

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

December 2014



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

- The Mother

Year 5

Issue 9

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

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

Year 5

Issue 9

CONTENTS

New directions in environmental policy: Moving beyond the deadlock	6
The 'cause' of environment: Hijack through ideas:	6
Need for revision in Indian policy:	8
The History of Sino-Indian Relations and the Border Dispute between the Two Countries (2)	12
II. Sino-Indian Relationship During the British Rule from 1764-1947	12
A. The Western Sector	12
<i>a. Ladakh-Tibet Border</i>	12
<i>b. Ladakh-Sinkiang (China) Border</i>	12
History of India – The Vedic Age (6)	31
II. The Aryan Invasion Theory	31
B. Sri Aurobindo on the Aryan Invasion Theory (Continued from the previous Issue)	31
The Greatness of India and Its Culture (5)	42
2. Indian Civilisation and Culture	42
I. The Fundamental Idea and the Essential Spirit	42
II. Indian Culture in the Eyes of a Rational Critic	42
(A) <i>Leading Ideas</i>	43

A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

- The Mother

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

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: MOVING BEYOND THE DEADLOCK

The issue of environmental protection has taken centre-stage at a time when India is facing both domestic and international pressures with regard to its policies on climate change and alternative energy sources. While the problem of climate change and rapid global warming dominates international environmental governance and India's controversial engagement with it, in the domestic or national space the issue of environmental protection spans a variety of other areas too. These include challenges of degradation of quality faced in the areas of food and air, global warming, wildlife, land and forest degradation and water pollution.

Each of these areas and the issue of environment as a whole, has been determined both by the demands raised by the environmental movements in India and abroad and by the selective policy positions on this issue. At the same time, both have also been shaped by the global politics of the environment. While both the activist and policy positions may appear to be mutually contradictory, they are yet motivated by the same broad ideas, and have resulted in the current environmental deadlock.

THE 'CAUSE' OF ENVIRONMENT: HIJACK THROUGH IDEAS:

Environmental activism has been gaining ground in India since the 1970s, with some of the globally influential movements such as the Chipko movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan creating powerful environmental lobbies in the country. Such radical social movements generally hold a respectable status in the public psyche since they are seen to be contesting governmental corruption and providing alternatives for the public. However, in the face of the current environmental policy deadlock, mounting environmental degradation and untransformed public attitudes towards environment, we need to question the 'cause' of environment that is currently being advanced. While these ecological movements and

organizations have been embroiled in similar politics of patrimony and power in foreign and national spheres which have overtaken the NGO sector in general, it is also notable that this kind of vaunted 'grassroots' activism has advanced the cause of the environment in an extremely narrow manner, causing more harm than good to the cause of environmental protection. These campaigns of awareness have been influenced by three major factors:

First, these movements have been motivated more by the ideology of equitable access and less by the motivation of saving the environment as an intrinsic good.

Second, often the form taken by environmental activism is that of activism for the sake of itself. Just like any other movement, the emphasis is on community or group empowerment, rather than on the environment. When environmental activists speak of 'access' and 'rights' of human communities, in the context of environment, they are further affirming the existing culture of consumerism, as the essence of both is human self-interest.

Third, they have formed a part of the policy orthodoxy of sustainable development. Sustainable development refers to a mode of development which seeks to reconcile the objectives of economic growth and environmental protection. Drawn from the minimalistic language of survival, the term itself connotes contradiction and short-termism, which cannot go beyond ensuring mere sustainability.

The 'cause' of environment has been shaped by the overarching concern of how to maximize human benefits vis-à-vis environment. This is true for both the business and the environmentalist lobbies. The new technologies that have formed a part of lofty policy initiatives like sustainable development, 'ecological modernization' and market mechanisms for preserving the environment may form a part of the corporate interest of eco-friendly economic growth, but the same also apply to activists spearheading the cause of the environment. Both sides, through the language of justice, are motivated by the common consideration of maximizing their own benefits. Even when they speak of saving the planet for future

generations, the justification and goal is that of the interest-based idea of 'intergenerational equity'.

As a result, environmental policy debates have been shaped through the misleading logic of ensuring human justice and empowerment and ensuring the continuance of existing modes of greed and consumption through new technologies that can reconcile these objectives with those of the environment.

NEED FOR REVISION IN INDIAN POLICY:

The very first policy initiatives in the area of environment in India, during the 1970s, were realized through the twin concerns of the rising environmental movements in India and abroad and the subsequent international policy initiatives like the Stockholm Convention which highlighted the adverse environmental impacts of industrial activity. Indian policy deliberations on environment have, thus, been entangled in the West-imported ideological vocabulary, mirroring the global policy ideas, for a long time, creating confusion and lack of progress. The mutual policy contradictions in several issues of environment – pollution in the areas of air, food, water, forest, land use, waste management and noise pollution – exposes the weaknesses in the present policy approach, despite the passage of several laws and creation of environmental institutions/systems.

The approach being taken by the current government marks a break from the past policy on environment. It has become common knowledge that the current government has declared a 'war on the environment' by adopting plans which are clearly oriented towards maximizing economic growth. This is, however, a misconception rather than a reality, for two reasons:

First, even though the previous UPA-II government was well-known for its strong environmental laws and institutions, so much so that these laws often resulted in negative fallouts for the industry, it ended up creating more confusion than clarity. Failing to realize the true impact of environmental disasters, the previous government has treated laws as a mere formality to show that the area of

environment is not being completely ignored. The policy of the previous governments was a half-way house trying to accommodate all kinds of global, domestic and grassroots lobbies and interests. Torn between the objectives of development and environment, it could not focus on either and often resulted in policy paralysis on both fronts and ample scope for corruption.

Second, the current government is attempting to take a balanced approach to the entangled questions of growth, environment, global power interests and efficiency/costs. By dismantling the old laws and favouring faster project clearances, the government may come across as being more inclined towards industry. In fact, however, the government is now engaging with the environment actively in two directions – uniform environmental legislation and campaigning.

Uniform environmental legislation – First, a major step taken by the government was the appointment of the TSR Subramanian Committee to review the existing key laws on environment. These included the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. In keeping with the Modi government's objective of ensuring faster clearances and implementation and removing the multiplicity of inefficient laws, the Committee recommended the creation of an umbrella law, the Environmental Loss Management Act (ELMA) with two expert bodies at the centre and the states under it.

Second, in keeping with its commitment to bring transparency through technology, the government will start a new online system for monitoring industrial waste discharge into water bodies, from March next year.

Bringing legislation to the public – The current approach towards environment is likely to generate greater awareness than in the past. This is seen through the widespread mobilization organized by the government around the Clean Ganga Mission and the Clean India or Swachh Bharat campaign. While the Ganga Action Plan-I and Ganga

Action Plan-II was inaugurated initially by the Rajiv Gandhi government and UPA-II government respectively, it has never generated the same spirit of cultural belonging and awareness as the present mission. There is now a move to substantiate this process through legal measures, after the recent Supreme Court ruling which sought to expand the role of the National Green Tribunal, and the central government's decision to form 25 special teams to investigate the sources of pollution in Ganga. The Ganga plan is also an important part of the government's cleanliness drive.

The Clean India Mission, rhetorical until now, is also being linked to substantial initiatives. Recently, the environment minister, while stressing the role of public participation, also announced the imposition of penalties running into several lakhs of rupees and other legal measures to deal with the threat of plastic waste. Recent reports show that the threat of waste is causing great vulnerability in the Himalayas. Heaps of uncollected non-biodegradable waste absorbs heat which causes global warming and melts glaciers, thereby making the mountain settlements more prone to, what has come to be termed as, an impending 'water bomb'.

Both these breaks from the past policy are important intermediate steps in environmental protection. They are much more practical and efficient and, due to the increasing cultural involvement of people, more likely to be transparent and avoid corruption. This, however, is just the beginning. The opening provided through the involvement of the public needs to be widened further and needs to depart from the typical civic bourgeois mentality. The rise in awareness around environmental issues should not be based on the imported activist demands of human justice and rights and neither should it be based on the typical middle-class preoccupation with maintaining consumerist lifestyles, as is the basis of technologies that underlie policies like sustainable development.

There is also an urgent need of recognizing the limits of science in environment, which has given us a false sense of control and security and misrepresented both the problems and the solutions,

resulting in the current confusion. With the ecological disasters in waiting, transparency and public participation comes a little too late, while laws will remain as toothless as ever. Even now global policy-makers are trapped in a short-term interest-maximizing mentality and fail to act upon the urgency of the situation. Recently, the Lima climate talks brought back into focus the nature of ineffective piecemeal 'reforms' that are still being debated – such as net zero carbon emissions and green climate fund. The whole rationale behind 'net' zero emissions instead of radical zero emissions and a fund for 'adaptation' to climate change shows that public policy continues to focus on innovating in ecosystem and natural environment to be able to maintain current social and economic patterns, rather than clipping the very roots of environmental harm. Unfortunately, India is supporting the position on adaptation and climate finance in order to maintain its resource-intensive model of development. However, in the time of increasing ecological fragility, India needs to realize that it cannot simply replicate the western model of development. Possessing only 2.4% land area in the world and more than a substantial share of the world's human and non-human population, India is even more vulnerable to social conflicts arising over inevitable ecological disasters.

(To be continued...)

THE HISTORY OF SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS AND THE BORDER DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES (2)

II. SINO-INDIAN RELATIONSHIP DURING THE BRITISH RULE FROM 1764-1947

A. *The Western Sector*

a. *Ladakh-Tibet Border*

b. *Ladakh-Sinkiang (China) Border*

In 1960, on the insistence of Premier Chou Enlai, Prime Minister Nehru agreed to convene talks between Indian and Chinese border experts. The officials nominated by the two countries held 47 meetings over a period of six months from 15th June to 12th December 1960 in three different locations namely Delhi, Beijing and Rangoon. During these meetings the Chinese and the Indian officials received clarifications from each other on the border issue. After the conclusion of these meetings, on 14th February 1961 the Government of India's report on border dispute was published. In this Report, the Indian government produced evidence to prove that the boundary between Ladakh and Sinkiang was well established even before the coming of the British in India. To prove its case this Report produced copies of unofficial maps published in China, India and other countries. The first map produced showed that at the end of the sixth century, the Kuenlun Mountains formed the southern limits of Sinkiang. The second map, which was drawn by Jen Chao, a Buddhist priest, in 1607 showed that the Tsungling (Kuenlun and Pamir, see attached Map 1), lay between India on the one hand and Sinkiang and Tibet on the other. The next map that was presented by the Indian side was from Chin ting which was published by a Commission set up by the scholars and officials in Peking in 1321. This work of Chin ting contained a number of maps of Sinkiang. The maps in this work clearly showed that the Tsungling Mountains (Kuenlun mountain system), formed the southern boundary of Sinkiang. Next, an unofficial

Chinese map, published by the Peking University in November 1925, was presented showing the extent of the Chinese Empire under the Ching dynasty, which ruled until 1911. According to this map, the Aksai Chin area was not included in China under the Ching dynasty. Of course, all this did not unequivocally define the Indo-China boundary. Imperial dynasties historically never occupied all that constitutes China or India today.

Along with the above mentioned maps, the Report also cited as proof writings and maps by individual Chinese travellers who travelled in these areas during the nineteenth century. Thus the varied evidence in the Report including contemporary chronicles, reports of individual travellers and unofficial maps showed that the Ladakh-Sinkiang (China) border has been well defined for many centuries. It is, however, important to note that, the British did not take India's border with Sinkiang as historically settled. They were far from being confident in this matter. And in spite of their determined efforts, they were not able to arrive at any definite understanding with China on the Ladakh-Sinkiang border. As a result, the Ladakh-Sinkiang border was still undefined according to a map showing the political reorganization of India up to March 31, 1948 printed in the publication "Notes, Memorandum and Letters Exchanged between the Government of India and China", New Delhi, Government of India, July 1948 (Map 4).

During the nineteenth century the British frontier policy in the northwest of India was guided and determined, to a large extent, by the imperialistic Russian threat, as the two European powers were in the process of expanding their territories and protecting their frontiers without confronting each other directly. Due to the advance of the Russians into Tashkent and Samarkand and right up to the borders of Afghanistan, the British government was very keen and eager to define the border with China. By the 1840s the British government in India had acknowledged the paramountcy of China over Tibet and as the British were making serious efforts to determine the northern territorial limits of their empire, they felt it was necessary

to involve the Chinese in the process. So within three months of signing the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, the British Government set up a Boundary Commission in order to demarcate the eastern and northern boundary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. To secure Chinese cooperation in this matter, the British plenipotentiary at Hong Kong, Sir John Davis, wrote to the Chinese High Commissioner Chiyang at Canton that the British government in India wanted to maintain good relations with China and for this it was necessary to exactly demarcate the boundary between China and the British India.

The letter of Davis makes it clear that the British were trying to get the Chinese cooperation regarding the following two boundaries: (i) the boundary between Tibet and the British Indian territories which were ceded by Nepal at the end of the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1815-16 (Map 3), and (ii) the boundary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir with Tibet in the east and Sinkiang in the north. During the 1840's the British were not keen to adopt an expansionist policy towards Tibet because of their bad experience in Afghanistan. Therefore, in properly demarcating this border, the British government's main concern was to maintain peace and security along the areas bordering Tibet and Sinkiang.

To get the Maharaja of Kashmir's cooperation in this venture, the British government sent a letter to the Maharaja asking him to depute two intelligent men to work with the officers of the Boundary Commission for the demarcation of the boundary. The British appointed Vans Agnew as the head of the first Boundary Commission who established contact with the Chinese Amban in Lhasa and informed him of the changes in the territories resulting from the Treaties of Lahore and Amritsar and about the appointment of the Boundary Commission to settle the boundaries. The British requested the Chinese Amban to depute two confidential agents who would be helpful in pointing out the limits of the Chinese territories. The British also informed the Chinese about the decision of the Governor General to change certain provisions of the 1842 Treaty of Leh signed between the Tibetan Government and the Maharaja of Kashmir. It was pointed

out that the reason for the changes in the provisions was to remove the difficulties the British Indian subjects might face while conducting trade with Tibet.

In spite of their earnest efforts, the British Government failed to get Chinese cooperation for the demarcation of the boundary because the Chinese were very distrustful of the British especially after the Treaty of Nanking in 1843 after the First Opium War (1839-42). By this treaty the British got control over Hong Kong and also got 21 million dollars as war indemnity. The Chinese were also obliged to open four ports – Canton, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai – for foreign trade. Therefore, when the British asked for Chinese cooperation for discussions on Tibet's trade and border, the Chinese were very reluctant to further grant any commercial rights to the British regarding Tibet. Their view was that trade was already covered by the recent maritime commerce treaty concluded between the two countries. Moreover, as far as the borders were concerned, the Chinese view was that the borders were well defined and it would be convenient to adhere to the existing arrangements. However, Davis succeeded in convincing Chi Ying, the Chinese High Commissioner at Canton, that the maritime commerce treaty between China and Britain was different from the border trade between British India and Tibet. Finally Chi Ying acquiesced and agreed to transmit the British request to the Chinese Emperor.

Despite the two boundary commissions which were set up by the British Government in 1846 and 1847 – one headed by Vans Agnew in 1846 and the second headed by Alexander Cunningham in 1847 – they failed to get the Chinese to cooperate. The report submitted by Vans Agnew was the first report which properly tried to define the northern boundary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In the eastern side Agnew's boundary line joined Chushul, Demchok and Lanak-La (Map 2). Running northwards the line ran along the Karakoram Range and included the valleys of Shyok, Galwan and Chip Chap rivers on the Indian side and ended at the Karakoram pass.

In spite of the Chinese non-cooperation, the British's attempts to define the border were not in vain, there were some positive results obtained by the Boundary Commissions. One of the important achievements of the first Boundary Commission was the determination of the Indo-Kashmir boundary. Due to the exchange of territories Spiti became part of the British domains and the trade route between Rampur Bashahr (Himachal Pradesh) and Gartok (Tibet) came under British control. In his Memorandum of 13th May 1847, Vans Agnew clearly indicated the boundaries of Lahaul and Spiti and also pointed out that the Karakoram Range constituted the limit of the territory of Gulab Singh. During his explorations, as the head of the Boundary Commission, Agnew went up to Gilgit (Map 1) from Ladakh and the information he could get on the traditional boundary was that it went along the Karakoram ranges between Yarkand and Nubra and as far as Hunza and Nagar (Map 1). His description of the Sino-Ladakh border included the Chang Chenmo valley into Ladakh before it joined the Karakoram Range (Map 2). According to him Lanak-La at the eastern extremity was also within the territory of Kashmir.

1. "Johnson Line" of 1865

"Since the two Boundary Commissions failed to secure Chinese cooperation in the determination of Tibet's borders with Kashmir, the Indian government decided to act unilaterally to ascertain the limits of Britain's imperial domain, by determining the traditional boundary between Tibet and India, and Tibet and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. This could be done through exploration, survey and through mapping of the border areas, with the help of the local officials. Mapping of the Indo-Tibet border started soon after the British had annexed Kumaun and Garhwal. The border in that area was well known since it was essentially the border between Tibet and the kingdom of Nepal, along the Himalayan divide. Strachey started surveying the borders of Kumaun in 1846 where he met the local Bhotias whose services proved to be particularly useful in 1847 in determining the traditional boundary between Tibet and India. It

was from the materials that Strachey had collected during his surveys, assisted by the Bhotias, that he had drawn the sketch maps of the border areas. In 1851, the Survey of India had published two maps based on these surveys; and these maps were later incorporated in the Atlas of Northern Frontiers of India, first published by the Government of India in 1959, after the India-China differences on the border issue had come into the open. It is important to realize that Strachey was not a professional surveyor, nor did he have access to the mechanical tools that a modern day surveyor may use at high altitudes. Strachey's sketches of areas between two established high points, therefore, were likely to be approximate. This, however, in no way minimizes the importance of his work in determining the traditional boundary between Tibet and India. As one looks back on the work of the two Boundary Commissions, it becomes clear that there was no chance of the Chinese imperial authorities agreeing to the determination of the India-China/Tibet border through negotiations between wandering British and Chinese Boundary Commissioners. If any success was to be achieved in this matter, it would require negotiations between the British and Chinese Governments, on the basis of specific proposals. However, no serious effort was made by the British Foreign Office in London to start such negotiations with the Chinese, on the basis of specific proposals, till the 1890s; and when the British Government eventually presented definite proposals for determination of the Kashmir-Tibet boundary, the Chinese were elusive in their response.

Survey operations began in Kashmir in 1855. The purpose of these surveys was to determine the extent of India's boundary so that the matter could be taken up later for negotiations with the Chinese. However, the maps prepared by the Survey of India on the basis of these surveys, depicting India's boundaries with China which were, in effect, no more than claim lines, became mired in controversies. A key figure in the controversy over Kashmir's boundary in the north and the east, was W. H. Johnson, a civil sub-assistant to Major Montgomery who was in charge of survey operations in Kashmir. Johnson was assigned the responsibility for surveying north

eastern Ladakh and he was in Ladakh in 1865 at a time when Chinese rule had virtually collapsed in the westernmost territories of China; and by 1860 a new state, Kashgaria (Kashgar), had come into existence under Yakub Beg. Taking advantage of this, the Maharaja of Kashmir sought to extend his kingdom beyond the Karakoram Pass and succeeded in establishing a Chauki in Shahidula in 1854, although by 1857, the Maharaja's men had been driven out from the post. By 1877, the Chinese had re-established their control over Kashgaria and made it into a province of China—Sinkiang. But the boundary of Ladakh shown in Johnson's map, after his visit to the Karakoram Pass, Suget and Shahidula, showed the entire territory between the Karakoram Pass and the Kuenlun range as falling within the province of Ladakh. Johnson's motives are not above suspicion. For his survey operations in Ladakh, Johnson depended on Mangal Mehta's assistance for logistical support and safe conduct, and it is not inconceivable that his views were influenced by Mehta, the Wazir of Ladakh.

Moreover, Johnson himself was eyeing a job under the Maharaja's dispensation and, in fact, was later appointed the Wazir of Ladakh. It is quite possible, therefore, that in depicting Ladakh's boundary with Tibet, he took a position favouring the Maharaja's claims to territories that did not belong to him. Doubts about the correctness of Johnson's boundary are also justified because at least three other British travellers — Forsyth, a senior government official, Robert Shaw, an English writer and Hayward, who were in Ladakh closely on the heels of Johnson — had all rejected his boundary claims, and reverted to the watershed boundary of the Karakoram-Changlang range."¹

In the later years, the Johnson boundary assumed a very important place in context of the discussion on the Sino-Indian border. The then British Forward School strategists (who were of the view that Britain should advance forward and meet the Russian threat directly) had advocated that India's borders with China should be along the Kuenlun range. The maps issued by Survey of India had

originally shown the Karakoram Chang Chenmo watershed as British India's boundary with Tibet, but later the maps were changed and the boundary was extended to the Kuenlun range. However, a controversy developed after the first edition of the Turkestan map was prepared by the Survey of India. This map showed the boundaries of the British Empire and the Russian Empire. In this the boundary of Ladakh was shown along the Kuenlun range. On 28th July 1873, in his letter to the Surveyor General, the Superintendent of Survey, Walker, gave some reasons for expanding the boundary up to the Kuenlun range as shown in the Turkestan map. He wrote that the change was brought about because Johnson had visited Khotan (Map 2), and on his way he found a Chauki established at Shahidula by the Maharaja of Kashmir and also because the Maharaja was claiming that Ladakh's boundary extended up to the Kuenlun range.

“Why was this extended boundary of Ladakh as shown in the new Turkestan map, based on the exaggerated claims of the Maharaja, not corrected? ... Walker's explanation was ingenious. He explained to the Surveyor General that any correction would be inappropriate since several copies of the map had already been circulated, including the copies sent to England, and, the two copies sent to Russia. It became known in 1873 that Walker had been regularly exchanging maps with his Russian counterpart. The Russians, obviously, took interest in British maps to ascertain the extent of India's boundary claims, just as the Indian government was interested in Russian maps. Walker, however, added two comments in his report to the Surveyor General which are significant. First, he pointed out that the maps published by the Survey of India were not necessarily issued with the authority of the Government of India, thereby leaving room for later manoeuvres. What is more, Walker categorically stated that with certain exceptions, ‘no boundaries... have as yet been defined, and therefore everyone should understand that the map cannot be considered conclusive regarding hitherto undefined boundaries. Nevertheless, the advanced boundary of Ladakh, as shown in the first edition of the Turkestan map, was incorporated in the maps of some cartographers such as Keith

Johnston, adding a new dimension to the subsequent controversy over the Sino Indian boundary during the middle of the twentieth century, since the Johnson boundary included within Kashmir's territory the whole of Aksai chin — a 'desert of white stones'."2

2. The "Foreign Office Line" of 1873

After the rejection of the Johnson Line by the British Foreign Office, the responsibility of properly demarcating the northern border with China was given to Frederic Drew, Governor of Leh in 1870-71. Drew was the first person who prepared a detailed map of Aksai Chin and highlighted its geographic aspects. His map was based on his own explorations as well as the explorations of Hayward, Shaw and Forsyth mentioned above. According to Drew, the high-altitude east of the Karakoram was divided into three distinct parts by the Lakstang Range (Map 2). North-eastwards flow the streams which form the Karakash river and in the west and north-west flow the Chang Chenmo, the Galwan and the Chip Chap rivers, all of which join the Shyok-Indus system. In the South-western section of the Aksai Chin lies the Depsang Plains and through it passes the route to Shahidula (Qizil Jilga to Haji Langar to Shahidula). In the south-central part of the Aksai Chin lies the Lingzhi Thang Plain. North-east of the Lakstang Range, lies the Aksai Chin proper, known variously as the Kuenlun plains or the Soda plains (Map 2). It was on the description given by Frederic Drew, that the British government drew a line delineating the northern boundary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This line is known as the Foreign Office Line of 1873 (Map 2). This line started from Lanak-La, and then moving north-west side it finally joined the Karakoram Range. This line which started from Lanak-La was a little south of the Lakstang Range, which later in 1899 was used to define the Macartney-Macdonald Line.

3. The "Macartney-Macdonald Line" of 1899

Towards the last decade of the nineteenth century British policy towards China was determined mainly by the Russian moves in Central Asia. At this juncture the British were more concerned and worried about the expansionist Russians than the Chinese, since

China was internally weak at that time. The British during the 1890s tried to consolidate China as they thought that this will be helpful to them in countering Russia. "In 1889 the then Viceroy Lord Hardinge wrote, for example, that the territory between the Karakoram and Kuenlun ranges being inaccessible, and of relatively little value, the Chinese could be encouraged to take it, since that would be better than having a no man's land between the frontiers of India and China. 'Moreover', he wrote, 'the stronger we can make China at this point, and the more we can induce her to hold her own over the whole of Kashgar Yarkand region, the more useful will she be to us as an obstacle to Russian advance along this line.'

After the reconquest of Kashgar, first the Chinese tried to consolidate their position, and continued to treat the Kuenlun mountains as constituting the southern limits of their territory, as was done by the rebellious Yakub Beg. But by the 1880s, the Chinese were looking further south in a bid to re-establish their authority in areas they considered as belonging to China. In 1890, when Captain Younghusband went to the Pamirs to ascertain the limits of China's territory, he was told that the Karakoram mountains constituted the southern limits of China and, as if to assert this claim, they had put up a boundary marker in the Karakoram Pass in 1892, declaring that Chinese territory began from there. This was a unilateral move, but the British did not contest it then, as it seemed to be quite consistent with the ideas held by the British rulers in India, although the alignment of the Sino Indian border on both sides of the Pass as yet remained undefined. Differences emerged between Britain and China over the Aksai chin issue. The issue came up for direct talks between British and Chinese officials in 1896, following Chinese protests over the depiction of Aksai chin as a part of Kashmir in Keith Johnston's Atlas of 1894, that was presented to the Chinese Taotai of Kashgar. ... As noted earlier, the advanced boundary of Ladakh, as shown in the first edition of the Turkestan map, had influenced the work of some cartographers, including Keith Johnston. The boundary alignment of Kashmir, shown in Johnston's map, as running along the Kuenlun range to a point east of 80°E longitude, placed Aksai

chin within Kashmir. This was, in fact, similar to the boundary suggested by Johnson. When Russian officials drew the attention of the Taotai to this map pointing to its adverse consequences for the Chinese, he made a verbal protest to McCartney, the British official at Kashgar, claiming that Aksai chin belonged to China. McCartney sought to explain it by arguing that Aksai chin was “a general name for an ill defined and very elevated table land at the North East of Ladakh” and that “it was probably the case that part [of it] was in Chinese and part in British territory.’ Perhaps McCartney would have liked to have some specific agreement with China concerning the boundary of Aksai chin, but the British Government was not too enthusiastic about the idea, apprehending that it might precipitate Russian interference in Kashgaria. McCartney’s description of the Aksai chin was corroborated by a British intelligence report in the same year.”³

The Russian consolidation of their position in Central Asia was becoming a headache for the British government and by the later years of 1890s the British became determined to define a proper border with China, as this would be helpful to them in determining the future course with Russia. Keeping this in view, in 1897 the British government made a determined effort to come to an agreement with China regarding Kashmir’s border. At this time Viceroy Elgin dispatched India’s first comprehensive boundary proposal for the north-western border to Whitehall. He suggested that a line should be drawn on the watershed principle, including Lingzhi Thang plain as part of Ladakh, thereafter moving west of the Depsang plain upto the Karakoram pass (Map 2). Thus Elgin’s proposal abandoned the Johnson line and made no attempt to include the empty quarters of the Aksai Chin in Ladakh’s territory.

If Lord Hardinge was in favour of strengthening China so that it could be an obstacle for the Russian advance towards India’s north-west frontier, the Forward school strategists did not share his view. Hence, while Elgin’s proposal was still under consideration, the Forward school advocates in the War Office in London took the

matter into their own hands. To their advantage they found an important ally in Sir John Ardagh, the Director of Military Intelligence. In 1897 Ardagh completely refuted the watershed principle. "Ardagh recommended that Britain's border in north India be pushed beyond the watershed to include the Yarkand and Karakash valleys, in order to 'retain within our territory the approaches to them on the northern side and the lateral communications between these approaches'. He suggested that this would best be achieved by establishing 'our supremacy and protection [over] the chief of the local tribes, and to assert it by acts of sovereignty . . . and in this manner acquire a title by prescription'. ...he even suggested that this principle 'be applied at a future period to the upper basins of the Indus, the Sutlej and even the Brahmaputra, in the event of a prospective absorption of Tibet by Russia', implying that to forestall a Russian advance into Tibet, Britain should move across the Himalayan range and occupy Gartok, Shigatse and, inevitably, Lhasa!"⁴ Ardagh's proposal was not accepted by the Foreign Department of the Indian Government. The Viceroy, Lord Elgin, wrote to the Secretary of State for India that he and his advisors were not in favour of the Ardagh's line since it was of no strategic importance to British Government in India. He also added that this line proposed by Ardagh would strain the relations with China and might precipitate Russian interference. Although Ardagh's views were rejected by the Foreign Department, they continued to influence India's frontier policy for the next two decades.

The Government of India was well aware of the Russian advance into Central Asia. Indeed, Viceroy Elgin, two years before Ardagh's proposal was presented, advocated a direct approach to the Chinese to settle the boundary of Kashmir with China. But the Foreign Office was not too keen because the Chinese were embroiled in the Sino-Japanese war. But in 1898, there was a change in the British policy regarding the border issue because the British government learnt that the Chinese and the Russians were settling their frontier of East Turkestan (present day Sinkiang). Consequently, the Government of India informed Whitehall that they should settle boundaries of Kashmir, Hunza and Afghanistan with China. Till 1898, the

Government of India had not made any specific proposal to China for defining its borders with Kashmir. The Foreign Department in a despatch to Whitehall (23rd December 1897) had rejected the Ardagh line on the ground that this will be of no strategic importance to India but did not give an alternative proposal which could be presented to the Chinese for negotiations. On 27th October 1898, prompted by the Foreign Office in London, the British government in India came up with its own proposal and sent it to the Secretary of State. The Boundary proposed by the Government of India depicted a line on the crest of the Karakoram Range, moving in the south-east direction following Lakhsang Range until it reached the eastern boundary of Ladakh little east of 80 longitude. This line was a modification of the line that was presented by Vans Agnew on 13th May 1847. It was this proposal of the Foreign Department of the Government of India which, on 14th March 1899, was presented to the Chinese authorities, by Sir Claude MacDonald, the British envoy in Peking. This proposal also incorporated the suggestion by Macartney who had proposed that Aksai Chin should be divided between China and Kashmir along the boundary following the Lakhsang Range, a line of hills running East West and thus dividing the Aksai Chin proper.

The 1899 boundary line, known as the Macartney-MacDonald line, was the only official boundary line that was ever presented to the Chinese government by the British to define Ladakh's boundary with China. This line was a compromise between moderate view of Viceroy Elgin and the maximalist's view of the Forward School strategists like John Ardagh. In the eastern boundary of Ladakh, the MacDonald line left the whole of Karakash Valley, the trade route and almost the whole of Aksai Chin to China, while the Lingzhi Thang salt plains, the whole of the Chang Chenmo valley and the Chip Chap river were left with India (Map 2). "The Chinese Government never sent a formal reply to the British proposal, possibly because they were irked by the suggestion for relinquishing China's 'shadowy claims' to suzerainty over Hunza. Another factor influencing China's decision might have been her anxieties over Russia's reactions, had

such a proposal been accepted. However, the Chinese Government did not reject the proposal either. Under the circumstances, the British Government could have taken the position, as indeed was suggested by Lord Curzon in 1904, that since the Chinese had not rejected the MacDonal proposal, London would be justified in regarding China's reticence as a sign of her tacit acceptance of the same, and declaring the MacDonal line as Kashmir's boundary with China."⁵

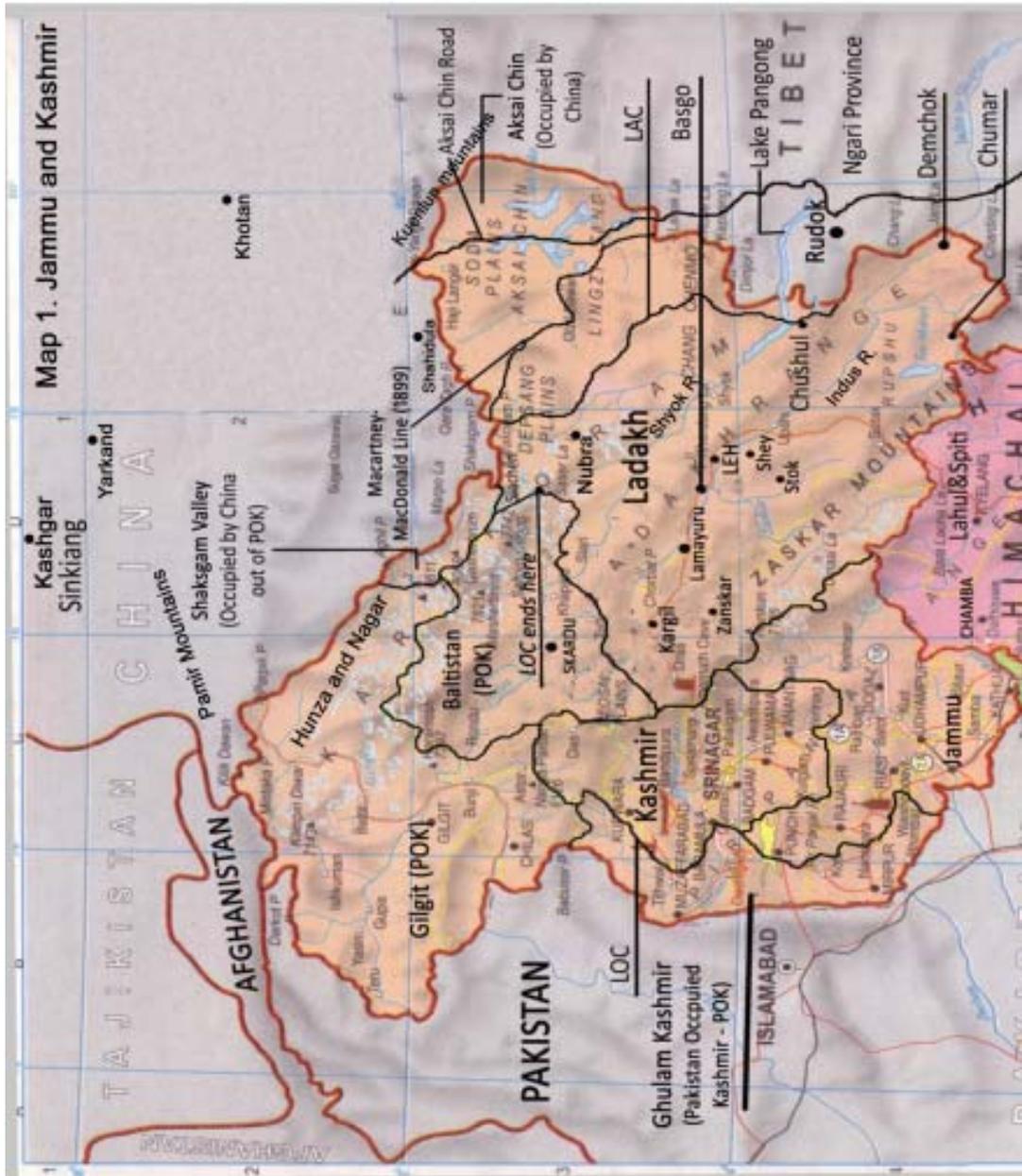
Even though the Macartney-MacDonald line was accepted by the British in 1904, the British Government vacillated between the Johnson line and the MacDonald line clearly violating international rules and norms. In 1912, following the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty, the British apprehended that the Russians may make a move to occupy Sinkiang. Accordingly, Viceroy Lord Hardinge urged the British government in London that the Johnson Line should form the Ladakh-Sinkiang border but his suggestion was shot down. However, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 brought a shift in the British policy and the British shifted the Ladakh-Sinkiang border line from the Macartney-MacDonald line to the Johnson line (Map 2). However, in 1927 as the Russian leaders, mainly Leon Trotsky and Stalin, were embroiled in a mutual conflict regarding the new economic policies and social reforms brought up by Stalin, the British moved backwards, abandoning the Johnson Line in favour of the Macartney-MacDonald Line. It is interesting to note that from 1917 to 1933 the editions of the Postal Atlas of China showed the Kuenlun Range (or the Johnson line) as the boundary between India and China. In 1941, when the British came to know that the Russians were surveying the Aksai Chin area for Sheng Shicai, the warlord of Sinkiang, they again moved to the Johnson line. Until the time the British left India in 1947, they still had not decided which line – the Johnson Line or The Macartney-MacDonald Line – defined the northern border of India with China. The map published by the Government of India in July 1948 showed the northern boundary of India with China as "Boundary Undefined" (map 4). The continuous shift of British policy regarding the Ladakh-Sinkiang border was the reason for the claims and counter-claims regarding the boundary of Aksai Chin. This has been the seed of

contention between India and China in the western sector.

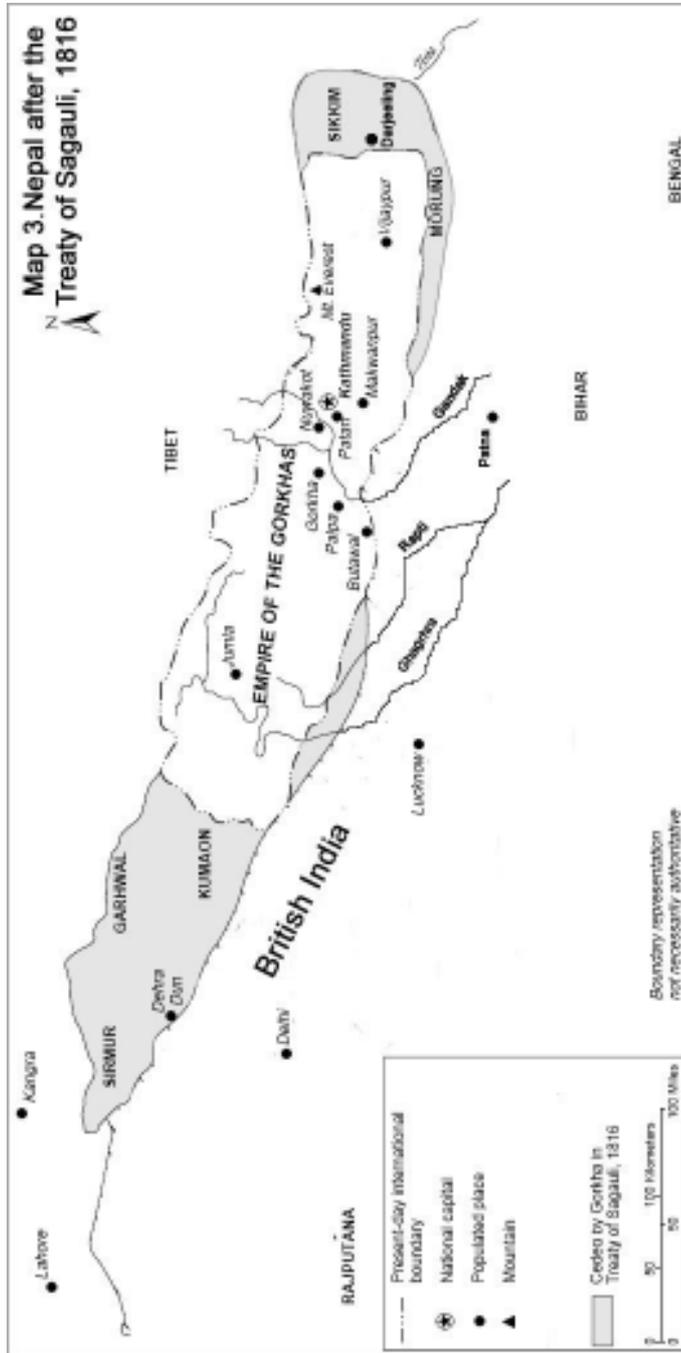
(To be continued...)

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HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (6)

II. THE ARYAN INVASION THEORY

B. SRI AUROBINDO ON THE ARYAN INVASION THEORY (CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS ISSUE)

The Origins of Aryan Speech

“Among all the many promising beginnings of which the nineteenth century was the witness, none perhaps was hailed with greater eagerness by the world of culture and science than the triumphant debut of Comparative Philology. None perhaps has been more disappointing in its results. The philologists indeed place a high value on their line of study, – nor is that to be wondered at, in spite of all its defects, – and persist in giving it the name of Science; but the scientists are of a very different opinion. In Germany, in the very metropolis both of Science and of philology, the word philology has become a term of disparagement; nor are the philologists in a position to retort. Physical Science has proceeded by the soundest and most scrupulous methods and produced a mass of indisputable results which, by their magnitude and far-reaching consequences, have revolutionised the world and justly entitled the age of their development to the title of the wonderful century. Comparative Philology has hardly moved a step beyond its origins; all the rest has been a mass of conjectural and ingenious learning of which the brilliance is only equalled by the uncertainty and unsoundness. Even so great a philologist as Renan was obliged in the later part of his career, begun with such unlimited hopes, to a deprecating apology for the ‘little conjectural sciences’ to which he had devoted his life’s energies. At the beginning of the century’s philological researches, when the Sanskrit tongue had been discovered, when Max Müller was exulting in his fatal formula, ‘*pitṛ, patṛ, pater, vater, father*’, the Science of Language seemed to be on the point of self-revelation; as the result of the century’s toil it can be asserted by thinkers of repute that the very idea of a Science of Language is a chimera! No doubt, the case against Comparative Philology has been overstated.

If it has not discovered the Science of Language, it has at least swept out of existence the fantastic, arbitrary and almost lawless Etymology of our forefathers. It has given us juster notions about the relations and history of extant languages and the processes by which old tongues have degenerated into that detritus out of which a new form of speech fashions itself. Above all, it has given us the firmly established notion that our investigations into language must be a search for rules and laws and not free and untrammelled gambollings among individual derivations. The way has been prepared; many difficulties have been cleared out of our way. Still scientific philology is non-existent; much less has there been any real approach to the discovery of the Science of Language.”¹

“The first error committed by the philologists after their momentous discovery of the Sanskrit tongue, was to exaggerate the importance of their first superficial discoveries. The first glance is apt to be superficial; the perceptions drawn from an initial survey stand always in need of correction. If then we are so dazzled and led away by them as to make them the very key of our future knowledge, its central plank, its basic platform we prepare for ourselves grievous disappointments. Comparative Philology, guilty of this error, has seized on a minor clue and mistaken it for a major or chief clue. **When Max Muller trumpeted forth to the world in his attractive studies the great rapprochement, *pit*, *pat*, *pater*, *vater*, *father*, he was preparing the bankruptcy of the new science; he was leading it away from the truer clues, the wider vistas that lay behind. The most extraordinary and imposingly unsubstantial structures were reared on the narrow basis of that unfortunate formula.** First, there was the elaborate division of civilised humanity into the Aryan, Semitic, Dravidian and Turanean races, based upon the philological classification of the ancient and modern languages. **More sensible and careful reflection has shown us that community of language is no proof of community of blood or ethnological identity;** the French are not a Latin race because they speak a corrupt and nasalised Latin, nor the Bulgars Slavs in blood because the Ugro-Finnish races have been wholly Slavonicised in civilisation and

language. Scientific researches of another kind have confirmed this useful and timely negation. The philologists have, for instance, split up, on the strength of linguistic differences, the Indian nationality into the northern Aryan race and the southern Dravidian, but sound observation shows a single physical type with minor variations pervading the whole of India from Cape Comorin to Afghanistan. Language is therefore discredited as an ethnological factor. **The races of India may be all pure Dravidians, if indeed such an entity as a Dravidian race exists or ever existed, or they may be pure Aryans, if indeed such an entity as an Aryan race exists or ever existed, or they may be a mixed race with one predominant strain, but in any case the linguistic division of the tongues of India into the Sanskritic and the Tamilic counts for nothing in that problem.** Yet so great is the force of attractive generalisations and widely popularised errors that all the world goes on perpetuating the blunder talking of the Indo-European races, claiming or disclaiming Aryan kinship and building on that basis of falsehood the most far-reaching political, social or pseudo-scientific conclusions.

But if language is no sound factor of ethnological research, it may be put forward as a proof of common civilisation and used as a useful and reliable guide to the phenomena of early civilisations. Enormous, most ingenious, most painstaking have been the efforts to extract from the meanings of words a picture of the early Aryan civilisation previous to the dispersion of their tribes. **Vedic scholarship has built upon this conjectural science of philology, upon a brilliantly ingenious and attractive but wholly conjectural and unreliable interpretation of the Vedas, a remarkable, minute and captivating picture of an early half-savage Aryan civilisation in India. How much value can we attach to these dazzling structures? None, for they have no assured scientific basis.**"²

"The present theory is wholly illusory; for it assumes that common terms imply a common civilisation, an assumption which sins both by excess and by defect. It sins by excess; it cannot be argued, for instance, that because the Romans and Indians have a

common term for a particular utensil, therefore that utensil was possessed by their ancestors in common previous to their separation. We must know first the history of the contact between the ancestors of the two races; we must be sure that the extant Roman word did not replace an original Latin term not possessed by the Indians; we must be sure that the Romans did not receive the term by transmission from Greek or Celt without ever having had any identity, connection or contact with our Aryan forefathers; we must be proof against many other possible solutions about which philology can give us no guarantee either negative or affirmative. The Indian *suraṅga*, a tunnel, is supposed to be the Greek *surinx*. We cannot, therefore, argue that the Greeks and Indians possessed the common art of tunnel-making before their dispersion or even that the Indians who borrowed the word from Greece, never knew what an underground excavation might be till they learned it from Macedonian engineers. The Bengali term for telescope is *ḍurbān*, a word not of European, origin. We cannot conclude that the Bengalis had invented the telescope independently before their contact with the Europeans. Yet on the principles by which the philologists seem to be guided in their conjectural restorations of vanished cultures, these are precisely the conclusions at which we should arrive. Here we have a knowledge of the historical facts to correct our speculations; but the prehistoric ages are not similarly defended. Historical data are entirely wanting and we are left at the mercy of words and their misleading indications. But a little reflection on the vicissitudes of languages and specially some study of the peculiar linguistic phenomena created in India by the impact of the English tongue on our literary vernaculars, the first rush with which English words attempted to oust, in conversation and letter-writing, even common indigenous terms in their own favour and the reaction by which the vernaculars are now finding new Sanskritic terms to express the novel concepts introduced by the Europeans, will be sufficient to convince any thoughtful mind how rash are the premises of these philological culture-restorers and how excessive and precarious their conclusions. Nor do they sin by excess alone, but by defect also. They consistently

ignore the patent fact that in prehistoric and preliterate times the vocabularies of primitive languages must have varied from century to century to an extent of which we with our ideas of language drawn from the classical and modern literary tongues can form little conception. **It is, I believe, an established fact of anthropology that many savage tongues change their vocabulary almost from generation to generation. It is, therefore, perfectly possible that the implements of civilisation and culture ideas for which no two Aryan tongues have a common term may yet have been common property before their dispersion; since each of them may have rejected after that dispersion the original common term for a neologism of its own manufacture. It is the preservation of common terms and not their disappearance that is the miracle of language.**

I exclude, therefore, and exclude rightly from the domain of philology as I conceive it all ethnological conclusions, all inferences from words to the culture and civilisation of the men or races who used them, however alluring may be those speculations, however attractive, interesting and probable may be the inferences which we are tempted to draw in the course of our study. **The philologist has nothing to do with ethnology. The philologist has nothing to do with sociology, anthropology and archaeology. His sole business is or ought to be with the history of words and of the association of ideas with the sound forms which they represent.** By strictly confining himself to this province, by the self-denial with which he eschews all irrelevant distractions and delights on his somewhat dry and dusty road, he will increase his concentration on his own proper work and avoid lures which may draw him away from the great discoveries awaiting mankind on this badly explored tract of knowledge.

But the affinities of languages to each other are, at least, a proper field for the labours of philology. Nevertheless, even here I am compelled to hold that the scholarship of Europe has fallen into an error in giving this subject of study the first standing among the

objects of philology. Are we really quite sure that we know what constitutes community or diversity of origin between two different languages – so different, for instance, as Latin and Sanskrit, Sanskrit and Tamil, Tamil and Latin? Latin, Greek and Sanskrit are supposed to be sister Aryan tongues, Tamil is set apart as of other and Dravidian origin. If we enquire on what foundation this distinct and contrary treatment rests, we shall find that community of origin is supposed on two main grounds, a common body of ordinary and familiar terms and a considerable community of grammatical forms and uses. We come back to the initial formula, *pitṛ, patr, pater, vater, father*. What other test, it may be asked, can be found for determining linguistic kinship? Possibly none, but a little dispassionate consideration will give us, it seems to me, ground to pause and reflect very long and seriously before we classify languages too confidently upon this slender basis. **The mere possession of a large body of common terms is, it is recognised, insufficient to establish kinship; it may establish nothing more than contact or cohabitation.** Tamil has a very large body of Sanskrit words in its rich vocabulary, but it is not therefore a Sanskritic language. The common terms must be those which express ordinary and familiar ideas and objects, such as domestic relations, numerals, pronouns, the heavenly bodies, the ideas of being, having, etc., – those terms that are most commonly in the mouths of men, especially of primitive men, and are, therefore, shall we say, least liable to variation? Sanskrit says addressing the father, *pitṛ*, Greek *patr*, Latin *pater*, but Tamil says *app*; Sanskrit says addressing the mother *mṛtar*, Greek *mṛter*, Latin *mater*, but Tamil *amm*; for the numeral seven Sanskrit says *saptan* or *sapta*, Greek *hepta*, Latin *septa*, but Tamil *eṭu*; for the first person Sanskrit says *aham*, Greek *egō* or *egōn*, Latin *ego*, but Tamil *nṇ*; for the sun, Sanskrit says *sṛra* or *sṛrya*, Greek *helios*, Latin *sol*, but Tamil *ṇṇyir*; for the idea of being, Sanskrit has *as, asmi*, Greek has *einai* and *eimi*, Latin *esse* and *sum*, but Tamil *iru*. The basis of differentiation, then, appears with a striking clearness. There is no doubt about it. Sanskrit, Greek and Latin belong to one linguistic family which we may call conveniently the Aryan or Indo-European, Tamil to another for which

we can get no more convenient term than Dravidian.

So far, good. We seem to be standing on a firm foundation, to be in possession of a rule which can be applied with something like scientific accuracy. But when we go a little farther, the fair prospect clouds a little, mists of doubt begin to creep into our field of vision. Mother and father we have; but there are other domestic relations. Over the daughter of the house, the primaeval milk-maid, the Aryan sisters show the slight beginnings of a spirit of disagreement. The Sanskrit father addresses her in the orthodox fashion, *duhitar*, O milkmaid; Greek as well as German and English parents follow suit with *thugather*, *tochter*, and *daughter*, but Latin has abandoned its pastoral ideas, knows nothing of *duhit* and uses a word *filia* which has no conceivable connection with the milk-pail and is not connected with any variant for daughter in the kindred tongues. Was Latin then a mixed tongue drawing from a non-Aryan stock for its conception of daughterhood? But this is only a single and negligible variation. We go farther and find, when we come to the word for son, these Aryan languages seem to differ hopelessly and give up all appearance of unity. Sanskrit says *putra*, Greek *huios*, Latin *filius*, the three languages use three words void of all mutual connection. We cannot indeed arrive at the conclusion that these languages were Aryan in their conception of fatherhood and motherhood, but sonhood is a Dravidian conception, – like architecture, monism and most other civilised conceptions, according to some modern authorities; for Sanskrit has a literary term for child or son, *snu*, with which we can connect the German *sohn*, English *son* and more remotely the Greek *huios*. We explain the difference then by supposing that these languages did possess an original common term for son, possibly *snu*, which was dropped by many of them at least in a colloquial expression, Sanskrit relegated it to the language of high literature, Greek adopted another form from the same root, Latin lost it altogether and substituted for it *filius* as it has substituted *filia* for *duhit*. This sort of fluidity in the commonest terms seems to have been common – Greek has lost its original word for brother, *phraor*, which its sisters retain, and substituted *adelphos*, for which they

have no correspondents, Sanskrit has abandoned the common word for the numeral one *unus, ein, one* and substituted a word *eka*, unknown to any other Aryan tongue; all differ over the third personal pronoun; for moon Greek has *selene*, Latin *luna*, Sanskrit *candra*. But when we admit these facts, a very important part of our scientific basis is sapped and the edifice begins to totter. For we come back to this fatal fact that even in the commonest terms the ancient languages tended to lose their original vocabulary and diverge from each other so that if the process had not been arrested by an early literature all obvious proof of relationship might well have disappeared. It is only the accident of an early and continuous Sanskrit literature that enables us to establish the original unity of the Aryan tongues. If it were not for the old Sanskrit writings, if only the ordinary Sanskrit colloquial vocables had survived who could be certain of these connections? or who could confidently affiliate colloquial Bengali with its ordinary domestic terms to Latin any more certainly than Telugu or Tamil? How then are we to be sure that the dissonance of Tamil itself with the Aryan tongues is not due to an early separation and an extensive change of its vocabulary during its preliterate ages? **I shall be able, at a later stage of this inquiry to afford some ground for supposing the Tamil numerals to be early Aryan vocables abandoned by Sanskrit but still traceable in the Veda or scattered and imbedded in the various Aryan tongues and the Tamil pronouns similarly the primitive Aryan denominatives of which traces still remain in the ancient tongues. I shall be able to show also that large families of words supposed to be pure Tamil are identical in the mass, though not in their units, with the Aryan family.** But then we are logically driven towards this conclusion that absence of a common vocabulary for common ideas and objects is not necessarily a proof of diverse origin. Diversity of grammatical forms? But are we certain that the Tamil forms are not equally old Aryan forms, corrupted but preserved by the early deliquescence of the Tamilic dialect? Some of them are common to the modern Aryan vernaculars, but unknown to Sanskrit, and it has even been thence concluded by some that the Aryan vernaculars

were originally non-Aryan tongues linguistically overpowered by the foreign invader. But if so then into what quagmires of uncertainty do we not descend? **Our shadow of a scientific basis, our fixed classification of language families have disappeared into shifting vestibules of nothingness.**

Nor is this all the havoc that more mature consideration works in the established theory of the philologists. We have found a wide divergence between the Tamil common terms and those shared in common by the "Aryan" dialects; but let us look a little more closely into these divergences. The Tamil for father is *app*, not *pit*; there is no corresponding word in Sanskrit, but we have what one might call a reverse of the word in *apatyam*, son, in *aptyam*, offspring and *apna*, offspring. These three words point decisively to a Sanskrit root *ap*, to produce or create, for which other evidence in abundance can be found. What is there to prevent us from supposing *app*, father, to be the Tamil form for an old Aryan active derivative from this root corresponding to the passive derivative *apatyam*? **Mother in Tamil is *amm*, not *m*; there is no Sanskrit word *amm*, but there is the well-known Sanskrit vocable *amb*, mother.** What is to prevent us from understanding the Tamil *amm* as an Aryan form equivalent to *amb*, derived from the root *amb* to produce, which gives us *amba* and *ambaka*, father, *amb*, *ambik* and *ambi*, mother and *ambar*, colt of a horse or the young of an animal. *Sodara*, a high Sanskrit word, is the common colloquial term in Tamil for brother and replaces the northern vernacular *bh* and classical *bhr*. *Akk*, a Sanskrit word with many variants, is the colloquial term in Tamil for elder sister. In all these cases an obsolete or high literary term in Sanskrit is the ordinary colloquial term in Tamil, just as we see the high literary Sanskrit *s* appearing in the colloquial German *sohn* and English *son*, the obsolete and certainly high literary Aryan *adalbha* undivided, appearing in the colloquial Greek *adelphos*, brother. What are we to conclude from these and a host of other instances which will appear in a later volume of this work? That Tamil is an Aryan dialect, like Greek, like German? Surely not, – the evidence is not sufficient; but that it is possible for a non-Aryan tongue to substitute

largely and freely Aryan vocables for its most common and familiar terms and lose its own native expression. **But then we are again driven by inexorable logic to this conclusion that just as the absence of a common vocabulary for common and domestic terms is not a sure proof of diverse origin, so also the possession of an almost identical vocabulary for these terms is not a sure proof of common origin. These things prove, at the most, intimate contact or separate development; they do not prove and in themselves cannot prove anything more.** But on what basis then are we to distinguish and classify various language families? Can we positively say that Tamil is a non-Aryan or Greek, Latin and German Aryan tongues? From the indication of grammatical forms and uses, from the general impression created by the divergence or identity of the vocables inherited by the languages we are comparing? But the first is too scanty and inconclusive, the second too empirical, uncertain and treacherous a test; both are the reverse of scientific, both, as reflection will show, might lead us into the largest and most radical errors. Rather than to form a conclusion by such a principle it is better to abstain from all conclusions and turn to a more thorough and profitable initial labour.

I conclude that it is too early, in the history of philological research, we have made as yet too crude and slender a foundation to rear upon it the superstructure of scientific laws and scientific classifications. **We cannot yet arrive at a sound and certain classification of human tongues still extant in speech, record or literature. We must recognise that our divisions are popular, not scientific, based upon superficial identities, not upon the one sound foundation for a science,** the study of various species in their development from the embryo to the finished form or, failing the necessary material, a reverse study tracing back the finished forms to the embryonic and digging down into the hidden original foetus of language. The reproach of the real scientist against the petty conjectural pseudo-science of philology is just; it must be removed by the adoption of a sounder method and greater self-restraint, the renunciation of brilliant superficialities and a more

scrupulous, sceptical and patient system of research.”³

(To be continued...)

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THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (5)

2. INDIAN CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

I. The Fundamental Idea and the Essential Spirit

II. Indian Culture in the Eyes of a Rational Critic

“It is felt that before we carefully consider the accomplishments of Indian culture it is best to clear out certain misconceptions about Indian culture which have settled themselves in the mentality of most educated Indians as a result of hostile and unsparing rationalistic criticism directed at it by the people with occidental mentality. A hostile criticism, when it is honest and free from the tendency of overcharging – the criticisms of Mr. Archer, the rationalistic critic Sri Aurobindo addresses, is not of this kind – is good for the soul and the intellect provided we do not allow it to afflict, beat down or shake us from the upholding centre of our living faith and action, “Most things in our human world are imperfect and it is sometimes well to get a strong view of our imperfections. Or, if nothing else, we can at least learn to appreciate opposite standpoints and get at the source of the opposition; wisdom, insight and sympathy grow by such comparisons.”¹

“To have put a high value on philosophy, sought by it the highest secrets of our being, turned an effective philosophic thought on life and called in the thinkers, the men of profoundest spiritual experience, highest ideas, largest available knowledge, to govern and shape society, to have subjected creed and dogma to the test of the philosophic mind and founded religious belief upon spiritual intuition, philosophical thought and psychological experience, are signs, not of barbarism or of a mean and ignorant culture, but marks of the highest possible type of civilisation. There is nothing here that would warrant us in abasing ourselves before the idols of the positivist reason or putting the spirit and aim of Indian culture at all lower than the spirit and aim of Western civilisation whether in its high ancient period of rational enlightenment and the speculative idea or in its modern period of broad and minute scientific thought

and strong applied knowledge. Different it is, inferior it is not, but has rather a distinct element of superiority in the unique height of its motive and the spiritual nobility of its endeavour.”²

In Mr. Archer, we find a wholesale and unsparing condemnation and an attempt to find out and state in its strongest term all that can be said against India and its culture. His attack covers the whole field and this allows us to see in one comprehensive view the entire enemy case against the Indian culture. Understandably, the eye of such a critic turns, not to the millenniums of culture and greatness of Indian civilisation but to the apparent ignorance and weakness of a few centuries. “In the poverty, confusion and disorganisation of a period of temporary decline, the eye of the hostile witness refuses to see or to recognise the saving soul of good which still keeps this civilisation alive and promises a strong and vivid return to the greatness of its permanent ideal. Its obstinate elastic force of rebound, its old measureless adaptability are again at work; it is no longer even solely on the defence, but boldly aggressive. Not survival alone, but victory and conquest are the promise of its future.

But our critic does not merely deny the lofty aim and greatness of spirit of Indian civilisation, which stand too high to be vulnerable to an assault of this ignorant and prejudiced character. He questions its leading ideas, denies its practical life-value, disparages its fruits, efficacy, character.”³

(A) *Leading Ideas*

The rationalistic critic’s most serious charge against the effective value of Indian philosophy is that “it turns away from life, nature, vital will and the effort of man upon earth. It denies all value to life; it leads not towards the study of nature, but away from it. It expels all volitional individuality; it preaches the unreality of the world, detachment from terrestrial interests, the unimportance of the life of the moment compared with the endless chain of past and future existences. It is an enervating metaphysic tangled up with false notions of pessimism, asceticism, karma and reincarnation, all of them ideas fatal to that supreme spiritual thing, volitional individuality. This is a grotesquely

exaggerated and false notion of Indian culture and philosophy, got up by presenting one side only of the Indian mind in colours of a sombre emphasis, after a manner which I suppose Mr. Archer has learned from the modern masters of realism. But in substance and spirit it is a fairly correct statement of the notions which the European mind has formed in the past about the character of Indian thought and culture, sometimes in ignorance, sometimes in defiance of the evidence. For a time even it managed to impress some strong shadow of this error on the mind of educated India.”⁴

To say that by putting an almost exclusive value on spirituality Indian culture – under the shadow of its leading philosophical ideas – turned away from life and has, therefore, been neglectful of the material base is patently false. Ancient Indian thought admitted that “...material and economic capacity and prosperity are a necessary, though not the highest or most essential part of the total effort of human civilisation. In that respect India throughout her long period of cultural activity can claim equality with any ancient or mediaeval country. No people before modern times reached a higher splendour of wealth, commercial prosperity, material appointment, social organisation. That is the record of history, of ancient documents, of contemporary witnesses; to deny it is to give evidence of a singular prepossession and obfuscation of the view, an imaginative, or is it unimaginative, misreading of present actuality into past actuality. The splendour of Asiatic and not least of Indian prosperity, the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind, the ‘barbaric doors rough with gold’, *barbaricae postes squalentes auro*, were once stigmatised by the less opulent West as a sign of barbarism. Circumstances are now strangely reversed; the opulent barbarism and a much less artistic ostentation of wealth are to be found in London, New York and Paris, and it is the nakedness of India and the squalor of her poverty which are flung in her face as evidence of the worthlessness of her culture.”⁵

“To say that Indian philosophy has led away from the study of nature is to state a gross untruth and to ignore the magnificent history of Indian civilisation. If by nature is meant physical Nature, the plain truth is that no nation before the modern epoch carried scientific

research so far and with such signal success as India of ancient times. That is a truth which lies on the face of history for all to read; it has been brought forward with great force and much wealth of detail by Indian scholars and scientists of high eminence, but it was already known and acknowledged by European savants who had taken the trouble to make a comparative study in the subject. Not only was India in the first rank in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, surgery, all the branches of physical knowledge which were practised in ancient times, but she was, along with the Greeks, the teacher of the Arabs from whom Europe recovered the lost habit of scientific enquiry and got the basis from which modern science started. In many directions India had the priority of discovery, – to take only two striking examples among a multitude, the decimal notation in mathematics or the perception that the earth is a moving body in astronomy, – *calā pāthvā sthirā bhāti*, the earth moves and only appears to be still, said the Indian astronomer many centuries before Galileo. This great development would hardly have been possible in a nation whose thinkers and men of learning were led by its metaphysical tendencies to turn away from the study of nature. A remarkable feature of the Indian mind was a close attention to the things of life, a disposition to observe minutely its salient facts, to systematise and to found in each department of it a science, Shastra, well-founded scheme and rule. That is at least a good beginning of the scientific tendency and not the sign of a culture capable only of unsubstantial metaphysics.

It is perfectly true that Indian science came abruptly to a halt somewhere about the thirteenth century and a period of darkness and inactivity prevented it from proceeding forward or sharing at once in the vast modern development of scientific knowledge. But this was not due to any increase or intolerance of the metaphysical tendency calling the national mind away from physical nature. It was part of a general cessation of new intellectual activity, for philosophy too ceased to develop almost at the same time. The last great original attempts at spiritual philosophy are dated only a century or two later than the names of the last great original

scientists. It is true also that Indian metaphysics did not attempt, as modern philosophy has attempted without success, to read the truth of existence principally by the light of the truths of physical Nature. This ancient wisdom founded itself rather upon an inner experimental psychology and a profound psychic science, India's special strength, – but study of mind too and of our inner forces is surely study of nature, – in which her success was greater than in physical knowledge. This she could not but do, since it was the spiritual truth of existence for which she was seeking; nor is any really great and enduring philosophy possible except on this basis. It is true also that the harmony she established in her culture between philosophical truth and truth of psychology and religion was not extended in the same degree to the truth of physical Nature; physical Science had not then arrived at the great universal generalisations which would have made and are now making that synthesis entirely possible. Nevertheless from the beginning, from as early as the thought of the Vedas, the Indian mind had recognised that the same general laws and powers hold in the spiritual, the psychological and the physical existence. It discovered too the omnipresence of life, affirmed the evolution of the soul in Nature from the vegetable and the animal to the human form, asserted on the basis of philosophic intuition and spiritual and psychological experience many of the truths which modern Science is reaffirming from its own side of the approach to knowledge. These things too were not the results of a barren and empty metaphysics, not the inventions of bovine navel-gazing dreamers.”⁶

(To be continued...)

References:

1. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo 20, Page 98*
2. *Ibid, p. 118*
3. *Ibid, pp. 120-21*
4. *Ibid, pp. 122-23*
5. *Ibid, pp. 119-20*
6. *Ibid, pp. 123-25*

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“O our Mother, O Soul of India, Mother who hast never forsaken thy children even in the days of darkest depression, even when they turned away from thy voice, served other masters and denied thee, now when they have arisen and the light is on thy face in this dawn of thy liberation, in this great hour we salute thee. Guide us so that the horizon of freedom opening before us may be also a horizon of true greatness and of thy true life in the community of the nations. Guide us so that we may be always on the side of great ideals and show to men thy true visage, as a leader in the ways of the spirit and a friend and helper of all the peoples.”

– The Mother
(CWM 13, page 360)

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