as if their appalling pollution and devastation of the environment is more than compensated by pretty, immaculately well-ordered gardens, sometimes around a Hindu temple - for example at the Laxminarayan temple complex built by IMFA’s Ferro-Alloys factory at Therubali in Rayagada district, Odisha.

Meanwhile, the word ‘*pardes*/paradise’ was used in biblical writings for the mythical Garden of Eden. Many travellers, observing the abundance of species in pristine rainforests, have used the term ‘paradise’ to conjure a sense of nature in ‘pristine’ form, evoking the Garden of Eden. ‘Birds of paradise’ are exceptionally colourful species in and around New Guinea, that were hunted by natives, and then much more intensively for the European trade in exotic ladies’ hats. Similarly, increasingly large areas of the ‘paradise’ of the Amazon rainforest have been devastated, and turned into hell for its human inhabitants over generations, for example by the rubber boom and

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more recently to make soya plantations or to feed cattle for beef.

So do our conceptions of 'paradise' and 'conservation' carry certain faultlines? It may prove vital to understand and transcend this situation if we humans are to survive in this 'Garden of Eden' ecosphere we inhabit.

The *pardes* of the Achaemenid kings in Persia was apparently a space within royal hunting parks. They seem to have inherited this tradition from the Assyrians, for whom hunting lions in particular was a ritual that validated kingship. Before them, the 'hanging gardens of Babylon' seem to have preserved an even earlier approach to landscaping. Xenophon and his Spartan general Lysander commented that the Persian kings excelled not only in war but also in gardening; and that their *paradeisos* collected plants from distant land, especially fruit-trees.

The Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks, set up in California and Wyoming-Montana-Utah states respectively in the USA during the 1860s-1890s, are understood as among the world's first national parks. John Muir (1838-1914), key founder of the Sierra Club in 1892, was an inspiring genius behind these conservation efforts, and is often called 'father of the national park'. It is significant to understand that, during these decades, the indigenous Americans who used to inhabit and hunt in the demarcated area of Yellowstone, including for example some of the Eastern Shoshone tribe (contemptuously referred to as 'sheepstealers' by their white contemporaries) were rigorously excluded - a pattern repeated in all too many national parks since.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, established in 1948) defined National Parks as 'Protected Areas' set aside for conservation purposes in 1969. This definition in a sense hardened the tendency to exclude native human inhabitants. In India for example, it extended the colonial era category of 'Excluded Areas', and has severely curtailed tribal rights to hunting and gathering in their surrounding forest areas. India's Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 rationalised the present system of National Parks ('category II type of Protected Area') and Wildlife Sanctuaries ('category IV type of Protected Area'). India is presently estimated to have 104 National Parks (40,501 sq kms), with stricter restrictions on human activity, and 551 Wildlife Sanctuaries (covering 119,775 sq kms). Together these include 51 Tiger Reserves.¹²

Forest dwellers' evictions

The shadow side of conservation therefore needs to be understood in terms of a 'green imperialism',¹³ that continues today. Expulsions from National Parks and Wildlife Areas have accelerated since the

1960s in India, following the trend set in the USA and African countries, as we shall see. In many ways, these expulsions, often carried out with extraordinary insensitivity and cruelty, echo Christian conceptions of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the original 'Garden of Eden' paradise.

All too often in India, the united front of environmental activism and tribal rights, so conspicuous in the Niyamgiri movement,¹⁴ has been absent. Tribal land and forest rights are being trampled in hundreds of areas, with industrial takeovers, big dam projects, commercial forestry plantations¹⁵ and many other scams, often with too little support by conservationists, whose main focus is mainly on designated National Parks and Sanctuaries.

Conservationists have been much criticised for undermining tribal rights, over the issues of the Forest Rights Act (2006) as well as National Parks/Wildlife Sanctuaries, from which dozens of tribal communities have been displaced by force, often in the name of saving tigers.¹⁶ Instead of supporting tribal peoples' initiatives to conserve forests, some conservationists seem to be aiding the eviction process.¹⁷ Notorious cases of Adivasis recently expelled from forest dwellings include Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh¹⁸ among many others.

This situation in India echoes a similar situation worldwide of indigenous people being evicted from iconic wildlife parks.¹⁹ One notorious example is the Ik people in north Uganda,²⁰ who were evicted from Kidepo Valley National Park from 1958 (when Uganda was still a British colony), with notorious callousness. Anthropologist Colin Turnbull's book *The Mountain People* (1972) gives an extraordinarily negative analysis of their society, seemingly oblivious to the negative impacts, including famine conditions, caused by restricting their traditional hunting grounds through exclusion from the demarcated area of this park; and to the anthropologist's own callous behaviour in studying and photographing people as they starved to death, and then publishing such a negative appraisal of their society.²¹

Another example is the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, established in 1931 and renamed in 2000 as the Bagalagadi Transfrontier Park, 75 percent of which is in Botswana and the remainder in the northern Cape of South Africa. Soon after this Protected Area was set up, its indigenous people were thrown out, with what is apparent now as blatant racism and cruelty.²² The main people, known as the !Khomani San, were a group of 'Bushmen' who spoke a language called N/uu, thought to have become extinct, but rediscovered around 2000 among descendants of those evicted.²³ These people called themselves N' n' e, which translates as 'home

people', and now refer to themselves simply as 'Die Boesman', Afrikaans for 'wild people', i.e. Bushman. Before these people were evicted, a study of them was made in 1935 by academics from Witwatersrand University to determine whether they were 'pure' enough specimens of the Bushman race to be allowed to stay in their territory, which fell within the new park. This involved measuring their skulls, genitals and linguistic skills; and it seems they were evicted partly because their language was significantly different from previously documented San languages, or adulterated by the Nama language that they also spoke. Bizarrely, the eviction happened through a British Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg in 1936, that took 75 of these people to exhibit them there. They were invited on the grounds that this would create sympathy for their cause, but they were given no transport back, and when they finally arrived back at their homesteads, they found their huts and possessions destroyed and were given strict orders never to return. The post-apartheid government has tried to rectify their situation through a land claim, starting in 1997, whose origin is this horrific example of conservationist injustice.

The situation of tribal or indigenous people in Africa may seem far from that in India, but some issues, such as takeovers of forest land for industries, plantations, dams or wildlife parks are all too similar. In Ethiopia, Indian companies are among those whose plantations are displacing indigenous inhabitants.²⁴ About 200,000 indigenous people are threatened with dispossession by 'development projects' in Ethiopia's remote Omo Valley, where the Kwegu tribe face starvation.²⁵

In India, Gladson Dungdung's book *Adivasis and Their Forest* (2019) summarizes the continuing history of injustice. As elsewhere in the world, India's Indigenous communities have safeguarded forests and their biodiversity more than anyone. Survival International's 2014 Report *Parks Need Peoples* documents the situation. As examples: Chenchu Adivasis have been under intense pressure to move out from their villages located in Amrabad Tiger Reserve in Telengana. Their Gram Sabhas (village councils, mandated by the Forest Rights Act and other legislation) have been undermined and manipulated into giving bogus 'consent' for 'voluntary relocation'.²⁶ Baiga from Jholar village began to be evicted from Kanha Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) in 1968; and Baiga are under present threat to move out from Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, Chhattisgarh, forbidden from farming there, and told that 'forest rights don't apply in Tiger Reserves' – which is untrue.

The very idea of 'voluntary relocation', promoted by the Wildlife

Conservation Society-India with US funds, is contradicted repeatedly by villagers' experience. For example, Jenu Kuruba Adivasis have been evicted from Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka; and J.K. Thimma, a Jenu Kuruba leader, has recently spoken out against pressure for them to move out of the nearby Nagarhole Tiger Reserve.²⁷ In 2016 the head of India's Tiger Conservation Authority announced the planned removal of 300,000 more people, from over 700 villages earmarked for removal, especially from 35 Tiger Reserves. This despite the amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972) in 2006, which recognised the rights of Scheduled Tribal citizens inside Protected Areas (section 38V950).

On the one hand, conservationists take what seems the correct, longterm overview, that India's natural, biodiverse forests are disappearing appallingly fast, as in so many other countries too. But the main culprit is generally the industrial invasion and decimation of forestlands, for minerals, timber, land and water; and this same invasion is simultaneously devastating Adivasi or tribal and many other farming communities. Adivasis themselves are facing mass displacement in many forest areas, from where they've been brutally dispossessed by megadams and industries, their lands and ways of life obliterated.

Of course, one of the greatest of Adivasi skills lies in hunting. This brings a seemingly unavoidable conflict with conservationist aims of conserving and overseeing scarce species. It is probably true that certain tribal peoples throughout central and northeast India have been complicit with hunting and timber mafias – a situation clearly compounded by fury at the higher value placed on animals' lives than their own.

In this context, the arming of wildlife guards in Kaziranga National Park for instance (first established as a game reserve in Assam during the 1900s, with hunting forbidden in 1938), has led to gruesome deaths of tribal people. Allegedly, men and boys have been tortured and shot, mostly members of the Karbi tribe,²⁸ who have suffered a long history of prejudice and human rights abuse.²⁹ For local Karbis, Kaziranga is an ancestral entity, so the continuing expulsion of Karbis is an affront to the park's name, which is definitely from the Karbi language and culture, so should carries some hope for symbiosis between conservationist aims and the local culture. From 2020, expansion of the Kaziranga park threatens many more Karbis with expulsion. An official from the district administration reportedly told Karbi villagers: 'dismantle your homes voluntarily or face eviction'.³⁰ Is such callousness a betrayal of all such hope?

It is well known that security forces, including forest guards as

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well as armed police, have committed atrocities with impunity on countless tribal citizens during recent decades in India, compounded by patterns of extreme corruption.³¹ Given such a pattern, doesn't the arming of guards in sanctuaries almost guarantee abuse? In a situation of well armed poachers, the need for arming those who are guarding the rhinoceros and elephant inhabitants of the National Park is understandable, but who can guard local villagers from excesses by the armed guards?

To heal the divide between conservationists and tribal rights activists, it is necessary to recognise an extremely ancient pattern of coexistence. In Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve (also in Karnataka), Soliga Adivasis, who 'worship tigers as gods', have been officially allowed to remain, even in the park's core area. Tiger numbers increased here from 35 to 68 during 2010-2014, proving that coexistence is possible, and where a harmonious relationship with authorities exists, can be beneficial for wildlife.³²

A middle ground is urgently needed therefore, and conservationists need to join forces with tribal rights activists to confront the land-grabs and devastation of ecosystems caused by mining companies such as Adani whose coal projects in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha are destroying both biodiversity and cultural diversity – as also in Australia.³³ Such joint activism is urgently needed for example in the Saranda forest (Jharkhand) and many other forested areas whose high biodiversity is proof of this coexistence.³⁴

Adivasi Economics is a fitting term for traditional economies that are attuned to ecosystems through non-monetised or little monetised exchange systems that people have long practised in these forests.³⁵ Once expelled from their forest villages, these livelihood systems are permanently disrupted and most people's standard of living plummets.³⁶ Some Adivasis work for the tourist industry that brings large numbers of visitors to the sanctuaries; but this involves only a small part of the population, and draws Adivasis into often humiliating dependence on a huge and complex hierarchy.

Do conservation scientists actually understand and manage the forest better than Adivasis? Or is it possible that indigenous knowledge and value systems go deeper? Adivasi communities still pass on extensive knowledge systems.³⁷ Might they ensure better long-term preservation of species than conservation-management can alone? Can conservationists find more extensive, and non-hierarchical, ways of supporting and working with tribal communities?

Indigenous conservation

In most countries in Latin America, including Amazonian Brazil,³⁸

Peru³⁹, Guatemala⁴⁰, Honduras⁴¹, and Mexico⁴² among most others, indigenous communities have been at the forefront in upholding the integrity of ecosystems and Rights of Nature or of Mother Earth. In India, the divide between conservationists and tribal rights activists has been so corrosive⁴³ that this presently seems almost inconceivable, due to the wars of words, and the continuing draconian expulsions from sanctuaries. Yet Adivasi communities have been actively conserving their local forest – witness a recent victory to save some apex forest trees in Bastar.⁴⁴

In Aotearoa (as Maori call New Zealand), recent indigenous activism has established the legal rights of a river.⁴⁵ In tune with this, and with the Cochabamba declaration on the rights of nature and the legal initiative against ecocide, the Agartala Declaration in February 2013 asserted indigenous people's rights over natural resources in Northeast India, and to say no to big dams;⁴⁶ as did a similar Dimapur Declaration in May of the same year.⁴⁷ Such initiatives are urgent in the face of new megadams threatening several indigenous peoples with mass displacement in Northeast India.⁴⁸

Obviously, India's National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries preserve wonderful, threatened species, with lavish, caring input by expert conservationists. But the removal of Adivasi or tribal villages has broken the historical link between traditional forest dwellers and wildlife. It has often been extremely insensitive, at times violent as well as unnecessary and profoundly counterproductive. Among other aspects, it gives the impression that wildlife is much more highly valued than the indigenous communities that have lived alongside this wildlife since recorded history.

Given countless examples of Adivasis taking strong concerted efforts to conserve the forest areas around their villages, can the two sides come together? It is not just in sanctuaries that elephants, tigers, bears, leopards, pangolins and many other original inhabitants of the country are killed in horrifying numbers. If the two can join forces, could the devastation of the world's forest, river and mountain ecosystems be halted?

A recent 'thirty-by-thirty' plan being promoted at the UN biodiversity summit to be held in China in May 2021 proposes to expand the world's Protected Areas set aside for conservation to cover 30 percent of the Earth's land surface. Some fear the plan will involve more expulsions of Indigenous Peoples. Eduardo Brondizio, a Brazil-origin environmental anthropologist based at Indiana University USA, 'argues that there has been progress in recent decades in conservation actions recognizing that the land and resource rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities are foundational to environmental

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protection.⁴⁹

Perhaps we need to relearn a sense of sacredness in nature characteristic of indigenous societies. Can we begin to transcend our violent human past to start to understand *How Forests Think*?⁵⁰ Many indigenous peoples understand non-human species as relatives, through myth and ritual. Can we conceive of Nature's surviving wild places no longer in terms of gated compounds, but as Gardens of God in a far more expansive sense, in basic harmony with the perceptions and needs of today's surviving Indigenous Peoples?

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Narcotics Trafficking and Terrorism in North-East India at the Bangladesh Border: An Analysis

Sharmistha Baruah

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of narcotics trafficking, which initially started as an organised cross border crime, has now emerged as a global threat owing to its diabolic alliance with terrorist groups. The collaboration between the drug traffickers and the terror groups assumes various forms— from facilitation to protection, from transportation and taxation to direct trafficking by the terrorist organisation with an aim to finance its activities. The paper analyses the nexus between drug traffickers and terrorists which has created a force powerful enough to cause insecurity in the country and focuses on the issue in the North-eastern region of India. India's North-East continues to face security challenges since a long time in terms of insurgency and cross-border crimes and now it has gradually become a cynosure for the interactions between the terror groups of the region and the drug lords, thus forming a fertile ground for narco-terror activities. The paper proposes a stringent and multipronged approach to counter this mammoth problem.

Key words: Crime-Terror Nexus, Terrorism, Drugs trafficking, Narco-terrorism, Indo-Bangladesh relation

'Narco Terrorism' – Delineating the term vis-a-vis the Crime-terror Continuum

THE 'WAR ON drugs' and the 'war on terror' have traumatised humanity since decades, each posing threats of its own at the expense

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of destroying lives and nations. But the confluence of these two threats, that have traditionally been treated separately, have manifested into something more sinister - 'Narco-Terrorism'. It is a phenomenon which indicates the deadly combination of the narcotics traffickers and the terrorists. It is evident that drug traffickers and terrorists are both seen as considerable threats to the welfare of the nations as well as the international community, but it is their amalgamation which poses a greater threat to the humanity. It has surfaced as a strong, but intricate internal problem after 1980s affecting not only the national but internal security as well and has also exerted intense influence in the field of health, economy and the crime rate of almost all the affected nations of the world. Although it is known to have existed since a long time, only after 9/11 it garnered greater consideration. In post-9/11 America, with evidence that it is drugs that finance the Taliban, the government of the United States of America increasingly concentrated on deploying resources to curb this dangerous practice.¹

The term 'Narco-terrorism' has become a catchword in foreign and domestic policy. However, one must note that although the word is commonly used and serves as the footing for several policy decisions relating to terrorism and drugs, its definition is ambiguous in the sense that it has different focus and implications depending on which part of the compound word is emphasised. The term was first adopted to designate operations by drug traffickers using terrorist means, such as killings and kidnappings and use of car bombs against the anti-narcotics police in Colombia and Peru.² Hence, the Peruvian President Belaunde Terry introduced the term 'narco-terrorism' as a concept way back in the year 1983 to designate attacks against his country's drug enforcement authorities. Drug criminals intend to obstruct the peace and tranquillity of a nation with terror by employing methods ranging from political attacks to manipulating the political scenario of the country.³

The Oxford Dictionary (1999) defines narco-terrorism as terrorism connected with business in illicit drugs.⁴ Narcotics trafficking, which initially started as an organised cross border crime, has now emerged as a threat to the globe because of its association with terrorist groups.⁵

However, according to these definitions, the narcotics trafficking organisation seems to occupy the centre-stage with the illicit drug dealing being the principal activity and terrorist activities being a subsidiary activity, causing ambiguity to the meaning of the term. Eventually, the concept of 'narco-terrorism' has adopted two main usages. While one of them centres around the drug criminals who uses the methods of terrorists so as to guard their own drug operations, the other is the use of drug trafficking as a means to raise funds for

terror ventures.⁶ Focussing on the terrorism aspect, the United States Drug Enforcement Agency has defined 'narco-Terrorism' as the participation of teams or associated persons in taxing, providing safety for, or otherwise aiding or abetting drug trafficking operations in an effort to promote or finance terrorist activities.⁷

During the Cold War, many scholars saw cases of narco-terrorism as low intensity threats compared to traditional military threats, thereby not posing immediate danger to the states. However, the era of 1990s witnessed the consolidation of the crime-terror nexus, thereby paving the way towards the rise of transnational organised crimes and mutation in terrorism. This mutation meant that two traditionally separate phenomena have started to show many operational similarities.⁸ Thus, criminals and terror groups appear to be learning from each other and employing the same infrastructures as well as operational tactics to accomplish their goals, yet staying focused on their respective motivations. It is here that Tamara Makarenko's 'Crime-terror Continuum Model' appears relevant.

The Crime-terror Continuum Model portrays a continuum between the organised crime and terrorist organisations. The two groups evidently support each other and their methods might converge, yet their basic motives would differ and keep them at a distance from one another. The model further clarifies that an increased interaction between the two groups have occurred since the 1990s and therefore, places the organisations in a crime-terror continuum pertaining to the governing motivations of their actions and the environment in which they function.⁹ The two groups can find common cause in corrupt and shaky administrations. In such conditions, interactions are repeated time and again and might even form newer types of alliances.

According to Makarenko, the most commonly adopted criminal tactic by the terrorist groups for raising funds is drug trafficking.¹⁰ Both the groups, i.e., drug traffickers and terrorist groups benefit from this combination. The drug traffickers benefit from the military tactic, weapons supply and access to undercover organisations of the terrorists. The terrorists gain the source of revenue and proficiency in illicit fund transfer as well as laundering of proceeds from illegal transactions.¹¹ Both groups successfully bring in corrupt officials who provide mutual benefits such as preparing fraudulent documents including passports and custom papers. They exploit the porous international borders and strive to identify loopholes in immigration controls. Drug traffickers also gain easy access to many areas when they work in conjunction with the terrorists who control large amounts of territories. Traffickers and terrorists have similar needs in terms of material and the covert movement of goods, people and money.

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Therefore, illegal drugs and their trafficking could contribute to terrorism in source, passage and consumption in five different ways, which are:

- First of all, trafficking of illicit drugs is a lucrative trade which successively supplies cash for terrorism.¹²
- Second, drug dealing activities generate chaos in countries where drugs are produced, transited, sold at retail or consumed. Sometimes chaos is deliberately planned by drug traffickers and terrorists and organised crime groups to provide an environment conducive for the illegal activities.¹³
- Third, it engenders corruption in law enforcement, military, and other governmental and civil institutions in ways like providing support for terrorists' activities, preparing fraudulent paper-work and documentation and eventually weakening the capacity of the society to combat terrorist organisations and actions.¹⁴
- Fourth, it provides a base for supporting terrorist actions and movements of terrorist personnel and material, and also it supports a standard infrastructure like smuggling capabilities, illicit arms acquisition, money laundering or the production of false identification or other documents, capable of serving both drug-trafficking and terrorism purposes.¹⁵
- Fifth and the last one is competing for law enforcement and intelligence attention.¹⁶

It has been generally observed that both terrorist groups and drug trafficking organisations rely heavily on compartmental configuration to realise their respective goals. Their organisational structures are arranged in compartments or units. While there may be a strong central leadership, day-to-day operations are carried out by members of section-wise cells. This structure boosts security by providing a degree of separation between the leadership and the rank and file.¹⁷

Moreover, terrorists and drug dealers utilise comparable approaches to hide benefits and financial support. They utilise informal exchange systems, money laundering, and maintain multiple bank accounts. The two groups progressively utilise false administrative work and records, including visas and other identification proof and customs reports to smuggle products and weapons. They make use of their networks of trusted dispatch services and contacts to carry on their illegal business. Furthermore, they own several cell phones which are encoded and are cautious about what they communicate to one another.¹⁸

The linkage between arms, drugs and terrorism relies upon on two inter-related components:

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➤ **Need for weapons:** First; to oppose and combat the government, terrorists need weapons. In the early phase, they acquire them by grabbing arms from poorly trained police and village guards; then, as they become better prepared, they graduate to striking segregated police posts, often in intrigue with dishonest policemen.¹⁹

➤ **Need for funds:** Next, as the battle builds up, the terrorists need more refined weapons to challenge the military capability of the State for which they need finance. Very often illegal business in narcotics is the best source to raise such finance.²⁰

Drugs fuel terrorism and economically sustain the very organisations which the governments of various nations pledge to overthrow. In today's context, narco-terrorism has become much more organised. Narco-terrorism is closely linked with political terrorism in the Asia-Pacific region and India is also not free from its clutches. Narcotics drugs are priced at very high rates.

For instance, the price for one kilogram of heroin from the 'Golden Crescent' is worth more than ten million Indian rupees in the US market.²¹ The illegal drug trade generates huge amount money and terrorists have successfully established connections with the drug traffickers to fund their operations. Drug traffickers throughout West Africa have utilised the proceeds raised from drugs trafficking to fund the al-Qaeda mission.²²

Research Objectives & Methodology

The author through this paper seeks to outline the term 'narco-terrorism' with reference to the crime-terror nexus and thereby attempt to highlight the impending issue of terrorism in the North-Eastern region of India and its alliance with drugs trafficking which has become a major source of raising funds for the terror activities in the region. The region has been characterised by widespread ethnic conflicts and the presence of several insurgent groups. Illegal migration has also been a key issue in the region. Adding to the woes is the increasing issue of drugs trafficking across the Indo-Bangladesh border which in turn has become a source of funding for the terrorist and insurgency activities in the region. This paper seeks to analyse it. The author also seeks to throw light on the strategies and policies adopted for combatting the issue at hand and suggest measures towards combating narco-Terrorism.

Methodology

The present paper is both descriptive and analytical in nature. The paper is based on secondary data. The data sources for the research

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have been drawn from books, articles, various reports of national as well as international authorities in the field and news articles related to the topic at hand. Although the Indo-Myanmar border also poses no less a threat in terms of drugs trafficking from the 'Golden Triangle', yet for convenience, the study has concentrated on the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Crime-Terror Scenario across the Indo-Bangladesh Border

The Indo-Bangladesh border is a highly porous one and perhaps the most complicated land border to be found anywhere in the world. The sensitivity of the border has changed over a period of time. Apart from the rampant issues of human and cattle trafficking in the Indo-Bangladesh border, over the recent decades, drug trafficking has emerged as a foremost concern requiring urgent attention. Several reports point out that many terrorist groups have sourced money through drug trafficking in this area.

Huge seizures of drugs on the Indo-Bangladesh perimeter has been reported in the year 2020. 'Meth' (methamphetamine) tablets commonly referred to as 'Yaba' trafficked from Myanmar are in high demand in Bangladesh. Although both India and Bangladesh have locked the conventional routes for the traffickers, these drugs are now being trafficked from West Bengal through Northeast to Bangladesh. Yaba is rampant in the West Bengal's border areas.²³

The BSF Guwahati Frontier seized contraband drugs and substances like phensedyl, yaba tablets, ganja or marijuana, opium and other smuggled items worth 20.70 crore during the Covid-19 lockdown period in 2020. Apart from this, the BSF Guwahati Frontier in cooperation with the Border Guards of Bangladesh has formed two anti-human trafficking units and has also built up the surveillance by installation of digital sensors, drones, night-vision cameras and other gadgets in the perimeter in anticipation of crimes during the period when restrictions for COVID-19 were relaxed across both the countries.²⁴

The nexus between drug traffickers, organised criminal groups and terrorists has created a force powerful enough to cause insecurity in the country. Money generated through drug trade has been found to fund various insurgent and terrorist movements.²⁵ The World Health Report 2019 of United Nations discloses that India accounts for 30 percent of the illicit drug use population in Asia.²⁶ Some of the most popular drugs and prohibited substances that are the subject-matter of trafficking include Cocaine²⁷, Heroin²⁸, Marijuana²⁹, Methamphetamine³⁰, MDMA³¹, LSD³² and PCP³³. These drugs are traded illicitly and the proceeds thereof are utilised for financing terror

activities.

The highly porous Indo-Bangladesh border lets Indian insurgents to cross over to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries for asylum. Presently, the United Liberation Front of Assam [ULFA], the All Tripura Tiger Force [ATTF], the National Liberation Front of Tripura [NLFT], and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland [NDFB] as well as several other insurgent outfits from the Northeast have their hideouts in Chittagong, Khagrachari, Sylhet district, Mymensingh, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban, Sherpur, Moulvi Bazaar, Netrakona and Sunamganj districts of Bangladesh.³⁴

Several reports of the Indian Intelligence Agencies point out that there are ninety-seven hideouts or camps of Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh. It is also reported that as many as seventy-seven Indian insurgents/criminals figuring in Interpol Red Corner Notice are being harboured by Bangladesh. Such terror camps in Bangladesh also provide training to the North-Eastern insurgents and has been reported to receive aid and protection from both Bangladesh Army as well as the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).³⁵

Moreover, the Islamic militant activities proliferated in India's North-East taking religious fanaticism and division as key coordinates. This became a problem particularly after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the use of Bangladesh as safe haven by active remnants of al-Qaeda³⁶, which in turn gave a push to the activities of Islamic extremist groups of Bangladesh. These groups, namely, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh [JMB] and Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh [HuJI-B] have widened their operations to India chiefly in the North-east and West Bengal, where large numbers of Bangladeshi immigrants have illegally resided over the years.³⁷

The alliance between the Bangladeshi militant groups and the North-East insurgent groups have therefore, resulted in heightened militant operations in the region, be it for self-protection or to gain political advantage. The 1993 communal clash between the Meitei and Pangal (Muslim) communities of Manipur led to the formation of many Manipuri Muslim militant groups. One of the prominent groups has been the People's United Liberation Front [PULF], which was later suspected to have connections with the Bangladeshi unit of Lashkar-e-Taiba [LeT] and even with Bangladeshi intelligence agencies.³⁸

Permeable border, lack of economic opportunities, poverty and underdevelopment, attitude of the people towards petty crimes, laxity in vigilance, nexus between criminals and police as well as border guarding forces all contribute to swelling trans-border crimes.³⁹ The issues engaged with border management are perplexing to such an extent that they oppose simple solutions. The security concerns of the

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Indo-Bangladesh border have been for long ignored as it figures very low on the priority list of the Government of India.⁴⁰

North-East and Narco-Terrorism

The crime-terrorism nexus comprises of a reciprocal relationship in North-East India and is the outcome of poor governance in the region. The criminals and the terror groups run parallel governments in many parts of the region and generate funds through illicit trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances, arms and human beings as well as resort to money laundering. India's crime-terror problem in the Northeastern region is further intensified by the operations of the militants and criminals of India's eastern neighbour – Bangladesh.⁴¹

A significant pointer of the rising size of Narco-trade is the high occurrence of drug abuse, largely in Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya. The greater part of the narcotics trade is through Moreh in Manipur; the Naga-Kuki conflicts are immediate outcomes of insurgent groups attempting to control the illicit drug trade from Moreh to Imphal. The interest for securing assets to fund terrorism and insurgency has been the significant reason for narcotics trade across the border.⁴²

In the past, North-East India was not a producer of narcotics for illegal trade, which is a post-independence development. In contrast to the Tamil insurgency led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE] in Sri Lanka which is profoundly associated with illegal drug trade, the extremists of North-East India had earlier relied on other strategies to raise funds.⁴³ In Nagaland and Manipur, extortion from every family, government contractor and representatives, businessmen and even government officials including ministers was the main means of financing insurgency. The insurgents have now increasingly resorted to trade in illegal narcotics to raise funds to carry on their activities. The illicit narcotics trade has now become one of the significant means of financing the insurgencies, organised crimes and arms dealing activities in the North-East.⁴⁴ Groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isaac Muviah group [NSCN-IM] and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang group [NSCN-K], United Liberation Front of Asom [ULFA] and ethnic Kuki state army in Manipur are either directly associated with dealing in narcotics or collect around 10 to 20 percent of the proceeds from drug lords and smugglers.⁴⁵

The consequence of the increasing drugs trafficking activities in the North-eastern region is the sharp rise in drug addiction and spread of HIV/AIDS infections. The National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India Report 2019 states that the North-eastern states account for the highest prevalence of current use of Opioids (in percentage) among the age group of 10 to 75 years, of which Sikkim

accounts for 18.74%, Arunachal Pradesh 22.18%, Nagaland (25.22%), Manipur (14.22%), Mizoram (25.67%), Tripura (5.01%), Meghalaya (6.34%) and Assam (2.91%) in comparison to Punjab (9.69%) and Haryana (8.68%).⁴⁶ Apart from this, states with the highest dependence on Sedatives are Sikkim (15.61%), Nagaland (9.57%), Manipur (7.73%) and Mizoram (6.80%).⁴⁷ North-eastern States with highest current Cannabis use are Sikkim (10.94%), Arunachal Pradesh (7.36%), Nagaland (4.65%), Manipur (3.74%), Mizoram (3.24%), Tripura (2.10%), Assam (2.27%) and Meghalaya (1.68%).⁴⁸ Arunachal Pradesh accounts for highest Cocaine use prevalence with 3.01% and Daman and Diu with 1.38%.⁴⁹ Manipur has rate of use of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) at 4.86%.⁵⁰ The statistics of People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in India shows that an estimated 8.5 Lakh people inject drugs in India, of which Manipur falls in the top ten category.⁵¹

As per the survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] in association with National Aids Control Organisation [NACO], compared to the other Indian states there are about 100,000 people surviving with HIV and AIDS in the eight Northeastern states with Manipur and Nagaland having the highest number of cases. The HIV and AIDS occurrence rates in Manipur and Nagaland are 1.57 and 1.2 per cent respectively and well above the national average of 0.34 per cent.⁵²

The State Health authorities in Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram have organised credible HIV training and awareness campaigns, which have been generally fruitful in controlling the progression of HIV. Manipur and Nagaland are India's two most affected states for HIV, generally because of the high number of intravenous drugs users.⁵³ The economic and social instability in many states of the region have heightened narco-terrorism.⁵⁴

Some of the important factors adding to narco-terrorism in North-East India are as follows:

1. State structure: Narco-Terrorism is particularly found in the states that have precarious political structures. The North-eastern region of India experiences under-development and inter-community and inter-ethnic clashes. Political fragility creates a conducive climate for crime. Dealers profit from such ineffective state structures.⁵⁶

2. Legitimatising drug funds: Production of narcotics often operates as the base of the economy in a number of countries. The law-and-order mechanism in the area, the political groups and the government are effectively penetrated by the money flowing from narcotics trade. The money so derived is invested in land, foreign exchange rackets, import-export exchanges, films, securities exchanges and so on.⁵⁷

3. Influence over Government structure: Narco-terrorists establish a network across different countries. The coordinators of a criminal organisation might be in Bangladesh, the production may take place in Myanmar, the wholesalers in India and the returns of illegal trade might be laundered in Nepal. Although capturing criminals associated with illegal dissemination only in one country might settle the issue temporarily, yet the underlying foundations of the activity will continue to remain. Drug dealers, through their illicit fund supporters also influence administrations of these countries.⁵⁸

4. International cooperation in drugs and arms dealing: There is considerable international cooperation and coordination in drugs and arms trade. For example, different individual producers cultivate poppy or cocoa plants. In the wake of harvesting, they offer the raw material to other people who develop it into narcotic substances. From the preparing point to the ultimate customer, the transportation of the refined narcotics takes place over an intricate, complex, and settled network. The association of drug/arm dealers and terrorists ranges over the entire region. The people who pass on drugs from one point to another are in fact many a time the same individuals who transport arms, making the inclusion of terrorist associations in the narcotics trade crucial.⁵⁹

5. Economic Angle: Economically, global dealing in narcotics and psychotropic substances has created massive amounts of capital for its initiators and coordinators. These drug cartels and dealers are composed of people who work productively inside national economies. The benefits from their criminal operations are either made a part of the mainstream economy or utilised for the pursuit of further criminal activities.⁶⁰

6. Poverty and Employment: Though the drug exchange network appears to be extremely huge, individuals cultivating the drugs are in reality extremely poor farmers who do not have a substitute source of earnings. Reinforcing the economy at the lower levels is needed to eliminate the issue at the source of production.⁶¹

Two significant operations 'Operation Bajrang' and 'Operation Rhino' were launched by the government of India to counter the violent activities of ULFA from 1990 to 1992.⁶² The efforts put up by the Governments of Bhutan as well as Bangladesh in dealing with Indian insurgent groups indeed deserves appreciation. Both the countries have taken resilient action to expel Indian militants from their soil. The Royal Bhutan Army (RBA)'s 'All Clear' operations carried out in the year 2003 had given a serious setback to the insurgents. It has now become an impossibility for the militants to find a safe haven in Bhutan. Likewise, the Government of Bangladesh

under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina had taken strong action against the Indian militants engaged in illicit operations in Bangladesh. Even the Government of Nepal too had actively cooperated with India in arresting many terrorists and insurgents, Manipur's United National Liberation Front [UNLF] leader R.K. Meghan. More recently, in 2015, the Government of India conducted 'Operation All Out' against the Bodo militant groups.⁶³

The situation is under control in most parts of the North-Eastern region, except for Manipur, parts of Northern Assam and some areas around the Assam-Arunachal and Assam-Meghalaya borders. However, the alarming situation is the reported contact of the Chinese Intelligence Agency with the insurgent leaders of North-East particularly with the Manipuri insurgent groups and on top of that with the head of ULFA, Paresh Baruah, who is on the 'most wanted list' of Bangladesh Government for the 2002 Chittagong arms haul case.⁶⁴

Manindra Sarania, Superintendent, Central Bureau of Narcotics, says that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah [NSCN-IM] and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang [NSCN-K] are all involved in narcotics trade. Most of the marijuana (ganja) is produced in Manipur's Ukhrul and Senapati districts, which are both under NSCN-IM. The majority of the insurgent groups in bordering states are involved in this trade. Not just narcotics, but also substances like acetic anhydride and ephedrine, which are lawfully produced in India, can be used to generate amphetamine or heroin, which are then transported to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Laos by militant organisations.⁶⁵

Combatting Narco-Terrorism – Strategies and Policies

Drug trafficking and terrorism occupy different levels of security concerns including national and international security. In contrast, the traditional view of the drug problem is that it threatens human security.⁶⁶ Despite the fact that the effects of the drug trade, such as the spread of HIV/AIDS and other transmittable diseases like Hepatitis C cause immense suffering for those who are infected and impose enormous costs on the States in terms of health care, medical treatment and lost productivity, yet the drug threat has not been regarded as a national security problem until recently. This perspective stems from an emphasis on the consequences of drug abuse in consumer societies. In stark contrast to this viewpoint, much of the policy execution in the drug war has been focused on the supply side. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on eradication, drug cartel infiltration and prohibition.⁶⁷

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Although the problem of narcotics could be portrayed as a national and even international security threat, it remained a problem for low politics throughout the twentieth century. However, following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, attitudes about the drug war began to shift. The threat of narco-terrorism was presented as a worldwide concern, and the war on drugs was placed within the context of the war on terror, owing to the suspected link and cooperation between drug trade and terrorist organisations. The traditional security hierarchy gave priority to terrorism. It has been observed that too strong focus on narco-terrorism has not yielded much success, which suggests that anti-drug and anti-terrorism strategies need to be integrated.⁶⁸

In India, the task of keeping an eye on the terrorist activities gained momentum post Kargil war. A high level Group of officials headed by the then Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Mr. L K Advani recommended specific legislations to counter terror financing. It may be worth noting that the issue of terror financing entices provisions from a host of legislations, including:⁶⁹

- a. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- b. The Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1976.
- c. The Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.
- d. The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.

However, some of these legislations lack the teeth to combat the present terror situation in all its complexities and hence warrants a relook. In fact, some of these enactments may not wholly be compliant with the UN Resolution 1373 which vehemently necessitates the importance of comprehensive law against terrorism. Although it is globally acceptable that there cannot be a universally acceptable model law to combat terror financing, yet it is high time for India to evolve a law on this menace taking into consideration the peculiar and unique regional conditions.⁷⁰ At present the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) with its multiple amendments to incorporate the ever-changing face of terrorism is the sole anti-terrorism law in India.

The establishment of the Financial Intelligence Unit in the year 2004 to battle cross border movement of black money is a progressive step in this direction. The Financial Intelligence Unit is responsible for receiving, handling, investigating and disseminating information relating to dubious financial transactions. Its primary object is to coordinate and reinforce the efforts of national as well as international intelligence agencies in tracking down money laundering and related

crimes.⁷¹

With regard to the National Narcotics Policy, Article 47 of the Constitution of India enshrines the nation's approach towards Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The Constitutional provision mandates that the State shall make effort to prohibit the consumption of intoxicating beverages and substances that are harmful to one's health, except for medicinal grounds. The same principle of prohibiting the intake of drugs except for medicinal purpose was also adopted in the three international conventions, namely, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988. These three conventions have been signed and ratified by India. India's commitment to preventing drug abuse and trafficking pre-existed even the coming into force of the three conventions. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 [NDPS] and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 [PITNDPS] were enacted in response to India's obligations under the three UN drug conventions as well as Article 47 of the Constitution. Therefore, the current legal framework on narcotics and psychotropic substance is in the form of the above two enactments.

The NDPS Act outlaws the creation, production, trade, use, and distribution of narcotics and psychotropic substances, except for medical or research purposes. The government's approach, thus, has been to encourage their usage for medicinal and scientific purposes while limiting their diversion from legal sources and forbidding illicit distribution and abuse. Unlike previous Opium Acts and the Dangerous Drugs Act it superseded, the NDPS Act has delegated enforcement authority to numerous central and state law enforcement authorities, allowing law enforcement to reach far and wide. Since its commencement, the NDPS Act has been amended three times, the most recent of which was passed in February 2014. The new amendment expands access to narcotics for medical treatment and includes provisions to improve treatment and care for those who are addicted to them. The modifications contain provisions to improve treatment and care for persons who are addicted to drugs for the first time.⁷² However, there is still a lot of room for improvement in the light of the augmented techniques, such as misuse of the 'darknet' and other advanced technology, by the drug criminals and their diabolic alliance with the terrorist groups. The 'darknet' is a deep hidden internet platform that is used for drug sales, the sharing of pornographic materials, and other criminal activities by exploiting the ToR Onion router's secret alleys to avoid law enforcement

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observation. These issues were discussed during a recent webinar conference of BRICS nations (4th session of the BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group) held in August 2020, wherein India had also participated.⁷³

A multipronged intervention with a combination of military, political and development measures has resulted in the decline of violence and improving the overall security situation. It is true to say that the entire North-eastern region cannot be clubbed under an umbrella when it comes to represent insurgencies and ethnic conflicts. The nature of insurgencies and conflicts differs from place to place. However, it can be seen that many insurgent groups have come to the negotiation table with the Government of India including the recently agreed Framework for Peace Agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah NSCN (IM). Splits in the prominent insurgent organisations as well as existence of peace in Mizoram, Tripura and some parts of Arunachal Pradesh suggest that the situation has improved considerably. India took several other initiatives to enhance its relations with its neighbours to bolster its security and other strategic interests in the region.⁷⁴ Some local politicians have also been found to be involved in the illicit trade.⁷⁵

The Act East Policy

The Act East Policy was announced by the Government of India in 2014. It replaced the earlier 'Look East Policy' by a pragmatic and action-oriented policy. The Act East Policy has been developed with the idea of enhancing the economic and social setting of Northeast India. The policy is primarily aimed at reviving the political, security and trade relations with Southeast Asian countries. Northeast India has been given prominence in the Act East Policy owing to its cultural and historical ties as well as strategic location as the gateway to Southeast Asia. The policy has been in discussion for some time now and has generated a sense of hope for the region.⁷⁶ As part of the Act East Policy, the Government of India has been developing and strengthening the connectivity of the North-eastern region of India with the ASEAN region by means of the 3Cs (Culture, Connectivity and Commerce). Some of the major projects include the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, the Border Haats and the Rhi-Tiddim Road Project.⁷⁷

The Act East Policy can succeed only when the neighbouring countries like Myanmar are made key stakeholders in establishing peace in the region. The Government of India will also have to tackle the arms and drug traffickers who receive support of the insurgent

groups of the North-East and Myanmar. Moreover, Chinese attempts to derail India's efforts to bring peace and stability is another major concern which entails India to work towards balancing China in Myanmar and ASEAN. China is already using political and economic influences to create instability in the North-East and thereby delay the implementation of projects by India.⁷⁸ Further, connectivity through the North-east India via Myanmar seems to be in question with Myanmar being politically unstable and strife-torn at present. The bottom line is that the Act East Policy can be put into action only when efforts to bring stability into the North-eastern region by bringing the insurgents to the negotiating table and also address the question of cross-border illegal immigration, terrorism, drugs and arms supply and other forms of non-conventional security threats.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Having analysed the problem of narco-terrorism and its dangerous alliance with mainstream terrorism as well as its impact on India's security, an attempt has been made to provide certain suggestions as to how to tackle the problem. First is to achieve a balance between anti-drug and anti-terrorism efforts. Too much focus on narco-terrorism will not contribute to any success in either the war on drugs or the war on terror. The Narcotics Control Bureau should be strengthened. The National Investigative Agency needs a trained special task force with active legal and forensic backing dedicated to counter and investigate cases of terrorism and drugs trafficking. The Government should initiate steps so as to bring closer cooperation, coordination and coalition, particularly in terms of intelligence sharing, between the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Intelligence Bureau (IB), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) as well as the Army, Border Security Forces (BSF), Paramilitary Forces, Police Force and other nodal agencies.

India's effort in preventing money laundering has enhanced since mid-2009 with stronger legal provisions for preventive action. However, further scope for improvement looms large. Concerns over effectiveness of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 are primarily raised in the light of fewer convictions under the said law. So far only thirteen persons have been convicted under the PMLA 2002 in nine cases.⁸⁰

The available infrastructural facilities deployed at the border entry points must be updated on timely basis. Stronger emphasis ought to be laid towards effective implementation of the 1993-94 centrally sponsored scheme of Border Area Development Programme [BADP] in the Indo-Bangladesh border. The 2015 Report of the NITI Aayog

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on 'Evaluation Study on Border Area Development Programme' stated that the earlier version of the BADP was not properly implemented in the North-eastern region.⁸¹ A revised BADP programme has come into effect since April 2020 in the light of the challenging issues of cross-border crimes and terror activities.⁸²

The role of civil society in assisting the state to deal with the drug trafficking and abuse in the region is crucial. This can be achieved by means of approaching the public through community of faith-based organisations. An instance of such can be pointed to the Young Mizo Association (YMA) in the State of Mizoram which has been successful to an extent in intervening the opioid crisis in the region.⁸³

The battle against terrorism ought to be the top concern of the Government, as it includes manpower and intelligence agencies while emphasising on its deadly combination with organised crimes such as drug trafficking. Perhaps, the South Asian region, including India, may take lessons from the manner in which the US Drug Enforcement Administration has sought to curb Columbian narco-terrorism. While it is not possible for the problem to be eradicated at one go, phased targets can be set, with national and international security agencies playing a more vigilant role.

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30. Belongs to the Amphetamine group that can produce mental instability including paranoia, delusion and violent behaviour if used for long, with Myanmar and North-Eastern region of India being one of the manufacturing hotbeds.
 31. Also called Ecstasy, Essence or Clarity, a synthetic drug that acts as a stimulator or mild hallucinogen.
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Effect of Practising Charkha Spinning on Cognitive Development in Children: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

The increasingly competitive life of modern age has added to increased incidence of psychological problems in all the societies around the world. There is an increase in stress levels, psychosomatic disorders and suicide rates amongst children and youth. Efforts are needed to identify solutions like empowering children and young people by giving them the tools to develop self-reflection, self-protection, self-regulation, and holistic self-development. There are several types of meditative practices that serve as tools- Mindfulness Meditation being one amongst them. For the present study, it was hypothesized that charkha spinning, an age-old practice of spinning cotton thread is a way of practicing mindfulness meditation with measurable cognitive development and mental health benefits. It helps improve intelligence, concentration, multitasking abilities, patience, motor activity, mind-body coordination, processing speed, self-awareness amongst its practitioners. It was intended to evaluate the changes before and after regular spinning of charkha measured using psychological tools. The present study has added that Mindfulness Meditation can also be practiced by spinning 'charkha'. The study undertaken as a pilot project in children has shown encouraging results in improving the IQ, logical abilities, concentration, processing speed and overall development of the brain. Also, the spirituality quotient and feeling of 'being' is enhanced after continuous attention to charkha spinning.

Key words: Charkha spinning, mindfulness meditation, mental health, cognitive development

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Introduction

“TAKE TO SPINNING to find peace of mind. The music of the wheel will be as balm to our soul. I believe that the yarn we spin is capable of mending the broken warp and woof of our life. The charkha (spinning wheel) is the symbol for nonviolence on which all life, if it is to be real life, must be based”.¹

The increasingly competitive life of modern age has added to increased incidence of psychological problems in all the societies around the world.² It is estimated that approximately 800,000 people die by suicide worldwide.³ Death by suicide accounts for 8.5% of all deaths among adolescents and young adults (15–29 years) and is a leading cause of death among youth worldwide.⁴

The daily struggle to excel at every stage of life is undeniable and sadly the major brunt is borne by the children and youth of the society. Expectations of parents and teachers, peer pressure, interpersonal problems, academic stress, worries about the future, and home environment are some of the stressful issues faced by adolescents.⁵ Another emerging stressor is the rampant use of smartphones that have become an integral part of our lives. Addiction to smartphones has also become a serious problem.⁶ Researchers revealed that smartphone addiction has a negative impact on individuals’ psychological and physical health as well as academic and work performance.^{7–9} Healthcare professionals have identified media as a cause of mental illness, dependency, obsessive–compulsive behaviors, concentration problems, and other attention disorders. Besides these physical and mental risks, safety concerns are being raised in media-heavy communities; issues such as cyberbullying, young children being exposed to violence, and sexually explicit material, as well as extreme or inappropriate behaviors, are being highlighted. The current scenario is challenging for both teachers and parents, as well as for children, to foster a positive mental health status. These stressors could lead to psychosomatic disorders in children and adolescents (between 10% to 25%), mental health problems including adjustment disorder, anxiety, depression, and suicide.^{10,11}

Efforts are needed to identify solutions like empowering children and young people by giving them the tools to develop self-reflection, self-protection, self-regulation, and holistic self-development. The ancient practice of yoga is empowering and may help children and young people cope with stress and contributes positively to mental health.¹² Yoga is a way of life that consists of certain postures (asanas), regulated breathing techniques (pranayamas), hand poses (mudras), and meditation. Meditation mentioned here is not just ordinary

concentration but a special type of internal concentration. Meditation consists of many forms, most of which originated in ancient religious and spiritual traditions. A meditating person uses certain techniques, such as a specific posture, focused attention, and an open attitude towards distractions.¹³

There are several types of meditative practices- Mindfulness Meditation being one amongst them. Mindfulness entered the Western Society in the year 1979 with its roots in Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness consists of maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, cultivating outlook.¹⁴ During mindfulness meditation, the meditator's goal is to maintain attention to current internal and external experiences with a nonjudgmental view, manifesting acceptance, inquisitiveness, and openness.¹⁵ Meditation is generally done with the eyes closed where the subjects are instructed to focus on a thought, breath, body part etc. and internalize their thoughts and feelings.

The spinning of charkha (India's generic term for any spinning wheel or hand-cranked spinning machine) is hypothesized to be a form of meditation where the eyes are open. Gandhian Philosophy with spinning of 'charkha' at its core played a vital role during the freedom struggle of India by showing the path for living a valuable life with dignity, power and self-respect. Spinning charkha is considered to fulfil a moral requirement and regenerate physical capacities.¹⁶

In this study an attempt was made to address one component of meditation where the eyes are open but the mind is focused on a task.

The spinning of charkha can be an indigenous form of mindfulness meditation with added health benefits along with the established historical objective of self-reliance. The present study was undertaken to test this hypothesis and is the only study in the world conducted to bring out the cognitive development and mental health benefits of spinning Charkha regularly.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Subjects

Thirty female children, aged 10 to 18 years (13.60 ± 2.11) studying in 5th to 12th grade in a government school, participated in this study. However, at the end of 1 month of training, there were 28 children because of 2 drop-outs. All the children belonged to a balika ashram based in Delhi. Written permission to conduct this study was obtained

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from the authority of the balika ashram prior to the start of this research study. All the students who participated in the research study were in apparent good health.

Research Design

Quasi experimental pre and post design was used for conducting this research study. The subjects were assigned into the experimental group (n=30) using purposive sampling. Subjects were assessed on the first day and after 1 month of the intervention. The subjects then underwent a training of Charkha spinning, under the supervision of a charkha trainer, for one hour everyday in the evening for a total period of 1 month. All the subjects were provided the same environment during the study as they were living in a balika ashram.

Assessment

The following tests were administered to assess the pre and post intervention effect:

*Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (John C. Raven, 1936)*¹⁷: This is a nonverbal test used to measure general human intelligence and abstract reasoning. It is one of the most common tests administered to both groups and individuals ranging from 5-year-olds to the elderly. It comprises 60 multiple choice questions, listed in order of increasing difficulty. All questions were black patterns on a white background. In each test item, the subject is asked to identify the missing element that completes a pattern.

*Multiple Intelligence Test (Howard Gardner, 1983)*¹⁸: This test consists of 90 items which are used to assess nine types of intelligences based on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

CNS Vital Signs neurocognitive testing: CNS Vital Signs in-office neurocognitive testing procedure is a non-invasive clinical procedure to efficiently and objectively assess a broad spectrum of brain function performance or domains under challenge (cognition stress test).

Statistical Analysis

Standard methods were followed for the data extraction for each of the variables (mentioned above). Data was analysed using paired t-test and p value < 0.05 is considered significant. The mean values \pm SD of pre and post variables are presented in [Table-1].

RESULTS

A total of 30 subjects were selected for the study. 28/30 subjects were suitable for analysis as 2 subjects opted out of the study citing

compliance issues. The mean age of subjects was 13.60 (SD=2.11) years with an age range of 10-18 years. The youngest children were students of standard 5th, the eldest were in class 12th and 3 children were not studying.

Table-1: Pre-test and post-test mean & S.D. values of selected variables after 1 month of Charkha spinning training.

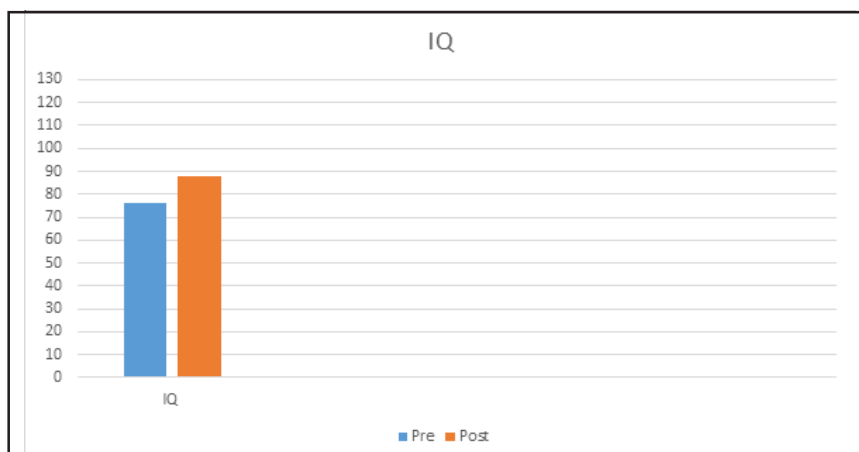
Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		p Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
IQ	76.10	12.00	87.80	11.20	0.01
Multiple Intelligence					
<i>Linguistic</i>	29.50	3.62	27.20	5.60	0.08
<i>Logical-Mathematical</i>	27.20	4.38	31.70	3.62	0.01
<i>Spatial-Visual</i>	28.00	6.07	29.70	5.20	0.20
<i>Bodily-Kinesthetic</i>	28.40	5.73	28.90	4.38	0.68
<i>Musical</i>	30.80	5.25	30.50	3.62	0.78
<i>Interpersonal</i>	28.90	5.25	30.80	4.45	0.08
<i>Intrapersonal</i>	30.60	4.28	33.50	4.76	0.01
<i>Naturalist</i>	31.50	4.47	33.00	5.44	0.18
<i>Existential</i>	29.70	4.31	34.30	3.63	0.01
CNS					
<i>Complex attention</i>	61.90	29.50	53.20	28.30	0.18
<i>Processing speed</i>	17.90	9.53	23.90	11.90	0.01
<i>Psychomotor speed</i>	84.80	29.30	95.70	20.50	0.08
<i>Reaction time</i>	792.00	264.00	825.00	184.00	0.50
<i>Verbal memory</i>	42.30	7.32	43.20	8.24	0.60
<i>Visual memory</i>	34.90	4.74	34.60	4.27	0.70
<i>Composite memory</i>	77.20	10.60	77.70	10.70	0.80

IQ

The mean score of IQ (pre-test) was 76.10 +/- 12.00 and mean score of

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IQ (post-test) was 87.80 +/- 11.20. There was statistically significant difference in the mean of IQ among pre-test and post-test scores (Paired t-test, p-value<0.01). It showed significant improvement in IQ.



Multiple Intelligence

Linguistic

The mean score of Linguistic (pre-test) was 29.5 +/- 3.62 and mean score of Linguistic (post-test) was 27.2 +/- 5.60.

Logical-Mathematical

The mean score of Logical-Mathematical (pre-test) was 27.2 +/- 4.38 and mean score of Logical-Mathematical (post-test) was 31.7 +/- 3.62. There was *statistically significant difference* in the mean of Logical-Mathematical among pre-test and post-test scores (Paired t-test, p-value<0.01). It shows increased capacity to analyze problems logically.

Spatial-Visual

The mean score of Spatial Visual (pre-test) was 28 +/- 6.07 and mean score of Spatial-Visual (post-test) was 29.7 +/- 5.20.

Bodily-Kinaesthetic

The mean score of Kinesthetic (pre-test) was 28.4 +/- 5.73 and mean score of Kinesthetic (post-test) was 28.9 +/- 4.38.

Musical

The mean score of Musical (pre-test) was 30.8 +/- 5.25 and mean

score of Musical (post-test) was 30.5 +/- 3.62.

Interpersonal

The mean score of Interpersonal (pre-test) was 28.9 +/- 5.25 and mean score of Interpersonal (post-test) was 30.8 +/- 4.45.

Intrapersonal

The mean score of Intrapersonal (pre-test) was 30.6 +/- 4.28 and mean score of Intrapersonal (post-test) was 33.5 +/- 4.76.

There was *statistically significant difference* in the mean of Intrapersonal among pre-test and post-test scores (Paired t-test, p-value<0.05). It indicates the increased ability of children to understand themselves.

Naturalist

The mean score of Naturalist (pre-test) was 31.5 +/- 4.47 and mean score of Naturalist (post-test) was 33 +/- 5.44.

Existential

The mean score of Existential (pre-test) was 29.7 +/- 4.31 and mean score of Existential (post-test) was 34.3 +/- 3.63.

There was *statistically significant difference* in the mean of Existential among pre-test and post-test scores (Paired t-test, p-value<0.01). It shows the increased interconnectedness of children with the world around them.



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CNS Vital Signs Test

Complex Attention

The mean score of Complex Attention (pre-test) was 61.9 +/- 29.5 and mean score of Complex Attention (post-test) was 53.2 +/- 28.3.

Processing Speed

The mean score of Processing Speed (pre-test) was 17.9 +/- 9.53 and mean score of Processing Speed (post-test) was 23.9 +/- 11.9. There was *statistically significant difference* in the mean of Processing Speed among pre-test and post-test scores (Paired t-test, p-value<0.05).

Psychomotor Speed

The mean score of Psychomotor Speed (pre-test) was 84.8 +/- 29.3 and mean score of Psychomotor Speed (post-test) was 95.7 +/- 20.5.

Reaction Time

The mean score of Reaction Time (pre-test) was 792 +/- 264.0 and mean score of Reaction Time (post-test) was 825.0 +/- 184.0.

Verbal Memory

The mean score of Verbal Memory (pre-test) was 42.3 +/- 7.32 and mean score of Verbal Memory (post-test) was 43.2 +/- 8.24.

Visual Memory

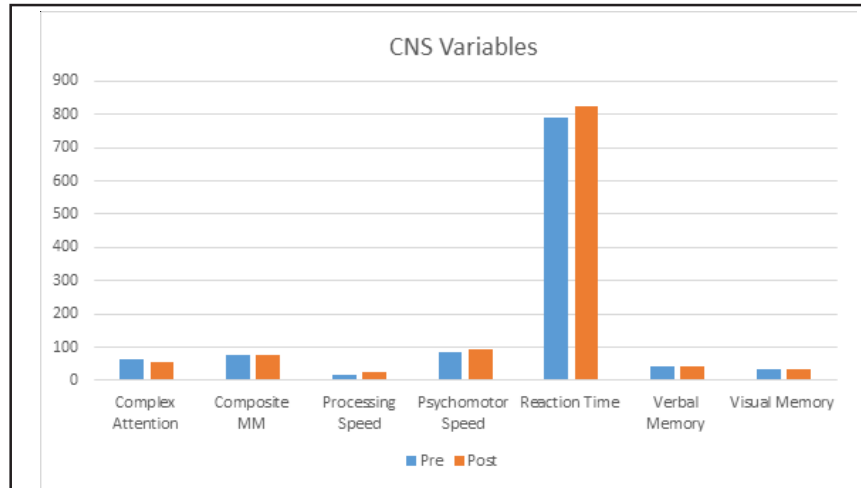
The mean score of Visual Memory (pre-test) was 34.9 +/- 4.74 and mean score of Visual Memory (post-test) was 34.6 +/- 4.27.

Composite MM

The mean score of Composite MM (pre-test) was 77.2 +/- 10.6 and mean score of Composite MM (post-test) was 77.7 +/- 10.7.

DISCUSSION

Mindfulness is defined as staying in the present and being oblivious to the thoughts, actions and emotions. It may be simply defined as staying in the moment and focusing on the task in hand. Spinning charkha is also a regular, rhythmic activity that requires complete attention while practicing. For ease of explanation in the context henceforth it will be referred to as intervention (spinning charkha). It is remarkable that this seemingly simplistic practice can have such a wide range of applications and effects. The theoretical framework of mindfulness is an attempt to explain its mechanism and how it



influences the functioning of different regions of the brain.¹⁹ Baer tried explaining the effects of cognitive change, self-management, relaxation, acceptance occurring as a result of mindfulness meditation.²⁰

Studies prove that meditation improves the Intelligence quotient (IQ) of the practitioner.^{21,22} The IQ scores in our study increased after regular charkha spinning for 1 month. IQ is a complex entity to arrive at- attention span and logical reasoning ability being important parameters of IQ. Repeated activity gradually improved the attention span due to formation of neural pathways and removal of 'noise' signals from the brain thereby increasing attention and logical reasoning abilities as discussed below. In our study the intrapersonal component has shown significant improvement (p value - 0.01) post intervention that is in congruence with the improved self-management, relaxation and acceptance theory of Baer. Neuroimaging studies have added objectivity to the theoretical framework of mindfulness meditation. There is an improved cognitive function as a result of a continuous process of spinning that focuses the attention to the task and prevents any distracting thoughts that may occur during the process. Continuous attention to spinning a charkha also added to the existentialism among these children. Also, the spirituality quotient and feeling of 'being' enhanced in these kids. Studies have already demonstrated existentialism and spirituality enhancement with mindfulness meditation practitioners, therefore another evidence that proves that charkha spinning is a form of meditation.

The executive attention is a function of the pathway between the fronto-insular cortex and anterior cingulate cortex.²³ Brain imaging

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studies have found that cognitively challenging tasks consistently decrease activation in the same set of brain regions.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study has added spinning of charkha as a form of meditation. The study undertaken as a pilot project in children has shown encouraging results in improving the IQ, concentration, processing speed, self-awareness, logical abilities, existentialism and overall cognitive development of the brain. The spinning of Charkha can be introduced in the curriculum of students to promote positive mental health and brain development with a vision to create a mentally healthy society and nation.

Limitations of the study

The small sample size is likely deterrent to statistical significance of variables. Having a longer follow-up period would have shown effect on more measurable indices. Differential loss to follow-up may have introduced a bias though less likely as the results that are statistically significant, are individual variations that may not be affected by this limiting factor. However, this is a pilot study that analyses the effects of spinning charkha- the first of its kind. It is feasible to design a large study with adequate funding to further substantiate the mental health benefits of spinning charkha.

Declaration

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Notes & Comments

Sundarlal Bahuguna and Sri Dev Suman

Kaushal Kishore

ON WORLD CULTURE Day, a series of tributes began to pour in as soon as Rajeev Nayan Bahuguna shared about his father on the social media from AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Science) at Rishikesh. It was on occasion dedicated to the indigenous diversities amidst one of the worst pandemics of history. Cartoonist Satish Acharya depicted a saint merging into the two trees engrossed in talks as a tribute to the Gandhian leader Padma Vibhushan Sundarlal Bahuguna (09.01.1927-21.05.2021). The freedom fighter since early teenage, the journalist for prestigious Hindi daily Hindustan, and at last environmental activist, fully active until reduced to illness in the ripe old age, finally lost the long battle to COVID-19.

One can easily cross a thousand words limit in order to explain the creativity all centred around the Gangaputra (Son of the Ganga), the excellent expression depicting the spirit of satyagraha (nonviolent protest) in modern India. I hope it will continue to shine across the Himalayan peaks as long as the traditional forest rights of the indigenous communities are not restored.

The public protests to save the Himalayan forests with economic and ecological concerns unfolded in the 1970s with the Chipko

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(embrace the tree) movement. It has extended further against the Tehri Dam by the following decade. The 12 long decades in its background can be helpful to ascertain the accurate picture. Around the mid-19th century, the great civilisation has started to take the Ganga and the Himalayas in its loop with a couple of projects headed by Proby Thomas Cautley and Frederick Wilson, respectively. The Kingdom of Tehri-Garhwal entered into a contract with Wilson, an absconded British soldier from the Afghanistan War, to exploit all forests of the empire as an economic resource for 400 rupees per annum that later increased to 6000 rupees. The perpetual contract helped him to replace the mixed forests of the Himalayas with the pine monoculture for better economic gains within 45 years before its end in 1895. After that, the kingdom laid certain restrictions on the use of forests by the villagers for the next few years that largely remained disobeyed by the people and intensified the tension that reflects from the Durbar Circular on 31st March 1905 and the revolt when king Kirti Shah rushed to Khandogi to pacify the public in 1907, “when one of his forest officers, Sadanand Gairola was subjected to manhandling”.¹ The bone of these contentions rests in the infringement of traditional forest rights of the local community.

In 1930, Garhwali freedom fighter Sri Dev Suman (AKA Sri Dutt Badoni) went to Dehradun to take part in the Salt protest at the tender age of fourteen and was “sentenced to jail for fifteen odd days”.² The two had their first interaction at the school when Bahuguna was only thirteen years old. After 84 days of hunger strike in prison, Suman died in 1944. Following his martyrdom, the movement intensified, and young Bahuguna was active as a prominent Congress leader in Tehri district. School of politics based on Gandhian philosophy in the Himalayas, and the struggle for democracy created its history five years after this martyrdom, when the kingdom of Tehri-Garhwal joined the Union of India as a part of Uttar Pradesh on 1st August 1949. These two were eminent figures in the protracted battle for independence. The political economy of these movements in the Western Himalayas is closely connected with the initiatives of these leaders.

Sundarlal Bahuguna, along with his wife Bimla Bahuguna, represents the spirit of the satyagraha in post-independence movements. Former prime minister Indira Gandhi banned deforestation in Uttarakhand for fifteen years in 1980 “after the meeting with Bahuguna”.³ Life and works of Babaji, as I used to refer to Bahuguna Ji, remains incomplete in the absence of the beloved Mataji (Bimla Ji). As such, it is better to refer to them as the Bahugunas. She was among the students of Lakshmi Ashram at Kausani near

Almora. The role of this institution in the Chipko movement is a fascinating study in itself. An endeavour based on Gandhi's basic education (Nai Talim) started in 1946 by one of the two well-known daughters of the Mahatma, Sarala Behn (Catherine Mary Heilemann). The Gandhian School of Politics had first manifested regarding the colonial injustice and the grand larceny behind the pine monoculture of this region in 1952 when Mira Behn (Madeleine Slade) wrote the celebrated essay, i.e. *Something Wrong in the Himalaya*.

After independence, the state government of Uttar Pradesh invited Mira Behn to help with her expertise in agriculture. This was when she was trying to persuade Bapu with the blessings to start her Ashram in North India. Before the foundation of Gopal Ashram, where Bahuguna joined her, she is known to leave Kisan Ashram near Roorkee, Pashulok Ashram and Bapu Gram at the outskirts of Rishikesh.⁴ The advent of Wilson in the Himalayas got a response from women after 125 years on 26th March 1974 at Reni village in Garhwal, when Gaura Devi with certain other women launched a protest in solidarity with the forest rights that latter referred to as the celebrated Chipko movement. The communities with its leaders like Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Ghanshyam Raturi and Dhoom Singh Negi in Garhwal, and Sarala Behn and Radha Bhatt in Kumaon played a significant role in it. This was a creative rendition of the five hundred years old Rajasthani tradition, practiced among the "Bishnoi community to preserve the sacred Khejri trees in the deserts".⁵

A decade after Tehri-Garhwal joined the Republic of India, the Chinese displaced the Buddhist ruler Dalai Lama to declare its occupation in Tibet. Next year, one of the top Gandhian leaders of post-independence, Acharya Vinoba Bhave invited the Bahugunas at Wardha to discuss the Himalayan picture. Here, Acharya referred to him with these words, "You are resting in your village. There is a great danger to India from China. Take Mahatma Gandhi's message of Gram Swarajya to the remote border villages of the Himalayas".⁶ As such, padyatras (foot-march) started that caused the formation of public groups to look after the forest and village in Garhwal and Kumaon. The Gandhian political philosophy as described in the Indian Home Rule seems to play a key role behind most of these creative works and the satyagraha for forest rights. Sucheta Kriplani, former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, banned liquor in certain parts of the state after meeting with their delegation headed by "Sarala Behn before the end of sixties, and it prolonged for two decades in different areas".⁷

The Chipko movement is glorified than most other movements in Uttarakhand. Across the nations, its glorification started in the 1980s

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itself. Nature and her motherly characteristics helped certain thinkers to draw the ecofeminist version of the public protest. Vandana Shiva can help us here as well, as she delightedly declared, "While the philosophical and conceptual articulation of the ecological view of the Himalayan forests has been done by Mira Behn and Bahuguna, the organisational foundation for it being a women's movement was laid by Sarala Behn with Bimla Behn in Garhwal and Radha Bhatt in Kumaon".⁸ The seed conservation movement and the initiative to grow organic food led by women definitely deserve words of appreciation. Sadly, the need to focus on restoring the mixed forests in the Himalayas is still missing from public discourse in the age of Chipko glorification decades.

Babaji, the lifelong supporter of Aviral-Nirmal Ganga, invited me to join him on a kind of pilgrimage to Prayag and Meerut in 2008. Allahabad University had invited him to the dialogue series on the Ganga. The week-long companionship offered us certain excellent opportunities to share information and views too. In addition to Viktor Schauburger's wisdom on the living water, the success saga of the Chipko movement and the failure of the satyagraha against Tehri Dam was the most discussed topics between us. Indeed, it was horrific to learn about the "state sponsored accident in the eighties that prompted him to repeat what the history witnessed after Chauri Chaura massacre during the freedom struggle".⁹ They visited Mira Behn at the Vienna Woods to share the details of their long battle, not long before her death in the early 1980s.

Satyagraha for the Bhagirathi is an extension to Aviral Ganga Campaign initiated by Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya as a response to the Eastern Ganga Canal. It was the other significant project that Cautley developed for East India Company in six years between 1848 and 1854. One can notice outcome of his satyagraha at Malviya Dweep in Haridwar as manifested at the Bhagiratha Point ever since its creation during World War I.¹⁰ The agenda of the corporate state is an open secret in the 21st century. However, Prof. G.D. Agarwal tried hard to carry it further in the last phase of his life. What to say on the fate of the first member secretary of CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board)? The same AIIMS on 11th October 2018 had witnessed the "fate of the other Gangaputra".¹¹ The Bahugunas often conveyed the message to restore the Himalayan landscape with fruit-bearing trees replacing the pine monoculture as the missing bit of the Chipko movement. Leaves that can resist the raindrops are better than the pine needles, no? It can also heal some of the old wounds in the future.

The destruction of Kedar Nath in 2013 and the recent glacier burst

at Tapovan suggest something serious. After the new avalanche across the same Reni, “the tribal communities in Lahaul Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh intensified the protest against the hydropower projects in their surroundings”.¹² Forest Rights that promote the fundamental role of the indigenous communities in its conservation is in the focus since the United Nations cleared its position on this topic. Unfortunately, the political class has surrendered before the ruling class in the post-development period. It is not easy for the Himalayan tribes to dream what is right and just in these trying times.

We the people need to revisit the Chipko movement with his message; however, it is not so easy. The replacement of the pine with an oak or a walnut, or an almond in the Himalayan woods is a real challenge before the new generation. However, the king without a crown achieved it in the second half of the 19th century, even in the absence of modern technology. Basanti Devi has been active since the Kosi flash flood in Almora more than a decade ago. She has imparted her basic education at the same shrine (Lakshmi Ashram) in the eighties. In the age of all-pervasive division among the public on religious lines, Forest Rights Movement is a kind of hope in the mirage. The thin rays of hopes with the next generation of the Bahugunas like Dr. Vandana Shiva and Kishore Upadhyaya in Garhwal and Basanti Devi in Kumaon are also in the frame, as they are trying hard to settle the Himalayan blunders.

The Gandhian leaders like Anupam Mishra and the Bahugunas have become more relevant since the “Third Pole turned into a battlefield”.¹³ They can invite attention from all corners, and the rays of hopes that can cement the hearts with peace and prosperity rest there alone.

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Book Reviews

Louise Tillin, *Indian Federalism*, New Delhi: Oxford India Short Introduction Series 2019, pp xii+152, Paperback, Rs.345 ISBN-10 : 0199495610

Federalism's appraisal is essential for understanding how politics, the economy and public policy function in India, the world's largest democracy. In this book Louise Tillin brings to the forefront the complex dimensions that affect relations between India's central government and the states. It is a one-stop narrative to federalism in India. The primary focus of the book is on the relationship between the centre-state governments. The only drawback of the book is its neglect of democratic decentralization to the third tier since the 1990s.

The book has four synoptical chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion, and a separate section on recommended readings. The first chapter on constitutional design discusses the origins of federal ideas in India. It starts with the colonial period. It then debates centre-state relations in the constituent assembly and the eventual adoption of a comparatively centralized but flexible vision of federalism, accompanied by calls for cooperative federalism with a larger role for central government (p.25). Last segment of the first chapter looks at the way regional interests are represented at the centre, especially in the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). Since India adopted a parliamentary model of federalism rather than presidential one, it led to a smaller role for the second chamber in representing territorial interests (p. 41).

The second chapter on federalism and diversity discusses the reorganization of state boundaries for facilitating multiple identities. India has experimented with asymmetric devices that offer different levels of autonomy to particular regions with distinctive identity or having historical centre-region conflicts. Various asymmetric devices that offer different degrees of autonomy to regions such as Jammu and Kashmir, as well some states in Northeast India have been

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highlighted. The territorial model of accommodating diversity has limitations, and it has been successful only in some parts of India (p. 69).

The following chapter is on centre-state relations and it *considers* the ways in which changes in the political environment have shaped their operation historically. The rhetoric of cooperative federalism has also gained currency; but the central government has been more concerned with the question of how to work effectively with the states to pursue national goals. Numerous institutional devices have been designed to facilitate better cooperation between the centre and states. Party system is arguably the most important feature shaping intergovernmental relations. In the last segment of the third chapter Narendra Modi's policy and re-empowerment of centre with coercive elements has been highlighted. The last chapter on federalism and the economy illustrates some limits to the central government's ability to redistribute income and economic opportunities across states in the era of liberalization. Regional inequalities have increased since the onset of liberalization. The benefits from greater exposure to the global economy have been captured by a handful of states.

This book investigates some of the big dilemmas facing India today. Indian states' ability to contribute to national policy making that reflects local priorities is intimately linked up with the question of federalism. Tables that are given in each chapter are very illuminating. In the concluding chapter Tillin discusses the future of Indian federalism and states that the same single-party dominance like that of 1970s has been re-established. She speaks about promoting collaboration and learning between centre and states in order to achieve success. She also describes the fluctuations from collaborative federalism to competitive federalism and the rhetoric on cooperative federalism. This book provides a synthesis of the various historical debates and rifts in the federal political design in the wake of the abrupt revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status.

This book only provides a brief introduction to the study of Indian federalism. Special emphasis has been given to the period of 1990s onwards when states, often led by regional parties, were at the centre of power at the national level as part of the coalition. In the last decade, there has been renewed centralization, especially since the rise of the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power in 2014.

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