

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

December 2022



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

– The Mother

Year 13

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 13

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

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

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

– The Mother

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

THE RISE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES: A DIVE INTO THE METAVERSE

The age of Internet and other fast-paced technologies has brought upon us a momentous revolution. Over the past three or four decades, Internet has become a widely pervasive technology, necessary to the everyday lives of common people. Becoming a mass-based technology, it has impacted the entire structure of individual lives and collective institutions of economy, politics and society. The desktop computer was merely its basic form. It has now branched into smart technologies, social media, Internet of Things and is being powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The stride of technological behemoth machinery invented by us has breached those levels where it no longer needs human beings to go forward. The age of automation and the rise of the intelligent machine is upon us and mankind is gradually waking up to the possibilities of what this could mean for humanity. If the Internet, over just thirty years, brought about a revolutionary storm and ushered in the Third and the Fourth Industrial Revolutions, another storm is now upon us by the name of the ‘Metaverse’ – a concept which has transitioned from the fictional world of cinema and novels to the everyday lives of the people.

The Metaverse, in simple terms, is an altogether different world from the world that we know and presently live in. It is a virtual world – a world in which individuals can live as concretely as they do in the real world. It signifies an alternate virtual reality, an immersive experience wherein the individuals can dissociate themselves from the physical world and experience

concretely the virtual world – as concretely and palpably as they experience the physical world. While the Internet and its associated technological progress so far has maintained the distinction between the real and the virtual worlds, the Metaverse signifies the blurring of this thin line.

RE-IMAGINING REALITY: A NEW DIMENSION

Of the unpredictable times upon us, the Metaverse appears to be a crowning moment, among other path-breaking discoveries. While there have been many forms of Virtual Reality over the past two decades, the Metaverse represents a giant leap over all of them. It is set to revolutionize the way we not only engage with technology, but also with each other, as more and more people begin to lead their lives in such parallel digital universes instead of the real world.

How Does The Metaverse Work?

All that is needed to experience the Metaverse is wearable hardware – a VR (Virtual Reality) set, through the medium of which we can be instantly transported into a parallel world which we can feel, touch, taste, see and experience completely. This world can be felt as concretely as the physical world, through the means of the digital identity or digital avatar that the users create. This digital avatar is a digitized human-looking virtual form of themselves – our individual in the virtual world. In this world, it then becomes possible to socialize and live as concretely as we do in the real world.

Difference between Metaverse and Existing Online Space

Current Online Space	Metaverse
<p>Accessible through screens, such as computer/laptop/smartphone screens.</p>	<p>Accessible through easily portable and immersive hardware like headsets, gloves, watches and contact lenses. These will allow users to view, hear and touch a digital landscape directly, as opposed to a projection on a screen.</p>
<p>Consists of disconnected platforms/websites, where the user is required to have separate identities/accounts for separate platforms.</p>	<p>Will consist of an alternate ecosystem/world which will have its own currency, possessions, assets and property. There would be no need to log into separate accounts for separate tasks. All online tasks can be done in one single, seamless digital space.</p>
<p>Allows partial access to users' personal, emotive and biometric information by automated algorithms.</p>	<p>May allow unlimited access to users' personal and biometric information. This may include intrusive and minute information such as heart rate, gestures etc. as well as emotive information such as beliefs, psychology etc. which can be manipulated.</p>

In the Metaverse, a user can be or achieve all that they could not in real life. Thus, a person who is unattractive in real life can realize their fantasy of being the opposite by creating such an avatar and leading a second life as real as their physical life. A person can also cultivate entirely new relationships with new people in the Metaverse, thereby making real-life relationships dispensable. They can do business, engage in education, attend and conduct events, shop and live their mundane lives in this world.

Except, perhaps, for eating and sleeping, the Metaverse has potential to replicate almost all aspects of the physical world. In 2021, a Tamil Nadu engineering couple became the first Asians to solemnize a Hindu wedding on the Metaverse, from the guests to the gifts to the marriage ceremony – everything was done virtually. Indeed, they went a step ahead. The bride was able to create a digital avatar of her father (who, in the physical world, had passed away) to give her away in the virtual wedding. Thus, Metaverse makes it possible to not only cultivate relationships, but to also revive the relationships which no longer exist in the physical world due to death. For, in the world of the Metaverse, there is no death.

This is the situation at a time when the Metaverse technology is just at its inception. It is still being explored by an elite class of Big Tech corporates and is neither yet commonplace nor yet commercially viable. Like any other technology, once the Metaverse is developed more and made cost-effective, its attraction for the masses, especially the younger generations cannot be underestimated.

TRACING THE GROWTH OF THE METAVERSE

While ideas revolving around the Metaverse have been

around for the last two or three decades, they have been more confined to the world of human imagination in the domain of cinema and novels. Neal Stephenson is credited with coining the term in his 1992 novel named *Snow Crash*. Distant approximations of the Metaverse have also been familiar to the addictive, immersive world of video gaming. The Metaverse is one of the anchors of the virtual world, others being alternate forms of reality such as Augmented Reality, Multiverse, online gaming, online socializing websites based on digital avatars (such as ‘Second Life’) and the use of cryptocurrencies. Indeed, it can be visualized as an amalgam of all of these.

The Emergent Digital Landscape:

- **Augmented Reality (AR)** – Trans-positioning or overlaying of digital objects into the actual physical spaces around us, usually used to enhance the online consumer experience. For instance, one can use a simple smartphone camera to assess how a piece of furniture or a particular type of jewellery or make-up is looking around and on us. It will be as if we were trying it out in a physical mode. The famous online game – *Pokemon Go* – uses an AR approach, where the players are supposed to catch cartoon characters on their smartphone screens which show them the real-time location. Many have fallen to death while playing this game.

- **Multiverse** – Like Metaverse, Multiverse is a form of Virtual Reality (VR). However, unlike Metaverse, it is not a single, seamless interconnected space in which we can live our whole lives. Instead, there are separate, discrete Multiverses or specialized ecosystems for separate activities like education, online gaming, meetings, etc.

However, it is only since the past few years and particularly in recent times – during the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which heralded a shift towards digital platforms – that conversations around the Metaverse have become more mainstream, with people actually beginning to experiment with this technology in their daily lives, and with companies attempting to test the commercial future of the technology. As we transition towards Web 3.0 – a decentralized user-controlled version of the Internet – the Metaverse becomes a particularly central representation of it.

Thus, developments like marriages being solemnized on the Metaverse and well-known consumer goods companies opening their shopping stores on Metaverse are becoming more familiar. Similarly, hosting meetings, conferences and interviews on the Metaverse is also becoming a familiar idea, with many big corporates resorting to the same. Recently, a college in the United States – Morehouse College – held classes in the Metaverse. It is also gaining traction in the real estate industry, where prospective buyers would not need to physically visit the site, and yet through Metaverse undertake a detailed examination of it. Similarly, Virtual Reality therapy is becoming common for treating mental health problems. With the digital self becoming as important – if not more – as the physical self, yet another innovation achieved in the Metaverse is to capture real-time facial expressions from a user’s camera and translate it onto their digital avatar, such that the digital avatar becomes a close approximation of the user. This helps to cement emotive connect in a virtual world by tracking facial expressions and movements, just as one would in the real world.

Big tech giant – and parent company of social media

platforms like Facebook and Instagram – Meta unveiled its Metaverse platform called ‘Horizon Worlds’ over the past one year. However, it could not take off much, and has been beset with controversies. For instance, a woman levelled accusations of being sexually harassed in this Metaverse – for in Metaverse, everything can be seen, felt and experienced as concretely as in the real world. Besides the company Meta, other big tech giants are also attempting to establish a foothold in the world of Metaverse.

Presently, the Metaverse is new and is still in incipient modes of development, although its development is proceeding fast. A few big technology giants – Google, Meta, Apple etc. – are creating Metaverse design. Once they achieve a successful breakthrough – like the age of social media in the era of Web 2.0 Internet – the amount of intrusive psychological information these companies can access about users will be taken to another level. Presently, social media addiction has ushered in an age of mass psychological manipulation for political and commercial purposes. Metaverse would mean that a few big technology giants would have access to users’ deepest fears, desires and emotions in a doubly magnified form, which can also be further moulded.

METAVVERSE AND OTHER SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENTS: OVERLAPPING VIRTUAL WORLDS

The general movement towards the world of the Metaverse is being accompanied by other developing technologies which are set to revolutionize collective life. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) forums such as Chat GPT – which can

produce content – and Lensa – which can produce art – are cases in point. In particular, Chat GPT has raised many questions about the future of education and work.

Chat GPT and the Future

Chat GPT is an easy-to-use AI-powered chatbot which is capable of generating content. It is also called ‘conversational AI’, due to its ability to engage in conversations as human beings do. It was invented by a company called Open AI which had also created another similar AI-powered software called ‘Dall-E’ which could convert text to images.

The unique feature of this chatbot is that it actually generates content that is academically sensible and coherent. Thus, it not only generates content, but also ideas. For instance, it can form stories, essays, poetry, policy insights, jokes etc. Even though updated only till the year 2021 – with further upgradation in pipeline – this chatbot has generated immense interest.

Its ‘writing’ capabilities have already given rise to much debate about the future of work and education. Two immediate implications are instantly visible:

First, the education system will be dealt a blow. If there is an AI-powered software which is free to access and can generate thoughtful essays, answers and presentation points in a creative and logical manner, then what purpose does the classroom serve? The students can not only use this software to do all their homework and assignments, but they will also no longer need the services of the teachers. As it is, Internet has changed the education system, with every information available at the click of a finger. Already in the classroom, the learning environment has changed. Instead of exchanging ideas and

learning, teacher-student interaction has become commercialized. The primary objective of students is to test and trip their teachers somehow and with access to Internet search, students ‘googling’ and asking teachers questions has become a norm.

With this software, automation is taken to another level – not just information is available, but it can also be reasonably synthesized automatically into a logical, creative whole. With this, the role of human agency and effort can be minimized entirely, and the thinking process can be nearly eliminated, on the part of both teachers and students. That is why, recently, the New York education department has instructed all public city schools to completely ban the use of this software, fearing that it can be used by students to cheat. But such bans are not a solution. They can easily be circumvented; for, this software generates different answers to the same question, making verification of cheating or plagiarism checks difficult.

This irrepressible march of AI does not seem to have any alternative, at least not one that is visible in the present condition of humanity. The only possible alternatives to such an AI-powered world would lie in a deeper standpoint, the one that addresses the spirit rather than the outer mould, such as the ancient Aryan system of Gurukul education which had sought to develop each and every aspect of the inner and outer life of the individual. In today’s commercial and utilitarian world where profit motive drives education, there is no psychological space or consciousness to develop such a system. Such a utilitarian system can only give way to technologies which can further drive the profit motive and steep us into our material comfort. This is what the AI-powered Chat GPT does.

An Illustration From A Chat with Chat GPT:



Will rise of Artificial Intelligence lead to decline of religion?



The relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and religion is a complex and nuanced topic, and it's difficult to predict exactly how the rise of AI will affect the future of religion.

On one hand, some argue that the advancements in AI may lead to a decline in religious belief and practice. As AI becomes more advanced and better able to perform tasks that were previously seen as the domain of the divine, some people may see less need for religious belief and may turn to science and technology for answers to life's questions.



On the other hand, some argue that the rise of AI may actually lead to an increase in religious belief and practice. As AI becomes more advanced and more prevalent in everyday life, people may become more aware of their own limitations and mortality and may seek spiritual or religious guidance to make sense of their place in the world.

Additionally, as technology advanced, it could potentially bring new dimensions to religious practices, such as virtual and augmented reality, that could help further the cause of religious organizations.

It's also worth noting that it's possible that the effect of AI on religion may vary depending on the religious tradition and context.



Some religious traditions may be more resistant to change and may be less affected by the rise of AI than others.

It's also important to note that, as we are still in the early stages of development of AI, and it is hard to predict how exactly will it change our societies and culture, it's also hard to predict the exact outcome on religion.

In any case, AI is a rapidly evolving field and its impact on society, including religion, will likely be multifaceted and will depend on how it is developed, implemented, and regulated.



Source: An illustration from Chat GPT's responses to questions.

Second, with the rise of such AI-powered software, debates are already being raised about the nature of work. While initial waves of technological advancement were all about the mechanization in production and replacement of manual labour by machines, the present wave of generative AI software, such as Chat GPT, is raising debates about the relevance of those in the research, writing, teaching and other higher skilled pursuits.

Software such as Chat GPT are merely the first of their kind forays into the world of generative AI. In future, such AI technologies are expected to become more sophisticated, engaging with human emotion also in such a way that the difference between AI and human beings would become indistinguishable. Once that happens and the emotional connect with AI is established, then relationships will also become dispensable.

At a very basic level, the difference between human beings and AI is already indistinguishable to a great extent. Once emotional intelligence is cultivated, the entire psychological and social structure of human beings will witness the change. Many corporates have started deploying AI-enabled technologies to engage with their customers and the difference cannot be spotted. In the process, the difference between AI-generated creativity and authenticity is set to be eliminated entirely.

More importantly, when it comes to subjective domains of human life, AI is based on human knowledge and as such will reflect the dominant trends in collective thinking, regardless of how ignorant or full of hatred they are. Recently, Chat GPT software became a focus of controversy in India when it refused to generate a joke on Prophet Muhammad, but

unhesitatingly generated crass jokes of Lord Rama and Jesus Christ. The makers were quick to correct this error. However, the damage had been done. The entire episode reveals that future AI will reflect the bias, limitations and ignorance of human knowledge, on which future generations of youth will be fed.

The Potential of Artificial Womb:

The potential development of artificial womb technology has yet again spurred debate in recent times. A scientist from Berlin, Hashem Al-Ghaili, has released the video of a potential artificial womb facility called 'EctoLife', whose technology, he claims, is already there but is facing difficulties in being made practicable due to ethical constraints. But the glimpse into the potential future offered by this technology is indeed revelatory.

An artificial womb facility envisages a large space with various 'growth pods' or artificial wombs. Such artificial wombs would be dynamized using invitro fertilization (IVF). The embryo can be genetically engineered for superior traits before it is planted and made to develop inside the artificial womb. In EctoLife, there would be 30,000 growth pods equivalent to wombs for producing 30,000 babies. It would supposedly be meant for couples who are infertile. The pods are designed to replicate the conditions inside a mother's womb. They will have sensors that can monitor the baby's vital signs such as heartbeat, blood pressure, breathing rate and oxygen, any potential genetic abnormalities etc. Furthermore, any trait of the baby, such as hair colour, eye colour, height, intelligence and skin tone can be genetically edited through a range of over 300 genes. When the growth is complete, the babies can

be taken out of the artificial womb just by the push of a button.

Thus, the concept – if implemented – completely does away with biological ways of reproduction, eliminating the entire process of carrying babies in the womb and of labour pains. The technology – powered by renewable energy – claims to address the problem of imminent ‘population collapse’ due to rising infertility across various countries, in order to save the future of humanity. The interesting aspect of this technology is that it is already available and achieved by scientists with resounding success. All that now remains is the implementation. The fact that the concept and its demonstration were released to the public shows that the scientists are already testing the waters. Thus far, public reactions have ranged from wonderment to negativity to fear – and that is why the makers of this technology speak of ‘ethical’ constraints – but it is only a matter of time before this is implemented in some way.

The Destructive Potential of Gaming in Metaverse:

There is little to limit scientific and technological innovation, and the path that Science is traversing at present is the one in which even human imaginations are being realized with ease. While the Metaverse may still be an initial work in process, the extremities of its psychological penetration can be gauged from the use that it can be put to in a highly lucrative industry – the world of online video gaming. The innovations that have taken place in the world of gaming – and the interlinked world of comics – have been little noted, as the powerful industry has been carefully shielded from public glare. Incidents have come to light now and then, over the years, only to be scuttled and never be heard of again.

The gaming industry – in front of which television and social media addiction would appear relatively innocent – has been in news recently with countries like India and China (especially the latter) attempting to regulate the youth's excessive access to online games. Over the years, we may have also heard, now and then, of shocking online games leading to players ending up committing suicide or inflicting serious self-harm, as though possessed by the devil. For instance, the Blue Whale challenge (2016) and the Momo challenge (2018) were of such types. The players were assigned a series of tasks by unknown game administrators which involved inflicting self-harm and then committing suicide, or users witnessing random grotesque caricature of a woman flashing across their screens. Cases were reported across the world, including in India.

The gaming world has also fostered much addiction among the youth. Concepts like Metaverse, Multiverse and Augmented Reality have been known to gamers for a long time. These concepts have also formed a part of famous Japanese comic books ('Anime') which are as addictive to the young and the old alike as gaming. Parallel to the development of the Metaverse, a technology company, Oculus, has now developed a Metaverse game which can kill players in real life if they die in the game. The concept was inspired by a Japanese comic book series in which players, while playing such a game in the Metaverse, got trapped in it. Now such a game has actually been developed – only the implementation is remaining.

The game uses not just a simple VR headset to let the user's experience the Metaverse. It uses a 'Nerve-gear' headset, which, if it explodes will blow the users brains with it and result in real-life death. If a user, thus, gets killed in the Metaverse world, the Nerve-gear will actually explode and

instantly kill the person in real life. The only hindrance to the implementation of this fully developed gaming technology – like artificial womb technology – are ‘ethical considerations.’ The inventing company has admitted that they are hesitant to even hold trials of the game; for, if the user doesn’t get killed in the game, but still the Nerve-gear malfunctions and explodes, then there would be a problem. Such possible errors have not yet been addressed. Again, since the technology is fully developed, one may never know when it gets released in the market. ‘Ethical considerations’ have hardly been able to halt the march of science and technology and will be unlikely to do so now.

CONCLUSION

The development of Metaverse and related technologies marks a significant turn in the crossroads at which humanity presently stands. This technology is gaining immense traction and the coming years are predicted to mark a transition to this and other breakthrough technologies.

From a deeper perspective, if the physical world signifies the distorted sense-perception from which our consciousness constantly struggles to separate itself, the world of the Metaverse takes this entanglement of the senses to altogether another level. Indeed, the heightening of the sensory experience and the utmost indulgence in the world of the senses is what the Metaverse is all about. While in the physical world, there may be still some scope – through our struggles and suffering – to cling to our inner psychic core, the make-believe and apparently ‘perfect’ world of the Metaverse allows or needs no such space. In that sense, it is indeed another dimension in itself – a dimension created by technology, resembling a perfect,

typal world which co-exists alongside the physical world.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have spoken about the various mental and vital worlds, including symbolic typal worlds, which exist besides the physical world and constantly exercise their influence over the latter. These worlds are often the source of vital and mental creations, energies and inspirations which occupy a space of importance in the physical world. They are typal as they are fixed in their own groove and the beings of these worlds cannot follow the cycle of progress and decline, and birth, decay and death, which we experience on the terrestrial plane. These worlds do not have the animation of the psychic consciousness which is the reason for progress and evolution on the physical plane. Through a more active consciousness – in touch with deeper realities – we can become aware of these worlds, their beings and their working.

Much like these planes represent another dimension of consciousness, so, in a different and perverse way, does the Metaverse. However, while these worlds are invisible to us, the virtual world of the Metaverse is visibly amongst us, enticingly open to the masses and to anyone in general who would like to experience it. It is akin to placing a brand new dimension right within the physical dimension for anyone to retire into.

Its co-existence alongside the physical world and its ready accessibility to anyone represents that point in the curvature of scientific development when our scientific creations and machinery become progressively more controlled by vital impulsions, making them the handmaidens of human comfort and vital and egoistic indulgence. Many of the inventions of Science have subserved such ends. In addition to this, the

Metaverse caters to an extraordinary level of psychological manipulation as well – which can not only excite the vital initially, but soon completely drain it out and make it lifeless. Such has been the effect of most immersive, interactive social technologies including those preceding Metaverse.

The scintillating possibilities of a new world offered by the Metaverse, both as an escape from real life and as a new vital exploration, may have bedazzled mankind, as have all other kinds of rapid scientific progress we seem to be making. However, as Sri Aurobindo has said, *“The utmost widening of a physical objective knowledge, even if it embrace the most distant solar systems and the deepest layers of the earth and sea and the most subtle powers of material substance and energy, is not the essential gain for us, not the one thing which it is most needful for us to acquire. That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race”* (Selections From the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo I, 2022, p. 536).

Indeed, it may have the opposite effect. The universality and material oneness achieved by Science over a century have been superseded by the prospects of material oneness heralded by the new technologies of the present. However, instead of breadth and universality, today’s technological progress renders this material oneness within a narrow virtually-constructed prism – a make-believe world of our own making, driven more than ever by the egoistic vital human being. In this context it is worth questioning whether the robotization of progressive generations of human beings is occurring.

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HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

Even as the war rages on, Russia's Putin is consistently suffering a series of parallel setbacks. In economic terms, Putin's calculations clearly backfired. A warmer winter in Europe did not create the kind of energy crisis that Putin was anticipating. In addition, the decision of the G7 countries to impose a price cap (\$60 per barrel) on Russian oil has compounded Russia's already festering economic woes. As a result of this price cap implementation, the price for the Urals crude blend has slipped below the price cap to between \$50 and \$55 per barrel. Countries buying Russia oil are now in a position to demand even steeper discounts, and while Putin has threatened to take action against the price cap, he has yet to formulate any coherent course of action.

Alternative economic proposals generated by Russia have further fallen flat. The "gas union" proposed by Putin between Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in order to explore alternate gas routes has been outrightly rejected by the latter two countries. So has the "gas hub" proposed to be built by Russia in Turkey. Realizing Putin's weakness, most countries that Putin is in touch with are demanding their pound of flesh. In the Caucasus, Azerbaijan continues to assert itself against Armenia in Karabakh, disregarding Russia's feeble mediation completely. Most recently, Azerbaijan and Turkey conducted joint military exercises close to the Iranian border. The Turkish presence was a warning to Iran to cease confronting Azeris and also a direct challenge to Russia's waning authority in the South Caucasus.

In terms of war, the winter has been harsh. Ukraine is giving back more than it receives, dealing heavy blows to Russian positions. Ukrainian strikes on two Russian air bases deep within Russian territory in the early part of December 2022 could not evoke much retaliation from Russia except strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure. And even these strikes have proven costly for Russia. Data shows that Russia's heavy shelling of Ukrainian civilian infrastructure has led to a growing shortage of artillery and Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) shells. As a result, the total cost of reproducing the entire range of munitions used during the active hostilities in Ukraine this year would exceed \$92.74 billion – much more than annual Russian defence spending.

The Russia side is engaging in a war of attrition in which it itself is emerging as a loser. For, every Russian strike is reinforcing West's resolve to further arm Ukraine. Indeed, Europe is now more united than ever before on the issue of dealing with Russia – this is mainly due to clear Russian weakness.

One key change in the course of the war has been that the West is no longer attempting to discourage Ukraine in attacking targets deep within Russia. In addition, the West is set to provide Ukraine with critical high-precision long-range weapon systems – such as the MQ-

1C Grey Eagle drone, Storm Shadow cruise missile or TRIG-230 Multiple Launch Rocket System, to be supplied, respectively, by the US, the United Kingdom and Turkey – which is already drastically changing the course of the war.

This happens even as newly mobilized Russian forces are suffering badly in frozen trenches with deplorable supplies.

Furthermore, Russia's weapons supply is also at a low. The shortage of Russia tanks lost in enormous numbers in the past 10 months of fighting leaves the demoralized Russian army only capable of holding its defensive lines.

As a result of these failures, its reliance on an international pariah like Iran – which has been transferring drones to Russia and is even helping manufacture them within Russia – has only increased. In return, Russia has apparently provided Iran with stolen weapons from the West as well as cash. Thus, Iran will be able to study these weapons and learn how to make them through reverse-engineering the delivered systems.

Russia's increasing association with Iran, mounting war losses, internal sabotage incidents (with at least 72 incidents of attacks on Russia's military facilities by anti-Putin protestors throughout 2022) and waning influence in Caucasus and Central Asia does not bode well for Putin. Already discussions are going on about de-militarizing post-Putin Russia. The key changes in the war also give a glimpse of hope that the war may either end sooner with Ukrainian victory than anticipated, or, may continue to the peril and entire destruction of Russia.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER CONFRONTATION

Face-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers occurred in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh on December 9th, 2022. According to official account, minor injuries were sustained by around 20 Indian and a much higher number of Chinese soldiers. Both sides fought with bare hands, sticks and clubs, and disengaged immediately after the brief confrontation. A commander-level meeting was immediately held to defuse tensions. Both sides played down the confrontation saying that the perception of Line of Actual Control (LAC) in this sector

is rather vague, and both parties have been patrolling up to their perceived claim lines for many years.

This is another significant confrontation to have occurred after the 2020 Galwan clash and just two months after Xi's renewal of term in China's 20th Party Congress. A new border law implemented by China, which empowers China's personnel to take action against intruders, coming into force this year, may have also played a role in the clash.

ELECTIONS IN GUJARAT, HIMACHAL PRADESH AND DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

Three sets of election results were an eye-opener for the ruling party – the Delhi MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) elections and the state assembly elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Out of these three, the BJP retained Gujarat, but lost Himachal Pradesh and Delhi.

Delhi MCD Elections:

The significance of the MCD elections lay in the fact that both the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which is the ruling party in Delhi, and the BJP which had controlled the MCD for 15 years, engaged in a high decibel and energetic election campaign to score victory. The control of MCD in a Union Territory like Delhi is important from the point of view of funds control as well as local level governance. If the ruling party at the state/UT-level and in the Municipal Corporation is the same, challenges become much less.

Over the last year, both AAP and BJP have engaged in a constant tussle over the control of Delhi. In this election, it

was widely expected that AAP's growing support base among the Delhi populace and the 15 years of anti-incumbency against the BJP will give 200+ seats to AAP. The results, however, were more damping.

Aam Aadmi Party

Seat share (2022)	Seat share (2017)	Vote share (2022)	Vote share (2017)
134	48	42%	26%

Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)

Seat share (2022)	Seat share (2017)	Vote share (2022)	Vote share (2017)
104	181	39%	36%

Congress

Seat share (2022)	Seat share (2017)	Vote share (2022)	Vote share (2017)
9	30	11.6%	21%

The seat share was out of 250 seats in 2022 and 270 seats in 2017, due to the delimitation exercise conducted prior to the 2022 elections.

The results indicate that:

First, AAP performed much below expectations. It may have improved its performance vastly relative to 2017, but its hopes of getting 200+ seats were dashed. Moreover, its vote-share has fallen from 53% in 2020 assembly elections to 42% in the 2022 MCD polls.

Second, BJP performed much better than what was widely anticipated, despite 15 years of anti-incumbency. It actually increased its vote-share by 3 percentage points relative to 2017 and its performance was almost at par with its 2020 assembly elections vote-share (at around 40%).

Third, BJP's loss can also be attributed to the low voter turnout in the present polls. This low voter turnout was from South Delhi and other rich constituencies which are usually BJP voters. On the other hand, AAP's voter base belonging to poor sections of the city and in areas around East Delhi turned up in large numbers.

	Congress	BJP	AAP	Others
Hindu upper caste	7	49	34	10
OBC	10	42	44	4
Dalit	5	41	50	4
Muslim	39	3	54	4
Other minorities	6	36	58	0

Source: Lokniti-CSDS post poll survey

Fourth, voting patterns further indicate that the Hindu vote-bank was deeply polarized between AAP and BJP, with upper castes preferring BJP and OBCs and Dalits being evenly

polarized between the two parties (with more tilt towards AAP). On the other hand, the Muslims voted for AAP. Even Congress's only voting base left is the Muslim community.

Gujarat Assembly Election:

Assembly elections in Gujarat brought a landslide victory for the BJP. The result was not only along expected lines that the BJP would win, but was unexpected in the sense that the scale of the victory was unprecedented. Despite being embroiled in pre-election controversies such as collapse of Morbi bridge and AAP's controversial and heavy election campaign, the BJP managed to thwart all these factors and even the anti-incumbency of last few decades to clinch a historic victory.

The Congress lost heavily in the state, while the AAP managed to open its account with 5 seats and a nearly 13% vote-share.

	Seats won (2022)	Change from (2017)	Vote (%) (2022)	Change from (2017)
BJP	156	+57	52.5	+3.45
Congress	17	-60	27.2	-14.16
AAP	5	+5	12.9	+12.9
Others	4	-2	7.3	-2.21

Source: Lokniti-CSDS post poll survey

The results indicate that Congress was the major loser, with a major share of its votes going to AAP and a minor share to the BJP.

	Congress + NCP (Vote %)	BJP (Vote %)	AAP (Vote %)
Upper caste	25 (-11)	62 (+6)	12 (+12)
Patidar	18 (-17)	64 (+3)	15 (+15)
Kshatriya (OBC)	23 (-22)	46 (+1)	4 (+4)
Koli	24 (-7)	59 (+7)	16 (+16)
Other OBCs	24 (-17)	58 (+5)	11 (+11)
Dalits	32 (-21)	44 (+5)	17 (+17)
Adivasis	24 (-20)	53 (+8)	21 (+21)
Muslims	64 (-1)	14 (-13)	12 (+12)
Others	24 (-21)	63 (+13)	6 (+6)

Source: Lokniti-CSDS post poll survey

It is clear that BJP has increased its vote-share among all communities, except the Muslims, while Congress has lost votes among all groups, with AAP cornering substantial votes of the Congress.

The BJP not only benefitted due to the Hindu unity in Gujarat, but also due to the stellar performance of its welfare schemes, such as provision of free food grains, healthcare, housing, cash transfers, energy etc., which ended up benefitting a majority of households.

Himachal Pradesh Election:

In Himachal Pradesh, the BJP lost to the Congress, due to a wide spectrum of reasons, with no major issue prevailing over the others. Thus BJP's loss was a combination of anti-incumbency and local factors.

	Seat share (2022)	Seat share (2017)	Vote share % (2022)	Vote share % (2017)
Congress	40	21	44	42
BJP	25	44	43	49

There were many factors which impacted the Congress victory in Himachal Pradesh.

First, caste and community factors played an important role in BJP's loss. Unlike in Gujarat, BJP was unsuccessful in forging a Hindu coalition.

How voters of different castes voted?

Caste	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2022	2017	2022	2017	2022	2017
Brahmin	33	35	48	56	19	9
Rajput	40	36	49	49	11	15
Other upper castes	34	44	54	51	11	5
OBC	58	43	36	48	6	9
Dalit	53	48	34	47	14	5
Adivasi (all community)	33	45	60	50	7	5
Others	38	38	32	28	30	34

Note: All figures in percentages

Source: Lokniti-CSDS post poll survey.

It is clear that while Rajputs and Brahmins voted for the BJP, Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis broadly preferred the Congress.

Another reason for the loss of the BJP was the prevalence of local economic issues, apathy of local population towards welfare schemes and preference to candidate over the party in various constituencies. Furthermore, issues such as the Old Pension Scheme had an impact on inducing the salaried government officials to vote for Congress.

PARLIAMENT SESSION OF WINTER 2022

In the winter session of 2022, the Parliament passed key bills over 13 sittings. 7 Bills were passed by Lok Sabha and 9 Bills were passed by Rajya Sabha, with the total number of Bills passed by both Houses of Parliament during the Session being 9. The following are the key seven bills passed by the Parliament, excluding two Appropriation Bills.

Bills passed	Contents
The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2022	It seeks to increase the species protected under the law, and implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.
The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022	It seeks to (a) mandate use of non-fossil sources, including Green Hydrogen, Green Ammonia, Biomass and Ethanol for energy and feedstock; (b) establish Carbon

	<p>Markets; (c) bring large residential buildings within the fold of Energy Conservation regime; (d) enhance the scope of Energy Conservation Building Code; (e) amend penalty provisions; (f) increase members in the Governing Council of Bureau of Energy Efficiency; (g) empower the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions to make regulations for smooth discharge of its functions.</p>
<p>The New Delhi Arbitration Centre (Amendment) Bill, 2022</p>	<p>It proposes to change the name of the Centre from New Delhi International Arbitration Centre to India International Arbitration Centre so that a unique identity of the institute of national importance as conferred on it by law is evident and reflects its true objective.</p>
<p>The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022</p>	<p>It seeks to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Uttar Pradesh) Order,</p>

	1967 to exclude Gond community as a Scheduled Caste in four districts of Uttar Pradesh: (i) Chandauli, (ii) Kushinagar, (iii) Sant Kabir Nagar, and (iv) Bhadohi and recognise them as a Scheduled Tribe in these four districts.
The Maritime Anti-Piracy Bill, 2022	It proposes to make special provisions for repression of piracy on high seas and to provide for punishment for the offence of piracy and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022	It seeks to further amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State of Tamil Nadu to include the Narikoravan and Kurivikkaran communities in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu.
The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Fourth Amendment) Bill, 2022	It seeks to further amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes in relation to the State of

	Karnataka to include Betta-Kuruba as a synonym for the Kadu Kuruba community in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka.
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Source: Press Information Bureau.

A Prayer

“The world is fighting for its spiritual life menaced by the rush of hostile and undivine forces.

Lord, we aspire to be Thy valiant warriors so that Thy glory may manifest upon the earth.” (CWM 15: 167)