THE EMASCULATED HINDU

An Empiricist Analysis.



PANINI

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THE FIRST EMANCIPATION IS SELF-EMANCIPATION

This is not a book asking Hindus to find a better master. It is a book demanding that they stop looking for masters altogether. That is its beginning, its method, and its destination.

My contention is severe: the overwhelming share of the injuries that impede Hindu society must be confronted within Hindu society itself. I have described that proportion polemically as ninety percent. It is an indictment of misplaced priorities, not a fabricated statistical calculation. Casteism, regional chauvinism, inherited contempt, submission to charismatic authority, neglected public institutions, and the refusal to test claims against evidence are sustained—or ended—by the living. The first duty is to end them.

History matters. Conquest, coercion, and imperial domination cannot be erased by a lecture about internal responsibility. But an explanation of yesterday's losses is not a plan for tomorrow's freedom. A people can narrate its wounds magnificently and still refuse to disinfect them. It can build monuments to reason while rewarding obedience. It can call another guru its liberator and discover, a generation later, that it has merely exchanged one dependency for another.

The alternative is not a prettier creed. It is a disciplined way of life. Ask what is true. Ask how we know. Ask what observation could prove us wrong. Ask who benefits from an institution, who pays its costs, and

whether its promises survive measurement. Carry that method from the university into the sewer, the classroom, the courthouse, the hospital, the marketplace, and the home. Make intellectual independence inseparable from civic duty.

A street is not swept by a metaphysical proposition. A hungry person is not fed by applause for a sermon. A caste insult is not undone by invoking an ancient expression of universal consciousness while leaving the hierarchy intact. No prophet, monk, guru, philosopher, party leader, or national savior will do the work that citizens and institutions refuse to undertake. And no person—however poor or powerless—should be assigned responsibilities that belong to employers, governments, and the law.

The commitment of this book is explicit: dialectical materialism to examine the changing material world; logical empiricism to discipline claims by evidence; secular humanism to preserve equal human worth; free minds to make criticism possible; and market arrangements to be evaluated by their capacity to generate innovation and human flourishing, never worshipped as an infallible cure. None of these principles grants immunity to itself.

Stop worshipping solutions. Start solving problems. Reason supersedes both religion and civilization. Hindu emancipation is now or never.

THE READER IS THE JUDGE. This book presents an indictment, not an application for permission to criticize. Its exhibits are doctrines, decrees, institutions, records, and the measurable consequences of

obedience. I do not intend to acquit a political or religious system because its defenders demand reverence. I will prosecute Hindu caste hierarchy with the same severity that I apply to imperial Christianity, coercive Islamic institutions, exceptionalist claims turned into political privilege, British colonial rule, and Marxist dogma. The case will be stated with force; the evidence will be shown; the verdict belongs to the reader.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Mechanics of Emancipation: Why Reality Requires No Masters

Every philosophy must be judged by its consequences, not its ancestry. For generations, orthodox systems have demanded that we surrender our judgment to a master—whether that master is a self-proclaimed spiritual guru selling supernatural certainty or a dogmatic political theorist demanding that living economies bow to nineteenth-century scripture. This book rejects that entire architecture of dependency.

My synthesis rests on a simple, uncompromising premise: dialectical materialism is a tool for diagnosing the material world, not a holy grail or an immutable economic constitution. Traditional Marxism failed because its followers stopped investigating reality and turned a method of change into a rigid dogma of state command and bureaucratic control.

Marx's 19th-century analysis was fundamentally blind to the 21st-century realities of human mobility and economic fluidity. He was fatally unfamiliar with Indic religions and Asian civilizations, viewing them through the distorted lens of a colonialist observer. Furthermore, Marx was wrong in his core assumption of permanent, immutable classes—that a worker remains eternally trapped as a worker and a capitalist remains eternally a capitalist. In the modern world, especially driven by innovation in sectors like the IT industry, a worker can

become a capitalist through vision and execution, just as a capitalist can go bankrupt and fall into financial ruin at any moment.

When Lenin fine-tuned Marx's theories into the dictatorship of the proletariat and attempted to run an economy through rigid central planning, the results were disastrous. By rejecting the dynamic, materialist nature of economy and enforcing a static, planned model, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc states, Cuba, and Venezuela ultimately collapsed. Conversely, nations like China and Vietnam demonstrated that by embracing free-market reforms while keeping dialectical materialism as a dynamic philosophy of governance, and by understanding the true material nature of an economy, they could liberalize their markets and achieve prosperity.

That is why my ontology is dialectical materialism, and why I embrace free-market reforms because of the inherently dialectical nature of societal economics. My ontology is dialectical materialism and my ethics is secular humanism precisely because I do not trust god-men to save a nation or even a puppy. We do not need a new political priest.

Some will ask how a materialist philosophy can coexist with a defense of an Indian or Hindu civilization. The answer lies in a vital distinction between a confessional dogmatic creed and a vast, pluralistic civilization. I am a materialist in my philosophy because I reject theological fraud, unverified testimony enforced by power, and the passive fatalism that tells human beings to endure preventable misery. But I am Indian or Hindu in my civilizational loyalty because the

history of the subcontinent is not just a catalogue of caste oppression and surrender; it is rooted in an ancient, formidable inheritance of logic, skepticism, debate, and fearless inquiry. Just as the ancient Charvakas, Jains, and Buddhists maintained a materialist and skeptical outlook while being natively rooted in this civilization, we can embrace dialectical materialism while defending our civilizational home.

To defend that civilization is not to worship its decay, but to use the unsparing tools of reason and empirical science to clean out its rot. True self-emancipation means refusing to outsource our conscience to foreign doctrines or ancestral excuses. We use materialism to master our material conditions, markets to liberate our labor, and the deep intellectual courage of our own civilizational heritage to stand upright —without a master, and without apology.

The reader is the judge.

Panini, Author
Monday, November 9, 2026

Preface — A Civilization Cannot Outsource Its Conscience

The central cause of this book is self-correction. Conquest, imperial plunder, and the destruction of sacred and intellectual inheritances deserve rigorous historical indictment. Yet none of those crimes can serve as a lifelong exemption from the duty to eradicate caste oppression, regional antagonism, civic negligence, and intellectual dependence at home. The object is not to find a stronger master. It is to cease needing one.

There is a peculiar form of surrender that congratulates itself for being wisdom. It bows before force and calls the bow humility. It mistakes helplessness for tolerance, postponement for patience, and silence for peace. When its dignity is injured, it consoles itself with metaphysics. When its institutions fail, it seeks another holy man. When the street fills with filth, it waits for someone else to clean it. At last it may become so accomplished in explaining its defeats that explanation itself replaces action.

This book begins with a question more difficult than the familiar accusation that foreign conquerors injured India. Why should a society capable of producing rigorous schools of logic, skepticism, debate, and metaphysical inquiry become so willing, in some of its modern public habits, to suspend criticism of its own conduct? Why should people

who inherit a formidable intellectual tradition sometimes appear more devoted to its ceremonial symbols than to its methods of inquiry?

The answer cannot be that Hindus, or Indians, possess a fixed collective character. There is no such timeless essence to indict. The subcontinent is immense, divided by language, region, class, caste, religion, and circumstance; it contains argument, achievement, cruelty, courage, generosity, cowardice, and reform. An accusation against "the Hindu" therefore functions here as a deliberately confrontational summons to self-examination, not as a scientific description of every individual.

No institution wins immunity merely by calling criticism intolerance. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hindu caste hierarchy, British imperialism, and Marxist orthodoxy must submit their historical conduct and claims to the same examination. Name the authority. Quote the decree. Identify the injured. Produce the evidence. Outrage without proof is theater; documented coercion requires no apology from its prosecutor. A severe argument deserves a foundation no adversary can overturn by pointing to a careless assertion.

This book does not ask the reader to despise religion for the sake of another religion, nor to replace one civilization's claim of infallibility with another's. Its central proposition is more radical: Reason supersedes both religion and civilization. No sacred text owns the mind. No inherited philosophy is exempt from scrutiny. No priest, prophet, monk, philosopher, party secretary, or nationalist spokesman deserves obedience merely because he speaks with certainty.

What follows is a civilizational critique, but its destination is practical. It asks what people do with their bodies, streets, schools, markets, labor, historical memory, and political institutions. It insists that dignity is not restored by rehearsing ancestral greatness. Dignity is restored through conduct: by thinking independently, refusing humiliation, governing competently, honoring labor, preserving heritage, protecting the environment, and respecting the freedom of others to disagree.

And it offers a final proposal: that the ancient traditions of Indic and East Asian societies may cooperate without merging into one religion or submitting to a single leader. That proposal, the United Dharmic Alliance, belongs at the end of this argument because cooperation cannot substitute for the harder work that precedes it. A people unable to govern themselves responsibly will not be rescued by the grandeur of an international manifesto.

Before asking who conquered us, then, we must ask a more uncomfortable question. Who taught us to confuse submission with virtue—and why did we continue the lesson after the teacher had departed?

Foundations — Reality, Evidence, Human Equality, Free Minds, and Free Markets

A book that challenges the authority of scriptures, priesthoods, political parties, and civilizations must begin by disclosing its own standards of judgment. Otherwise I risk replacing one unexamined loyalty with another. I cannot condemn a tradition for confusing assertion with proof and then demand that my own assertions be exempt from proof. I cannot insist that the Hindu abandon borrowed certainties while smuggling my own convictions into the role of final revelation. Before discussing conquest, conversion, caste, economic stagnation, environmental neglect, or geopolitical humiliation, I owe the reader an account of the principles by which I will judge these matters—and the conditions under which I would revise my conclusions.

Five principles form that account: dialectical materialism as ontology; logical empiricism as epistemology; secular humanism as ethics; free minds as the necessary condition of inquiry; and free markets as a proposed form of dynamic economic coordination. They do not occupy the same logical category. An account of what exists is not the same as an account of how we know; a moral commitment is not a proof about the external world; and a particular economic arrangement cannot be deduced from ontology alone. Their unity is practical rather than scriptural: they discipline each other. No one principle deserves to become an excuse for violating the others.

I. Dialectical materialism: the world does not wait for our permission

The external world exists independently of my consciousness. Matter is primary; consciousness is secondary. The earth did not wait for human worshippers to exist. The stars did not begin shining when a poet named them. The microbes carried by contaminated water do not ask whether anyone believes in karma, divine providence, or revolutionary history. Disease, gravity, chemistry, fertility, exhaustion, and death are features of the material world, not rewards or punishments issued by an ideology.

This position should not be confused with the crude notion that human thought is powerless. Consciousness, once it emerges within nature, can alter nature through material action. The design of a bridge exists in thought before workers build it, yet thought alone does not hold the bridge above a river. Steel, concrete, labor, mathematics, and practical testing do. A doctor forms a hypothesis and acts upon the world; the patient's body responds or does not respond. Human intelligence matters precisely because it operates within reality rather than above it.

Reality is also dynamic. Soil changes when forests disappear; rivers change course; new technologies disrupt the institutions built around older ones; industrial organization shifts; populations migrate; states lose the capacity that made them formidable. A social structure that preserved life under one set of conditions may become an instrument of injury under another. This is why an account of material reality must attend not merely to objects but to relationships and transformations. The society and the environment shape each other. Competition can

encourage invention and produce concentration. Patience can sustain a population under temporary hardship and later become the habit by which preventable hardship is indefinitely tolerated.

I use the word dialectical to direct attention to these changing relationships, internal tensions, and transformations. But a dialectical account does not relieve us of the obligation to show which specific mechanism produced a particular outcome. Calling a phenomenon a ‘contradiction’ is not yet an explanation. If one claims that a policy destroyed an industry, one must identify the policy, the industry, the causal pathway, the time period, and the evidence. A philosophy of change that substitutes vocabulary for investigation would betray its own ambitions.

Nor does the value of materialist analysis depend upon Marx's personal infallibility. The truth of a scientific proposition does not inherit the nationality of the person who discovered it; and the falsity of a prediction does not become truth because a famous philosopher made it. I am prepared to learn from Marx without becoming his disciple. I am equally prepared to reject Marx's economic conclusions if the evidence requires it. Matter does not recognize party membership.

II. Logical empiricism: evidence is not a guest admitted only when convenient

How, then, do I distinguish my interpretation of reality from a comforting illusion? My rule is that arguments inconsistent with reliable evidence must be rejected or revised. No author, however brilliant, can legislate facts into existence. No scripture becomes a laboratory report through repetition. No political manifesto becomes a census by printing numbers in impressive columns. Every empirical statement in this book—including those most favorable to my thesis—must submit to the same tests of definition, documentation, comparison, and alternative explanation.

This is an allegiance to empirical discipline, not the assertion that science can answer every philosophical question. Logical analysis helps us expose contradictions and clarify meanings. Historical research assesses testimony and records that cannot be reproduced in a laboratory. Moral reasoning asks what we ought to do, not merely what a survey has counted. An economic observation can tell us that a policy increased production; it does not automatically decide whether the gains were justly distributed. The challenge is to use the right kind of reasoning for the right kind of question while refusing evidence-free immunity for factual claims.

Suppose I claim that a population became poor solely because its ancestors lost territory. The map may support an inquiry, but the claim is not proven until I compare land quality, density, institutions, access to trade, technology, capital, historical changes, and alternative

explanations. Suppose I claim that a ruler destroyed a temple because he hated images. A record of destruction is evidence of the act, not an unrestricted license to read the ruler's soul. Religious ideology, political conquest, wealth, retaliation, and dynastic rivalry may overlap. It is the historian's task to distinguish those motives when the evidence permits —and to acknowledge what the evidence cannot decide.

The same rigor must govern numbers that appear to vindicate my criticism of public negligence. A death counted in one government category may disappear from another without the person ceasing to have died. That difference warrants investigation: what law defines each category, who records the event, what incentives shape reporting, and what do independent observers find? Statistical disagreement should produce better questions, not a convenient choice of whichever total makes the most dramatic paragraph.

This method is demanding because it removes the writer's favorite privilege: the ability to tell a pleasing story unchallenged. Yet a civilization that cannot bear factual correction cannot bear intellectual freedom either. One of the purposes of this book is to reopen questions that pride, grievance, and religious reverence have tried to close. I must begin by permitting those questions to be asked of me.

III. Secular humanism: a civilization is not worth more than a person

The moral premise is equality of human worth. Every human being deserves equal concern for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is not a claim that every person's abilities, choices, or achievements are identical. It is a refusal to rank the value of a life by caste, race, religion, nationality, sex, inherited ancestry, or proximity to a supposedly chosen lineage. A child born into a stigmatized community does not inherit a smaller right to breathe clean air. A migrant laborer does not become less human because he is poor, dark-skinned, foreign, or dependent on an employer. A dissenter is not an enemy merely because she refuses the beliefs of her parents.

Equal human worth is a rule, not a muzzle. It protects the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or atheist individual while leaving doctrines, empires, priesthoods, ruling parties, and coercive institutions fully exposed to criticism. No empire is acquitted because it also established charities; no caste hierarchy is acquitted because its civilization produced philosophers. The accused are identifiable systems, decisions, and abuses of power—not populations assigned inherited guilt. If this principle ceases to apply to someone I dislike, it was never a principle at all.

The test is ordinary and relentless. Can a child drink clean water? Can a girl attend school without humiliation? May a person leave the religion of birth without threats? Does the poor citizen receive the protection of the law? Does public policy reduce avoidable suffering? A civilization cannot purchase exemption from such questions with monuments,

metaphysics, poetry, or memories of empire. A glorious past cannot compensate a living person for an avoidable death.

IV. Free minds: no book can begin without intellectual liberty

Without free minds I could not write the first word of this book. The reader could not evaluate the second. Writing an argument is an act of independence: I claim the right to examine what previous generations declared sacred, what fashionable thinkers call settled, and what governments would prefer left unspoken. This freedom cannot be granted only to writers whose conclusions please me. It belongs equally to the critic who disputes the title of this book and to the reader who finds my conclusions exaggerated.

The free mind is not a mind without obligations. Its first responsibility is to distinguish the liberty to speak from the certainty of being correct. It can entertain strange hypotheses, but it must expose them to criticism. It may question the oldest teacher, but it must also learn the teacher's actual argument before rejecting it. It may criticize Marx without pretending that a slogan settles economic history. It may honor Shankara, Nagarjuna, or the Buddha without treating any of them as the last permitted thinker.

Nor is freedom of conscience merely the right to move from one approved tradition to another. It includes the right to leave all traditions. The Hindu may become Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, atheist, or something not yet named. A person born into any other religion must possess precisely the same liberty. No community owns

its former adherents; no new community has a moral right to erase their history or command their silence. The right to leave a party when it ends—or when it becomes a disaster—is not treason against humanity. It is part of being human.

Intellectual independence also applies to the state and the marketplace. One must be free to criticize bureaucracies, corporations, parties, and wealthy benefactors. Otherwise 'free minds' becomes a decorative slogan invoked only against the priest, never against the powerful official or employer. My argument for economic freedom must therefore remain answerable to the question of whether people actually possess the practical ability to question, organize, invent, and dissent.

V. Free markets: the economic world is not a still photograph

I defend the investigation and substantial use of free-market institutions because economic life is a decentralized material process. A farmer watches weather and soil; a merchant observes demand; an engineer discovers a method of producing more with less; households change what they need; investors risk resources against uncertain futures. No planner can hold this evolving field of knowledge fully inside a single office. Prices may transmit information, profits and losses may reward or correct decisions, and competition may challenge producers who have become complacent.

Yet markets do not occupy an enchanted realm beyond material contradiction. Competition can destroy competition through monopoly. A price may fail to account for polluted water, unsafe labor, or climate

damage. A transaction may be legally voluntary while bargaining power is desperately unequal. Innovation can produce abundance and unemployment in the same season. The market's dynamism therefore does not establish that every market is free, fair, efficient, or humane. The empirical task is to distinguish conditions under which market coordination works well from conditions requiring public rules, competition policy, social insurance, labor protections, environmental standards, or public goods.

My further philosophical proposition is that markets can be understood as dialectical and materialistic in the character of their operations. Scarcity, production, technology, rivalry, incentives, ecological limits, and changing human needs generate material interactions that transform institutions and expectations. This is my interpretation; it should not be smuggled into a quotation from Bertrand Russell, nor mistaken for a theorem established solely by the word ‘dialectical.’ It must earn its force through detailed historical comparison and explanatory success.

The late Soviet Union and several Eastern Bloc economies exhibited persistent difficulties associated with central planning, incentive structures, shortages, quality, information flows, and adaptation. Their historical failures invite investigation, not the lazy proposition that every public institution must fail. Cuba has experienced economic limitations under extensive state control, but sanctions, tourism, energy supplies, and geopolitical dependence also matter. Venezuela's crises include oil dependence, institutional deterioration, macroeconomic

choices, and external pressures; it is not analytically sound to call the entire Venezuelan experience an uncomplicated test of a pure command economy.

China and Vietnam provide a different kind of evidence. Each introduced significant market mechanisms while retaining communist party rule. The subsequent transformation of production, trade, and living standards is substantial; so are the contributions of infrastructure, education, demographic change, international integration, public investment, and political institutions. The point is neither to worship Beijing nor to romanticize Hanoi. It is to reject the claim that an unchanging economic blueprint follows necessarily from materialist philosophy. Markets were not abolished because dialectics demanded it; market mechanisms were used because leaders confronting actual economic problems revised policy.

A market can be dynamic while its society is unfree. An authoritarian government may encourage commercial innovation yet punish political dissent. That is precisely why my five principles cannot collapse into one another. Economic growth does not excuse censorship. Public safety does not justify caste humiliation. The rights of the person do not disappear when GDP rises. A philosophy that has promised freedom must not treat human liberty as an accounting footnote.

VI. Russell's distinction and my independent proposition

Bertrand Russell gave this argument a necessary logical opening. In *Freedom and Organisation, 1814–1914* (1934), Chapter XVIII, "Dialectical Materialism," p. 220, he wrote of Marx that 'the whole of his theory of economic development may perfectly well be true if his metaphysic is false, and false if his metaphysic is true.' The point is not that Russell endorsed laissez-faire capitalism. He did not make my argument for me. His point is that the empirical status of Marx's economic theory cannot be settled by decreeing the truth of Marx's metaphysics.

That separation is liberating. If an economic hypothesis can be assessed independently of a metaphysical system, then the analyst is free to examine market coordination, public ownership, cooperative enterprise, central planning, mixed systems, and reform without first asking which answer would please the founder of a movement. Such inquiries are matters of evidence, institutional design, and ethical judgment. A statement about the primacy of matter cannot, by itself, legislate the appropriate ownership structure of every factory or the correct price of bread.

My additional claim is that market economies exhibit material interactions and tensions suitable for dialectical investigation, and that market mechanisms have sometimes helped transform economies that suffered under more rigid coordination. The distinction is essential to intellectual honesty: Russell supplies a logical premise; the proposed synthesis of dialectical materialism and free-market economic

organization is my own thesis. Its comparative defense requires studying the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, and the wider evidence—including cases that might complicate my conclusion.

I am not searching for a new final prophet of economics. I am trying to abolish the demand for one. If a socialist experiment works, analyze why. If a market reform fails, investigate the failure. If a regulation protects a river without sacrificing basic prosperity, preserve it. If a policy impoverishes the workers it was meant to rescue, abandon or repair it. To be dialectical is not to repeat the word ‘change.’ It is to be capable of changing one's mind when reality changes—or when the evidence reveals that one's mind was wrong from the beginning.

VII. The tests that this book must pass

I use five instruments, not five sacred theories. Material analysis follows changing conditions; empiricism tests claims; secular humanism protects equal worth; free minds make criticism possible; markets allow decentralized experimentation. Each has a job. I will use what proves useful, discard what fails, and answer readers who challenge the results.

Caste hierarchy receives no protection from Hindu philosophy. Conquest must be examined through identifiable actions and evidence, not inherited guilt. Japan and China offer lessons to inspect, not models to worship. The alliance I propose must remain open to criticism.

The criterion is simple: no teacher, party, scripture, market, nation, or civilization stands above reason. If an argument survives scrutiny,

retain it. If it fails, abandon it. Intellectual independence demands nothing less.

Chapter One — The Inheritance and the Abdication

1. The civilization that asked questions

India did not begin its intellectual history with a command to stop thinking. Among its oldest and most remarkable texts is a hymn that asks how the universe began and whether even the highest divine observer knows its origin. The significance of such questioning is not that it settles cosmology. It is that uncertainty itself can enter a sacred literary tradition without being expelled as an enemy.

Over many centuries, Indian thinkers disagreed about almost everything: the reality of the self, the existence of a creator, the nature of causation, the sources of knowledge, the proper ends of life, the grounds of moral duty, and the possibility of liberation. Some defended elaborate metaphysical systems. Others attacked their premises. Buddhists and Brahmanical philosophers challenged each other; Jain thinkers advanced their own accounts of knowledge and reality; materialists questioned doctrines their opponents regarded as indispensable. Logic was not merely ornament. It was a battlefield on which claims were made, tested, refined, and sometimes overturned.

To inherit that history is to inherit disagreement. Its noblest possession is not a set of conclusions that can be placed behind glass. It is the habit of asking what evidence warrants a belief, what follows from a proposition, and whether a doctrine survives contradiction. A

civilization dishonors its philosophers when it praises their names while forbidding their methods.

There is therefore an irony in some modern performances of civilizational pride. A person may invoke Shankara or the Buddha as a badge of belonging while refusing to entertain a serious objection to his own favorite teacher. He may celebrate the prestige of ancient reasoning while submitting to a contemporary guru who demands faith in place of demonstration. The vocabulary is philosophical; the conduct is anti-philosophical.

This is not a peculiarly Hindu temptation. Every tradition can convert inquiry into ritual and dissent into disloyalty. The question is not which civilization was born free of the danger. None was. The question is whether its living members are willing to recognize the danger in themselves.

2. Hinduism is more than a narrow confessional category

The word Hinduism does not exhaust the civilizational world that developed in and around the Indian subcontinent. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, skeptical, devotional, ritual, monastic, philosophical, and secular lives have intersected in complicated ways. Their histories contain debate and borrowing as well as exclusion and conflict. A useful account of Indic civilization cannot claim every one of these traditions as a subordinate branch of a single orthodoxy.

Nor was intellectual exchange bounded by the present borders of the Republic of India. Ideas, languages, texts, merchants, artisans, monks,

and political forms traveled across the Bay of Bengal, the Himalayas, and the trade routes of Asia. The surviving evidence of this movement is written into architecture, literature, political language, inscriptions, religious practice, and institutional memory across South and Southeast Asia. Exchange was neither uniform nor always peaceful; local societies adapted what arrived, and they retained their own agency.

To defend this inheritance is not to announce that India owns its neighbors. It is to recognize the history of connected but distinct civilizations. A Cambodian temple is not an Indian possession. A Japanese Buddhist tradition is not an inferior echo of a mother country. Daoism and Shinto are not junior partners in an Indic family. The history of Asia is richer than any single nation's claim to parental authority.

That conviction will later become essential to the proposal for a United Dharmic Alliance. Cooperation demands equality, not the disguised imperialism of a civilization that professes pluralism while expecting everyone else to bow.

3. The difference between memory and capacity

A nation may remember its achievements and still lose the practical disciplines that produced them. The ability to recite a philosopher's name is not the ability to reason. The possession of a famous ancient university is not the creation of a modern research institution. A proud account of sanitation in a distant city is not a clean public street today. Memory can inspire work, but memory is not work.

Here the distinction between civilization and society becomes urgent. Civilization names accumulated achievements, habits, institutions, conflicts, and shared inheritances across long stretches of time. Society is composed of actual people doing actual things now. Civilizational prestige does not automatically produce competent governance, honest administration, scientific education, reliable infrastructure, or freedom from everyday humiliation.

If caste pride has not built cleaner water, fairer schools, more trustworthy courts, or a stronger scientific culture, what is its practical achievement? If regional chauvinism leaves public services broken and citizens mutually contemptuous, what has it defended? A serious civilizational revival cannot be built on a competition in inherited rank. It requires an uncompromising inventory of present conduct.

4. A virtue can become its opposite

Patience is ordinarily praised because it restrains rashness. It can preserve a household, prevent revenge, make negotiation possible, and allow difficult work to mature. Yet the same virtue becomes destructive when it is detached from judgment. A person who waits while a child is harmed is not patient. A government that postpones an urgent duty indefinitely is not wise. A society that turns delay into a philosophy may discover that endurance has become an alibi for surrender.

The same test must be applied to hospitality, tolerance, nonviolence, loyalty, pride, and faith. Each may be a human achievement. Each may be transformed into an instrument of exploitation when detached from

consequences. Any philosophy that forbids such examination has abandoned its claim to guide living beings in a changing world.

5. The danger of replacing inquiry with accusation

It would be easy at this point to compile a list of invaders, missionaries, foreign rulers, rival states, and religious antagonists and attribute every modern failure to them. That might produce a fierce pamphlet. It would not produce the book this subject deserves.

Historical conquest matters. Exploitation matters. The destruction of heritage matters. So do differences in demography, land, economic organization, technology, and military power. But an explanatory theory must distinguish events from interpretations, incentives from theological claims, and the conduct of identifiable rulers from the character of whole populations. It must ask not only what outsiders did but what institutions inside a society enabled or resisted it.

Some attacks on temples were connected to military conquest, wealth, and political legitimacy; others expressed explicitly religious hostility. To understand them requires cases, dates, actors, sources, and comparison. A rhetorical description of every raid as simple religious hatred would be too shallow. A rhetorical description of every raid as mere theft would be too shallow as well. A serious indictment can be severe without being careless.

In the same way, modern international relationships cannot be reduced to the diet, theology, or skin color of entire populations. Pakistan's relationship with China, India's relationship with Israel, and the policies

of Gulf governments toward migrant workers demand analysis of strategic interests, state structures, labor law, security, and historical circumstance. My recurring suspicion—that power often matters more than professed principle—is worth testing precisely because it yields questions that evidence can answer.

If the evidence contradicts a favorite metaphor, then the metaphor must yield. This is the price of putting reason above civilization. Otherwise the book itself would become another shrine at which thought is asked to kneel.

6. The first obligation

No prophet, monk, party secretary, foreign ally, ancient text, or fashionable ideology will clean the reader's street. Nobody else can perform his basic acts of responsibility. A person must wash, learn, work, examine evidence, and act with regard for others. A community must maintain water, sanitation, schools, roads, soil, and institutions. A state must defend rights and administer law. These responsibilities are ordinary. Their ordinariness makes them easy to evade behind magnificent language.

One can cover a diseased body in beautiful bandages; the decoration does not cure the illness. In the same way, a society can embellish a failed system with new slogans, festivals, monuments, leaders, and identities without changing the institutional conditions that make it fail. The test of reform is not how proud it makes us feel but what it measurably improves.

The argument of this book will therefore move from historical inheritance to the mechanisms of dependency, from the politics of humiliation to the discipline of self-respect, and from civilizational critique to a proposed program of reconstruction. Its concluding chapters will ask how free minds, empirical inquiry, market coordination, public ethics, ecological stewardship, and voluntary international cooperation might fit together without producing a new dogma.

We begin not with a promise that someone will save us, but with a refusal to outsource the mind. The first emancipation is the permission—and the courage—to ask whether the stories by which we live are true.

7. The question before creation

A civilization that gave the world the Nasadiya Sukta ought to be cautious about demanding intellectual obedience. The hymn preserved as Rigveda 10.129 does not supply the easy confidence of a creation manual. It approaches origins with questions. What preceded the familiar categories of being and nonbeing? From where did the world arise? Who can know? Its closing movement entertains the extraordinary possibility that even the ultimate observer might not know. Here, in a text revered by tradition, is a refusal to pretend that the unknown has become known merely because the question is magnificent.

We should not counterfeit modern science by announcing that this hymn anticipated cosmology, quantum physics, or the Big Bang. It did not. Its categories, purposes, and historical setting are different from those of a modern scientific investigation. Its significance for this book is intellectual rather than technological. It makes uncertainty visible. It allows a sacred corpus to contain a question rather than only an answer. That is enough to disturb a civilization whose defenders sometimes behave as though admitting ignorance were an act of treason.

The greatness of the gesture must not be exaggerated into a claim that every Vedic author was a skeptic. Ritual orthodoxy, metaphysical certainty, and social hierarchy existed alongside speculation. Indian intellectual history is not a procession of heroic skeptics marching triumphantly toward modern rationalism. It is a difficult argument among people who disagreed about revelation, causality, selfhood, liberation, perception, and the authority of inherited texts. The inheritance contains freedom and constraint, inquiry and prohibition. A mature civilization inherits the whole history and learns to distinguish between its resources and its failures.

There is a practical consequence. If I do not know the origin of the cosmos, the appropriate answer is not to persecute a person who admits the same uncertainty. If I cannot explain a disease, I must investigate it; I must not pretend that citing an ancestor has cured the patient. The Nasadiya Sukta gives me no permission to replace experiment with poetry. It gives me permission—indeed an example—to confess the

limits of certainty. Without the capacity to say “I do not know,” there can be no honest inquiry.

8. Gargi: the questioner and the limit

Gargi Vachaknavi appears in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as an intellectually formidable interlocutor of Yajnavalkya. In the account of the public disputation she follows one answer with another, asking what supports the successive constituents of the cosmos. Her questions are not polite decoration around a male philosopher's performance. They advance the argument. The assembly must listen to a woman whose intellectual seriousness is part of the drama itself.

But we must tell the story accurately. In section 3.6, when her questioning presses beyond what Yajnavalkya permits, he warns her to stop. She falls silent. Later, in section 3.8, she returns with two deliberately formidable questions, comparing her challenge to an archer approaching an adversary with arrows ready. She is not written out of the debate. Yet neither is the episode a straightforward charter of limitless inquiry. It dramatizes both philosophical daring and a claim that some questions may exceed permissible boundaries.

That tension is intellectually useful. The point is not to transform Yajnavalkya into a twentieth-century advocate of unrestricted speech, nor to turn Gargi into a symbol emptied of historical context. The point is that the record allows us to see the struggle over authority. A civilization that remembers the woman who questioned its sages can also ask whether those sages were justified when they told her to stop.

The right to question a questioner is itself part of the inheritance I want to reclaim.

To defend a tradition intelligently, one must not sand away the passages that complicate its modern reputation. Suppressing the warning would be another form of intellectual dependence: this time dependence on a flattering historical portrait. I do not need flawless ancestors. I need an inheritance robust enough to withstand an honest reading.

9. The dissenting schools were not one school

The philosophical map of India was never a single road. Nyaya philosophers investigated inference and the means of knowledge; Vaisheshika thinkers developed categories of substances and qualities; Mimamsa defended sophisticated principles of textual interpretation and ritual authority; Samkhya elaborated a dualism of consciousness and primordial nature. Their methods and conclusions differed sharply. It is inaccurate to baptize every one of them as a materialist or a skeptic in the same sense. It is accurate to say that they participated in a dense culture of argument in which objections demanded replies.

The usual distinction between astika and nastika does not map neatly onto the modern contrast between believers and atheists. In common philosophical classifications, acceptance of Vedic authority plays an important role. A school might criticize the idea of a creator God while being classified as astika; another might offer demanding ethical and philosophical systems while rejecting Vedic authority. A modern

reader who translates these words as simply “religious” and “irreligious” risks misunderstanding the debate before it begins.

Buddhist and Jain philosophers were not minor footnotes to a supposedly uniform Hindu story. They challenged assumptions about enduring selves, causation, knowledge, violence, and the path to liberation. Their critiques helped stimulate new responses from Brahmanical thinkers, and in turn they were challenged by those thinkers. Nagarjuna's interrogation of intrinsic existence, the work associated with Dignaga and Dharmakirti on logic and cognition, and Nyaya responses deserve treatment as genuine philosophical interventions. One need not agree with any of them to acknowledge that disagreement was productive. The lessons are methodological. If an opponent identifies a contradiction, the answer is not to ask for his caste. If a rival school finds an ambiguity in a definition, the remedy is to clarify the definition. If a theory fails to explain experience, it must be defended with evidence and reasoning or revised. These are habits of intellectual citizenship. They are more precious than the ability to recite the names of philosophers without practicing their methods.

10. Charvaka: an adversary whose lost books still matter

The traditions commonly called Charvaka or Lokayata present a particularly revealing problem. They are associated with varieties of materialism and criticism of priestly claims, including skepticism toward postmortem reward and scriptural authority. Yet much of what survives comes from hostile reports, quotations, and polemical summaries. The original works and their transmission history are fragmentary. This creates a burden of care: I must not construct a conveniently modern revolutionary from evidence mediated by his enemies.

What, then, can their presence establish? It establishes that Indian philosophers had to reckon with views that resisted some of their most cherished metaphysical and religious assumptions. Opponents spent intellectual energy answering the materialist challenge. The archive preserves an argument, though often through the voice of the victorious adversary. In that sense the record is evidence not only of dissent but of the fragile conditions under which dissenting traditions survive.

The fate of Charvaka supplies an uncomfortable analogy for the present. A society may boast of having tolerated a critic while permitting the critic's writings to disappear and preserving mainly denunciations. This does not prove that every lost text was suppressed; loss can result from many causes. It does warn us against treating the survival of a tradition as proof of its intellectual superiority. A bibliography is not a verdict on truth.

The free mind must be able to examine unpopular philosophies without first asking whether they flatter the civilization in which they arose. If materialism is false, let argument expose its weakness. If a sacred claim is false, let argument expose that weakness too. An honest philosophical culture must provide the same rules of engagement to both sides.

11. The Kalamas and the harder meaning of inquiry

The Buddhist discourse addressed to the Kalamas has often been recruited into a modern slogan: believe nothing on authority; trust only yourself. That slogan is attractive but incomplete. In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha speaks to people unsettled by competing teachers. He warns them against accepting claims merely because they are traditional, written, ingenious, or delivered by a respected instructor. But he does not instruct them to elevate private impulse into unquestionable truth. He asks them to evaluate whether qualities and actions conduce to harm or welfare, and to consider the judgments of the wise. This is more demanding than mere contrarianism. Anyone can reject a teacher because obedience has become unfashionable. It is harder to ask what follows from an idea when put into practice, to correct one's biases, and to weigh harms without disguising preference as proof. The Kalama lesson is not that a solitary mind can dispense with all testimony. The lesson is that authority alone is insufficient and that moral and practical consequences require scrutiny.

For this book, the implication is plain. Criticizing religious coercion does not exempt a secular political party from examination. Praising the Buddha does not make a Buddhist government's policy wise. Admiring a philosopher's courage does not validate every assertion he made. A doctrine that liberates us from one authority can become a new prison if we cease to examine it.

The passage also offers a safeguard against my own polemics. An accusation may be emotionally satisfying and still fail a test of evidence. A metaphor can illuminate a mechanism; it can also conceal a missing demonstration. I intend to write with force. Force must not become a substitute for fact.

12. The difference between an intellectual inheritance and a living method

What, finally, does this history entitle us to claim? Not that India invented every branch of rational inquiry. Not that it was always tolerant. Not that the presence of a few brilliant disputants absolves centuries of hierarchy or the intimidation of dissent. The record entitles us to say something both narrower and more useful: traditions of disciplined disagreement existed in the Indic world, and their methods remain available to be recovered, argued with, and improved.

A civilization can inherit a library and still lose the habit of reading critically. It can place the image of a great logician on a public pedestal while rewarding men who never revise an opinion. It can celebrate ancient debates and punish modern dissent. Such a society has

confused the possession of historical artifacts with the exercise of intellectual capacity. The difference is like possessing a medical textbook and refusing treatment, or displaying an engineer's portrait while allowing the bridge to collapse.

If the ancestors questioned metaphysical foundations, their descendants should question economic institutions, caste privilege, environmental neglect, and administrative dishonesty. There is no special holiness in a drainage pipe; nevertheless, its failure can disclose more about our practical allegiance to reason than a thousand speeches about civilizational greatness. The method of inquiry must leave the seminar hall and enter the street.

This book begins with the questioning civilization because the entire argument depends on a reversal. I am not asking India to exchange an allegedly inferior mind for a foreign one. I am asking Indians to recover a human faculty that no civilization owns: the freedom to inspect reality and the courage to change course. Our history is not an exemption from criticism. At its best, it supplies reasons to undertake criticism more rigorously.

Chapter Two — The Virtue That Became a Vice: Patience, Passivity, and the Rotten Meal

1. The virtue that stayed too long

Every virtue has a season. Courage without judgment becomes recklessness; loyalty without conscience becomes servitude; generosity without limits becomes a subsidy for the unscrupulous. Why should patience alone be exempt from this law of transformation? Patience permits a seed to germinate, a wound to heal, and a difficult decision to mature. But patience cannot be infinite without changing its moral character. There comes a point when the refusal to act is no longer discipline. It is collaboration with decay.

Consider cooked food. While the meal is being prepared, patience is necessary. The impatient diner ruins it by demanding that it be served before it is ready. Yet the same food, stored carelessly beyond its useful life, becomes rotten. The cook cannot defend the spoiled meal by reminding us how virtuous it was to wait. Yesterday's wisdom has become today's danger. The virtue must be evaluated in time, according to its consequences. This is the point of the metaphor: not that patience is evil, but that an unchanging moral slogan cannot guide a changing world.

A civilization may praise forbearance because it protects families from vendetta and politics from indiscriminate violence. Those are genuine

achievements. But when it instructs the victim of caste humiliation to endure without remedy, asks a bereaved family to accept condolences instead of accountability, or advises a city poisoned by smog to trust providence rather than institutions, patience has crossed the boundary from restraint to surrender.

The question is not whether a society possesses enough anger. Anger is plentiful, and it is often wasted. The question is whether it possesses the discipline to turn justified dissatisfaction into organization: enforceable laws, functioning courts, inspected workplaces, professional municipal services, and measurable improvements. The impatient mob and the infinitely patient spectator are opposites that can produce the same result: the absence of durable reform.

2. Arjuna and the temptation to mistake hesitation for holiness

The opening crisis of the Bhagavad Gita presents Arjuna overwhelmed by the prospect of battle. The text does not treat his paralysis as an adequate final answer; Krishna offers instruction that culminates in a demand that Arjuna understand and act. This is not a simple license for violence. The Gita has been read as a defense of duty, a spiritual allegory, a theology of devotion, and a demanding account of action without attachment. But the scene does allow a narrow and powerful observation: even a canonical text associated with detachment does not equate endless immobility with wisdom. There is a difference between renouncing the fruits of an action and renouncing responsibility for action altogether. Confusing the two permits a convenient religious language to conceal institutional negligence. A damaged bridge does not need a metaphysical explanation for its suffering. It needs inspection and repair. An underpaid worker does not need a lecture on destiny in place of a wage. The ethical test is concrete: what conditions have we changed, and who remains exposed to preventable harm?

This book will not pretend that every Indic tradition teaches passivity. Indeed, it must argue the opposite if it is to be intellectually coherent. The inheritance is varied; the failure occurs when selected words are converted into excuses that protect present arrangements. That distinction makes the criticism more severe, not less. It is not an accusation that our ancestors prohibited action; it is an accusation that we have sometimes used their names to excuse our own refusal to act.

3. The numbers behind the euphemism

Government figures reported to the Lok Sabha in August 2026 identified 498 deaths during the cleaning of sewers and septic tanks from 1 January 2019 through 30 June 2026. The same official response stated that no death had been reported as resulting from “manual scavenging.” These statements can coexist because the administrative categories are not identical. That is precisely why they require scrutiny. [1] A category may be legally meaningful and still fail to capture how the public understands a dangerous occupation. Readers must not be invited to mistake the government's terminology for evidence that nobody died in the sewers.

There are also different official counts for overlapping periods, and civil society organizations have reported higher totals for some individual years. An honest investigation must state which source counted which deaths, over which dates, using what criteria. The death of a worker is a fact about a human being; a column in a government return is a fact about an administrative method. The second must answer to the first, not erase it.

What is the significance of such a gap for a philosophy of responsibility? It is the point at which explanation threatens to replace action. A report is prepared, a definition is defended, a debate is held, and the machinery of sanitation may remain dangerous. The practical questions are whether confined-space entry has been eliminated wherever possible, whether equipment and emergency protocols are enforced, whether contractors are accountable, and whether families

receive timely compensation. The measure of reform is not the elegance of the terminology. It is whether the worker returns home alive.

4. The threshold of responsibility

We can now offer a test for patience. It is virtuous when it helps people discover facts, avoid unnecessary injury, or prepare effective action. It is vicious when it indefinitely postpones a feasible remedy while predictable harm continues. This formulation does not give moral authority to every act of rebellion; it demands proportionality, competence, and evidence. A society that acts impulsively may destroy what it hopes to save. A society that refuses to act may allow destruction to proceed without opposition.

The argument is dialectical in its simplest sense: a quality must be judged by the conditions in which it operates, the tensions it contains, and the consequences into which it develops. Such reasoning is harder than praising patience or condemning impatience. It forces the uncomfortable question at the center of the book: at what point did the virtue we admired become the excuse that disabled us?

5. The dialectic of a virtue

Patience is not contemptible. A parent who patiently tends an ill child demonstrates care. A negotiator who resists provocation may prevent a disastrous conflict. A persecuted person who survives through restraint may preserve the possibility of future action. *Kshama*, often rendered as forbearance or forgiveness, and the broader virtues associated with endurance must not be treated as defects simply because their abuse is possible. The philosophical question is not whether patience is good or bad in the abstract. It is what patience does in a particular material situation.

Here is the dialectical question. When does an attitude originally meant to prevent harm begin to reproduce harm? Restraint before an avoidable provocation can be wisdom. Restraint before a recurring, preventable institutional failure may become complicity. There is no magic number of days at which patience changes its nature. The transition occurs when waiting no longer creates a better opportunity for action, when the known remedy remains unused, or when endurance becomes the excuse by which responsible authorities avoid accountability.

The relevant question is not whether patience sounds noble. It is whether continued restraint still prevents harm or has begun to preserve the institution responsible for it. A virtue retained without judgment becomes an excuse for abandoning judgment; ethics must answer to consequences.

There is a second danger. Patience may be imposed most insistently on those least able to refuse it. The well-protected official advises the worker to endure. The powerful caste instructs the humiliated neighbor to forgive. The wealthy neighborhood praises spiritual detachment while the poor neighborhood lives beside an open drain. What appears as the moral excellence of the sufferer can become the administrative convenience of the comfortable. The virtue remains voluntary only when the person asked to exercise it possesses meaningful alternatives.

6. The public duty that the epic cannot perform

The Bhagavad Gita confronts its protagonist with a grave decision. I have already examined that ethical crisis above. The modern failure under examination is institutional, not epic: a sanitation department facing preventable deaths cannot outsource its decision to spiritual serenity. It needs adequate budgets, mechanized cleaning, enforceable safety procedures, independent inspection and accountable officials.

7. The worker beneath the street

Consider the person who descends into a sewer or septic tank. This is not an abstraction invented to shame a society. It is a worker whose employment may involve exposure to lethal gases, infectious material, and confined spaces. Families depend on the wage; municipalities depend on the labor; citizens often notice the worker only when a drain is blocked. If the worker dies, explanations begin. What was the legal classification of the work? Was it manual scavenging under the applicable definition? Was the employer a contractor? Was a safety procedure followed? Which department held responsibility?

Such questions can be legitimate. Legal classifications determine duties, remedies, and administrative records. But classification becomes moral evasion when it replaces the recognition of a preventable death. The official reporting categories discussed earlier in this chapter must be presented accurately, not manipulated. For the dead worker's family, however, the categorical separation does not reverse the death.

The figure must also be read with care. It is a count of recorded deaths over a specified period, not a measurement of the number of people engaged in all kinds of sanitation work, and not a direct calculation of the risks each worker faces. Underreporting, inconsistent categories, and changes in reporting practice are legitimate subjects of investigation. Civil-society groups have disputed official counts in some years. A responsible chapter must examine both the data and the method by which the data are generated.

The moral question does not vanish because the statistical question is difficult. Is mechanized cleaning available? Are protective systems adequate? Does the contractor bear enforceable responsibility? Are deaths investigated independently? Do families receive the compensation provided by law? A city that cannot answer these questions has no right to congratulate itself merely because its ceremonial language sounds ancient and refined. The test of a civilization is not how poetically it describes human dignity, but what it does when dignity enters a dangerous workplace.

8. Karma, fatalism, and the politics of explanation

The word karma carries a long and varied philosophical history. It cannot responsibly be equated with a single doctrine of helpless predestination. Many Indian traditions link action with consequence and affirm meaningful agency, ethical responsibility, or the possibility of liberation. To say that karma always teaches passivity would be a historical and philosophical error.

But the misuse of a concept can be socially important even when the concept admits nobler readings. A person may explain another's suffering as deserved, inherited from an unknowable previous life, or too cosmically determined to require collective intervention. Such an explanation transfers attention from observable causes to an inaccessible moral ledger. The blocked drain, negligent contractor, discriminatory practice, or corrupt department disappears behind an unseen metaphysical cause.

For practical purposes this is the wrong direction of inquiry. When a worker suffocates, the immediate questions concern oxygen, toxic gases, safety systems, training, enforcement, and rescue procedures. When a child falls ill from contaminated water, the immediate questions concern water quality, pathogens, infrastructure, and public administration. Even a person who believes deeply in karma can recognize these material causes and act. No theology is required to neglect them; no theology is sufficient to repair them. My criticism therefore addresses the conversion of explanation into absolution. Whether the comforting phrase is religious, nationalist, communist, or bureaucratic, it performs the same trick if it makes responsibility disappear. The world does not become cleaner because we possess an interpretation of dirt. It becomes cleaner when people organize resources and change the conditions producing it.

9. From individual endurance to organized action

Private anger is not a public sanitation system. Outrage can announce a problem, but it cannot on its own train workers, maintain machines, design safe procurement contracts, or measure air quality. If my argument is to escape the same theatrical politics it criticizes, it must move from slogans to institutions. What powers does a municipal authority possess? What information can citizens obtain? Which remedies can be pursued in court? How are budgets allocated? Are inspections independent? Can a worker refuse lethal assignments without losing the means to feed a family?

A public philosophy of responsibility begins with such questions. It does not ask every poor worker to become a solitary hero. It requires institutions that distribute obligations fairly. Local residents, engineers, contractors, elected representatives, regulators, and courts have different capacities and different duties. To tell the powerless simply to take responsibility while leaving the powerful unaccountable is not emancipation. It is another demand that the weak carry the burden of the strong.

Nor does civic organization demand the abolition of patience. Reform requires patience in the disciplined sense: sustained planning, negotiation, coalition building, legal persistence, and the willingness to endure delays without abandoning objectives. The patience I reject is resignation masquerading as wisdom. The patience I defend is perseverance directed toward measurable improvement. The difference is between waiting for an invisible rescue and working over time to construct one another's safety.

A practical standard can be stated simply. When a harmful condition is identified, specify the responsible institution, the available means of remedy, the cost, the deadline, and the evidence that will show whether the remedy worked. The result may be imperfect; institutions learn through revision. But the question changes from “How much indignity must we endure?” to “What shall we change, who must act, and how shall we know?”

10. Do not confuse compassion with helplessness

There is a temptation in polemical writing to speak of an entire people as soft, weak, or incapable. The metaphor may produce anger, and anger may briefly awaken attention. But it risks losing precisely the citizens whom reform requires. A worker who endures dangerous employment to support children is not morally weak. A woman who confronts caste discrimination while maintaining a household is not a symbol of civilizational cowardice. Their endurance may testify to courage under conditions they did not choose.

My argument must therefore direct its fiercest criticism toward institutions, doctrines, rationalizations, and habits of public inaction—not treat every ordinary person as the author of their own disadvantage. A society does not become strong by despising its vulnerable members.

It becomes stronger by making responsibility enforceable and by giving more people the means to act without fear.

There is a further philosophical reason for this discipline. If all human beings possess equal moral worth, then the suffering of a poorly paid citizen counts no less than the reputational humiliation of a nation. National pride cannot be the supreme measure of progress. It is not enough to demand respect from outsiders while tolerating humiliation at home. The interior test of dignity must be passed before the exterior claim can carry moral authority.

When the citizen can refuse dangerous work without punishment, when the child can drink safe water, when the village has functioning

sanitation, when public offices publish reliable numbers, when caste does not determine whose life may be risked, then patience has been transformed into purposeful endurance. This is not surrender. It is the difficult practice of collective self-respect.

11. The measure of a living civilization

No prophet will descend to repair our water mains. No metaphysical system will replace a defective respirator. No ancestral philosopher, however brilliant, will sit automatically on the municipal budget committee. These statements are not insults to philosophy. They are reminders that philosophy must know the difference between understanding a problem and carrying out its remedy.

The distinction brings us back to the opening argument. A living tradition asks questions about the universe; a responsible society asks questions about the conditions of life. Those investigations are not enemies. Scientific curiosity, ethical seriousness, and public administration belong to one human effort: to understand reality well enough to reduce avoidable suffering and enlarge freedom.

Patience should preserve courage, not extinguish it. Tolerance should make coexistence possible, not excuse cruelty. Hospitality should express generosity, not abolish prudent judgment. Reverence for the past should enlarge our intellectual resources, not close inquiry. Every virtue must be tested in the situation where it is exercised. An ethical vocabulary that refuses such testing becomes a collection of beautiful labels attached to worsening conditions.

The lesson is direct. Do not worship the capacity to endure a bad system. Build the capacity to change it. A civilization does not prove its greatness by enduring an avoidable wound indefinitely. It demonstrates maturity when it diagnoses the wound, admits the cause, and does the difficult work of healing.

Chapter Three — No Savior Is Coming

1. The master is the problem—not the solution

The hunger for a more charming master is itself part of the dependency I oppose. A more graceful guru, a more attractive sermon, a fresh promise of cosmic rescue—none of these answers whether a child can drink clean water, whether caste can decide a person's dignity, or whether a court delivers justice without delay.

The guru may speak beautifully. That is not evidence. The crowd may feel consoled. That is not reform. The teacher who invites investigation can be useful; the teacher who makes his personality the substitute for investigation offers another route away from reality. We do not need a spiritual landlord of the mind. We need the relentless pursuit of reason, empirical evidence, critical thought, and scientific method in every thought and action.

Let every authority—from scripture to state, temple to party, university to marketplace—answer the same question: what justifies your claim, and what would persuade you to change it? If the answer is obedience, the case for emancipation has already been made.

2. The borrowed mind

A teacher can give us a language in which to ask questions; a teacher cannot relieve us of the responsibility for deciding whether the answers are true. The distinction is elementary, but entire institutions survive by erasing it. A tutor explains a proof. An intellectual proprietor demands our gratitude for possessing the proof. A physician proposes a diagnosis that can be examined and revised. A self-appointed miracle worker sells certainty while concealing the tests that would expose a mistake. Both offer instruction. Only one accepts the independent existence of reality.

The dependency I oppose is not reverence, gratitude, or education. Human beings inherit nearly all their knowledge through other people. The dependency I oppose begins when a source is promoted into a standard of truth: when a person believes a proposition because a master approves it, and would continue to believe it even after the available evidence turned against it. That is the decisive abdication. It can happen in a monastery, a university, a revolutionary cell, a corporate boardroom, or an elected government. Dogma has no exclusive costume.

A culture may celebrate philosophy while discouraging philosophical behavior. It may maintain a thousand statues of thinkers and impose penalties on anyone who thinks against their conclusions. It may call its inheritance a civilization of debate, then treat a questioner as a traitor. The contradiction does not disappear because the slogans are ancient or the ceremonies splendid. A living inheritance is an instrument; a dead

inheritance is a display cabinet. The instruments of reason were meant to be used, not polished until they became untouchable.

This book insists upon an uncomfortable symmetry. A claim written in Sanskrit does not become true by being Sanskrit. A claim written in Arabic does not become false by being Arabic. The same is true of English, Chinese, Latin, German, and Russian. Proof is not a national costume. If we reject the infallibility of the Bible or Quran while manufacturing an infallible interpretation of the Vedas, we have changed the object of worship, not emancipated the mind.

3. The courage to disappoint one's own side

The easiest argument to make is the one that flatters the people applauding us. The hardest is the one that disappoints them. If a government associated with our preferred tradition suppresses dissent, the principles of free inquiry do not become temporarily unavailable. If a community we regard as historically injured reproduces caste humiliation, the old injury does not confer permission for a new one. If an economic policy advanced by our ideological allies fails, we cannot rescue it by calling the statistics an imperialist conspiracy without examining the statistics.

A society's intellectual freedom is tested not by whether it permits criticism of its enemies, but by whether it permits criticism of itself. The standard is exacting because no civilization is an innocent abstraction. Real civilizations contain competing interests, exploitative institutions, brilliant dissenters, reformers, cruelty, hospitality,

creativity, and error. Their histories do not deliver a single verdict. A person can love a cultural inheritance and refuse to defend everything done in its name. Indeed, refusing may be the highest form of respect available to an honest heir.

Consider the figures who argued against entrenched hierarchy in Indian society: Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, B. R. Ambedkar, Periyar, and numerous others. They differed profoundly from one another, and their judgments must not be flattened into a convenient chorus. But their existence defeats the proposition that everyone in the civilization meekly accepted the social order. The historian's task is not to erase these dissenters to make the title of this book more dramatic. It is to ask why their work was required, what it achieved, and what institutions still resist its implications.

The phrase “emasculated Hindu,” in this book, names a condition of diminished agency, not an inherited condition of a people. To use it otherwise would concede the most foolish principle of the caste hierarchy itself: that human capacity can be assigned by birth. Intellectual dependence is made and unmade through education, incentives, fear, habits, and institutions. It is not a substance in the blood. Our own theory of emancipation must be capable of emancipating everyone.

4. Free minds are the first productive force

Without the liberty to disagree, scientific discovery becomes precarious. The scientist must be able to say that a widely admired theory predicts the wrong result. The engineer must be able to say that a bridge design will fail. The sanitation worker must be able to say that a sewer is lethally dangerous and refuse entry without facing destitution. The reporter must be able to demand the records that embarrass a minister. These are not unrelated liberties. Each protects an encounter between material fact and an authority that would prefer to remain unquestioned.

There is a temptation to praise freedom of mind as a spiritual ornament while denying its economic and political consequences. But the first productive instrument in any modern economy is not the factory machine. It is the ability to notice that the machine can be improved, that a procedure wastes labor, that a price conveys information, or that an official report conceals a defect. Innovation requires an environment in which someone can contradict the established procedure without surrendering livelihood or liberty. A society that fears questions pays for that fear in foregone knowledge.

Free minds also require material conditions. A child who cannot read, a worker exhausted by hazardous labor, and a young woman punished for speaking face obstacles that cannot be removed by telling them to be brave. Freedom is a right and a set of enabling institutions: education, a fair hearing, protection against coercion, access to reliable information, and the space to dissent. To say “think independently” while tolerating

institutional terror is to offer an empty instruction. Intellectual courage deserves institutional protection.

Freedom of belief entails freedom of unbelief. A Hindu must be free to become a Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, Christian, atheist, or adherent of any other view. The convert must be free to reconsider. The person who wishes to return must be free to return. A religion that claims lifelong custody over a mind mistakes allegiance for property. Nor does the right to leave extinguish the right of a religious person to believe, worship, and persuade peacefully. The same freedom that protects the skeptic protects the believer.

5. No compulsory savior and no infallible philosopher

The claim that a spiritual teacher possesses universal authority must be examined, not simply repeated. A tradition may propose salvation; the state may not force every citizen to accept it. A religion may teach a final prophet; dissenters must remain free to reject that doctrine. A political school may honor Marx; it may not declare an economic question settled because Marx once expressed an opinion. This is why the book's rejection of compulsory saviors is paired with its rejection of final economists and infallible philosophers. The problem is compulsory authority over the mind, not the mere existence of doctrines.

The universe is immense, and our knowledge of it remains limited. Questions about consciousness, origins, and purpose should evoke intellectual humility, not a race to assert universal privileges for a

preferred historical messenger. Religious believers may offer philosophical reasons for such claims; skeptics may challenge them. Neither party gets exemption from scrutiny. It is possible to defend a person's right to believe something while concluding that the evidence offered for it is inadequate.

This principle also protects us against the false savior of civilizational nostalgia. To say that an ancient school developed subtle logic does not prove that a modern municipality is competent. To say that ancestors traveled to Southeast Asia does not guarantee that today's schools teach science well. To remember conquest is not to repair a hospital. Historical memory may justify preservation and scholarship; it cannot substitute for present capacity. The ancestor is not coming to make the appointment, audit the budget, or test the drinking water.

6. Ownership without omnipotence

Individual responsibility is often misunderstood as a declaration that individuals alone cause all their problems. That would be absurd. Children do not design the schools into which they are born. Sewer workers do not individually write municipal procurement rules. Migrant laborers cannot negotiate as equals with every employer holding legal power over their residence. Recognizing those structures is materialism, not excuse-making. Responsibility means identifying what each person and institution can actually change, then insisting that the responsible agent act.

A household has obligations; so does a municipality, a contractor, a regulator, a court, a ministry, and a parliament. To tell a family to clean its street while a city refuses to collect waste is not self-reliance; it is the transfer of public obligations to the powerless. To demand that the state solve every problem while residents refuse the simplest shared rules is the complementary evasion. Emancipation requires both sides of the equation. No guru is coming with a broom, but neither should the government disappear behind the broom in a citizen's hand.

The distinction is equally important when we discuss historical wrongs. Descendants cannot retroactively reverse a conquest or restore every vanished city. They can preserve evidence, repair surviving monuments, protect present rights, build institutions, and refuse to repeat the abuses they condemn. The responsibility of the living is neither amnesia nor inherited revenge. It is a commitment to prevent avoidable harm here and now.

7. The economy of dependence

Dependence has economic beneficiaries. A teacher who discourages independent thought may preserve a client. An official who cultivates confusion gains discretionary power. A politician who keeps citizens permanently frightened may secure loyalty without delivering results. A closed profession protects its members by persuading outsiders that its mysteries are unapproachable. These mechanisms do not require a coordinated conspiracy. They arise wherever institutions reward obedience more reliably than discovery.

Consider an inefficient procedure. The worker closest to it may see how to remove unnecessary steps. The managers who authorize the procedure may regard the proposal as a threat to position, identity, or status. The organization therefore has two contradictory interests: improving the task and preserving the hierarchy that controls the task. A serious dialectical examination begins with that contradiction. It asks who bears the cost of delay, who gains from the present arrangement, and what evidence would establish whether the proposed change is beneficial.

This is where the principles of free minds and free markets touch. Decentralized experimentation can reveal alternatives that a hierarchy has never imagined. But economic competition alone does not guarantee fairness, worker dignity, clean air, or honest information. Markets require rules against fraud and coercion, and institutions must remain open to criticism. The point is not that private actors are virtuous. It is that the structure of information and incentives matters. No system becomes sound simply by choosing the correct ideological label.

8. The obligation of the present

I do not ask a civilization to despise its past. I ask it to stop using the past as a substitute for performance. A tradition that produced philosophers should produce people capable of questioning its authorities. A culture that praises compassion should show compassion in the treatment of those whose labor is despised. A society that calls itself tolerant should defend the right to leave its prevailing religion. A nation that celebrates ancient science should insist on reliable measurement in modern government.

There is no promised rescuer. No one will arrive from the heavens to correct a procurement contract. No foreign power will secure the dignity of a worker merely because that worker's ancestors belonged to a distinguished civilization. No admired economic theorist will repair a failed policy by repeating it. We are not guaranteed success, but we are obliged to encounter the facts, take responsibility for the choices within our reach, and correct our errors.

The first liberation is the freedom to think. The second is the discipline to act. Neither can be outsourced. The house belongs to those who live in it. The work belongs to the living.

Chapter Four — The House No One Else Will Clean

1. The body, the street, and the republic

Stand at the edge of a sewer and ask a simple question: what does this place reveal about the civilization above it? The answer will not be found in the antiquity of its scriptures. It will be found in the pipe's design, the municipality's accounts, the contractor's equipment, the worker's rights, the water-testing records, and the speed with which a failure is corrected. Philosophy has not disappeared from the scene. It has entered the material world, where human claims about responsibility encounter human bodies.

A magnificent philosophical vocabulary can coexist with avoidable filth. This is not merely hypocrisy; it is a failure of translation. A society may have language for the ultimate nature of being but lack habits of documenting whether a public toilet functions. It may announce reverence for life while allowing workers to inhale poisonous gases. The problem is not that metaphysics is intrinsically worthless. It is that metaphysics cannot perform the work of engineering, administration, law, and ethical enforcement. An idea becomes socially serious when its adherents are prepared to follow its implications into mundane institutions.

This is why the house is the book’s recurring metaphor. A house requires maintenance. Its roof, drains, kitchen, doors, and foundation

obey physical laws whether or not its residents agree on theology. The same holds for a city. Shared life requires collective systems, personal habits, public revenue, supervision, reliable data, and mutual obligations. Civic responsibility is not exhausted by private cleanliness. A spotless home connected to an untreated sewage network remains vulnerable to the neighbor's neglected infrastructure. Society is made of such relationships.

2. When the worker enters the poison

Chapter Two established the distinction between recorded sewer-cleaning deaths and the narrower administrative category of ‘manual scavenging.’ Here the emphasis shifts from repeating the figures to enforcing responsibility. How was each death classified? Which agency employed the worker? What precautions were required? What was actually supplied? Who investigated? What compensation reached the family? [1]

The numerical discrepancy between official and civil society reporting deserves an equally unsentimental audit. Different counting practices, reporting periods, definitions, and access to incident information can yield different totals. It is careless to declare every discrepancy proof of deliberate concealment. It is just as careless to assume the official count is comprehensive merely because it is official. A genuine empirical method asks for incident-level records, definitions, dates, methods of verification, and transparent reconciliation.

The death of a worker in a confined sewer is not a metaphor. It is an event with a location, a family, a contract, a ventilation condition, a gas concentration, a chain of supervision, and a set of decisions that could have been made differently. When the dead are reduced to an occupational category, the government may satisfy a reporting formula while evading the moral meaning of the event. When the dead are reduced to a rhetorical weapon, the critic commits a different failure: using lives as symbols without examining the systems that killed them. Evidence must restore the particular human being to the account.

In its October 2023 judgment concerning manual scavenging and hazardous cleaning, the Supreme Court of India directed measures to eliminate manual entry into sewers and specified compensation of ₹30 lakh for sewer deaths. The order also addressed rehabilitation and family support. A court judgment is an institutional demand, not proof that all agencies subsequently complied. The next inquiry concerns implementation: whose families were identified, whether payments were completed, and whether procurement and supervision changed. [2]

The ethical test is direct. It is impossible to claim equal human worth while accepting that certain bodies are expendable because the work is regarded as lowly. The historical association of sanitation labor with caste degradation makes this especially urgent, though the rights at stake belong to every worker irrespective of caste. Mechanization, protective equipment, training, emergency response, enforceable

prohibitions, and compensation are not acts of charity. They are expressions of equal citizenship.

3. From impurity to public health

A civilization can develop elaborate concepts of ritual purity while failing to maintain the material conditions of public cleanliness. Those ideas are not identical, and there is no need to pretend they are. Ritual purity belongs to a religious and social grammar. Pathogens, toxic gases, waste streams, and groundwater contamination belong to physical processes. One is not a substitute for the other. A person can be ritually observant and negligent about infectious disease; another can reject ritual entirely yet maintain exemplary hygiene.

If the objective is public health, the relevant questions are measurable. Where does sewage go? Are wastewater treatment plants operating at design capacity? Do households have safely managed sanitation? How is sludge processed? Are drainage systems inspected before the monsoon? Are workers authorized to stop unsafe operations? Are contractors penalized when they disregard standards? These questions are unromantic, and precisely for that reason they test whether human welfare or ceremonial prestige governs priorities.

The obligation is shared but unequal in scale. Individuals can avoid littering and keep homes safe. Residents can organize neighborhood reporting and demand audits. Municipal governments must finance collection and treatment. State and national institutions must enforce safety and transparent standards. Commercial firms must internalize

costs that would otherwise be imposed on workers, neighbors, and waterways. To demand personal responsibility without institutional responsibility is to privatize failure; to demand institutions without civic participation is to make reform fragile.

4. The air that does not recognize a border

The atmosphere is indifferent to caste, creed, and language. Fine particles enter the lungs of the believer and the unbeliever alike. Children breathe the consequences of decisions they had no role in making. Pollution arises from multiple sources, including energy systems, vehicles, industrial activity, construction dust, household fuels, and open burning; the relative contribution varies by place and season. A slogan that blames one population or one festival will not replace measured source apportionment and policy evaluation.

The Lancet Countdown's 2025 India data sheet estimated more than 1.718 million deaths attributable to anthropogenic PM2.5 exposure in 2022, an increase of 38 percent compared with 2010. It estimated the monetized value of premature mortality associated with outdoor air pollution at approximately US$339.4 billion, equivalent to 9.5 percent of GDP. These are epidemiological and economic model estimates, not a list of individually certified death certificates, and the 9.5 percent figure should not be mistaken for a direct accounting measure of output lost. [3]

The distinction matters because a book devoted to logical empiricism must explain what its numbers mean. Population-attributable mortality

estimates rely on measurements, exposure models, health-outcome relationships, and uncertainty. Disputes about methodology deserve examination; they do not justify acting as if contaminated air were harmless. Where evidence is uncertain, uncertainty should be reported. Where evidence is strong, ritual arguments and political slogans must not displace proportionate action.

Clean air requires collective action: better fuel and power systems, reliable public transport, industrial enforcement, monitoring networks, regional cooperation, and incentives that reward lower emissions. The United Dharmic Alliance manifesto's ecological proposals—solar and wind development, low-emission hydrogen, protection of soil and biodiversity—belong to this practical agenda, although each technology must itself be judged by lifecycle costs, reliability, safety, and evidence of emissions reductions. Nature does not honor technologies simply because we describe them as virtuous.

5. The beautiful bandage and the disease beneath

A colorful bandage may look magnificent on a body afflicted by a grave disease. It may attract admiration. It may reassure an anxious family. It does not cure the disease. This is the structural point of my metaphor: visible gestures can produce emotional satisfaction without altering the mechanism of harm. A public-relations campaign does not repair a broken treatment plant. A new slogan does not equip a confined-space rescue team. The unveiling of a statue does not answer an audit finding.

Yet the opposite mistake must also be avoided. Some small reforms matter enormously. A well-designed guardrail, a reporting channel that workers trust, a transparent procurement portal, or a reliable waste collection schedule may look modest beside grand civilizational declarations. Their very modesty can conceal their worth. They change the material conditions under which people live. Genuine reforms can be incremental without being cosmetic. The difference lies in outcomes and mechanisms, not in theatrical size.

We should therefore ask of every proposed remedy: what is the causal pathway? What evidence suggests it will work? What would count as failure? Who has authority to adjust it? What are the costs, including hidden costs borne by the poor? Can an independent observer verify the outcome? These questions turn logical empiricism from a declaration of identity into a public discipline.

6. Accountability is more important than explanation

Explanations are necessary. They are not enough. When a sewer worker dies, an investigation may explain the absence of protective gear. When a city floods, the report may explain that drains were blocked. When an illegal dump grows beside homes, officials may explain jurisdictional confusion. Each explanation can help identify a remedy; each can also become the final ritual of a bureaucracy that does not wish to act. The decisive question is whether the explanation changes the next decision.

A functioning public system closes the loop: report, investigate, assign responsibility, act, inspect, publish results, and correct new deficiencies. Without that cycle, an institution can become extremely articulate about its own failure. It can publish excellent reports of consistently poor outcomes. Knowledge without feedback becomes another display cabinet, and citizens are asked to admire the quality of the documentation while conditions deteriorate.

The intellectual framework of this book demands more. Matter is primary: pollution, injury, and hunger exist whether we acknowledge them or not. Empirical inquiry is indispensable: interventions must be tested against results. Secular humanism commands equal moral attention: the life of the sewer worker is not worth less than the life of the administrator. Free minds make criticism possible: the worker and journalist must speak without reprisal. Markets can contribute innovation and efficient delivery, but incentives must be aligned with safety and the public interest. The five principles are not competing slogans here. They meet in a functioning water system.

7. The dignity of work and the dignity of refusal

The sanitation worker's right to refuse unsafe entry is not an inconvenience to a civilizing mission. It is the mission. A society cannot describe itself as free while compelling the most vulnerable to accept lethal work because their alternatives are worse. Freedom has an economic dimension: access to alternative employment, enforceable contracts, skill development, and protection from retaliation. The demand for safety must not become a demand that the poor heroically refuse work without the support needed to survive.

Technology offers possibilities but no magical exemption. Mechanized cleaning can reduce dangerous entry, yet machinery can fail, procurement can be captured, and maintenance can be neglected. Supervisors must know when entry is prohibited, when specialist rescue is required, and who can authorize exceptions, if any are legally permitted. Workers must be part of the design and evaluation of the system. Treating them only as beneficiaries rather than knowledgeable participants repeats the same hierarchy that helped create the danger.

This is one reason the criticism of caste cannot be deferred to a different chapter. A society that assigns dignity by birth often discovers ways to assign danger by birth as well. Even when occupational roles change and legal equality advances, inherited expectations may continue to shape whose discomfort is tolerated. The remedy is not contempt for a civilization's members; it is the extension of equal citizenship into every workplace and public service.

8. The environment is not someone else's property

Soil, rivers, forests, coastlines, and air are not inexhaustible repositories into which a society can throw the costs of its prosperity. Economic growth can improve health and provide infrastructure, but growth can also create external harms that market prices fail to capture. A materialist understanding of economics must include those harms. A factory's output cannot be described accurately if the accounting omits the illness, groundwater damage, and lost agricultural productivity it imposes elsewhere.

A genuinely dynamic market order requires institutions capable of correcting such failures: transparent measurement, enforceable liability, credible regulation, innovation, and public scrutiny. The choice is not between an omniscient state and an immaculate marketplace. Neither exists. The choice is among imperfect institutional arrangements, to be examined by their capacity to produce better results under actual conditions. A market mechanism that prices pollution, a rule that prevents contamination, and a public investment that restores a river may each be appropriate in different cases. Our philosophy must permit the evidence to choose.

The United Dharmic Alliance's ecological commitment should therefore be defended as a proposal for shared science, technology, and preservation, not as a claim that any civilization is innately greener than all others. Historical teachings can supply ethical motivation. Modern laboratories, engineering, and public institutions must supply evidence

of performance. Reverence for life is admirable; measurable protection of life is indispensable.

9. A civic ledger instead of a civilizational boast

Imagine a book of national accomplishments containing not only temples, universities, rockets, and historical achievements but also measurable indicators: safely managed water, sanitation coverage, work-related deaths, compensation timeliness, pollution exposure, school learning, and protection for dissenters. No society would have a flawless page. That is the point. A civilization that learns to publish its failures honestly gains an instrument for correction rather than a certificate of humiliation.

This ledger would distinguish what governments can control from what they can influence; it would report regional variation; it would identify disparities by income, gender, caste, and geography where reliable data permit. It would also publicize success. If one district eliminates hazardous manual entry while another does not, the question is what institutional arrangement made the difference. The success of an obscure municipal department may teach more than an argument about the superiority of an ancient civilization.

A person who does not clean his own house should not be astonished that strangers decline to do it. A government that fails to maintain its public house should not expect citizens to salute its neglect. Nor should citizens wait for a prophet, foreign nation, or revolutionary party to

carry the ordinary burdens of civic life. The metaphor is deliberately severe because the work is ordinary and unavoidable.

There is nothing humiliating about picking up a broom. There is humiliation in assigning the broom to another human being as a mark of hereditary inferiority. There is nothing undignified about repairing a sewer. There is indignity in sending someone to die inside it because the people above ground refuse the cost of safety. There is no philosophical greatness in denying the difference.

The house will be cleaned when its inhabitants are free enough to report the dirt, equal enough to share the obligations, informed enough to measure the results, and determined enough to keep the institutions answerable. That is not a lesser goal than civilizational glory. It is one of the few forms in which glory becomes humane.

Chapter Five — Caste, Self-Contempt, and the Fourth World

1. Prestige at the immigration desk

I have seen a peculiar human comedy in the Indian subcontinent. A person may travel through life surrounded by titles, surnames, communities, subcommunities, hereditary rank, regional prestige, family genealogies, and carefully maintained distances from those deemed lower. He can spend fifty years in a society that reminds him every morning that he is someone. Then he boards an aircraft, crosses an ocean, and stands before an immigration officer in Atlanta. The officer asks for his passport. The magnificent ancestral hierarchy does not appear on the form. It cannot establish his admissibility. It does not permit him to step past the queue. His caste is not a visa.

The point is not that America has overcome prejudice. It has not. Nor is it that an immigration officer possesses some magical moral superiority. The point is that social prestige is not an objective measure of human worth. It is power recognized within a particular network of institutions and habits. Carry the claimant beyond that network and its authority may evaporate. A caste title cannot substitute for the rule of law; a surname cannot build a bridge; ritual rank cannot repair a sewer.

Why must we learn this lesson at a foreign airport? Why should the recognition of equal civic procedure appear revolutionary only when an

officer speaking English refuses to honor inherited Indian superiority? Why should a society that produced elaborate philosophies of knowledge require an international flight to encounter a practical lesson in the limits of its own vanity?

I ask the question of the privileged first. The poor have already spent generations being instructed about their limitations. The privileged must now discover theirs. If a social rank brings honor without competence, authority without accountability, and deference without service, it has become a tax upon the public intelligence.

2. The cruel arithmetic of local superiority

Caste and regional chauvinism are not identical, but they often reveal the same mental habit: the insistence that birth should settle questions which evidence ought to decide. The old hierarchy announces that one person is superior because of descent. Regional arrogance announces that one population is naturally superior because of language or locality. Both mistake inheritance for achievement.

Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, and the many other languages of the subcontinent are enormous civilizational accomplishments. They preserve literature, philosophy, music, humor, memory, and ways of experiencing the world. Precisely because they are precious, they should not be reduced to tools of contempt. A language is not improved by belittling its neighbors. A society can celebrate its literature and still fail to educate its children. It can boast of its poets while its laboratories lack

equipment. It can perform national pride at full volume while a citizen spends decades awaiting judgment in court.

The contradiction is absurd. We behave as pit bulls toward one another over petty internal distinctions and then complain that our political institutions are poodles before stronger powers. We expend ferocity where cooperation is needed and exhibit deference where critical independence is required. This is not a biological disposition, nor an eternal attribute of any population. It is a pattern of conduct and incentives that can be criticized and changed.

The alternative is not cultural amnesia. It is cultural maturity. Love a language enough to translate its books. Love a region enough to demand clean water for everyone who lives there. Love a heritage enough to refuse the lie that a child born to a disadvantaged family possesses fewer rights than a child born to yours.

3. Phule: the inheritance of rebellion

Any book that accuses Hindu society of complacency must begin by acknowledging those who refused to be complacent. They are not footnotes inserted to satisfy critics. They are evidence of another India, the India whose capacity for dissent exposes the inadequacy of its complacent institutions.

Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule confronted the exclusion of communities and girls from education in nineteenth-century western India. Their work was not simply an argument about courtesy or social manners. Education determines who has the authority to interpret the

world. A person forbidden to learn is more readily forced to accept another person's account of reality. The restriction of knowledge thus becomes a technology of domination.

A society may declare that learning is sacred and still organize itself to prevent particular children from entering the school. This is the contradiction with which the reformer begins. The problem is not that Indian civilization lacks eloquent statements about knowledge. The problem is the distance between what is praised in abstraction and what is permitted in practice.

I am not interested in a museum of reformers where we hang their portraits and then ignore the conditions that made their reforms necessary. If a nineteenth-century campaigner for girls' education becomes another garlanded statue while contemporary students continue to face exclusion, the statue has become a substitute for the struggle. The correct tribute to the Phules is not ceremonial reverence. It is universal access to education, measurable learning, and freedom from inherited humiliation.

4. Periyar and the demanding word self-respect

The word self-respect is often used by those who wish to secure privileges for their own group. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy turned it into a weapon against the claim that social authority should flow from birth and ritual status. His Self-Respect Movement, launched in the mid-1920s, challenged caste hierarchy and the use of customary authority to regulate marriage and social relationships. Its advocates insisted that the dignity of women and subordinated communities was a political question, not merely a private sentiment.

Periyar's views were provocative, and his language and historical claims invite criticism. That is not a reason to omit him. It is a reason to discuss him as an intellectual adversary whose arguments deserve engagement rather than ritual denunciation. An intellectual tradition that cannot make room for the person who attacks its most comfortable assumptions is not vigorous. It is frightened.

A particularly important feature of the Self-Respect Movement was the attempt to remake social practices, not simply to change ideas. Marriage, education, public speech, and social representation were sites of reform. In this respect the movement illustrates a principle central to this book: thought that never changes institutions becomes decoration.

I do not ask every reader to adopt every conclusion Periyar reached. I ask a more demanding question. Can you identify the evidence that would change your mind about an inherited hierarchy? If you cannot, your claim to be a rational defender of civilization has already failed.

5. Ambedkar: the speech that could not be delivered

In 1936, B. R. Ambedkar prepared an address for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, an organization that publicly opposed caste distinctions. The invitation was withdrawn after a dispute over the proposed address, which challenged premises that many of the would-be hosts were unwilling to confront. Ambedkar published the undelivered speech as *Annihilation of Caste*. The episode survives as a devastating illustration of conditional openness: discussion is welcome until it reaches the foundational assumption that must supposedly remain untouched.

This is a more instructive episode than another exchange of denunciations between admirers and detractors of Ambedkar. The issue is whether a society can tolerate a critic who demands more than cosmetic reform. A host who invites a surgeon and then forbids him to examine the diseased organ is not seeking treatment. He is seeking reassurance.

Ambedkar's critique was not satisfied by appeals to gentle behavior among individuals. It was concerned with structures that reproduced unequal standing. That distinction must remain central. Polite discrimination remains discrimination. A hierarchy does not become equal merely because its higher ranks are encouraged to be charitable. Charity can coexist comfortably with domination; equal citizenship cannot.

Nor should Ambedkar be reduced to an icon whose intellectual positions are insulated from criticism. I have challenged features of the

constitutional and judicial framework he helped shape. He must be discussed with respect and intellectual seriousness, not with the cowardice of compulsory approval. The same freedom to question that legitimates his assault on caste also permits criticism of his constitutional choices. The test is evidence, not the social identity of the critic.

6. What the numbers can say—and what they cannot

The official figures do not permit us to pretend that caste-based harm is a vanished problem. The National Crime Records Bureau reported 55,698 registered cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes in 2024, compared with 57,789 in the preceding year, according to published reporting of the Crime in India statistics. Another official parliamentary answer reports 55,685 cases for a narrower category under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The discrepancy is not a license to choose whichever number delivers the more dramatic sentence. It signals that the categories and coverage must be specified. [4]

Registered cases are not the same as total incidents. They depend on reporting, police registration, legal classification, and access to institutions. A decline in reported cases may reflect genuine improvement, changes in reporting, or several mechanisms at once. A chargesheet is not a conviction. A conviction rate has its own denominator. Precision is not pedantry. It is the price of making serious accusations responsibly.

The moral proposition, however, does not require a particular number to be inflated. A person denied employment, education, housing, dignity, or physical security because of caste has suffered an injury that cannot be excused by pointing to a national average. Equal moral worth is not a statistical concession available only after a society exceeds a threshold of violence.

And there is a second uncomfortable question. We praise ancient philosophical subtlety, but how much sophistication is required to understand that a child born today did not choose an ancestor? A society that can debate the relationship between consciousness and matter should not find itself intellectually defeated by the proposition that birth confers no superior entitlement to another person's labor or obedience.

7. Fourth World: a metaphor, not a census category

I have called the Indian subcontinent the Fourth World. I am not proposing a new formal category for the United Nations or claiming that development economists have established such a classification. I am naming a condition of social and political contradiction: peoples whose histories intersect and whose intellectual inheritances are substantial, yet whose institutions too frequently reward inherited identity, inward antagonism, and public resignation rather than practical achievement.

The expression deliberately provokes. The First, Second, and Third World labels arose from particular twentieth-century political and

economic classifications; they have never been sufficient measures of human dignity or institutional quality. My Fourth World is a literary indictment of squandered capacity. It is not a ranking of the intelligence or worth of South Asians, and it must never be used that way.

There is no virtue in replacing foreign contempt with self-contempt. A person who insists that everything Indian is inferior has surrendered judgment as completely as the chauvinist who insists that everything Indian is superior. Both have stopped asking questions. Both have made ancestry the substitute for evidence.

What should the reader measure instead? Whether a village has potable water. Whether a girl can study without harassment. Whether the accused receives a timely hearing. Whether the worker can leave a dangerous job without starvation. Whether the person who changes religion remains a full citizen. Whether a company can innovate without purchasing political favor. These tests are mundane only to those who do not have to live without their benefits.

8. Hindus against former Hindus: ancestry is not ownership

I have also spoken of Hindus against former Hindus. The phrase attempts to describe a historical reality: across South Asia, religious communities often arose through conversion and social change among people who shared territory, languages, and ancestry. The political identities later organized around these traditions sometimes became antagonistic, even where genealogical connections persisted.

Yet ancestry is not a title deed to another person's conscience. A person whose ancestors practiced a particular religion has the right to accept it, criticize it, or leave it. His descendants may choose differently. They do not thereby become defective versions of their forebears. They become individuals exercising a human freedom.

The problem deserving criticism is not the existence of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, or atheists in a land with an Indic past. It is the use of identity to excuse persecution, the destruction of heritage, compulsory belief, and unequal citizenship. Those wrongs are wrong when committed by a state bearing an Islamic name; they are equally wrong when committed by one invoking Hindu tradition.

A philosophy that genuinely places reason above civilization cannot demand unrestricted freedom for itself and theological obedience from its neighbors. If it did, the entire project would collapse into the exceptionalism it condemns. Our task is more difficult: preserve historical memory without turning history into an obligation imposed on living people.

9. The limits of inherited prestige

The immigration-counter example in Section 1 exposes the limits of status inherited by birth. Returning home, the lesson is to build institutions that confer rights through citizenship rather than pedigrees. Ancestral standing cannot replace demonstrated competence, lawful procedure or equal dignity.

The lesson also applies to the person who believes a foreign country, politician, corporation, or religion has a superior right to decide his society's future. Imported prestige is no more rational than inherited prestige. The English-speaking bureaucrat is not automatically wise; the local priest is not automatically foolish. Both must answer to evidence and institutional accountability.

This is why I reject the temptation to turn anti-caste reform into another competition among communities for inherited moral superiority. Every person is equal in worth. Not every proposition is equally true. Not every public institution performs equally well. A civilized society must learn to make these judgments without confusing them.

Equality is a moral commitment; competence is an empirical question. The child of a supposedly superior caste can be incompetent. The child denied status may be extraordinarily gifted. A functioning society creates institutions capable of recognizing talent without permitting talent to cancel rights. That is the difference between a republic of citizens and a collection of genealogical claims.

10. The civilization worthy of defense

The most persistent objection to my title is that a people who produced Phule, Savitribai, Periyar, Ambedkar, and generations of other reformers cannot fairly be described as uniformly passive. I agree with the factual premise. A civilization is not a single character with one permanent personality. My title is a provocation about recurring habits and institutional failures, not a medical diagnosis of millions of human beings.

A stronger interpretation follows. These reformers show that the capacity for intellectual and moral rebellion was present. The scandal is not that nobody recognized the problem. The scandal is that institutions often resisted those who did, and continue to fall short of the standards reformers demanded. The reformer is not an embarrassment to the civilization. He or she is part of its unfinished argument with itself.

If the book's demand for emancipation means anything, it must begin with the refusal to humiliate fellow citizens. A civilization that cannot recognize the equal dignity of its own people has little standing to lecture the world on pluralism. And a person who defends sacred temples while treating another human being as polluted has confused stone with morality.

I would rather belong to an imperfect society that permits radical correction than to a society that requires me to praise its perfection. The purpose of criticism is not to destroy the past. It is to end the

practice of using the past as an alibi for present suffering. The greatest tribute to an intellectual inheritance is the freedom to surpass it.

My standard must apply to my own inheritance first. Otherwise this indictment would become another license for unexamined obedience.

Chapter Six — The Imported Courtroom: Independence Without Institutional Emancipation

1. The man who walked back into the cell

A chained man is a victim. A man who is released and walks back into the cell is something else. These are the words with which I want to begin the trial of India's postcolonial judicial imagination. It is too easy to explain every institutional failure by invoking the departing British. Colonial rule imposed a legal architecture, a governing language, and administrative habits whose consequences did not vanish on independence day. But independence made possible the work of redesign. The existence of that possibility creates an obligation to explain why so much was retained, why so little became intelligible to ordinary litigants, and why justice so often still arrives at a pace unrelated to the urgency of human life.

One must be precise about the accusation. India's Constitution was not written by the British and simply placed upon India like a second colonial proclamation. It was debated and adopted by an Indian Constituent Assembly. Its makers sought to overcome untouchability, secure equal citizenship, protect liberties, establish universal adult franchise and discipline public power. The Constitution is therefore also a major act of Indian political agency. My charge is sharper than calling its authors imitators. I ask whether the institutional arrangements they inherited and modified have proved equal to the

burdens of the society they intended to transform. A sacred attitude toward any constitution is as unworthy of a free mind as a sacred attitude toward any scripture.

The question is not whether a provision has an Indian or an English ancestor. Reason has no nationality. A method should be adopted because it works, adapted because circumstances differ, and replaced where it persistently defeats the purposes for which it was chosen. The colonial origin matters because it helps explain the system; it cannot substitute for proof of its present failures.

2. The American courtroom: an eyewitness account, not a universal verdict

I once appeared in an American traffic court to contest a ticket. I could have paid by mail and disappeared. Instead I contested the allegation and, by my recollection, succeeded on its merits. Another defendant came before the judge. They appeared acquainted, exchanged friendly remarks, and the judge said he would retire the citation as a matter of professional courtesy. In that small scene, the language of procedure seemed capable of laundering a personal favor into a respectable act. I describe what I witnessed; I do not pretend that a single encounter proves the practices of every American court.

But a first-person account may ask a legitimate question. What happens when a citizen lacks the language, money, patience, or specialized knowledge needed to challenge the person who decides his fate? The judge has a robe. The prosecutor has a title. The lawyer has a

vocabulary. The litigant has a life to live. Formal equality means little if one participant understands the system and the other cannot even tell when an advantage has been granted to somebody else.

The evidence of an American access-to-justice crisis is not confined to anecdotes. The Legal Services Corporation's 2022 Justice Gap study reported that low-income Americans received no legal help, or inadequate help, for 92 percent of their substantial civil legal problems. It also recorded cost as a common reason people avoided seeking assistance. This statistic describes low-income Americans' civil legal needs—not every criminal case, every legal claim, or every American. Still, it challenges the assumption that the mere availability of courts delivers accessible justice.

If the most resource-rich legal market leaves much of its poorer population without adequate civil assistance, India cannot treat a lawyer-intensive process as a remedy requiring no further justification. It must ask what happens when the litigant is a landless laborer, a tenant, an elderly widow, a migrant worker, or a farmer whose assets are smaller than the fees required to defend them.

3. A nation whose cases outlive its people

India's National Judicial Data Grid is an instrument of modern accountability: it publishes data about pending cases and their duration. A parliamentary response dated 7 August 2026 listed 95,954 pending matters before the Supreme Court as of 30 July 2026 and 6,466,970 before the High Courts. The district-court component must be read from the corresponding dated grid rather than casually added to figures from a different day. Case totals change daily, definitions and duplication must be checked, and a pending case is not necessarily a case of misconduct. Nevertheless, the magnitude is not a statistical curiosity; it is a lived social fact.

An inheritance quarrel can occupy the years in which a family should have been cultivating land. A wage dispute can become irrelevant when the wage earner has died. A criminal charge can destroy a reputation long before a verdict. Powerful litigants may exploit delay, although delay also stems from vacancies, procedure, understaffing, uneven case management, and the growing demands placed on courts. To understand these causes is not to excuse them. It is to move from rhetorical fury to diagnosis.

There is a distinct moral violence in a procedure that treats time as though it belongs equally to everyone. The wealthy may purchase delay; the poor must spend their lives in it. If rights exist only after a person can bear years of expense, the rights are in danger of becoming abstractions.

4. Whose language does justice speak?

Article 348 of India's Constitution establishes English as the ordinary language for proceedings in the Supreme Court and High Courts, subject to legally specified exceptions and authorizations. That does not mean every district courtroom conducts every proceeding in English. India uses regional languages in important parts of its judicial system, and translation mechanisms also exist. Yet the hierarchy of authoritative judgments, higher appeals, legal education, and professional advancement has given English an unusually powerful role.

The point is not that English is an enemy language. It is a useful language that connects India to the world and to a vast body of law. It becomes an institutional problem when the person whose home, liberty, land, or livelihood is under consideration cannot understand the process without relying on intermediaries. A legal system ought to speak intelligibly to the people whose lives it governs. At minimum, the litigant must be able to read the charges, follow the material proceedings, understand the outcome, and obtain explanations and enforceable reasons in a language he or she knows.

Would a person who cannot read the verdict in his own case call the verdict his own? The problem is not solved by translating ornamental passages while leaving the practical decision inaccessible. The test is usable comprehension. Can the ordinary litigant detect an error? Can the person object? Can the decision be challenged without first purchasing a private translator of legal meaning?

5. Dharma, rights, and the danger of romantic nostalgia

I propose that India revisit its own traditions of practical dispute resolution—not because every ancestral custom was just, but because a civilization that once developed vigorous traditions of reasoning should not imagine legal creativity ended at the colonial frontier. The language of dharma invites questions about obligations, proportionality, repair, and the restoration of social relations. These are useful questions. They do not negate the modern vocabulary of individual rights. They can help us think about what rights are for.

Here a profound objection must be answered. Traditional councils and local authorities could reproduce the oppression of caste, gender, property, and status. A panchayat with no restraint might become the village strongman's courtroom. Restorative justice can become compulsory reconciliation, especially where the weaker party is told to forgive the stronger. The promise of proximity must never become the tyranny of familiarity.

My proposed alternative is therefore not the uncritical resurrection of an old village institution. It is a modern local justice system with trained decision-makers and technical advisers, publicly recorded reasons, disclosed conflicts of interest, rotating membership, open hearings where appropriate, independent audits, affordable appeals, and a constitutional floor of individual rights that no local majority may violate. A council must never be permitted to enforce caste exclusion, deny a woman equal standing, or compel a victim to reconcile with an abuser.

Specialized knowledge should go where the dispute lives. A land disagreement may need a surveyor more urgently than five adjournments. A defective building claim may need an engineer. A medical compensation case may require independent clinical expertise. Commercial disputes may benefit from accounting and valuation. Technical competence should be made accessible rather than reserved for people who can purchase the best expert witnesses.

The project would need pilots. Choose several districts; define which categories of disputes qualify; preserve voluntary participation where conciliation is involved; publish clearance times, appeal outcomes, reversals, costs and citizen comprehension measures. Compare them with conventional courts serving similar populations. If the reforms fail, abandon the ineffective designs. If they succeed, expand them. That is how a system faithful to logical empiricism should behave.

6. Ambedkar and the obligation to improve what he helped build

B. R. Ambedkar's importance cannot be reduced to his chairmanship of a drafting committee. He confronted a social order in which inherited status could negate a human being's dignity before the law. Constitutional equality, protection against untouchability, and enforceable rights were therefore not ornamental imitations of Europe: they were essential weapons against domination at home.

A serious criticism of the legal system must not mistake that achievement for the source of every judicial failure. Ambedkar worked within the intellectual resources and institutional constraints of his

time, but he also made deliberate choices. We can honor his project of equal citizenship by asking whether the machinery available to citizens is capable of delivering it. Criticism is not desecration. It is the work through which a republic learns.

The British built much of the machine. Independent India retained, altered, and administered it. That is the historical fact from which I begin. But my preferred verdict is not that India should reject everything whose origin lies abroad. It is that India must stop confusing inheritance with adequacy. A legal order is justified by the justice it can deliver, not by its pedigree, whether British, Indian, ancient, or modern.

A man in another man's coat is not necessarily a fool. The coat may protect him from the cold. But if it does not fit, if it prevents him from moving, and if generations have learned to call discomfort a virtue, a free people ought to have the confidence to tailor their own clothes.

Chapter Seven — Temples, Plunder, and Power

1. The altar, the treasury, and the throne

A temple is not merely a building made of stone. Its meaning cannot be measured by the market value of its pillars. It can be a house of worship, a center of scholarship, a place where communities gather, a treasury into which patrons deposit wealth, a landholding institution, a storehouse of memory, and a visible declaration that a particular political order possesses authority. To destroy such an institution is not the equivalent of breaking an anonymous roadside object. It can strike at the faith, wealth, history, and sovereignty of a community at once.

The modern observer who asks whether temple destruction was religious or economic may already have made a mistaken division. A powerful shrine could be valuable precisely because it was sacred. Worshippers gave it resources, sovereigns endowed it, and regional legitimacy accumulated around its deity. Attack the shrine and one might gain treasure, unsettle the ruler who patronized it, and dramatize the superiority of one's own power. Belief and material interest could reinforce one another, not merely compete as alternative explanations.

I have accused conquerors of disguising robbery in religious language. This accusation deserves investigation rather than a chorus of approval. The records must be permitted to distinguish a military raid seeking treasure from an order motivated by theological intolerance, an attack

on a rebellious patron from the destruction of an ordinary village shrine, and a chronicler's boast from an event corroborated by independent evidence. If all these are made identical, we may produce an indignant story, but not a trustworthy history.

The history of a civilization can be injured twice: first by men who destroy its institutions and again by those who invent convenient legends about the destruction. One group steals the stone; the other steals the truth. Neither should be granted ownership of our memory.

2. Three questions before judgment

When a chronicler records the fall of a temple, I want three questions answered before anyone announces a universal conclusion. What happened? Who acted, and under what circumstances? What evidence establishes the motive?

The first question is factual. Was an image removed, a treasury looted, a roof broken, a sanctuary converted to another use, or the entire complex razed? These are distinct actions. A structure might be attacked, repaired, replaced, rebuilt, endowed by another ruler, or remembered by later generations in a way that differs from the first surviving record. The word destruction should not become a license to conceal that complexity.

The second question is political. What ruler controlled the place? Was the temple closely associated with that ruler? Had the patron rebelled, or was the invading army advancing through territory it intended to

annex? The answer may reveal a strategy aimed at sovereignty rather than a general campaign against every shrine belonging to a religion.

The third question is epistemological. Who wrote the account and for whom? Court chroniclers had reasons to flatter patrons. Religious writers had reasons to magnify humiliation or triumph. Colonial officials had reasons to depict earlier rulers as barbarous so that foreign government appeared benevolent. Modern nationalists have reasons to make the past a single continuous quarrel. None of these incentives proves a particular account false. They explain why comparison among Persian, Sanskrit, inscriptional, archaeological, and local narrative evidence is indispensable.

The requirement is severe, but it follows from the book's foundations. Logical empiricism is not a weapon to be used only against the claims of another religion. It is an obligation we impose upon our own most emotionally satisfying explanations. An accusation strong enough to survive evidence is stronger than a thousand accusations protected from investigation.

3. Somnath: the fact, the record, and the afterlife of memory

In 1026 Mahmud of Ghazni attacked the temple at Somnath in Gujarat. The raid and plunder are historical matters deserving serious treatment. Somnath became one of the best-known symbols of the encounter between armed conquest and a Hindu sacred site. It is precisely because the event matters that it should not be surrendered to a single source tradition or an inflated death toll.

The historian Romila Thapar's *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* draws attention to the differences between Turko-Persian narratives and other accounts produced across a long period. The invasion itself does not disappear when the sources are compared. What changes is our confidence in later claims about the exact character, consequences, and remembered meaning of the raid. A story used for centuries in political argument may accumulate details that cannot be demonstrated from near-contemporary evidence.

There is no intellectual courage in pretending that a plundered temple was not plundered. There is also no courage in inventing precise massacres, universal religious motives, or an unbroken collective hatred because a dramatic narrative satisfies the present. The first approach purchases harmony by suppressing evidence; the second purchases certainty by enlarging it beyond recognition. Both betray the same philosophical duty.

Somnath also acquired a separate political life during British rule. In 1842, the East India Company's governor-general, Lord Ellenborough, publicized the recovery of what were presented as the gates of Somnath from Ghazni. Scholarship has challenged the identification of those objects and examined how the episode was enlisted in imperial storytelling. The event shows how a conqueror's raid may later become useful to another conqueror's political theater. History did not stop in 1026. Its manipulation continued.

The right response is neither forgetfulness nor myth-making. Study the raid; examine the sources; preserve the site; refuse collective guilt; and ask how a society protects its cultural inheritance without handing its judgment over to the passions of any court or party.

4. Kashi: the difficult case of Aurangzeb

A still harder case is the destruction of the Vishwanath temple at Banaras under Aurangzeb in 1669. The destruction is not merely a legend invented by modern polemicists. Accounts associated with the Mughal court, together with subsequent historical and architectural research, support the central event. The deeper controversy concerns the motives, extent of the imperial orders, and the relationship between religious orthodoxy and punishment of political opposition.

Some historians emphasize Aurangzeb's religious policies and the contemporary chronicler's language about suppressing teachings deemed improper. Others, including Richard Eaton, place weight on the association of the temple with political patrons connected to perceived opponents of Mughal authority. Both kinds of explanation must be considered where the evidence permits. To say that a ruler could have political motives is not to prove that he held no religious convictions. To say that a chronicle uses theological language is not to prove that economic and political calculation were absent.

The destructive act remains a destructive act. A historian's explanation is not an acquittal. When a sanctuary is attacked to punish its patron, the worshipper who loses access to it does not suffer a smaller injury

because the imperial chancery possessed a political rationale. Explanation and justification are different acts of reasoning. We should refuse to confuse them in either direction.

At the same time, contemporary documentation indicates that Aurangzeb's dealings with temples were not uniform: orders and grants also protected or supported some religious establishments. The question is therefore not whether the emperor was consistently tolerant or uniformly destructive. The real question is how imperial authority selected the institutions it protected and those it punished, and when theological language became a means of legitimizing policy.

For my purposes, the important consequence is institutional. A shrine dependent upon the pleasure of a sovereign is vulnerable even when the sovereign tolerates it. Cultural security cannot rest solely upon the benevolence of kings. It requires law, dispersed authority, public memory, and institutions capable of surviving a change of government.

5. A conqueror may attack a deity to defeat a king

Richard M. Eaton has argued that many attacks upon royal temples occurred where political authority was being established, contested, or punished. A major dynastic temple could house the image associated with the patron's sovereignty. Removal of the image or damage to the shrine signaled that the patron's protection and authority had failed. This argument has generated fierce disagreement, but it raises a historical question no serious treatment can omit.

Consider the political economy. When a sanctuary belongs to a royal complex, its resources and prestige are not distributed as if it were an isolated private altar. Soldiers can seize portable treasures; rulers can claim the right to redistribute endowments; chroniclers can narrate the removal of a rival's divine patron as proof of victory. None of this makes religious language irrelevant. The humiliating symbolism may be precisely what makes the attack effective.

Eaton's study identified around eighty reasonably certain recorded instances for particular regions and centuries, chiefly between 1192 and 1729. That figure is a documented corpus, not a census of every temple ever damaged under Muslim rule. Destroyed records, incomplete inscriptions, changing definitions, and the limits of available evidence prevent us from converting the list into a final total. It would be equally dishonest to transform eighty into evidence that no further destruction occurred or to inflate it into an unverified number of thousands.

I also reject a seductive but invalid inference. From the fact that a state targeted politically prominent shrines, it does not follow that ordinary believers were indifferent to the harm. An act may have been strategic from the conqueror's perspective and sacrilegious from the worshipper's. Historical analysis must permit more than one human standpoint to exist in the same event.

The strongest version of the materialist argument is therefore not that religion was a disguise in every case. It is that religious institutions possessed material functions and political relationships that made their

destruction intelligible within struggles for power. Religion could be conviction, symbol, resource, and instrument at the same time.

6. The evidence that refuses to flatter us

There is another fact that must enter this chapter whether it comforts our pride or not: Hindu rulers sometimes plundered or desecrated the temples and images associated with rival rulers. The Rashtrakuta king Indra III's attack on the Kalapriya temple patronized by the Pratiharas is one recorded example. Accounts of the appropriation of sacred images as war trophies, and of temple plunder under the Kashmiri ruler Harsha, further complicate the picture.

This does not prove that every period or dynasty behaved identically. It does not make the frequency of attacks equal across regions or erase theological differences between Hindu and Muslim rulers. It proves something narrower and more demanding: the political vulnerability of sacred institutions did not begin only when Muslim sovereigns acquired power in northern India. A king could regard an opponent's deity as implicated in that opponent's legitimacy, even when the two kings belonged to broadly related religious traditions.

Now I ask the question that matters to the governing philosophy of this book. If my aim is to defend a civilization through reason, what do I gain by concealing the misconduct of rulers whose ancestry or religious vocabulary resembles my own? Nothing. I would exchange historical understanding for a flattering picture, precisely the bargain I have accused the complacent Hindu of making in every other sphere.

A civilization is not strengthened by the invention of an immaculate past. It is strengthened by discovering which institutions failed, why they failed, and what must be built to prevent the repetition of injury. The crime of an invader is not less serious because a local ruler committed a similar crime. The crime of a local ruler is not less serious because an invader later did worse.

The universal moral standard is severe because it does not allow me to grant exceptions to my ancestors. That is its virtue. If I excuse my own side from examination, I have ceased to write philosophy and begun to perform tribal public relations.

7. The sacred stone: when comparison clarifies and when it misleads

I have challenged the selective ridicule directed at Hindu image worship by asking why other traditions honor particular physical places and objects. The Kaaba is the focal point toward which Muslims direct their prayers; the Western Wall in Jerusalem is a place of Jewish prayer, mourning, and historical attachment. These are powerful forms of sacred geography and embodied reverence. Such practices remind us that religious meaning is often carried by the material world.

But an accurate comparison requires us to state differences as well as similarities. In mainstream Islamic theology, Muslims do not worship the Kaaba as a deity. In Jewish practice the Western Wall is not a god. And Hindu murti worship includes several theological understandings: an image may serve as a consecrated presence or a focus through which a deity is approached, rather than an assertion that an ordinary stone

independently created the universe. To declare these practices identical would be a category mistake. To declare that only one's own physical symbols can be revered without intellectual ridicule would invite a charge of inconsistent standards.

The right philosophical demand is reciprocal understanding. Describe a tradition's practice as its educated adherents understand it before arguing against it. Do not reduce Hindu theology to the worship of rubble, Islam to the worship of a cube, or Judaism to the worship of masonry. These descriptions may amuse adversaries, but they prevent the careful comparison of concepts such as representation, presence, sanctity, direction, memory, and devotion.

I may reject the metaphysical claims of all these practices. Under logical empiricism, their supernatural propositions must be treated as propositions, not as privileges exempt from inquiry. Yet even a materialist should understand that human beings can create legitimate cultural and historical attachments to places. A ruined library does not become unimportant because its volumes consist of paper and ink; a sacred site does not become meaningless because its walls are made of stone.

My objection is not to the existence of Jewish or Muslim sacred places. It is to any standard that defends reverence for one's own symbols while treating another community's reverence as an invitation to humiliation or violence. The same standard must apply in the opposite direction.

8. The doctrine of iconoclasm and its historical uses

Iconoclasm is not one thing. It may be a theological judgment that sacred images are improper; a political campaign against institutions associated with adversaries; a performative assertion of sovereignty; or a pretext for removing valuables. It is also possible for actors to sincerely believe the theological judgment while benefiting materially from its execution.

To ask whether temple plunder was robbery rather than religion is to force attention toward incentives that triumphalist religious accounts often obscure. It is a necessary question, but not a complete answer. The historical record contains religious proclamations and material calculations. A ruler might sponsor one temple, punish another, and speak of doctrine while doing both. He might impose taxes, reward allies, or reward military service with seized assets. No universal claim can be deduced from the architecture of the building alone.

The people who lost access to the shrine need not have possessed the same vocabulary as the people who attacked it. The conqueror might record a victory for religious truth. A local worshipper might remember loss of the deity's home. A tax collector might record new revenue rights. A modern historian must resist collapsing these perspectives into a single voice.

I therefore reject two evasions. The first says that theology explains everything and political economy explains nothing. The second says that political economy explains everything and religious conviction

explains nothing. Both are intellectually economical in the worst sense: they purchase a simple narrative by discarding evidence.

A materialist method should instead ask how ideas act within institutions. Religious convictions can shape choices; those choices occur in circumstances structured by wealth, military coercion, alliance, scarcity, and political reward. Consciousness has causal effects even if one holds that it arises within material life. To describe consciousness as secondary is not to describe it as imaginary or powerless.

9. From the medieval record to the modern wound

The modern Indian must resist an especially dangerous confusion: the people alive today are not the same persons as the rulers recorded in chronicles hundreds of years ago. Contemporary Hindus did not personally endure every medieval raid, and contemporary Muslims did not personally conduct it. History can generate responsibilities to preserve monuments, investigate destruction, and acknowledge harm. It cannot automatically manufacture hereditary guilt.

A society that treats a modern neighbor as an agent of a distant emperor has replaced historical inquiry with collective accusation. This is precisely the kind of mental shortcut that a book committed to secular humanism must reject. All individuals possess equal moral worth; neither ritual inheritance nor religious family background changes that fact. The protection of a minority's house of worship is not a reward for a spotless past. It is a requirement of equal citizenship.

I have insisted that cultural heritage survives political boundaries. A Hindu or Buddhist site in present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Bangladesh remains part of the human historical record. The same principle must protect mosques, churches, gurdwaras, Jain temples, synagogues, and archaeological sites wherever they stand. A civilization worthy of defending its memory must become capable of defending the memory of others.

None of this forbids criticism of Islamic imperial history or of particular rulers who acted in the name of their faith. No historical tradition receives immunity from scrutiny. It requires only that our accusations identify the actors and evidence rather than substituting an undifferentiated modern population for past institutions.

We must be able to say simultaneously: this temple was attacked; the people who ordered or performed the attack are responsible; its destruction deserves remembrance; and a living neighbor who shares their religion is not thereby a criminal. If we cannot make those distinctions, we have learned very little from a civilization that once produced schools of logic.

10. The cost of architectural amnesia

A shrine can be a repository of craftsmanship, regional language, music, charitable activity, and social organization. Its destruction may erase manuscripts, interrupt ritual training, damage guild livelihoods, and scatter communities. These consequences deserve investigation even when the building's political patron has vanished and even when an historian can supply a coherent explanation for an attack.

Cultural loss is not repaired by observing that some temples survived. The destruction of one archive remains a loss even when a thousand libraries stand. Conversely, the existence of a ruined site does not prove that every monument in a region was deliberately attacked. We need inventories, provenance, conservation records, inscriptions, architectural history, and transparent methods of dating structures and phases of construction.

The contemporary question is therefore practical. Where are the archaeological surveys? Which damaged objects can be restored without inventing a false past? What protections exist for manuscripts and inscriptions? Can citizens inspect the evidence? How are local communities included in conservation without allowing the most powerful local faction to monopolize a site's history?

There is room here for the scientific attitude that this book demands in every chapter. Digital documentation, materials analysis, imaging, epigraphic study, public archives, and independent peer review can reduce the space in which rumor thrives. The answer to a disputed

monument should not be a mob competing with another mob. It should begin with evidence that can be examined by people who disagree.

When we allow a broken shrine to become an excuse for breaking another shrine, we have learned nothing. When we preserve evidence of damage, restore what can responsibly be restored, and protect the rights of the living, memory becomes a public good rather than a renewable supply of vengeance.

11. What an honest accounting would investigate

I examine each major case through its date, place, rulers, witnesses, documentary chronology, and political economy. I distinguish demolition, looting, conversion and reconstruction, and I compare rival historical accounts against particular evidence. A disagreement between historians is not a license to invent an event or dismiss every opponent as dishonest.

A case study should ask what was taken. Portable gold and jewelry are one kind of prize. Land grants, tax rights, sacred images, and the symbolic submission of a defeated polity are others. A raid may combine them. Even the absence of a recovered treasure inventory is significant: without evidence of what was taken, I must not manufacture an amount to dramatize the event.

The same rules should apply to cases involving Hindu rulers. If evidence of the Kalapriya episode comes through a particular inscriptional or narrative tradition, identify that tradition. If a story about the destruction of a Buddhist or Jain establishment is contested,

state the contest. We have no need of a false balance in which every group must have committed identical offenses. We need a method in which every claim faces identical scrutiny.

The outcomes should be described in human terms without fictionalized statistics. A sacred center could be economically connected to craftsmen, teachers, farmers, and pilgrims. Its removal would affect people differently according to their occupations and dependencies. This is where dialectical materialism is useful: it directs attention from the isolated monument toward relationships among labor, patronage, authority, belief, and power.

But dialectics does not license a predetermined verdict. If a particular instance is best explained by theological zeal, we must say so. If another is best explained by royal rivalry or extraction of wealth, we must say that instead. A method is valuable only if it can surprise the person using it.

12. The verdict this book can defend

My language has been severe. I have called the plunder of sacred institutions highway robbery and the mugging of the weak. The metaphor expresses a moral intuition: an armed force may use the rhetoric of principle to dignify the acquisition of another community's wealth or the destruction of its autonomy. The intuition deserves respect, but respect does not relieve us of the obligation to prove it in particular cases.

I will not retreat into a comforting fiction that premodern empires were innocent of greed, religious intolerance, or the deliberate humiliation of their defeated subjects. Nor will I manufacture a single timeless conspiracy to explain centuries of distinct states, rulers, alliances, and local conflicts. The historical actors were not a homogeneous people moving according to one permanent impulse. Their interests changed, their policies differed, and their institutions often contradicted their professed ideals.

The correct object of criticism is the machinery that turns sacred authority into permission to dispossess others. It may be imperial, priestly, dynastic, or national. It may wear a crescent, a royal emblem, a saffron banner, or the seal of a secular state. Its color does not determine its innocence.

What follows for the Hindu reader? First, abandon the temptation to replace history with grievance. Second, preserve the monuments and intellectual inheritances that survive. Third, demand institutions capable of protecting every citizen's sacred and secular heritage. Fourth, learn the political and economic conditions under which cultural life becomes vulnerable to force. Finally, use reason against your own myths with the same determination you bring to your adversary's.

A civilization does not grow stronger by accusing the dead. Strength means protecting freedom, preventing new injuries, and investigating

the past without surrendering judgment. The past must be studied, not worshipped.

Interlude — Unverified Testimony, Enforced by Power

The proposition and the machinery

I have spent much of this book examining the strange obedience of the conquered: the people who inherit a civilization capable of argument and then borrow the intellectual standards of others without submitting those standards to the examination they deserve. Here I must turn the question around. What happens when the conqueror arrives not merely with soldiers, but with a claim that his religion is the only true account of the universe? What happens when the argument does not end at the boundary of persuasion, but proceeds into law, taxation, property, and the policing of another person's conscience?

The title of this interlude names the problem: unverified testimony, enforced by power. The words are deliberate. I am not claiming to have disproved every possible conception of God. I am asking why an assertion that would require evidence in any other field should acquire compulsory authority because it has been called revelation. I am asking how a report made by particular people, in particular languages, at particular historical moments, becomes an alleged obligation upon every human being who has ever lived or will ever live. And I am asking what changes when that report gains an army.

There are three separate arguments here. First is an epistemological argument about how we know what is true. Second is an institutional argument about who gains authority when one testimony is treated as final. Third is a historical argument about particular episodes in which religious certainty helped legitimate conquest or suppress another people's intellectual life. These arguments must not be made to impersonate one another. [5] A crime committed in God's name does not logically disprove God. A theological proposition may be unsupported even when its adherents behave admirably. A reader deserves both distinctions, because this book claims reason as its judge.

I. Evidence cannot be replaced by reverence

The first question is not whether a prophet was eloquent, courageous, sincere, or historically influential. It is whether a claim about external reality can be warranted by the evidence offered for it. A text may be sublime and still be wrong about nature. A founder may suffer and still be mistaken. A community may preserve an ancient memory without thereby demonstrating the miraculous events woven into it. Sincerity is evidence of sincerity, not an automatic certificate of supernatural truth.

A young earth and a worldwide flood understood as recent, literal geological events confront a vast body of contrary scientific evidence. The historical status of the Exodus narrative is debated; the large-scale event in the biblical form has not been established by archaeology. These are different kinds of claims, and scholarly debate over ancient history is not identical to a scientific verdict on the age of the planet.

The distinction matters. Scientific evidence can falsify specific empirical propositions. It cannot, by itself, refute every metaphorical reading of a sacred story or settle whether any deity exists.

Take the historical figures seriously where the evidence warrants it. Scholars broadly accept Jesus of Nazareth as a historical person who was executed under Roman authority; Muhammad belonged to the identifiable political and religious world of seventh-century Arabia. Establishing the historical existence of a teacher, however, is not equivalent to verifying a resurrection, an angelic transmission, or an exclusive revelation. Historical method can weigh texts, contexts, dates, and witnesses. It does not confer scientific authentication on a miracle because the miracle appears in a document whose author believed it.

This does not mean testimony is worthless. Nearly all history depends upon testimony and material traces. The question is how testimony is tested. Are accounts independent? Were they produced near the event? Do they disagree? What incentives or traditions shaped their transmission? Are there alternative explanations? Would the historian accept the same level of evidence if the miracle were claimed for a competing tradition? I ask for symmetry. [6] A Christian may reject the claims of a later prophet; a Muslim may reject a Christian resurrection doctrine; a Jew may reject both. What standard does each use when the story belongs to someone else, and why should that standard be relaxed for the story inherited at home?

The skeptic need not pretend to know everything. He can say, without embarrassment: this testimony does not justify the universality claimed for it. It is not a declaration of certainty about all things supernatural. It is the refusal to convert another person's conviction into an obligation upon my mind.

II. The bridge from a creator to a compulsory creed

Suppose, for the sake of argument, a philosophical proof established a first cause or a necessary foundation of existence. A tremendous concession has been made. But what follows? Does that proof identify the Hebrew scriptures, the incarnation of Jesus, the Quran, a particular holy city, or the alleged finality of a messenger? It does not. No argument from the existence of the cosmos alone supplies the name, nationality, language, or authorized priesthood of its supposed creator.

Between a philosophical deity and a named revelation there is a bridge. The bridge is made of testimony, miracle reports, traditions of interpretation, and personal religious experience. Each may matter to a believer. None may be declared universally decisive simply because the believer regards it as sacred. If the argument is intended to bind strangers across the planet, the burden of justification must be intelligible to those strangers.

David Hume made the problem of miracles especially severe. A report of an event contrary to well-established experience must be weighed not only against the witness's honesty but against the possibility of error, exaggeration, transmission, and misunderstood natural events.

Philosophers continue to dispute whether Hume's standards are too restrictive; that controversy must be acknowledged. Yet the basic question remains inescapable: what would justify belief in an extraordinary event, and would the same standard be applied to reports from rival traditions?

Religious experience cannot simply be laughed away. People report experiences that transform their lives, and philosophers have defended the rationality of taking some such experiences seriously. But private experience and public obligation are not equivalent. The experience of a Christian mystic does not establish Islam's error; the experience of a Muslim mystic does not establish Christianity's error; neither establishes that a Hindu or a Buddhist must surrender an inherited philosophical vocabulary. A felt presence may be psychologically or spiritually important without authorizing a state to punish disbelief.

The universe is immense. The theological difficulty of particularity is not that a universal God would be logically forbidden to speak to a particular person. Such a prohibition cannot be demonstrated. The difficulty is evidential: why should a claim carried by one ancient community, in one part of one planet, possess unquestionable jurisdiction over all minds? The larger the claimed authority, the heavier the burden to explain how its truth has been established independently of the authority claiming it.

III. The messenger, the institution, and the beneficiaries

Religions are not merely systems of propositions. They are communities with languages, calendars, sacred places, authorities, rules of belonging, and economic institutions. Judaism's traditions of covenant and peoplehood, Christianity's diverse claims about Christ and salvation, and Islam's doctrine of final prophecy organize religious life in profoundly different ways. To flatten those differences would make this book less informed than its subject requires. Yet one recurring problem deserves investigation: exclusive truth claims can be used to elevate the authority of those who claim to represent them.

One can trace that transformation in institutional history. A theological judgment becomes an ecclesiastical office; an office acquires land; land produces revenue; revenue sustains political influence; political influence determines which forms of worship are tolerated. The process does not occur identically in every place. Nor are institutions uniformly corrupt. Temples and monasteries, including Indic ones, have also accumulated property and influence. But a declared monopoly upon salvific truth creates a distinctive temptation: opposition to the institution may be represented not simply as political disagreement, but as disobedience to the ultimate order of the universe.

A founder may suffer before followers enjoy power. Jesus was executed. Muhammad's community faced persecution in Mecca. Hebrew prophets often condemned their own rulers. Their suffering is an important historical corrective to any simplistic picture of founders designing comfortable careers. The institutional question emerges

afterward, when churches, courts, ruling dynasties, caliphates, colonial companies, and religious administrations begin to use inherited stories to justify their own jurisdiction. It is not enough to ask what the original messenger believed. We must ask what the authorized interpreter was permitted to do to a dissenter.

The inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud, mentioning Yahweh and an associated Asherah, illustrate another problem: theological traditions have histories. Scholars disagree about how precisely to interpret this association—goddess, cult object, or other symbol—but the evidence complicates the idea that the religious identities we now recognize appeared in their finished form from the beginning. Doctrines developed in specific cultures over time. That development is a subject for historians, not a license for one community to mock another. The same rigorous historical standards must examine the Vedas, Buddhist scriptures, Jain traditions, and every religion defended in the pages of this book.

The strongest form of my accusation is therefore not that religious founders were invariably frauds. I have not established that. My accusation is that later institutions sometimes treated historically conditioned and disputable claims as unchallengeable licenses to rule. A universal human being was made to answer to a local office because that office claimed authority from heaven.

IV. When revelation becomes a property deed

Some of the most disturbing evidence comes not from hostile pamphlets but from legal and ecclesiastical records. Fifteenth-century papal bulls accompanied and supported Iberian imperial claims. Among them were *Dum Diversas* (1452), *Romanus Pontifex* (1455), and *Inter Caetera* (1493). Their histories and relationships to later legal doctrines require careful analysis. They are not interchangeable texts, and they do not establish that every Christian accepted the same imperial policy. They do establish that ecclesiastical documents could become instruments in the allocation of conquest, sovereignty, and human subordination.

The American Supreme Court's 1823 decision in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* stands as an especially chilling transition from imperial inheritance to the law of a modern republic. The decision privileged the title of the discovering colonial sovereign and limited Indigenous peoples' capacity to convey land title to private purchasers. It did not simply reproduce a papal bull; its reasoning belonged to a longer colonial property tradition. But it demonstrates how ideas acquired under empire could continue to shape the legal handling of Indigenous land after the banners changed.

In March 2023, Vatican departments publicly repudiated what has become known as the Doctrine of Discovery. The statement also said that earlier papal documents had failed to reflect the equal dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples and that their contents were manipulated for political purposes. That acknowledgement must be reported

accurately, including the Vatican's insistence that the doctrine was not Catholic teaching and its reference to earlier church figures who defended Indigenous rights. The statement does not undo the dispossession. It does show that the controversy is not an invention of a modern critic: the institutions themselves have had to confront their historical record.

A comparison with the forced Christianization of some European peoples offers another test. Certain Frankish policies toward the Saxons under Charlemagne threatened severe penalties for rejection of Christian practices. Historians debate textual dating and the application of particular ordinances, so the most sweeping claims require documentary precision. But the larger pattern is not imaginary: political subjugation and religious conformity could proceed together. Europe's own older religious cultures were also transformed under rulers who claimed Christian legitimacy.

And in the Maya world the evidence is unbearably concrete. At Maní, in Yucatán, in 1562, the Franciscan Diego de Landa conducted proceedings against Maya religious practices. Maya books and ritual objects were destroyed. Later testimony, including de Landa's own account, records book burning, while archival and archaeological scholarship documents the event's violence and scale. This was not a philosophical demonstration that Maya knowledge was false. It was an exercise of organized authority against a people's memory.

A theology that relies on persuasion has to face an opponent's answer. A theology backed by power may try to remove the opponent's capacity to answer at all. The first submits itself to criticism. The second risks turning disagreement into an offense.

V. The human cost is not an abstraction

The Atlantic slave trade is among the most extensively documented examples of the scale of organized human exploitation. The *SlaveVoyages* project estimates that approximately 12.5 million captive Africans were embarked for the Americas, and that fewer survived to disembark. These figures describe the transport of human beings, not merely an economic commodity. Colonial regimes and merchants operating within predominantly Christian societies participated in the system. Yet it would be historically dishonest to infer that Christianity alone caused the trade: profit, racial hierarchies, state competition, African intermediaries, and changing imperial laws also shaped it. Religious rhetoric could legitimate and contest slavery; Christians were found among both slaveholders and abolitionists.

Slavery also occurred across trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean networks under diverse rulers, including Muslim powers, over much longer spans of time. The estimates and legal regimes are less readily comparable with the documented Atlantic system, and they must not be compressed into a single invented grand total. Enslavement within South Asia and coercive indenture under British rule require their own

regional evidence. This is a comparative history of institutions, not a claim of hereditary criminality attached to a contemporary religion.

The point of comparison is structural. When the powerful control land, law, education, and the categories by which people are recognized, the weak may lose not only property but the authority to describe what has happened to them. Colonization may give a community a new ruler and a new account of its former life. Children can be taught to regard their grandparents' beliefs as shame. Languages can lose prestige in courts and schools. A people can survive biologically while its inherited memory is broken.

The school and the courtroom can finish what the sword began. Mission systems have offered literacy, medicine, protection, and opportunity; they have also, in specific colonial settings, participated in coercive assimilation and the suppression of native languages or religious practices. A disciplined history must identify which institution did what, in which colony, under what law. The stronger evidence is not the phrase 'they all did it.' It is a record that refuses to let a well-documented act disappear into the general good intentions claimed by its perpetrators.

There is also a paradox of historical survival. We know some destroyed traditions through hostile reports written by those who opposed them. A reader learns of what the conqueror burned from the conqueror's description of the burning. That fact should humble every civilization that declares its own archive complete. Those who could not transmit

their version are not thereby proved to have had no version worth transmitting.

VI. Conversion, refusal, and the meaning of consent

Here my argument reaches the question that matters to a free mind. What is a conversion worth if rejection carries punishments imposed by government, employer, landlord, school, or family? What is the meaning of religious choice if the state describes the alternative as unlawful? A claim may be freely accepted by one person and coercively imposed on another. We must distinguish conversion under threat from conversion through intellectual conviction, personal relationship, social mobility, family tradition, or sincere spiritual experience.

A conquered population is not a population without beliefs or agency. People sometimes embraced new religions enthusiastically, sometimes selectively, sometimes to gain opportunities, sometimes under explicit coercion, and sometimes through generations of gradual interaction. It would be an error to describe every conversion under a Muslim ruler or a Christian colonial government as forced. It would be an equal error to describe every conversion as uncoerced merely because a later census recorded the new identity.

The relevant test is whether the individual could refuse, criticize, leave, and publicly disagree without facing violence or legal disability. The right to exit is as important as the right to enter. A faith that may be embraced only once, and then binds the conscience under threat, is not

simply a personal commitment: it becomes a structure of power. Apostasy and blasphemy laws in some contemporary states make this danger more than a historical curiosity. Their existence must be examined by jurisdiction, text, enforcement, and date, rather than attributed to all believers everywhere.

The rule I defend is universal. A Hindu must be free to become Muslim; a Muslim must be free to become Hindu; a Christian must be free to become atheist; a Buddhist must be free to reject Buddhism. The former community may be disappointed, but disappointment confers no right to intimidate. No civilization owns the human mind. This is why the proposed United Dharmic Alliance cannot claim to defend freedom while demanding conformity within its own membership. Its principle must travel in every direction.

VII. The counterargument that must not be hidden

A sophisticated defender of revelation may say that faith has forms of rationality beyond laboratory measurement. A philosopher may argue for cumulative historical evidence, for a properly basic religious belief, for religious experience as prima facie evidence, or for moral and metaphysical considerations that increase the plausibility of theism. These positions cannot be disposed of by simply repeating the word 'unverified.' The strongest objections deserve an answer: are the reported experiences discriminatory between rival religions, are miracle reports sufficiently independent, and why would a universal God make a supposedly universal obligation dependent upon access to one chain of testimony?

Another reader may argue that missionaries often opposed empire, defended Indigenous rights, established schools, and challenged slavery. That reader is correct about many identifiable episodes. A third will point to conquest by Hindu rulers, violence by Buddhist polities, and material exploitation by secular governments. The record supports such objections too. My answer is not to deny these facts, but to apply one rule. When coercion is carried out in the name of religion, the religious rationale belongs in the causal explanation; when it is carried out in the name of secular ideology, secular ideology must be examined with equal suspicion. There is no exemption for a tradition because it is mine.

A fourth objection asks whether religious violence proves the religion untrue. It does not, and I have never needed it to. The epistemological

question asks what evidence warrants the supernatural claim. The historical question asks how people wielding that claim exercised power. My thesis is that the two questions met repeatedly in institutions, often with consequences for the conquered. To keep them distinct is not to weaken the indictment. It is to stop one weak inference from making the whole indictment vulnerable.

The same reasoning guards against the lazy inversion of civilizational pride. One cannot say 'the Hindu monk carried a begging bowl, therefore every Indic religious expansion was peaceful,' any more than one can say 'a Christian army conquered, therefore every Christian preached under arms.' Histories are specific. Yet our contrast remains morally exact when applied to real methods: the begging bowl asks; the sword commands. A free mind can refuse the one and cannot always resist the other. No military victory settles a metaphysical question.

VIII. A right more important than victory

What would an intellectually emancipated civilization do with this history? It would recover destroyed documents where possible, translate neglected texts, protect places of worship and remembrance, and investigate acts of suppression without manufacturing fresh myths. It would build schools that teach its children to examine evidence rather than memorize injured pride. It would defend the rights of living human beings, including the freedom of those who no longer share their ancestors' faith. It would preserve an inheritance without mistaking inheritance for ownership of another person's future.

The United Dharmic Alliance, if it is ever to be more than a proposal, must defend precisely that right. Its proper enemy is not a neighbor's private faith, and not a child's decision to change religion. Its enemy is coerced conformity, conquest justified as revelation, and the political monopoly that follows when debate is forbidden. It must never answer exclusive theology with a new exclusive theology of its own. An alliance created to resist domination would destroy its own reason for existing if it became another dominator.

The argument of this chapter returns to the standard established at the beginning of the book. Material reality must not be subordinated to inherited authority. Evidence must not be accepted only when it confirms our preferences. Human beings have equal moral standing. Free minds are entitled to question. No claim to revelation can cancel another person's freedom. The truth of a proposition is established by reasons, not by the number of soldiers ordered to defend it.

The conqueror may carry a book and a sword. The book may contain poetry, compassion, philosophy, and genuine human insight. The sword may take a city. But the sword cannot make a sentence true. And if the book is true, it does not need the sword to prevent us from examining it.

Chapter Eight — Land, People, and the Geography of Power

1. The map is not innocent

It is comforting to divide people by square kilometers, announce that some nation is overcrowded, and regard the explanation as complete. The calculation is simple enough for a child. But a calculation is not a history. Before asking why a people has so little land, we ought to ask who possessed the land in earlier centuries, who drew the borders, who crossed seas with armies, who displaced existing communities, and who acquired the power to define possession as legitimate.

A political map is a document written in several inks. Geography supplies the mountains and rivers. History supplies war, migration, treaties, annexation, colonization, emancipation, compromise and defeat. Population changes supply another ink. Economics supplies yet another: the value of a hectare depends upon water, transport, markets, energy, institutions, and technology. An isolated density statistic is not false. It is merely insufficient to explain the condition of a society.

India has a severe problem of pressure upon land, infrastructure and resources. To deny that problem would betray my stated commitment to evidence. Yet I reject the intellectual laziness of treating every overcrowded street, every desperate worker and every constrained village as proof that the inhabitants alone created their predicament by

having children. Population matters. So does the history of territorial control. So does the organization of production. So do the uses and abuses of public power.

The first obligation of dialectical analysis is to examine relationships. To separate the numerator of population from the denominator of land and pretend that neither has a history is not materialism. It is arithmetic without understanding.

2. What the numbers show—and refuse to show

The World Bank's 2024 population-density series reports approximately 488 people per square kilometer of land area for India, 150 for China, 326 for Pakistan, 1,333 for Bangladesh and 340 for Japan. Taken at face value, India's territory accommodates substantially more people per unit of land than China's. Bangladesh is much more densely populated still. Japan supplies a reminder that density alone does not dictate poverty, technological achievement or institutional quality. [7]

The inverse of density permits another presentation. India's rounded density implies about 0.205 hectares of national land per person; China's implies about 0.667; Pakistan's about 0.307; Bangladesh's about 0.075; and Japan's about 0.294. These numbers do not describe personal ownership. Nor do they describe land suitable for cultivation. A square kilometer of arid plateau, steep mountain, irrigated plain, dense city or protected forest cannot be treated as one identical unit of productive opportunity.

The distinction is not pedantic. A populous country can have a large agricultural sector yet suffer from fragmented holdings and inadequate water. A country with enormous territory may possess vast areas unsuitable for dense settlement. Land quality, access to markets, irrigation, housing policy and infrastructure must be considered together. I will not allow the reader to mistake an elegant table for an explanation.

Nor will I pretend that fertility has not changed. India's demographic transition has reduced family size considerably over time. Any comparison between Hindu fertility and European fertility requires a specified date, indicator and population rather than a sweeping assertion. If a particular demographic claim cannot survive this scrutiny, it must be revised, including when I would prefer it to be true. That is not capitulation. That is logical empiricism operating as advertised.

3. The theft of continents

Consider the Americas. Their Indigenous nations were not waiting in emptiness for Europeans to arrive and name the land. The history of European settlement involved conquest, epidemics, forced removal, expropriation, coerced labor, and in many places the destruction of existing political and cultural systems. The Spanish, Portuguese, British, French and other empires differed in methods and periods; the common denominator was an enormous asymmetry between those able to project overseas force and those compelled to live with its arrival.

Australia was inhabited before British colonization. So was New Zealand. African societies possessed governments, laws, territories, trade and intellectual traditions before nineteenth-century European partition. To call imperial expansion the discovery of empty continents is to erase the people for whom those continents were already home.

I use the phrase 'the theft of continents' deliberately. It is a moral indictment of conquest, seizure and coerced dispossession, not a claim that every transfer of territory in human history was legally or historically identical. Land sometimes changed hands by purchase, alliance, treaty or migration; the historian must examine each case. But a purchase negotiated under military compulsion cannot be treated as though both sides enjoyed equal freedom. Nor does placing the signature of a conquered chief beneath a treaty automatically dissolve the injustice of dispossession.

I would apply the same standard to conquest carried out in the names of Islamic rulers, Christian rulers, secular empires or Hindu monarchs. The banner cannot absolve the act. Neither can the genealogy of the conqueror. Imperial institutions, not every descendant or adherent of the conqueror's religion, are the proper units of historical judgment.

Here my ethical standard matters. Secular humanism refuses to value the displacement of an Indigenous family differently because the army that expelled it carried a cross, a crescent, a royal coat of arms, or a revolutionary flag. Human beings must be counted first. The conquest is not purified by the conqueror's explanation of it.

4. Religion as a language of imperial legitimacy

The relationship between conquest and theological claims deserves especially close study. Some rulers and imperial institutions represented territorial expansion as a service to true religion. Missionary work, conversion policy, taxation, political hierarchy and military domination sometimes became entangled. Particular Christian colonial administrations supported missionary institutions; particular Islamic dynasties exercised power through religious law or invoked religious legitimacy. The histories were neither uniform nor continuous, and there were dissenting voices within both traditions.

That distinction must not become an escape hatch through which we refuse to study institutions. It matters whether an argument enters a community on the lips of a traveler or behind an army's supply train. It matters whether a listener can refuse a doctrine without losing property, legal equality, livelihood or safety. It matters whether the evangelist arrives with a begging bowl or with a governor who can confiscate the listener's house.

The contrast is therefore one of method and authority, not an assertion that every Asian tradition spread peacefully or that every Christian or Muslim missionary used violence. Indian kings made war. Buddhist and Hindu institutions sometimes received royal power and patronage. Christian and Muslim teachers also traveled peacefully, and Muslim merchants participated in religious transmission across the Indian Ocean. Evidence which complicates my thesis will appear in this book rather than be buried beneath it.

Yet that complication does not erase the central question: when a political power demands land and obedience while claiming to possess the only true theology, how much of the enterprise is religious conviction and how much is raw imperialism furnished with sacred vocabulary? The investigation must proceed by institutions, laws, campaigns and actual effects. The victims of conquest are not obliged to accept theology as an excuse for the confiscation of their homes.

5. Europe did not escape its own violence

European overseas expansion did not end violent rivalry within Europe. Dynastic contests, sectarian conflicts, imperial competition, the Napoleonic wars and two world wars make the opposite plain. Some of those conflicts were fought over theology; others over power, territory, markets, dynastic succession, nationalism or imperial ambition. Calling them all wars over correct doctrine would be historically indefensible.

I have raised a counterfactual question: what might the European powers have done to one another had overseas conquest not opened territories, resources and commercial markets? We cannot answer that conclusively. Historians cannot run a controlled experiment on another Europe that never crossed the Atlantic. Imperial expansion sometimes redirected competition abroad, but it also intensified rivalries, financed wars and made colonial territories additional theaters of conflict.

The defensible claim is large enough without pretending certainty: overseas empires profoundly redistributed wealth, people, resources and geopolitical leverage. They helped shape today's borders and

comparative opportunities. A modern comparison of land per person that excludes these transformations is an incomplete material account of modern political geography.

6. India did not merely lose land; it inherited hard boundaries

India's present borders emerged from many historical processes, including precolonial state formation, British imperial administration, Partition, subsequent diplomacy, and warfare. To describe all contemporary neighboring territories as lands mechanically 'stolen' from a timeless, geographically fixed Hindu nation would project modern nationalism backward onto political landscapes that changed repeatedly.

Yet neither should we pretend borders arrived without human suffering. Partition divided regions and social worlds; it displaced millions and created new states. Territorial changes carried grave implications for irrigation, trade routes, families, minority communities and defense. Their material consequences endure. When a modern economist calculates the density of India and its neighbors, the economist is working with political boundaries made by history, not handed down by the laws of physics.

This is the argument I wish to defend: population pressures are real, but political history is real too. One cannot use biology to absolve governments, and one cannot use conquest to absolve present administrators of obligations they can meet. A nation's past may explain part of its burdens. It cannot excuse every future failure.

7. From grievance to measurable policy

The serious question is what an independent society does next. It cannot recover a lost century by shouting at a map. It can improve land records; strengthen agricultural productivity and water efficiency; repair urban infrastructure; protect forests; build housing; expand high-quality education; guarantee legal rights; and permit economic activity capable of creating more value from existing resources.

This is where my position on free markets returns. Land and labor do not become productive by decree. Entrepreneurial discovery, technological investment, secure property rights, environmental regulation and effective public goods interact. A market may reveal that a crop is no longer worth growing; science may reveal that the aquifer supplying it is collapsing; public law must decide which uses of water are permissible. None of these processes exists outside material reality.

A dialectical materialist worthy of the name will investigate how each institution changes the others. A logical empiricist will look for actual results. A secular humanist will ask whose life improves and whose conditions deteriorate. A defender of free minds will permit critics to publish evidence of failure. A defender of markets will permit people to adapt rather than chain them to a bureaucratic prediction.

The purpose of studying the theft of continents is not to learn the vocabulary of permanent resentment. It is to reject the myth that

today's economic geography is innocent of history—and then to take responsibility for what can be changed today.

The map is not a verdict. It is the setting in which present human beings must act.

Chapter Nine — The Gulf and the Migrant

1. The worker carries the civilization

We have spoken about kings, borders, armies, temples and scriptures. Let us now look at a worker carrying a bag through an airport. He may have no secretary to write to a minister, no inherited title, no famous caste name and no interest in the metaphysics of the state. He has borrowed money, said goodbye to his family and taken a contract thousands of miles from home. He intends to work. He intends to send money. He intends to return, if circumstances permit, with enough to repair a roof, educate children or keep an elderly parent from destitution.

He is not a symbol assembled for my argument. He is a person with plans of his own. His decision to migrate may be brave, rational and economically beneficial. A book committed to human agency must never turn him into a helpless prop merely because pity makes better political theater.

But precisely because he is an agent, he deserves the freedom ordinarily associated with work: to understand a contract, receive the wages promised, retain personal documents, leave an abusive employer, seek legal remedy and return home. If these freedoms are weakened because he is foreign, poor or dependent upon a sponsor, then we must

examine the political economy of his situation, not congratulate ourselves on the size of his remittance.

The Gulf is a vast and varied world. There are wealthy Indian professionals in Dubai, merchants with businesses in Muscat, engineers in Doha, nurses and technicians in Saudi Arabia, domestic workers in private households, and construction workers laboring under an extraordinary sun. To describe every one of them as a ‘coolie’ is factually absurd. To overlook the workers whose bargaining power is most constrained would be morally worse.

My charge concerns the unequal structure of power. I want to know why the laborer who builds a gleaming tower should sometimes possess less control over his own work and mobility than those who profit from the building. I want to know which institutions of the receiving country make this possible, and what the sending country's government has done to protect the citizen it sent into that environment.

2. The old rupee and the new dependence

A strange historical object helps introduce the problem: the Gulf rupee. The Reserve Bank of India confirms that Indian currency had circulated widely in the Persian Gulf and that special notes for the Gulf were issued in the 1950s, including for Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States, now part of the United Arab Emirates. These special issues were gradually withdrawn as local currencies developed; the Reserve Bank's museum states that they ceased to circulate around 1970. [8]

I am interested in the reversal that the image suggests. A region in which Indian currency once served important trade functions became, in later decades, a magnet for Indian migrant workers seeking incomes beyond those available to them at home. Oil wealth, state-building and investment transformed the Gulf's political economy. India developed in other ways and at different speeds. A worker's journey today is shaped by those unequal economic opportunities.

The existence of the Gulf rupee does not mean that India politically ruled these states or that the rupee's circulation established Indian moral superiority. Monetary history is not a substitute for political history. Nor does the past entitle an Indian employer or worker to look down upon Gulf societies. What it shows is that relative economic position is not a fixed civilizational essence. It changes. Wealth changes. Institutions change. The direction of migration changes.

If economic fortunes can reverse, no society should confuse present advantage with an inherited right to humiliate outsiders. Nor should a country exporting labor confuse the remittances its citizens earn with evidence that it has fully served them.

3. How many people are we talking about?

In a response discussed in the Lok Sabha on 7 February 2025, India's Ministry of External Affairs estimated 9,371,779 Indians living in the six Gulf Cooperation Council states: roughly 3.89 million in the United Arab Emirates, 2.65 million in Saudi Arabia, 1.01 million in Kuwait, 830,000 in Qatar, 665,000 in Oman and 332,000 in Bahrain. These are estimates of Indian residents, not counts of wage laborers alone. [9]

The distinction is fundamental. A population figure cannot be turned into a worker-exploitation statistic by rhetoric. An Indian entrepreneur and an Indian domestic worker may live in the same Gulf state while experiencing radically different bargaining positions. A family dependent upon a foreign employer's sponsorship faces risks different from those of a senior professional with substantial savings and legal assistance.

The World Bank estimated that India received about 129 billion US dollars in remittances in 2024, the largest amount among the low- and middle-income destinations it listed. This total came from the world, not solely from Gulf countries. It is also an estimate for 2024 rather than a timeless annual constant. [10]

Now we face an uncomfortable dual truth. Migrant earnings materially improve families' lives. Overseas work can finance housing, medicine, education, small businesses and long-term security. A prohibition on migration would deprive many workers of precisely the agency and opportunity I insist upon defending.

At the same time, the economic value of remittances cannot excuse wage theft, abusive recruitment fees, employer retaliation, inadequate occupational safety or obstruction of a worker's right to leave. A government should not treat overseas workers as a national cash machine whose problems may be addressed later. The human being earns the money. The state receives the benefit of its circulation. The state's obligation does not stop at counting it.

4. Kafala: the employment relation becomes a relation of power

The International Labour Organization describes employer sponsorship arrangements often called kafala as systems capable of sharply restricting migrant workers' ability to leave an employer or move to another job. The arrangement can tie lawful immigration status to a particular sponsor. When the employer holds power over work and residence at once, disagreement about a paycheck can become a crisis about the worker's legal existence in the country. [11]

This is the essential asymmetry. In an ordinary ideal of a free labor market, an employee who receives an unacceptable offer may seek another employer, subject to lawful notice and contractual obligations. In a restrictive sponsorship system, the employee's right to work, remain in the country or depart may be constrained by the sponsor. The economic contract is reinforced by immigration control.

A worker who cannot readily leave an abusive employer does not negotiate as an equal. The problem is not that every employer is malicious. Some will pay fairly, supply safe housing and treat

employees with respect. The problem is that a legal structure need not rely on every employer being decent. It must protect the worker when a particular employer is not.

The ILO has recommended protections including the ability to change employers without the previous employer's consent, to retain lawful immigration status, and to leave a country without employer approval. These are practical institutional proposals. They are not an attack on Arab identity or Islamic theology. They are standards for assessing labor administration. [11]

In the language of my economic philosophy, this is an instructive contradiction. A region may embrace capital investment, complex international finance, modern ports and spectacular architecture while preserving forms of labor dependency that restrict the mobility essential to a genuine competitive labor market. A government may praise economic efficiency while permitting an employer to prevent a worker from seeking a better match for his skills. That is not the triumph of market freedom. It is a restriction on one side of the market.

5. Reforms are real; so are the remaining gaps

It would be inaccurate to write as though every Gulf country's law remained frozen in the same form. Qatar removed important restrictions on exit permits and employer changes and introduced additional wage protections. The ILO reports hundreds of thousands of approved job-change applications following reforms implemented from 2020 onward, while also documenting continuing difficulties, misinformation and employer retaliation. [12]

Saudi Arabia has likewise changed aspects of labor mobility for categories of workers covered by its labor law, subject to conditions; the ILO notes important exclusions, including some domestic workers. [11] Different Gulf states have introduced different rules, and implementation is as important as the text of law.

There is no intellectual victory in describing a reform as nonexistent merely because it fails to solve every problem. There is also no reason to applaud a reform as complete when a vulnerable employee still cannot exercise the right it promises. The empirical test is the worker's experience: can she obtain her passport, recover wages, change employers, report abuse and leave without retaliation? What proportion of complaints is resolved? How quickly? What penalties are imposed on repeat violators? Are domestic workers covered? Is legal aid accessible in a language the worker understands?

The International Labour Organization has continued to work with Gulf governments on these questions. A 2024 agreement extended its

cooperation with Qatar through 2028, with continuing attention to labor mobility, wages, occupational safety and institutional enforcement. [13]

This is the kind of reform we should demand and measure. An honest critic does not deny improvement, because improvement shows that institutional change is possible. Neither does he declare victory when the law has changed but enforcement remains uncertain.

6. The deaths: figures require both seriousness and precision

India's Ministry of External Affairs submitted a parliamentary reply on 19 March 2026 reporting recorded deaths of Indian workers in the Gulf states from 2021 through February 2026, broken down by country and consular post. Summing the ministry's entries for the complete calendar years 2021 through 2025 produces 33,396 recorded deaths: 7,740 in 2021; 5,937 in 2022; 6,290 in 2023; 6,603 in 2024; and 6,826 in 2025. [14]

These numbers require attention. They also require disciplined interpretation. The parliamentary table does not establish that all these people died in industrial accidents, as victims of murder, or as a consequence of labor exploitation. It counts deaths reported through government channels, including deaths from causes the table does not specify. Without age distributions, worker population denominators, occupational categories and medically determined causes, the total alone cannot reveal the rate of preventable occupational death.

A book that condemns official euphemism must not replace it with rhetorical exaggeration. We must seek cause-of-death records, occupational safety data, heat-exposure evidence, employer and sector patterns, independent investigations and family testimony. We must compare how different jurisdictions investigate deaths. If the data are missing, that absence itself is relevant to accountability; it is not permission to invent the missing cause.

The same parliamentary answer reports worker complaints, including allegations involving unpaid wages, passport retention and inhumane conditions. It also describes Indian consular programs offering counseling, support and assistance. The existence of those programs is evidence of governmental action; their effectiveness is an empirical question requiring more than a press release. [14]

The moral obligation remains clear without fictional precision: a person who leaves home to earn a living is entitled to protection from preventable harm, and a family receiving news of death is entitled to answers, documents and any compensation legally due.

7. Wage theft is not a cultural misunderstanding

Theft of wages should be called what it is: failure to pay money owed for work performed. If a worker has completed the task, the employer cannot convert the debt into a question of religious identity or national prestige. Nor can a government excuse the debt by celebrating national development.

Recruitment debt compounds the injury. An applicant who has borrowed heavily to obtain placement may endure abuse longer because leaving would mean returning home with debt and no income. Contract substitution may alter the promised job or salary after arrival. Passport retention can make it harder to travel or change employment. A restrictive immigration arrangement gives these abuses additional force when remaining lawful depends upon retaining the current sponsor.

These patterns demand contracts in languages workers understand, enforceable recruitment-fee rules, reliable wage-payment systems, accessible complaint mechanisms and legal assistance. Bilateral agreements must address the worker's practical ability to recover wages, not merely the diplomatic dignity of the two states.

The ILO's discussion of sponsorship reform is useful precisely because it describes the abuse as a function of institutional power. The remedy is not to hope that every employer becomes a saint. The remedy is to reduce dependence upon any one employer's goodwill. [11]

8. Free markets for whom?

Here I must apply my argument about markets to its hardest case. I defend economic dynamism and freedom of exchange. But freedom cannot mean only the freedom of the employer to hire a foreign laborer while denying the laborer a comparable freedom to move, negotiate or leave.

A labor market in which one side possesses strong legal control over the other's immigration status is not a demonstration that voluntary exchange is inherently exploitative. It is evidence that the conditions of voluntary exchange can be undermined by law and unequal bargaining power. The solution is not necessarily to abolish migration or private employment. It is to make contractual freedom more real for the person whose economic need is greatest.

My own five principles converge here. Dialectical materialism asks us to identify the real economic relations and their contradictions. Logical empiricism asks for data on wages, injury, complaints and enforcement. Secular humanism refuses to assign a lower value to a worker's life because he was born abroad. Free minds require the worker's right to complain, organize and criticize. Free markets require meaningful mobility rather than a fixed relationship enforced by immigration vulnerability.

If these principles do not protect a domestic worker confined in a household or a builder owed months of pay, they remain elegant words on paper.

9. The Indian state's share of responsibility

The Gulf states must answer for their own laws. India must answer for the conditions it can influence: recruitment licensing, the reliability of job information, predeparture training, grievance handling, legal assistance, emergency repatriation, bilateral agreements, consular staffing and transparent reporting.

A country cannot promise every migrant immunity from hardship. It can reduce avoidable risk. It can require recruiters to disclose contracts, wages and fees. It can prosecute fraudulent recruitment. It can facilitate insurance, emergency legal aid, and the recovery of unpaid wages. It can collect better information on occupational death and publish the methods behind the statistics. It can negotiate labor mobility and passport protections with receiving states.

The Ministry of External Affairs describes welfare centers, labor wings, complaint channels and assistance programs in its March 2026 parliamentary response. These are not imaginary institutions; they exist in the government's account. The next question is whether their outcomes are adequate for workers and families, and whether independent evidence supports those outcomes. [14]

A civilization's self-respect should not depend upon whether its ministers deliver the most eloquent speeches about expatriates. It should depend upon how quickly a stranded worker can reach a competent official, how honestly that official records the complaint, and how effectively the law enforces the worker's rights.

10. A people is not a category of labor

The insult ‘coolie’ belongs to a history of racialized and class-based contempt. I use it in this book to expose the language through which laborers were degraded, not to adopt it as a description of Indians. A dark-skinned worker is not less human than the owner of a tower he helped construct. A person who cleans a room possesses the same moral worth as the person who occupies it.

Nor should the treatment of migrants be attributed to an unchanging hostility supposedly shared by all Arabs or all Muslims. The countries of the Gulf have different societies and laws; migrants have different experiences; citizens and residents have different political views. Some employers exploit. Others act fairly. Some governments have reformed statutes. Civil-society organizations, lawyers, journalists and officials have argued for workers' rights. Our analysis should distinguish them.

My objection is directed at structures that permit humiliation or involuntary dependency. The proper answer to a worker's suffering is not reciprocal contempt for a people or a religion. The answer is enforceable rights, access to remedies and international cooperation based on equality.

One need not flatter the abuses of a labor system to respect the human beings who live under it.

11. The national humiliation that must not become national vanity

The old Gulf rupee and the modern remittance are instructive symbols. One belongs to a period of Indian commercial and monetary influence; the other reveals the capacity of Indian citizens to earn abroad and support households at home. Neither establishes the inherent superiority of India, and neither establishes the inferiority of Gulf societies.

I am interested in what a nation does with these facts. Does it invest in skills so that citizens have better choices? Does it build domestic industries, infrastructure and educational institutions that allow a person to migrate by preference rather than desperation? Does it negotiate from the standpoint of equal dignity rather than perform theatrical indignation after each reported abuse?

No wise policy would prohibit workers from going where opportunity exists. But no wise policy would celebrate migration while disregarding the institutions that protect those who go. Freedom includes the freedom to leave one's country. It must also include practical protection against confinement and the freedom to return.

A government that praises the diaspora as an economic treasure must remember that the treasure is made of human beings.

12. A practical program for labor dignity

An effective policy can be stated without invoking a savior. Recruitment contracts should be standardized, independently verifiable and available in languages workers understand. Fees and debts should be transparent. Employers should not control passports or determine whether a worker remains legally free to change jobs. Claims for unpaid wages should be resolvable within reasonable time limits and enforceable against employers who evade payment. Domestic workers should not be excluded from basic protections merely because their workplace is a private home.

Indian embassies and consulates need adequate staff, accessible multilingual assistance, publicly reported case outcomes and clear arrangements for urgent shelter and repatriation. Workers should have practical information about the legal systems they will encounter before leaving India. Insurance and compensation procedures should be intelligible to families who never expected to navigate foreign courts. A complaint system should be evaluated by results, not the number of telephone numbers printed on a government website.

The receiving countries also gain. Fairer labor mobility can improve job matching, encourage skill development, reduce abusive recruitment and strengthen legitimate businesses. The ILO makes this case in economic as well as human-rights terms. [11]

One day an Indian worker will return from abroad not only with money, but with the confidence that his government and the

government where he labored treated him as a person entitled to rights. That should not be an impossible aspiration in an age capable of building cities in deserts.

13. The question that returns home

There is a final cruelty in criticizing the Gulf for exploiting Indian labor while ignoring how workers are treated inside India. The construction laborer on an unsafe scaffold, the domestic worker denied wages, the agricultural worker exposed to toxic substances, and the migrant living in an improvised dormitory are equally capable of suffering. My criticism must pass through Indian institutions before it travels across the Arabian Sea.

That is the unifying lesson of this book. We cannot outsource responsibility. We cannot demand justice abroad while excusing injustice at home. We cannot proclaim the moral greatness of our civilization while neglecting the dignity of those who perform its hardest work.

The worker who travels to the Gulf carries no theological manifesto. He carries his labor, his hope and his life. That is more than enough to establish his claim to humane treatment.

Civilizational dignity is not the number of ancient kingdoms we can name. It is the quality of protection we extend to the living human being who needs it most.

Chapter Ten — Dialectics Without the Priests of Marxism

1. The heresy that begins with a simple distinction

There is a peculiar kind of Marxist who announces that everything changes except his interpretation of Marx. He praises contradiction but fears dissent. He proclaims the movement of history, then treats a nineteenth-century economist's conclusions as a permanent economic constitution. He invokes scientific materialism and expects living economies to obey yesterday's administrative formula. I have a question for this guardian of orthodoxy: when did the philosophy of change become a license to forbid change?

My answer begins by separating questions that ideological devotion has too often fused. What exists? How do we know? What makes a human life worthy of respect? What institutions permit people to think freely? How should productive activity be coordinated? A sentence about the nature of matter cannot settle all five. A metaphysical claim cannot, by itself, calculate the correct price of rice, determine the ownership of a machine shop, or establish the appropriate scope of a central bank. Economics is not an appendix to ontology. It deals in institutions that can be compared, altered, and tested against their effects.

The charge I bring against doctrinaire communism is therefore not that its founders were foreigners. Reason has no passport. The charge is that

followers who profess a materialist method have sometimes elevated intellectual ancestry over the material world. They have treated the answer as sacred before asking the question. I reject that inversion. My allegiance is to the investigation, not to the philosopher's name.

2. Matter first, consciousness second—and the difficulty of knowing

By dialectical materialism I mean, first, that an external material reality exists independently of our wishes and descriptions. Matter is primary; consciousness is secondary. Human minds emerge within the natural world and act upon it through bodily capacities, language, labor, technology, and social institutions. We do not manufacture mountains by admiring them, nor abolish hunger by declaring that it contradicts our ideals. If a policy leaves families without food, the family's hunger is not an ideological misunderstanding. It is a material fact demanding explanation and remedy.

I also mean that reality is relational and changing. Conditions interact; technologies displace older arrangements; incentives produce intended and unintended outcomes; institutions create pressures that alter the institutions themselves. What looks stable from a distance may be a temporary balance of competing forces. The market is one such field, but so is the state, the family, a monastery, a labor union, or a political party. None stands outside history.

This philosophical orientation is not a substitute for observation. Some formulations of dialectical materialism make claims too vague to be tested, or mistake attractive metaphors for universal laws. Those

formulations should be criticized rather than protected. The claim that matter is primary is itself philosophical and remains open to serious debate. To be faithful to logical empiricism, I must distinguish an interpretive orientation from a confirmed empirical mechanism. The language of contradiction is useful only when it specifies what is in tension, how the tension operates, and what evidence could show the explanation to be mistaken.

Here is my rule: explanations inconsistent with reliable evidence must be rejected or revised. That rule applies to my defense of free markets, to my treatment of Marx, and to the central propositions of this book. Intellectual honesty cannot be a weapon pointed exclusively at one's opponents.

3. Russell opens the door—but does not walk through it for me

The Russell distinction stated in the Foundations chapter separates a theory of material reality from Marx's specific economic predictions. I need neither a Marxist prophet nor an anti-Marxist prophet to decide how economies work. I need evidence about institutions, incentives and consequences. [15]

Russell's logical distinction is not a proof that market capitalism is necessarily correct; no such conclusion follows. My proposition is independent: economic claims must be tested against empirical results, not protected by philosophical loyalty. The separation allows me to adopt materialist investigation while rejecting any economic prediction that fails against actual experience.

The consequences are enormous. If the economic theory and the metaphysical theory can stand or fall independently, nobody may tell me that I must embrace central planning simply because I find a materialist conception of reality persuasive. Nobody may insist that the entire institutional history of the Soviet Union follows inevitably from the proposition that consciousness arises within matter. There are more steps in that argument than the faithful are willing to acknowledge, and each step must be defended.

Russell does not give me my free-market thesis. I accept full responsibility for that thesis. He opens the logical door; I walk through it, carrying a proposition drawn from observation, historical comparison, and the study of changing institutions. To attribute my conclusion to Russell would be both intellectually lazy and historically false. I wish to escape the need for an authorized prophet, not recruit a new one.

4. My proposition: the market is a material process in motion

I advance the following proposition as my own: decentralized market coordination is compatible with a dialectical-materialist understanding of economic reality, and market processes themselves exhibit material interdependence, tension, and transformation. A market is not a metaphysical paradise. It is a human institution made of labor, goods, productive assets, physical resources, rules, information, bargaining, technological possibilities, and decisions taken under uncertainty. It changes because the people and conditions that constitute it change.

Consider a farmer selecting what to plant. Rainfall, soil, labor availability, transport, credit, and the prices offered by competing buyers all matter. A drought alters supply. A new irrigation system alters productivity. A neighboring farmer's success invites imitation and may then lower prices. The conditions for the original success can be undone by its widespread repetition. At the same time, a successful crop can improve diets, attract investment, increase land prices, and exclude people who lack access to credit. The consequences are interconnected; the pattern does not stand still.

Now take an engineer whose invention makes an established machine obsolete. Her discovery may save materials and energy while destroying the value of factories built around the older process. It opens work for some and threatens work for others. Capital is redirected; skills become valuable or stranded; employers and workers renegotiate relationships. Innovation changes not only products but the organization of production itself. To describe such a process as dialectical is reasonable if the word means attention to interacting causes, internal tensions, and historical transformation. It would be absurd if the word were merely a magical certificate of truth.

A firm may prosper through competition and later buy its rivals. Its success can undermine the competitive conditions that enabled its rise. A new monopoly may use market power to restrict output, suppress competition, or influence regulation. A materialist analysis must investigate that reversal, not hide it. The proposition that markets are dynamic is not a promise that unrestricted markets always remain

competitive. It is a reason to examine how competition survives—or fails—under changing material circumstances.

5. Prices are signals, not commandments

A planner faces a real informational difficulty: productive knowledge is dispersed. The miner, the dockworker, the shopkeeper, the household, and the engineer know different things, often changing from day to day. Prices can summarize some of this scattered information and permit many people to adjust without awaiting orders from a central office. Profits and losses can reveal that resources are being used productively or squandered; entry and rivalry can expose complacent producers to alternatives. These are practical strengths of decentralized coordination, not theological virtues.

Yet prices can lie by omission. The price of a product may exclude the illness caused by the smoke from its factory. The wage accepted by a worker with no safe alternative may express desperation rather than equality of bargaining power. A land price inflated by privileged access or corruption is no impartial verdict of nature. Market prices reflect existing rights and power; change those rights and power relations, and the prices may change. That is why free markets require law, competition, public information, protection against fraud, and institutions that prevent economic freedom from becoming the freedom of the strong to dominate the weak.

The question is not 'market or state' as though society must select one deity from two rival temples. The more useful question is which

decisions are best coordinated through exchange, which require collective provision, and which constraints protect equal human worth. Sewer systems, epidemic control, basic justice, the enforcement of contracts, reliable statistics, and environmental protection cannot be designed by repeating slogans about either government omniscience or the sacred market. They must be built and evaluated.

A person who values free markets must be able to criticize cartels and monopolies. A person who values public institutions must be able to criticize waste and bureaucratic privilege. Otherwise both have abandoned empirical inquiry for liturgy.

6. Marx analyzed contradiction inside markets

It is too simple to portray Marx as a thinker who never understood economic movement. His analysis of capitalism was centrally concerned with transformation, accumulation, competition, crises, and the concentration of capital. In the first volume of Capital, especially the chapter on accumulation and the centralization of capital, Marx examines how rivalry among producers can create the conditions for increasingly concentrated ownership. He was investigating processes that changed through their own operation, not describing a placid, motionless economy. [16]

This matters because my argument must face Marx at his strongest. He would not be impressed by the observation that markets involve contradictions; he analyzed precisely that. He would ask who owns productive assets, how profit arises, how workers bargain, how

accumulation changes the distribution of power, and whether the advantages of productive competition are compatible with the long-term social consequences of capital concentration. These are serious questions. A free-market defense that refuses to answer them is no more scientific than a centrally planned doctrine that refuses to explain shortages.

My disagreement is with the leap from criticism to administrative destiny. Showing that markets generate exploitation or instability does not, by itself, prove that a comprehensive command economy will correct those problems. Demonstrating a defect in a decentralized institution is not evidence that any proposed substitute will work. The substitute has its own information problems, incentives, concentrations of power, and mechanisms of correction—or failures of correction. We must compare actual arrangements, not the imperfections of one system against the imagined perfection of another.

The same critical generosity must apply in the opposite direction. Soviet achievements in education, wartime mobilization, and scientific research cannot be erased because later planning suffered stagnation. China and Vietnam cannot be reduced to a single miracle attributed to pricing reforms alone. Markets themselves have created speculative crises, abusive labor relations, environmental devastation, and political capture. An economist who cannot see these realities is not a materialist investigator. He is a market priest.

7. The Soviet question: what happens when information cannot move?

The Soviet experience must be described historically, not as one continuous caricature of failure. The state built industries, expanded mass education, mobilized resources on an immense scale, and produced internationally significant scientific and military accomplishments. Some of those achievements took place under extraordinary conditions, including war and reconstruction. A serious account begins by acknowledging what occurred, including what does not flatter the critic.

Yet by the later Soviet decades, persistent economic difficulties exposed deep weaknesses in the coordination system. Enterprises were rewarded for meeting administrative targets, which sometimes encouraged quantity at the expense of quality and discouraged experimentation. Consumers encountered shortages or inadequate choice. Changing demand and technological opportunities were often slow to influence production decisions. Investment and output targets could reward bureaucratic compliance even when the resulting goods were poorly suited to actual needs. An International Monetary Fund examination published during the Soviet crisis identified systemic central-planning limitations, declining efficiency, weak incentives, and shortages among the major sources of difficulty. [17]

A system can mobilize steel and still fail to provide good shoes. It can count a factory's output without learning whether people want the product. It can build an impressive statistical apparatus that receives distorted reports from managers who know their futures depend on

satisfying the plan. The irony is not that planners lacked intelligence; it is that they operated within rules that could make truthful feedback costly and improvisation dangerous.

The late reforms themselves illustrate another difficulty. Partial decentralization can weaken old commands before workable new incentives and legal institutions are established. An unsuccessful transition does not prove that every conceivable plan must fail; it demonstrates that institutional change is path-dependent, complicated, and capable of producing the worst of competing arrangements. The central lesson is that no economic constitution may be protected from revision by an ideology that claims to understand material change.

8. China: the communist state that altered the economic question

China's reforms beginning in 1978 provide one of the most consequential modern examples of economic adaptation. Changes in agricultural incentives, local enterprise organization, trade policy, investment rules, and opportunities for private initiative altered the productive landscape. Households gained stronger reasons to increase agricultural output. Enterprises acquired incentives and room to respond to demand. Export manufacturing expanded as China integrated into world markets. These developments unfolded under continued Communist Party political rule, a fact that complicates every crude story in which markets and Marxist political leadership are defined as logically incompatible.

The World Bank estimates that nearly 800 million people in China rose above its historical international extreme-poverty threshold over four decades. That transformation is a profound material result. The number does not tell us that markets alone did the work. Public health investments, infrastructure, education, administrative capacity, international demand, demographic conditions, and state-directed coordination also mattered. But it does make an inquiry unavoidable: what changed in the institutions of production and exchange, and why did those changes accompany so dramatic an improvement? [18]

One can acknowledge the scale of Chinese growth while criticizing the political restrictions of its one-party system. Indeed, my insistence upon free minds requires that distinction. Markets can operate under governments that suppress dissent. Economic dynamism does not magically grant civil liberties. We should learn from China's experiments in incentives and production without confusing commercial adaptation with a complete philosophy of emancipation.

This is precisely the point: Chinese leaders did not preserve every element of their inherited economic model out of loyalty to the word 'materialism.' They made large practical alterations while continuing to employ communist terminology and political institutions. If policies must change when material conditions show their inadequacy, that historical act is more intelligible through an inquiry into changing conditions than through the worship of fixed slogans.

9. Vietnam: the lesson of an economy willing to revise itself

Vietnam provides a second major case, not an identical repetition of China. After reunification, the economy struggled with extensive planning, collective agricultural arrangements, shortages, and serious macroeconomic instability. Reform under Đổi Mới, announced in 1986 and developed in subsequent years, expanded household incentives, liberalized many prices, encouraged non-state production, and facilitated trade and foreign investment. A World Bank historical study describes how agriculture and the wider economy moved away from the earlier centralized arrangements as the government confronted slow growth and inflation. [19]

Vietnam's later trajectory involved industrial exports, rising incomes, dramatic poverty reduction, and improvements in health and education. The World Bank reports that its development advanced far enough for the country to enter the upper-middle-income classification in 2026. That status was not delivered by the magic of a market label. It involved capable administration, trade access, global supply chains, public investment, education, and the sustained labor of millions. But it was accompanied by major changes to how resources, enterprises, and producers could respond to demand. [20]

The lesson is not that Vietnam became a nation of doctrinaire laissez-faire economists. It did not. The lesson is that practical arrangements changed when older arrangements proved inadequate. Farmers did not harvest more rice because a committee discovered a new sacred slogan.

Incentives, access, organization, technology, and opportunity changed. These changes could be observed and measured.

China and Vietnam also warn against conflating economic liberalization with complete political freedom. Their development histories contain restrictions and inequalities that secular humanism and free minds require us to examine. I propose learning from their adaptation while rejecting the proposition that their governing parties have acquired a license to own the human conscience.

10. Cuba: neither a laboratory sealed from the world nor an innocent abstraction

Cuba raises a harder question than the simple slogans permit. Its economic difficulties developed within an economy characterized for decades by extensive state control, limits on private enterprise, restricted domestic competition, and reliance on external trade and support. But Cuba has also faced a long United States embargo and other sanctions, changes in its external benefactors, disruptions to tourism, energy constraints, and financial isolation. A comparison that eliminates these external pressures by fiat is not empirical; it is advocacy masquerading as science.

At the same time, the existence of sanctions cannot settle every domestic policy question. It does not show that restrictive licensing, distorted pricing, weak enterprise autonomy, or barriers to innovation are harmless. Cuba's recent experiments with private business and market-oriented adjustment are themselves evidence that the economic

model is not immutable. Reporting in 2026 described further measures aimed at decentralizing parts of its economy while substantial international constraints continued. The meaningful task is to identify which changes alter productivity and human welfare, and under what conditions. [21]

The honest investigator must keep both sets of causes in view. External punishment may injure an economy. Internal rigidity may injure it as well. One harm does not cancel the other. A materialist analysis must follow the mechanisms wherever they lead, including when the evidence embarrasses one's preferred ideological camp.

The debate about Cuba also reveals a wider danger: a society can be used as a symbol by outsiders who never endure the consequences of its shortages. One faction sees heroic resistance and refuses to look at domestic repression. Another sees only communist incompetence and refuses to examine sanctions. Neither has earned the authority to dismiss the lives of Cubans as material for a theological dispute over economic doctrine.

11. Venezuela: the price of misclassification

Venezuela should never be employed as though it were a duplicate of the Soviet Union. It possessed a mixed economy, an unusually consequential petroleum sector, varying levels of private activity, extensive public intervention, and institutions deeply affected by oil-price cycles. Its crisis involved political decisions, fiscal and monetary instability, deteriorating productive capacity, corruption, underinvestment, and sanctions that intensified at different times. The United States Energy Information Administration identifies mismanagement, sanctions, and the wider economic crisis among the factors damaging petroleum production. [22]

Oil wealth itself can create dependence and vulnerability. When public revenue relies heavily upon one commodity, its price influences fiscal capacity, imports, exchange rates, patronage, and political conflict. If governments respond to downturns by undermining monetary credibility or productive incentives, the shocks can intensify. But sanctions and external restrictions may further weaken investment and exchange. To attribute every consequence to one ideological word is not explanation; it is categorization in place of analysis.

My argument does not require pretending that Venezuela was a pure command economy. It requires examining the consequences of policies that restricted adjustment, concentrated discretionary power, or weakened the material conditions of productivity, alongside the damage caused by external pressures. The precise historical balance must be investigated rather than fixed in advance.

This is where logical empiricism disciplines the polemicist. I may wish to say that the Venezuelan tragedy proves my entire theory of markets. It does not. It supplies a difficult, multi-causal case in which I must identify mechanisms and compare alternative explanations. A weak argument demands that the case serve the doctrine; a strong argument permits the case to modify the doctrine.

12. The Indian communist and the borrowed brain

My criticism of some Indian communist traditions has a particular force because it concerns intellectual independence. India did not require anyone's permission to investigate its own land, labor, religions, political institutions, or agrarian struggles. Yet political movements may come to treat the strategic priorities of foreign states or the words of foreign theorists as substitutes for inquiry into Indian conditions. A party that claims to study material reality cannot place another capital city between itself and the evidence.

The Communist Party of India's changing position during the Second World War and the Quit India movement, especially after the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany, deserves a careful examination of contemporary party records and changing wartime alignments. The Telangana struggle and the discussions among Indian communists and Soviet leaders in the early 1950s are also relevant. These are historically specific questions. They cannot be resolved simply by invoking Stalin or by calling every participant a foreign agent. The

movements involved Indian workers, peasants, activists, and local grievances that demand accurate description. [23]

The Hyderabad state and the Telangana peasant movement cannot be understood through the single word ‘feudal’ if that word is used to erase the structure of princely power, religious legitimacy, land tenure, coercion, caste, and local resistance. Nor can they be understood solely through a religious label that erases economic relationships and the agency of peasants. A dialectical investigator must be able to hold these dimensions together without flattening them into a slogan designed for party applause.

The central accusation remains: an Indian communist who submits Indian reality to the final verdict of an overseas party has become what I call a “second-hand human being”—a person speaking with a borrowed mind. The expression indicts intellectual submission, not anyone’s equal human worth. Dialectical materialism should begin with India’s material conditions, not with an imported commandment. Such a charge still needs documentary evidence about a particular party and period; membership in an ideology alone cannot prove it. My purpose is to end obedience, not to make my own anger a substitute authority.

13. The penicillin principle and the independence of truth

Suppose a medicine is discovered in Britain and proves effective against an infection in India. Must an Indian become politically British to use it? The question answers itself. The medicine succeeds or fails because of its properties and their observable effects, not because of the passport carried by the researcher who discovered it. The same principle applies to ideas. A proposition from Marx is not false because Marx was European. A proposition from Shankara is not true because Shankara was Indian. Their claims must be investigated by methods appropriate to those claims.

My quarrel with the Indian communist who treats Marx's writings as an unalterable scripture is therefore inseparable from my quarrel with the religious devotee who refuses to question a sacred text. The content differs; the habit of submission can be identical. To say that an authority must be obeyed because it is an authority is to put genealogy above truth. That is precisely the habit this book is written to dismantle.

This does not require contempt for past philosophers. Marx may be studied for his criticism of capital accumulation and social power. Russell may be studied for his analytical clarity. Buddha, Nagarjuna, Nyaya philosophers, and modern economists may illuminate different problems. Their insights do not cancel one another by belonging to different civilizations. The error begins when a contribution becomes a monopoly on the human mind.

Science advances by preserving what survives criticism and replacing what does not. If a materialist philosophy wishes to claim kinship with science, it must practice this discipline rather than borrow its prestige.

14. Free minds and free markets are related, but not interchangeable

I defend free minds because without the ability to question authority, inquiry itself becomes impossible. A society that compels intellectual conformity can accumulate factories and still impoverish its intellectual life. It may produce competent engineers while forbidding them to criticize political decisions. It may permit entrepreneurs to compete while punishing journalists. That is not the freedom I seek. Economic adaptability and civil liberty are distinct achievements, and neither should be used to excuse the absence of the other.

The relationship between them is nevertheless important. Discovery often begins with the willingness to challenge an established arrangement. An engineer invents a process that makes the old plant obsolete; a businesswoman identifies a service neglected by bureaucracy; a researcher questions the theory honored by colleagues. Economic opportunity can provide the means to act upon these departures from orthodoxy. But commerce can also produce powerful private actors who try to limit the freedom of rivals, workers, or critics. Free minds require protections against public and private domination alike.

Secular humanism supplies a further test. If two economic systems produce different levels of growth, we must examine who benefits, who

is harmed, how personal liberty is protected, whether environmental costs are displaced, and whether the vulnerable can pursue a dignified life. Gross domestic product is important, but a human being is not an entry on the national balance sheet. The freedom to bargain has little meaning if a worker cannot safely leave an employer. A free-market argument that excuses such conditions contradicts the ethical foundations of this book.

I therefore defend a substantial role for decentralized exchange alongside enforceable human rights, democratic criticism, public goods, competition, environmental rules, and an evidence-based willingness to revise institutional design. This is not a final blueprint handed down from metaphysics. It is a program of inquiry and reform.

15. How to test my argument instead of applauding it

My claim ought to make predictions modest enough to be examined. Where producers gain secure rights to retain the benefits of increased output, we may expect stronger incentives to innovate and respond to demand, other things equal. Where prices remain permanently disconnected from scarcity and demand, we may expect shortages, waste, or distorted allocation under some circumstances. Where firms face genuine entry and competition, we may expect more pressure to improve price and quality than where incumbents are protected. But the phrase 'other things equal' is not a doorway through which inconvenient realities may be expelled. Institutions, enforcement, trade, education, geography, violence, and inequality all shape outcomes.

The comparison must also permit counterexamples. Some state-owned enterprises are productive; some public-health systems achieve results markets would struggle to coordinate; some privatizations create unaccountable monopolies; some liberalizations produce financial crises; and some planned interventions accelerate infrastructure development. A theory that cannot accommodate such evidence is not dialectical. It is insulated. The relevant test is comparative institutional performance under specified conditions, not the popularity of a word in a political party's constitution.

The stronger comparison asks the same questions of every economy: productivity, real income, poverty, incentives, innovation, political liberty and environmental cost. China and Vietnam matter, but so do Eastern European transitions, mixed economies and market failures. I reject the comfort of selecting only the examples that flatter my argument. Policy must survive comparison, not merely applause.

My intellectual position is neither that markets never fail nor that governments never succeed. It is that economic institutions must be revisable, and that decentralized market coordination deserves a serious place in the materialist study of how societies change. The conclusion remains open to correction by stronger evidence. That openness is not weakness. It is the cost of claiming to reason.

16. The empirical contrast: reform, rigidity, and the missing variables

My proposition must be stated with all its comparative difficulties in view. China introduced sweeping market-oriented reforms after 1978 while remaining under Communist Party rule. Vietnam launched the Doi Moi reforms in 1986 and moved toward a mixed economy with expanding markets, investment and enterprise. These changes were not an abandonment of every public institution or a simple transfer from state to market. They were adaptive combinations of pricing, incentives, state authority, trade, land arrangements and changing productive organization. Their significance for my argument is that economic coordination by markets proved compatible with political movements still claiming a Marxist or socialist inheritance. The compatibility was demonstrated in practice even if the ideological reconciliation remains contested.

The late Soviet system provides a contrast in its rigid planning apparatus, chronic difficulties of allocation, incentives and innovation, and its political limits upon correction. Yet the collapse of the Soviet Union cannot be assigned to a single economic variable. Military expenditures, international energy prices, the institutional politics of reform, ethnic and national tensions, and the timing of macroeconomic disruption all matter. Some formerly planned European economies later recovered through different combinations of market reform, public policy and integration into international institutions. A logically empirical history asks which specific rules worked, under what initial conditions and for whom.

Cuba and Venezuela are still more dangerous as rhetorical shortcuts. Cuba's planning arrangements, external restrictions, dependence on imports and difficulties of production must be analyzed together; its health and education achievements in some measures cannot simply be erased from the record. Venezuela's oil dependence, currency distortions, expropriation, governance problems, international sanctions and political crisis interact. To call either country the pure opposite of market success is to invent a laboratory with controls that exist only in my imagination. Such experiments do not deserve the name.

A World Bank working paper on the transition economies recognized a striking divergence between the reform paths of China and Vietnam and many Central and Eastern European and former Soviet economies, while identifying different initial conditions and political changes as necessary parts of the explanation. That comparative evidence informs the analysis here. I do not conclude that the market wins because China prospered, or that materialism wins because a communist party supervised market reform. I conclude a narrower but important proposition: a materialist conception of changing economic institutions is not logically bound to the permanent administrative ownership and allocation of every productive activity.

The practical question is not which doctrine can claim these nations as trophies. It is whether human beings are freer to produce, exchange, innovate, discover error, protect the vulnerable and revise an institution that fails. My dialectical-materialist position places reality above doctrine. My logical-empiricist discipline requires comparison above

slogan. My secular-humanist ethics asks whose lives improved and whose rights were restricted. My commitment to free minds and markets remains conditional upon those tests. No economic system should be admitted into the temple of infallibility.

17. No final economist

Here is the absurdity I wish to end. One political priest tells us that Marx settled the economic future. Another tells us that the market, left entirely alone, will reconcile every human conflict. Both ask us to stop investigating. One waves a red book; the other worships a price. Neither deserves the surrender of our judgment.

Soviet scientific achievement does not acquit Soviet economic failure; Chinese and Vietnamese economic growth does not acquit censorship. Marx's critique of capitalism deserves rigorous examination, not a priesthood charged with protecting every prediction he made. The market also has no right to worship itself. A red flag and a price signal are equally incapable of overruling an inconvenient fact. No school of thought is entitled to exemption from testing.

The free-market interpretation developed here is mine. I do not hide behind Russell, Deng, or any other authority. Russell provides a necessary logical distinction; comparative history provides evidence of varying strength; philosophical analysis proposes an account of economic change. Each contribution has its proper place. If future inquiry demonstrates that a particular market institution fails, I must

alter my position. Otherwise my own book would commit the offense it condemns.

Matter does not ask what a committee decided last century. Hunger does not consult a party congress. A production system does not become efficient by receiving the blessing of a philosopher. People must eat, work, invent, trade, breathe clean air, and live as free and equal human beings. The arrangement that serves those ends deserves investigation and improvement; the arrangement that frustrates them deserves correction or abandonment.

No compulsory savior in theology. No final prophet in politics. No final economist in the marketplace. And no philosophy of changing reality that is forbidden to change its mind.

Chapter Eleven — A Philosophy of Emancipation

1. Freedom begins where the borrowed mind ends

A man can live in an independent country and still rent out his mind. He can possess a passport, vote in an election, sing an anthem, and carry an ancestral history across generations while allowing somebody else to decide what he is permitted to think. Political sovereignty is a necessary achievement. It is not the same achievement as intellectual sovereignty. The first can be declared on a calendar. The second has to be exercised each morning.

This is the defect against which I have been arguing throughout this book. It is not that the Hindu has learned from outsiders. Learning from outsiders is often the beginning of progress. The defect is the conviction that the answer must already exist somewhere else: in a guru's final pronouncement, in a colonial institution, in an imported political theory, in a foreign capital, or in the reassuring legend of a perfect ancestral age. The mind becomes a customs office through which imported authority passes without inspection and domestic experience is detained at the gate.

A civilization that once cultivated argumentative philosophies does not honor its inheritance by repeating the conclusion of its favorite philosopher. It honors that inheritance by restoring the freedom to investigate. A society in which nobody may question the priest has not

recovered the spirit of the ancient disputant. A society in which a communist may quote Marx but may not correct him has not understood a philosophy of change. A society in which a nationalist describes every failure as a foreign conspiracy has mistaken the advertisement for the product.

I want a more exacting kind of patriotism. It must be capable of saying: our ancestors discovered much; they also misunderstood much. Our enemies sometimes harmed us; we also harmed ourselves. Our traditions contain resources for liberty; some of their institutions have denied liberty. There is no humiliation in admitting these things. Humiliation begins when the evidence is plain and we forbid ourselves to look.

Intellectual emancipation therefore begins with a refusal. No person, institution, book, or civilization receives a permanent exemption from criticism. This rule includes the present book. If its argument requires that its author be treated as infallible, the argument has already failed.

2. The five foundations are not five commandments

The five tools were introduced in the Foundations chapter. Here I am concerned with what they make possible: independent investigation, equal citizenship, economic experimentation and the right to reject inherited certainties. A mechanic does not worship a wrench. Neither will I worship materialism, empiricism, humanism, free minds or markets.

I am a materialist; I do not pretend that the universe is obliged to honor my ethical commitments. I am also a humanist; I choose to judge institutions by what they do to human lives. These positions are compatible, but they must be connected through argument rather than a trick of vocabulary. To say that consciousness depends upon material processes does not imply that the conscious person may be treated as expendable. Pain is no less real because nerves are material. A hungry child does not become less hungry because hunger has a biological explanation. The reality of suffering creates the subject matter of ethics, although the moral obligation to relieve it still requires justification.

Likewise, to say that markets are dynamic and material is not to declare them morally immaculate. A scam can be dynamic. Pollution is material. A monopoly can change its prices every hour without acquiring ethical authority. The case for market coordination must be made through incentives, discovery, accountability, and human consequences; it cannot be manufactured by calling markets dialectical.

The unity of my philosophy is therefore a unity of discipline, not an oath of obedience. Reality supplies the constraints. Evidence disciplines our descriptions. Human equality disciplines our purposes. Freedom makes criticism possible. Institutions must then be tested in practice. None of these principles gives me permission to turn the others into decorative slogans.

3. Evidence is not an enemy invited in only on convenient days

My objection to unverified revelation is not that its adherents are unintelligent or that religious texts contain no insight. A person can reason brilliantly within a religious tradition; a sacred book can contain poetry, moral warnings, and sophisticated philosophy. My objection concerns the passage from testimony to compulsory public authority. A report that a supernatural messenger spoke, that a miracle occurred, or that one historical revelation binds every human conscience must bear the burden appropriate to the claim. It cannot satisfy that burden by ordering the listener to believe.

The same obligation applies to the history I tell about my own civilization. If I say that a particular temple was destroyed in a particular year, a historian may properly demand the record. If I say that a political leader's policy caused an economic disaster, an economist may ask about alternative explanations. If I say that one nation's difficulties arise from conquest rather than fertility, a demographer may ask which boundaries and which populations I am comparing. I do not consider such questions hostile. They are precisely the questions that keep this book from becoming another scripture of injury.

The Buddhist discourse to the Kalamas is often summarized as an unrestricted endorsement of private opinion. Read more carefully, it is demanding rather than permissive. It rejects acceptance merely on the authority of tradition or a teacher, but it also tests conduct by harm and benefit and asks the hearer to attend to wise evaluation. The point is not

that whatever I feel must be correct. The point is that mere pedigree cannot settle the inquiry. A text can encourage questioning without making its original teacher the inventor of modern experimental science. We do not need that exaggeration to recognize an important inheritance.

Logical empiricism, as I use the term here, means a disciplined willingness to revise claims when reliable evidence defeats them. This is my operational rule, not a claim that the entire history of twentieth-century logical empiricism can be compressed into one sentence. Formal logic guards consistency. Observation and historical method help test factual propositions. Where the question is ethical, conceptual, or philosophical rather than directly empirical, evidence remains relevant, but reasoning must also explain the standards employed. A moral judgment is not a geological specimen.

Above all, a failed claim cannot be repaired by increasing the volume of its recitation. A larger congregation is not a stronger measurement. A longer lineage is not a laboratory result. A nation of devoted believers can be mistaken. So can a nation of proud atheists. Evidence owes no patriotic allegiance.

4. What liberation cannot be: the right to replace one infallibility with another

Every liberation movement faces a temptation. Having escaped one authority, it begins to worship the escape itself. A community rejects a priesthood and creates a party priesthood. It rejects colonial superiority and announces civilizational superiority. It attacks theological finality while borrowing the tone of a final prophet. History supplies enough examples of revolutionaries who liberated people from yesterday's hierarchy only to demand their obedience to today's hierarchy.

I refuse this exchange. I am not asking Hindus to remove Christian or Islamic claims of supremacy from their intellectual lives so that Hindu claims of supremacy can occupy the vacant throne. Nor am I asking them to exchange a god for Marx, Mao, a military strongman, a guru, or a technocratic bureaucracy. An idol can be made of stone, of a political portrait, of an economic formula, or of an ancestral grievance. Its material is irrelevant if criticism is forbidden.

This point matters especially to the United Dharmic Alliance. An association that proclaims equal standing among Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Daoist, Shinto, and other Asian traditions cannot quietly appoint one of them to supervise the others. It cannot demand that the citizen inherit a particular faith forever. Nor can it create an official civilization so sacred that a historian becomes disloyal merely by describing its crimes.

There is an even more difficult test. Suppose an individual born into an Indic tradition chooses Islam, Christianity, atheism, or a philosophy

unfamiliar to the family. Can the alliance defend that person's freedom while continuing to criticize coercive conversion? It must. If the right to choose is real, its exercise must sometimes produce results we dislike. A freedom that operates only when the individual chooses the approved destination is a corridor with the exit painted on the wall.

A person is neither a trophy captured by a religion nor a piece of ancestral property. The child may inherit the family's language, ancestry, and memories without inheriting its convictions. The parent may grieve the change. Grief does not confer ownership. My civilization is not improved by compelling a reluctant person to remain within it.

5. The right to leave the party

I have used a deliberately ordinary metaphor for this freedom. A human being must be free to leave the party when the party is over. More urgently, the guest must be free to leave when the party has become a disaster and the building is on fire. No host can invoke hospitality as a reason to lock the door.

Religious belonging is often treated as a decision made before the person existed. The child is named, dressed, taught, and counted as a member of a tradition. There may be affection and beauty in that inheritance. There is no injustice in a family sharing its beliefs with a child. Injustice begins when adulthood does not bring a genuine right of reconsideration. A faith inherited at birth becomes an intellectual prison if departure carries violence, state punishment, forced family

separation, economic dispossession, or a permanent threat of retaliation.

Here the distinction between persuasion and coercion matters. A missionary may explain a doctrine. A skeptical neighbor may challenge it. A family may say why its traditions are precious. But the person addressed must remain free to say no. The begging bowl asks; the sword commands. And the command does not become voluntary because its speaker adds a promise of heaven.

International human-rights principles recognize this liberty. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change belief. India's Constitution, in Article 25, protects freedom of conscience and religious profession, practice, and propagation, subject to stated constitutional conditions. The distance between these formulations and lived experience must be investigated country by country; no sentence in a declaration can secure the liberty of a person whom a family, militia, employer, or state has made afraid.

The principle applies beyond theology. Leave an ideology when its explanations fail. Leave a political party when loyalty has replaced conscience. Leave a guru when obedience is substituted for understanding. Leave a market arrangement when the evidence shows it is destroying rather than improving human welfare. The moral right to exit is one of civilization's strongest safeguards against stagnation.

A community that is confident of its value should be able to survive the departure of dissenters. What cannot survive departure without threats is not necessarily truth. It may simply be power that has mistaken possession for conviction.

6. The cosmic question and the modesty of knowledge

Consider the size and age of the universe. Billions of years unfolded before the emergence of our species. Immense numbers of stars and planets exist beyond the little ground on which our ancestors built their shrines and temples. Against that scale, an extraordinary claim appears: the ultimate destiny of all conscious beings is settled by compulsory assent to one revelation received in a particular human language, within a particular historical community.

I ask for the bridge. The existence of a first cause, even if one were established, would not establish the truth of a specific scripture, an exclusive covenant, a resurrection, or a final prophet. The conclusion is more particular than the premise. To cross that distance, one needs independent justification. An argument for a creator does not identify the creator's preferred religious bureaucracy.

The immensity of the cosmos is not a mathematical disproof of any revelation. A deity, if one existed, would not be prevented by distance from speaking to a small society. My argument is epistemic: those who assert a universal claim carry a universal burden of justification. Their evidence must do more than show that their community believes its own witnesses.

Nor should skepticism turn into theatrical certainty. The responsible skeptic need not pretend to know every possible fact about existence. The responsible believer may understand that a commitment of faith is not a measurement others are obliged to accept. Both can share a civic world so long as neither turns private conviction into compulsory allegiance.

This is the only freedom adequate to our universe: the freedom to remain uncertain. A human being may admit ignorance without being assigned to a lower caste of intelligence or morality. Humility before evidence does not require humiliation before authority. The cosmos has not asked us to pretend certainty for the convenience of our ancestors.

7. A human being is not an instrument of civilizational prestige

Secular humanism is the moral center of my position. It says that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness belong to persons as persons. These interests are not graded according to skin color, caste, ancestry, religion, nationality, or usefulness to the nation. The child of a day laborer and the child of a cabinet minister do not possess different quantities of humanity. The emigrant laborer does not become less human upon entering a wealthy foreign state. A Muslim citizen of India does not become less entitled to equal legal protection because I criticize the history of Islamic empires. A Hindu citizen of Pakistan does not become less entitled to safety because a government fears an argument about national identity.

I cannot defend the dignity of Hindus abroad while dismissing the dignity of minorities at home. That would be an accounting trick, not ethics. Nor can I condemn the punishment of apostasy in one tradition while approving intimidation of a person who leaves another. The name of the injured party cannot determine the weight of the injury.

There is a useful distinction between ancestry and conscience. A person's ancestors do not disappear when the person's beliefs change. A convert may remain shaped by language, cuisine, family stories, and geographical memory. But descendants may also choose which of those inheritances to keep. Genetic or cultural history does not amount to an irrevocable political claim. A son or granddaughter cannot be converted into an exhibit in somebody else's civilizational museum.

When I speak of Hindu self-respect, I do not mean inherited entitlement to command. I mean the refusal to confuse dignity with hierarchy and the willingness to correct institutions that humiliate actual human beings. The quickest way to betray that aim is to treat caste privilege as a more urgent possession than another person's freedom.

Human equality does not require agreement about gods. It requires a political and ethical order in which disagreement cannot be used to strip people of basic standing. A civilization exists for people. People do not exist as fuel for a civilization's self-congratulation.

8. The civilization's hardest examination is inside its own house

It is easy to write an indictment of historical conquerors. It is much harder to confront the humiliations that we have permitted among ourselves. Caste hierarchy, inherited exclusion, humiliating labor, dangerous sanitation work, and the contempt of region for region cannot be excused as unfortunate footnotes while foreign domination receives an entire shelf of books.

The reformers did not wait for permission from romantic histories. Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Periyar, and B. R. Ambedkar addressed injustices within Indian society itself, in different languages and through different programs. They disagree with one another and with many of the traditions whose failures they exposed. Their disagreement is a resource, not an embarrassment. A civilization that cannot bear its own reformers does not need enemies to defeat its capacity for correction.

The Atlanta immigration officer in my earlier example is indifferent to a visitor's inherited caste prestige. His job concerns passports and legal status. That encounter does not prove American institutions perfectly equal or free from prejudice. It does expose the fragility of status that is treated as metaphysical destiny at home but possesses no automatic authority abroad. A superior caste is a local story, not a universal law of nature.

The distinction between criticism and self-hatred must be handled carefully. Some people despise an entire ancestral inheritance because

they were harmed by particular institutions within it. Others defend every institution because they fear that criticism will become a concession to historical enemies. Both responses can abolish discrimination in thought only by creating another. The mature alternative is specific judgment. Preserve a philosophical achievement because it deserves preservation; abolish a cruel practice because it is cruel; reform an institution because its results fail; abandon an assertion because the evidence contradicts it.

No genuine self-respect is possible in the presence of preventable humiliation that society refuses to name. A civilization is not entitled to applause for having argued about the self and the cosmos if it will not protect the worker beneath the street. The ledger of wisdom must include the condition of the living.

9. The house, the street, the school, the court

No messiah is coming to clean the house. No foreign government will maintain our drains out of admiration for our ancient metaphysics. No guru can confer a functioning public-health department by blessing its files. A country may possess a thousand philosophical arguments about purity and still allow poisonous work to fall upon the bodies of people whom it treats as impure. That contradiction should be intolerable.

The remedy is not theatrical self-denunciation. It is responsibility organized into institutions. Roads require engineers and maintenance budgets. Sewers require protective equipment, mechanized cleaning, enforceable standards, and remedies for injured workers. Air requires

measurement, emissions controls, transport planning, and coordinated jurisdictions. Schools require competent teachers and a public culture in which children may ask questions. Courts require accessible language, reasonable cost, intelligible procedures, prompt decisions, and safeguards against unequal power.

The word 'responsibility' must never become an excuse for government to abandon its obligations. Individuals cannot build an entire sanitation network by improving their private attitudes. Nor can a state function if citizens regard every shared space as somebody else's property. Collective goods require collective action; individual dignity requires rights that protect against that collective power when it overreaches. Neither the person nor the institution can do the work alone.

This is why I reject the decorative reform that conceals structural decay. My metaphor is intentionally unpleasant: bright new bandages placed over a diseased body do not cure the disease. The cure begins with diagnosis, which requires the courage to find out what has failed. Explanations are useful if they lead to action. When explanation becomes a substitute for action, the civilization has learned to narrate its decline in eloquent prose.

A truly dialectical method notices the discrepancy between a noble ideal and a degrading material condition. A truly empirical method measures it. A humanist ethic refuses to accept the suffering as an acceptable price of prestige. Free minds challenge the excuses.

Effective institutions act. The five foundations meet here, not in a university examination but in the life of a worker breathing safe air.

10. Freedom of thought does not mean freedom from consequences

Some will object that the liberty I defend encourages every person to invent a private truth, ignore expertise, or reject necessary collective rules. This objection misunderstands the position. The right to question a physician is not a right to invent laboratory results. The right to criticize a court is not permission to intimidate witnesses. The right to reject a theology does not confer a right to threaten believers. Freedom makes inquiry possible; it does not abolish the material effects of error.

Modern science depends on criticism constrained by shared methods. An experiment must be described so others can test it. A historical claim must be situated in sources. A public policy must be assessed by its consequences, including harms to people who did not consent to become its subjects. A good-faith investigator may be wrong. That is precisely why institutions for correction matter.

Freedom also imposes duties of expression. To argue that a particular papal bull or imperial decree legitimized dispossession is to make a claim about identifiable documents and institutions. To conclude that every living Christian desires conquest would be to replace historical study with a prejudice. To examine a ruler's use of Islamic law is legitimate inquiry; to assign one intention to every Muslim is not. To denounce caste hierarchy is necessary; to assume that everyone born into a caste acts alike is a different form of intellectual laziness.

The restriction I oppose is not the ordinary requirement of evidence, accountability, and nonviolence. I oppose the power to punish a person simply for changing belief, publishing criticism, or refusing to say that a sacred proposition has become public fact. A government must protect people against violence and discrimination. It must not become the adjudicator of eternal truth.

To use reason is to accept that one's opponents can also reason. The honest debate is neither a duel of inherited identities nor a ceremonial performance in which both parties must be declared equally correct. Some claims survive; others do not. Every participant nevertheless retains human dignity when the argument ends.

11. Renunciation, courage, and the error of making an ascetic into a constitution

I have accused Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions of seeking 'salvation through starvation.' I intend the phrase as a severe editorial judgment about the elevation of renunciation and self-denial into civilizational ideals, not as a claim that every practitioner embraced dangerous fasting. Buddhist teaching famously criticizes the extremes of self-mortification; Hindu and Jain traditions contain diverse approaches to discipline, household life, and austerity. An honest polemic must know the difference between its metaphor and a complete historical census.

My objection is directed at a social mistake: transferring the virtues of the renunciant into the duties of the state. A monk may choose poverty.

A government has no right to choose poverty for its citizens. An ascetic may voluntarily accept hunger. A public-health minister must not treat a child's hunger as spiritual discipline. A sage may withdraw from political ambition. A society cannot withdraw from maintaining its borders, schools, courts, water supply, and the rights of the vulnerable.

Nor should we romanticize religious leadership elsewhere as a simple contrast. Popes have exercised temporal government, but many Christian monastics lived under vows of poverty. Some Islamic scholars stood close to rulers, while others resisted them. Jewish rabbis were not ordinarily sovereign territorial monarchs. Hindu monasteries and Buddhist institutions received royal patronage and sometimes controlled land and wealth. The pattern is more complicated than the slogan. Yet the slogan can still ask a serious question: what happens when admiration for spiritual withdrawal blunts a society's respect for practical competence?

The answer is not to despise the renunciant. It is to refuse to make him the automatic model of a finance minister, engineer, soldier, judge, or school principal. A person who has conquered appetite may have learned something important about self-command. He has not thereby demonstrated knowledge of monetary policy or epidemiology. We must not confuse voluntary holiness with administrative ability.

Here patience returns as a problem. A virtue that sustains people through unavoidable hardship becomes a vice when it is invoked to

excuse hardship that institutions could end. Renunciation must remain a choice, not the political destiny assigned to an entire population.

12. The free mind and the free market: partners, not synonyms

My economic proposition has already been developed in Chapter Ten, but its moral implications belong here. A system of decentralized exchange can use dispersed information, reward innovation, and allow competing plans to be tested through voluntary decisions. This is a material world in motion: prices change, products fail, technologies advance, and labor moves between activities. Those processes can be studied through a dialectical lens.

But a market is not a conscience. It can coordinate transactions without deciding whether the underlying distribution of opportunity is fair. A worker who cannot leave a sponsor, a borrower who cannot understand a contract, or a family denied education cannot participate on the same terms as someone with genuine alternatives. An exchange may be formally voluntary yet burdened by severe inequalities of power. The market must therefore operate within law, public health, education, labor protections, competition policy, and institutions capable of restraining fraud and exploitation.

This is not a betrayal of economic freedom. It is an inquiry into the conditions under which freedom is substantive rather than merely printed on paper. A state monopoly can silence dissent and conceal failure. A private monopoly can restrict choice and weaken accountability. Either deserves criticism according to its effects. My

philosophy does not award moral immunity to an institution because the institution is owned by the state or because it is owned privately.

China's and Vietnam's market-oriented transformations illustrate the importance of institutional adaptation and productive incentives, but neither country's economic history proves that political authoritarianism is necessary for development. The difficulties of Soviet planning, Cuba, and Venezuela likewise require comparison without erasing differences in sanctions, resources, political decisions, and global conditions. To call these cases 'experiments' is to accept the duty of measurement, not the privilege of selecting favorable observations.

Bertrand Russell's distinction between Marx's metaphysics and his economic propositions helps open this inquiry. Russell did not announce my market interpretation. I do. And I accept the cost of making it: it can be challenged by evidence. If a policy harms human welfare, the correct response is not to protect it with the vocabulary of dialectics. It is to change the policy.

13. What an emancipated education would teach

If a nation takes these principles seriously, it must begin in the classroom. Children must learn not only what their ancestors believed but how claims are tested, how institutions operate, how disagreements are resolved, and how evidence changes conclusions. The student should encounter Gargi's questions, the methods of Nyaya, Buddhist and Jain arguments, Charvaka skepticism, Ambedkar's assault on caste, and the modern sciences without being told that any one of these has completed the human search for knowledge.

A curriculum of emancipation would teach the difference between reverence and evidence. It would teach how a historical claim can rest on an inscription, how a statistical comparison can be distorted by changing denominators, how a scientific model makes predictions, and how an ethical proposition must explain its values. It would also teach that a nation can borrow an effective idea without surrendering its dignity. The origin of penicillin did not determine its usefulness. The nationality of a philosopher cannot make a valid argument invalid.

This education must include the skills of self-government. Citizens should be able to read the laws that govern them. Courts should not remain comprehensible only to professional intermediaries. Public budgets, local health figures, school performance, and environmental measurements should be understandable enough for ordinary people to question officials. Translation is not a cosmetic service when language determines access to justice.

The purpose is neither to create obedient nationalists nor professional skeptics incapable of action. It is to cultivate disciplined judgment and the competence to turn judgment into reform. A child who learns to distinguish assertion from evidence is less vulnerable to the charismatic authority of the guru, the politician, the advertiser, or the fraudulent employer. A population able to read public data is better equipped to demand safe infrastructure. Free minds must be trained to do more than complain.

The most important question a teacher can ask is not 'Have you memorized the approved answer?' It is 'What would make you change your mind?' A student who cannot answer is being trained in loyalty rather than inquiry.

14. Reforming inherited institutions without worshipping the word 'native'

My criticism of the imported courtroom can easily be misunderstood as a desire to expel everything that came from outside India. That is not my argument. It would be absurd to reject a reliable medical technique because its inventors lived elsewhere, and equally absurd to defend an inefficient court simply because it acquired an Indian name after independence. Institutions are means, not household gods.

I call for native solutions because problems are experienced in particular languages, geographies, relationships, and economic conditions. A court serving a village must understand land records, family disputes, local languages, corruption risks, and the distance a

litigant must travel. But 'native' cannot mean that powerful local castes may decide what counts as justice. A panchayat that silences a woman or excludes a Dalit is not emancipated because its members sit beneath an Indian tree. A distant court may fail through cost and delay; a local body may fail through familiarity and intimidation. Both failures require institutional design.

My proposed model therefore combines local accessibility with professional competence, transparent reasons, rights guarantees, independent review, and meaningful appeal. It is precisely because I reject infallible foreign authority that I must also reject infallible local custom. The source of an institution may suggest how it developed. It cannot settle whether the institution is fair.

Ambedkar's constitutional work is an instructive complication. A man who criticized Hindu social hierarchy helped construct a constitutional framework intended to protect individual equality. To call every imported constitutional element an alien imposition overlooks the agency of Indian thinkers who debated, selected, modified, and institutionalized principles in the Constituent Assembly. To treat the result as perfect would make the opposite error. The appropriate question is which provisions protect freedom, which procedures impede justice, and which reforms can improve actual outcomes without sacrificing rights.

The liberated mind does not choose between ancient India and modern Europe as though buying a costume. It asks what works, why it works,

what harm it causes, and how it can be improved. Borrow a useful instrument. Reject an oppressive rule. Invent where invention is needed. Pride is not the refusal to learn; it is the refusal to remain intellectually dependent.

15. Civilizational memory is not collective guilt

My discussion of conquest, temple destruction, slavery, forced assimilation, and missionary expansion is not an indictment of people born centuries after the acts described. It is an inquiry into what institutions did, why they did it, whom they harmed, and what narratives later justified the harm. The distinction is not an act of courtesy. It is a requirement of logical responsibility.

A historical accusation must identify the actor. A papal decree is not every Christian. A caliph's order is not every Muslim. A Hindu king's attack on a rival temple is not every Hindu. A British company's exploitation of labor cannot be explained by attributing the same intention to every contemporary Briton. If we cannot separate institutions, rulers, doctrines, and populations, we cannot describe history; we can only manufacture inherited enemies.

The reality of coercive expansion nonetheless deserves investigation. The loss of a temple, language, monastery, or body of knowledge is not erased by an assurance that the conqueror believed his own theology. A sincere aggressor can still inflict harm. At the same time, commerce, scholarship, migration, intermarriage, and voluntary conversion also belong to the record. One cannot replace colonial romanticism with the

equally unscientific claim that the history of every religion consists of one uninterrupted act of aggression.

The positive obligation is preservation. Document destroyed sites. Recover manuscripts where possible. Protect living religious minorities. Teach the history of Indigenous peoples and vanishing languages. Restore archives. Permit scholars to disagree. A civilization that fights for the memory of its ancestors while persecuting living dissenters has learned little from its past.

Memory should be a source of attention, not a hereditary warrant for vengeance. The dead deserve honest history. The living deserve their rights. The two duties reinforce rather than cancel one another.

16. The paradox of defensive strength

The United Dharmic Alliance emerges from a genuine strategic anxiety: how can culturally related societies cooperate to protect their heritage, institutions, and autonomy against coercive political or theological expansion? I do not pretend that military power is irrelevant. States inhabit a world of conflicting interests. Borders, resources, technology, and defense capabilities matter. A slogan about peace cannot replace the work of diplomacy or security policy.

But a defensive institution must not acquire the habits of the adversary it condemns. If the alliance prohibits religious conversion as such, its freedom of conscience has vanished. If it claims intrinsic superiority for one civilization, its rejection of exceptionalism has become theater. If it subordinates every member to the largest state, its promise of

equal partnership is false. If its environmental program is sacrificed whenever prestige requires another polluting project, 'Ecological Dharma' becomes stationery rather than policy.

The manifesto's constructive ideas are therefore indispensable: heritage restoration, scholarly exchange, a Nalanda-inspired university, shared research, renewable energy, preservation of soil and water, public health, and peaceful mediation. These institutions create habits of cooperation before any grand constitutional structure exists. They can be judged by measurable achievements rather than ceremonial declarations.

There are unresolved contradictions. Proposed member states disagree on territory, political freedoms, and relations with religious minorities. The manifesto also imposes permanent exclusions on several states while asserting universal moral equality. An advocate may explain those exclusions by reference to historical treatment of Dharmic heritage; a critical reader will still ask whether a permanent rule can recognize future changes. That is a proper question for a philosophy committed to revisability. The book need not silently revise the manifesto to acknowledge the difficulty.

The test of an alliance is not whether its members share one sacred past. They do not. The test is whether they can cooperate without seeking to own each other's future. A defensive association becomes credible when it protects liberty even where liberty produces dissent, disagreement, and uncomfortable departures.

17. Objections that a serious philosophy must survive

One objection is that my language is too accusatory to support careful thought. I accept that the metaphors are sharp. 'Fourth World,' 'salvation through starvation,' 'the borrowed mind,' and 'the man who walked back into the cell' are intended to provoke. But provocation does not earn a factual exemption. The metaphor introduces the problem; evidence must do the subsequent work. If the comparison misleads, it should be narrowed, not repeated more loudly.

A second objection is that India has always contained reformers, so the language of civilizational paralysis is unfair. The objection has force. It is precisely because Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar, and many others fought inherited injustice that the word 'always' cannot describe Indian obedience. My criticism concerns patterns of institutional failure and the temptation to excuse them, not an allegation that every Indian has lacked courage. The existence of dissent is not a rebuttal to the need for reform; it is the proof that reform possesses indigenous authors.

A third objection is that reason alone cannot dictate ethical ends. I agree. My humanism is a declared moral commitment, informed by the reality of suffering and the reciprocity demanded by equal human standing. I cannot derive the full content of human rights from the proposition that matter is primary. I must argue for equal concern, the ability to consent, safeguards against domination, and the social conditions of a dignified life. To recognize that work is not a weakness. It is philosophical honesty.

A fourth objection is that market economics can produce material power without political liberty. China raises this problem directly. An economy may expand while speech is constrained; material prosperity and free conscience are not identical measures. My support for productive markets cannot become a concession that economic success excuses indefinite suppression of dissent. Nor should the failures of centralized planning be used to deny the importance of public goods or the harms of unconstrained private power.

A fifth objection is that the rhetoric of civilizational conflict will itself worsen conflict. The danger is real. This is why accusations must identify their targets: coercive doctrines, laws, rulers, empires, and institutions, not permanent moral defects in people. My criticism of compulsory theology cannot become a program of compulsory atheism or compulsory Dharmic identity. If it did, I would have manufactured the enemy I claimed to resist.

A final objection asks whether emancipation can ever be completed. The answer is no, if completion means an age in which every institution has become final and every conclusion secure. That would be another static utopia. Emancipation is the continuing capacity to recognize error, hear criticism, and correct what can be corrected without surrendering human dignity.

18. The measure of emancipation

There is a temptation to end a philosophical chapter with a magnificent declaration. Nations like declarations. Parties manufacture them. Religious authorities sanctify them. Books employ them as though language alone could accomplish what institutions have postponed. I want a less flattering standard.

When a worker enters a sewer, is protective equipment available, and can he refuse dangerous work without losing his livelihood? When a woman enters a court, can she understand the proceeding and expect an impartial decision? When a child challenges a teacher, is the question examined or punished? When a person changes religion, can the family disagree without turning disagreement into coercion? When a citizen questions a minister, must he fear the police? When an economist's cherished theory fails in practice, does he revise the theory or denounce the measurement?

These questions are smaller than the cosmos. They are also harder to evade. They ask what freedom looks like once it has stopped posing for portraits.

Reason without moral concern can become cold technique. Moral concern without evidence can become sentimental error. Freedom of thought without competent institutions can be merely the liberty to describe preventable suffering. Markets without fair rules can reproduce dependency. Institutions without criticism become

hereditary machines. The principles I defend must correct one another where they fail.

I have no intention of replacing the Hindu's borrowed intellectual chains with a new set forged in my name. If my readers reject my economics after serious investigation, they have exercised the freedom I demand. If they contest my history with stronger sources, they have improved the inquiry. If they preserve an inherited belief by freely choosing it, that choice belongs to them. If they leave it, no one owns their departure.

The civilization I wish to see is not one that wins every quarrel about its past. It is one that can identify and repair the failures of its present. It may learn from Japan, from Europe, from Africa, from China, from ancient Indian philosophers, and from an ordinary citizen who notices that the official explanation does not match reality. It should be confident enough to borrow and honest enough to discard.

There is no final guru, no final prophet, no final economist, no final constitution, and no final civilization. There are human beings confronting a reality that does not promise to flatter them. We must investigate it, revise our conclusions, protect one another's dignity, and act.

REASON SUPERSEDES BOTH RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION.

Chapter Twelve — Look East, Learn Everywhere

1. Perfidious Albion occupied Indian minds

Perfidious Albion did not merely occupy Indian territory. It occupied Indian minds.

The occupation of territory was carried out through soldiers, treaties, revenue systems, coercion, and imperial administration. The occupation of the mind traveled by subtler means: through schooling, prestige, language, etiquette, rank, aspiration, and the assumption that to become civilized was to resemble the ruler. An army can be ordered to leave. An acquired habit of intellectual submission must be identified and rejected by the people who have adopted it. That is the harder emancipation.

My charge is deliberately severe. One of the foremost reasons for Hindu collective failure, as I interpret that history, is the readiness with which influential sections of Indian society followed their former colonial master like brain-dead sheep in manners, culture, conventions of civility, and intellectual expression. I will not dress this accusation in the soothing language of 'influence' alone. Influence can be productive. I am accusing a habit of unexamined imitation: the colonial standard is adopted not because it has passed an independent test, but because it arrived bearing the authority of the conqueror.

I am making a civilizational indictment, not announcing that every Hindu thinks alike or that Indians never resisted British cultural claims. Resistance existed; original thought survived; the independence movement itself disproves total obedience. But those exceptions do not eliminate the question I am pressing against the habits of prestige. When an elite treats the foreign accent as a certificate of intelligence, the imported institution as inherently superior, and an inherited colonial hierarchy as the natural structure of public life, the empire has acquired a life beyond imperial rule.

The question is not whether one wears trousers, speaks English, learns physics from a British textbook, or admires a British scientist. Those may be rational choices. The question is whether one has become unable to distinguish learning from surrender. If a decision is justified by evidence, efficiency, or human welfare, it deserves consideration. If its final defense is that the British did it, the intellectual trial has not even begun.

The deepest humiliation is not that another nation once occupied our land. Peoples have conquered and been conquered throughout history. The deeper humiliation occurs when independence arrives, the conqueror departs, and the formerly conquered still ask the departed ruler how to stand, speak, think, govern, and assess their own worth.

2. The mirror is more merciless than the map

The second accusation is harsher still: the Hindu refused to look into the mirror. He could study the map of lost territory, count the armies that crossed a frontier, identify a temple that was plundered, and condemn the colonial extraction of wealth. But when asked what weaknesses within his own society made domination possible, prolonged it, and allowed its habits to survive independence, he reached for another explanation. The mirror was more frightening than the map because it showed a responsibility that could not be transferred wholly to the invader.

Consider the absurdity. We inherit schools of argument, analysis, and disciplined disagreement. We celebrate ancient sages who asked questions about the nature of reality. Yet a modern public debate can be settled by the social standing of the speaker, the inherited reputation of his community, or the foreign institution printed on his certificate. We revere inquiry as an ancestral achievement and sometimes resist inquiry as a present obligation. We praise courageous thinkers after they are dead and punish uncomfortable questions while their authors are alive. That contradiction is more revealing than a thousand patriotic speeches.

The mirror does not deny the crimes of empire. It makes the indictment of empire less convenient. A conquered population can condemn its conqueror and still interrogate its own choices. Those are not opposite duties. A man assaulted on a road may rightly condemn the assailant; if the same danger threatens his children, he also has a

duty to secure the street, organize protection, and change the conditions of vulnerability. Recognition of injustice is not a substitute for prevention of its recurrence.

Self-examination is not self-hatred. It is the refusal to flatter oneself at the expense of truth. Self-hatred declares a people inherently deficient. Self-examination asks which institutions failed, which incentives rewarded mediocrity, which customs trained obedience, and which reforms might work. One is sterile contempt. The other is the first movement of recovery. I demand the second, even if its language has the sharpness of an accusation.

A civilization that refuses the mirror will always find another enemy, another miracle, another comforting historical comparison, another way to postpone the repair. The mirror will not rebuild the bridge, drain the sewer, reform the court, or educate a child. But without the mirror, these tasks remain invisible beneath a pageant of inherited greatness.

3. The Himalayan Blunder: now or never

The greatest blunder of Hindu civilization—the Himalayan Blunder—was not the loss of a fortress, a throne, or a frontier. A lost fortress may be recovered. A frontier may be defended again. The disaster I accuse us of committing is more intimate and more enduring: the education of vast numbers of people into dependence, the habit of asking someone else to solve the problems that their own intelligence, organization, and courage ought to confront.

I call it a Himalayan Blunder because the error rises above individual incidents. It is the mountain under whose shadow a hundred smaller failures become possible. We discover a broken school and wait for a minister. We encounter a dishonest official and search for a patron. We witness an unsafe road, an overflowing sewer, an inaccessible court, a humiliating employment practice, and ask which powerful stranger will descend to repair the injury. We multiply prayers, explanations, complaints, and excuses. We do not multiply competent solutions at the same rate. The failure is not a deficiency of human intelligence. It is a cultivated surrender of the responsibility to use it.

I will not disguise the violence of my accusation. The civilization that once produced formidable argument, mathematics, philosophy, surgery, trade, and art must not congratulate itself for having become a petitioner before every problem. The inheritance is not imaginary, but inheritance is not performance. A splendid genealogy of thinkers cannot think on behalf of a living generation. A thousand-year-old achievement cannot clean this morning's water supply. Ancient wisdom does not automatically repair a modern hospital. Memory becomes an anesthetic when it is used to avoid action.

History contributed to this condition, in my interpretation. The subcontinent experienced successive conquests, Muslim-ruled kingdoms and empires, European trading-company domination, and British imperial government. These were not one uninterrupted fourteen-century regime, and no single description fits every place or century. But the cumulative experience of political subordination,

social hierarchy, and adjustment to power could teach a poisonous lesson: the safest path is to accommodate authority, borrow its language, and seek its favor. Once that lesson becomes habitual, it can survive a change of flag. A former ruler need not stand in the room if the rules of obedience have taken residence in the mind.

Yet foreign domination cannot be the final explanation. If our ancestors were denied political choice, that denial is an injury. If we possess a meaningful sphere of choice and still refuse to exercise it, the injury has acquired an accomplice. The imperial government cannot be held responsible for every failure of public administration, education, sanitation, justice, or intellectual courage in the decades since independence. Nor may we excuse inherited injustices by pointing forever toward an absent imperial officer. The colonizer's responsibility must be acknowledged; the responsibility of the free cannot be indefinitely postponed.

A map records territory and conquest. The mirror asks how institutions, habits and borrowed prestige survived independence. No amount of cartographic grievance substitutes for an answer.

I reject the idea that this reflex is a permanent Hindu nature. It is neither biology nor destiny, nor does the phrase 'Hindu masses' describe uniform conduct by hundreds of millions of people. The accusation is directed at habits, incentives, hierarchies, and institutions, all of which can change. People who have created businesses, laboratories, hospitals, social movements, and democratic institutions

already demonstrate that independence of mind is possible. Their achievements make the excuse of helplessness less tolerable, not more. If some can act, the question is what prevents the practices of action from becoming wider social expectations.

How is that change to begin? Not by finding a new savior. Not by importing a new national costume. Not by declaring that Hindu thought contains every scientific discovery ever made. It begins with four revisions that can be undertaken now: perception, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

Change perception first. Do not regard yourself as the powerless inheritor of defeats awaiting rescue. Regard yourself as an agent whose decisions produce consequences, however limited the initial sphere of action. A citizen who can document a hazard, organize neighbors, question a budget, refuse a fraudulent claim, or insist upon equal treatment has begun to reverse the habit of dependence. The change is not magical optimism. It is the willingness to distinguish what lies beyond immediate control from what can be done today.

Change metaphysics. Matter does not yield to humiliation, prayer, ancestry, or rhetoric. A sewer is cleared by equipment, skill, trained workers, and enforceable safety standards. A bridge stands because engineers understand loads and materials. A prosperous economy depends on productive processes, information, incentives, and institutions. The world is not a stage constructed for the demonstration of our inherited virtues. It is an independent reality that answers action

with consequences. To become materially competent we must stop expecting consciousness, devotion, or indignation to substitute for work.

Change epistemology. Ask for evidence even when the claim flatters your civilization. Ask for evidence especially when it flatters your civilization. If a government promises progress, measure outcomes. If a guru claims knowledge, inspect the basis of that knowledge. If a political party announces a final economic truth, test its results. If I make a historical accusation, it is not exempt merely because I feel it deeply. Intellectual emancipation is the refusal to give one's favored assertions the exemption one denies to other people's revelations.

Change ethics. Stop treating endurance of avoidable suffering as an automatic virtue. An injured worker does not require a sermon on patience when he needs protection and justice. A child lacking sanitation does not require ancestral pride when she needs clean water. A woman denied an effective hearing does not require praise for tradition when she needs equal standing before an accessible court. Secular humanism begins where the value of a living person becomes more important than the prestige of an institution. Responsibility must extend to those whose caste, faith, class, or ancestry differs from our own.

Free minds and free markets then become practical instruments rather than decorative words. The free mind notices what the hierarchy has overlooked. The free market, where genuinely open and governed by

fair rules, may allow many people to attempt solutions instead of awaiting permission from a central authority. Neither alone cures injustice. Both require public accountability, honest information, and limits on coercion. The test is whether ordinary people gain real power to improve their circumstances, not whether the slogans sound modern.

Do not misunderstand the word 'immediately.' A society cannot rebuild its schools, courts, factories, and habits in an afternoon. Institutions take sustained effort; an injured community cannot be ordered into prosperity by a sentence. But the decision to stop worshipping dependence need not wait for another election, another prophet, another foreign expert, or another century. The decision can be made immediately. Its execution will take discipline, organization, measurement, and time.

That is the choice hidden inside the Himalayan Blunder. Continue blaming the past as if blame were action, or learn from the past and begin constructing something different. Continue imitating the conqueror as if imitation were education, or examine every foreign and domestic idea by the same standard: does it work, does it respect human dignity, and can it survive criticism?

Hindu emancipation is now or never—not because history gives us a supernatural deadline, but because postponement is the very disease this book indicts. The first act of liberation is not to ask who will save us. It is to stop waiting for salvation and begin doing the work of free people.

4. The reconstruction test: no messiah at the rubble

I ask a question that should disturb the comfortable worshipper of inherited greatness. What did the Germans do when their cities lay in ruins? What did the Japanese do when their industries, homes, and confidence had been shattered? What did the Russians and the other peoples of the Soviet Union do after an invasion that killed millions and devastated enormous stretches of their country? What did the British do when victory left them financially exhausted? And what can the experiences of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden teach us about organizing a society that works without waiting for a miraculous visitor?

The histories are different. Germany and Japan were defeated powers whose regimes had unleashed aggression and who then endured destruction and occupation. The Soviet Union was a victorious power that suffered appalling human and material losses. Britain won the war but carried crushing debt and severe economic strain; it was not physically obliterated like parts of Germany or Japan. Norway and Denmark endured German occupation, with damage and circumstances unlike the great continental battlefields. Sweden maintained neutrality and was not devastated in the same fashion. I will not falsify these distinctions merely to assemble a dramatic sentence.

The question survives every distinction. How does a society proceed when circumstances have made its previous arrangements impossible? The answer in these varied cases was not identical; neither was it a universal national virtue written into anyone's blood. The answer took

the form of work—some honorable, some coercive; some locally conceived, some supported from abroad; much of it accomplished through patient institutions rather than magnificent declarations. People cleared streets, rebuilt factories, reorganized administration, educated engineers, repaired transport, altered economic policies, expanded or reconstructed social services, and returned to production. Reconstruction was not a metaphysical reward. It was a material process.

Consider Japan. The devastation of 1945 was immense. Yet the subsequent transformation was not a story of Japanese character operating in a vacuum. The American-led occupation introduced major political and economic reforms, and American security arrangements and the Korean War's demand for supplies helped Japan's recovery. Japanese firms, workers, administrators, educators, and households then converted these circumstances into sustained productive capacity. It would be childish to deny either side of that equation. Assistance was real. So was the labor and institutional adaptation required to use it. The nation did not become an industrial power again by waiting for a celestial rescuer to rebuild its manufacturing plants.

Consider West Germany. Reconstruction followed military defeat, territorial division, reform of currency and economic arrangements, extensive domestic labor, external investment, and assistance through the Marshall Plan. It would be historically foolish to announce that nobody helped Germany. But help did not write technical manuals, fabricate every machine, train every apprentice, or govern every

municipal service. Recovery demanded the ability to organize productive life. It demanded institutions that could transform inputs into output. The point is not that Germans were magically more deserving than anyone else. It is that devastated societies can sometimes recover by cultivating capacities rather than merely commemorating injuries.

The Soviet example presents a sterner warning. The destruction was massive, and rebuilding required extraordinary mobilization. Yet the Soviet state also imposed forced labor, severe restrictions, and tremendous human costs. Industrial recovery does not automatically demonstrate political freedom or ethical success. A society may reconstruct steel production while violating the dignity of the people who produce it. I refuse to replace an admiration for Western power with an admiration for unfree discipline. The measure of emancipation is not output alone. It is output joined to humane institutions and the freedom to criticize them.

Britain's administrative recovery after the Second World War cannot purchase absolution for empire. It emerged with substantial debt and upheaval, yet preserved the institutions needed to legislate, trade, research, and reconstruct. That is evidence of practical capacity; it is not an acquittal for colonial exploitation. The Indian task is to master institutions worth learning from without granting the former imperial ruler a continuing right to define the standards by which India judges itself.

The northern European examples make a different point. Sweden was not a ruined battlefield. Norway and Denmark experienced occupation and postwar rebuilding under different conditions. The lesson cannot be that Scandinavian prosperity was born from one universal catastrophe or one exceptional racial temperament. Their histories instead direct attention to institutions, public trust that must be earned, education, negotiated obligations, lawful administration, and practical responses to economic problems. One society may favor a greater public role; another may rely more heavily on enterprise. The institutional forms differ, but none can abolish the need for actual execution.

And so I return to the accusation against my own civilization. Why should a people that celebrates the achievements of Aryabhata, the argumentative traditions of Nyaya, the questioning voices of the Upanishads, or the learning centers of its past become resigned to waiting for somebody else to solve the ordinary problems of present existence? Why should it boast of ancient engineering while tolerating a broken drain? Why should it claim philosophical depth while refusing to measure a failed school? Why should it insist on ancestral dignity while permitting caste prejudice and petty authority to humiliate living people?

The comparison is not a scientific verdict that every Norwegian, Swede, Russian, Dane, Briton, German, or Japanese is independent while every Hindu is dependent. Such a claim would be intellectually empty. Every society contains courage and passivity, competence and corruption, inventiveness and foolishness. Some postwar recoveries

depended heavily on help; some imposed terrible sacrifices; some left deep inequalities unresolved. My question concerns what institutions reward and what habits of mind they reproduce. If a culture teaches people to admire obedience more than initiative, inherited status more than measurable achievement, and consolation more than repair, it must expect consequences.

There is a subtle poison in the word 'help' when it becomes another name for surrender. Ask an engineer for advice; do not ask the engineer to live your life. Import technology when it works; do not import the proposition that you cannot invent. Cooperate with foreign universities; do not accept the humiliation that thought has a foreign passport. Seek assistance after catastrophe; do not mistake assistance for permanent guardianship. A people capable of judgment can receive a gift without transferring ownership of its future.

The Marshall Plan itself is an instructive answer to the false opposition between self-reliance and cooperation. European nations organized a joint program, and the United States provided resources. Its logic was not that Europeans should wait forever for American charity. It was that external assistance could help restore productive capacities until extraordinary assistance was no longer needed. Japan's recovery likewise involved outside power and local transformation. Help can be a tool. Dependence makes it a religion.

Nor am I appealing to a fantasy of immediate miracles. Factories cannot rise in a day. A damaged court system cannot be repaired by

shouting 'Now or Never' at a clerk. Education, law, public health, and scientific industry require years of disciplined organization. Yet the decision to stop using waiting as a political philosophy can be made at once. The intellectual change can begin before the bridge is built, although it cannot substitute for building the bridge. This is the distinction between beginning immediately and achieving everything immediately.

The Hindu cannot repair a broken nation by searching the sky for a messiah, by waiting for the British to return as administrators, by waiting for an Arab theologian to certify salvation, or by replacing either authority with a new imported political scripture. Every outside doctrine must stand before the court of evidence. Every inherited custom must stand there too. If a policy works, learn from it. If it fails, abandon it. If a teacher is right, understand why. If a teacher is wrong, correct him. The mind must be neither a shrine to the past nor a rented room for foreign authority.

I have called this the Himalayan Blunder because dependence can stand between a population and its own capacity as a mountain stands between valleys. But mountains are not removed by lamentation. Paths are surveyed, tunnels engineered, roads maintained, bridges financed, and obstacles measured. That is what the vocabulary of emancipation must finally mean: disciplined action upon reality.

No messiah is coming to take responsibility for the school, the factory, the street, the courtroom, the worker, the child, or the environment.

People may come to help. Ideas may arrive from everywhere. Cooperation may become indispensable. But nobody can perform the work of independent judgment on our behalf.

Hindus, look into the mirror. Look East. Look everywhere. Then stop waiting. The Himalayan Blunder ends only when we begin to solve our own problems. Now or Never.

5. Blank Checks on Heaven: Reason, Not Revelation

I have heard enough billion-dollar blank checks written against the bank of eternity. A guru speaks of universal nonviolence, another announces world peace, another offers the salvation of humanity, and a thousand listeners are expected to bow before the grandeur of the promise. But a promise is not a program. An invocation of universal compassion is not a water-treatment plant. A blessing does not disinfect a public toilet. The eloquence of the speaker does not make the street outside his institution safe, clean, or just.

Hindu gurus should stop writing billion-dollar blank checks about nonviolence, world peace, and the redemption of mankind when they cannot account for the clean, fresh toilet paper needed to wipe their own asses. I choose that crude image deliberately. It is meant to drag lofty pronouncements down to the level of ordinary physical need. A civilization that can discuss the purification of the soul for hours but cannot manage the cleanliness of a toilet has confused the height of its vocabulary with the level of its achievement. The measure of public virtue is not how far a sermon rises above the ground. It is how much

preventable suffering it removes from the ground on which people actually live.

Do not misunderstand my target. I am not asserting that every guru lives in filth, that every Hindu institution neglects the poor, or that teachings about nonviolence are worthless. Some religious organizations have built hospitals, schools, shelters, and sanitation projects; their work should be judged fairly. Ahimsa can express a serious ethical refusal to inflict needless harm. My accusation is against the social habit of treating magnificent moral language as a substitute for competence. When a teacher who has not solved the concrete problems before him claims the authority to instruct the whole world, it is reasonable to ask him for the evidence of his success.

Start with the nearest person. Is the cleaner paid fairly? Can she refuse hazardous work? Is the water safe? Does the school teach children to ask questions? Is the woman who objects heard as an equal? Can a young adult leave the religious community without punishment or intimidation? Does an institution publish its accounts and permit independent inspection? A teacher who speaks of compassion while ignoring these questions is not necessarily preaching a false moral principle. He is failing to demonstrate the discipline necessary to put that principle into practice.

The problem with a blank check is not that the amount written on it is too generous. The problem is that nobody has shown the funds. 'World peace' becomes cheap when the speaker bears none of the cost of

making peace. 'Nonviolence' becomes convenient when the violence of poverty, caste humiliation, preventable disease, and institutional neglect is treated as somebody else's department. 'Spiritual greatness' becomes a stage decoration when the workers who sweep the stage cannot expect ordinary dignity. A social ethic that begins by overlooking the nearest injury cannot claim superiority merely because it ends by embracing the universe.

Here I must state a harsher judgment: original Hinduism is dead. What remains, in too many of its public performances, is its caricature. I use that sentence as a philosophical indictment, not as an archival claim that there once existed a single, pure, unchanging original Hinduism. No such uniform historical entity can be recovered from the diversity of Indic schools. The point is that an inheritance of disputation, analysis, experimentation, and difficult ethical questioning is betrayed when its living representatives are reduced to repeating slogans and protecting the social prestige of the speaker.

A caricature has the outline of the original but not its intelligence. It displays a philosopher's portrait and suppresses the philosopher's questions. It praises the skeptical argument of antiquity and punishes skepticism in the present. It recites an ancient text as proof of present excellence without producing an argument, an invention, or a humane institution. It gives the past an ornamental dignity so that the present will not be required to earn one. That is not the revival of a civilization. It is the embalming of its reputation.

Therefore I reject the command to look backward for rescue. Study the past—yes, rigorously and without shame. Recover destroyed manuscripts where possible. Translate philosophers. Examine the failures as well as the achievements. Preserve temples, languages, works of art, and the memory of communities injured by conquest. But do not mistake conservation for creation. A museum can preserve a machine; it cannot replace an engineer. An archive can preserve a theorem; it cannot perform a modern experiment. The object of studying the ancestors is not to become their ventriloquist. It is to become capable of achievements they could not have imagined.

To revive Hindu civilization, do not look back for a final answer. Look forward. Look into the mirror first, because no future can be constructed on habitual self-deception. Look East where institutions have learned and rebuilt; look West where a technique or right is worth borrowing; look anywhere that evidence reveals a better method. But do not kneel before the passport of an idea. Neither the British Empire, nor a Sanskrit verse, nor a Japanese factory, nor a Marxist party, nor a modern guru can confer truth on a proposition by association. The question is what the claim explains, what it accomplishes, whom it helps, what it harms, and whether it survives examination.

This is why my prescription is philosophical before it is ceremonial. Change perception: stop seeing yourself as a supplicant awaiting instruction from a superior civilization or a supernatural rescuer. Change metaphysics: accept that physical conditions change through physical causes and collective action. Change epistemology: replace

inherited certainty with testable inquiry, evidence, and the freedom to admit error. Change ethics: measure institutions by the equal human worth of those who must live under their decisions. These changes will not instantly rebuild a hospital or create an industry, but they can begin immediately and will determine whether the patient work of reconstruction proceeds intelligently.

The true test of a guru is not how many countries listen to his account of world peace. It is whether he can tolerate a question he did not authorize, whether his institution respects the freedom to leave, whether his promises can be examined, and whether he treats the person cleaning the floor as fully human. The true test of a civilization is not the greatness of its former teachers. It is the capacity of its living people to produce, revise, and apply knowledge without intellectual permission from anyone.

I am not proposing that Hindus replace one revelation with another, or that reason become a new priest with an unquestionable costume. Reason is a discipline of giving and asking for grounds, not an oracle that guarantees perfect answers. It is powerful precisely because it can discover that its previous conclusion was mistaken. A person liberated by reason need not discard every inherited practice. He must be able to examine it, keep what withstands scrutiny, change what fails, and reject what violates human dignity.

Enough of blank checks drawn on heaven while the earth remains filthy. Enough of promises to rescue mankind from suffering by those

who will not examine suffering at their own doorway. Enough of the inherited claim that greatness resides permanently in our blood, scriptures, or ancestors. Greatness is not a birthright that may be cashed without work. It is a standard to be achieved, repeatedly, in institutions and in the treatment of actual human beings.

Not revelation, but reason will liberate Hindus toward future glory. Not obedience, but inquiry. Not imitation, but judgment. Not a return to a mythical original, but the construction of a society worthy of its best intellectual possibilities. The task begins with a mind that refuses to wait for a savior and continues with hands willing to repair what that mind has learned to see.

6. Macaulay: an education designed for intermediaries

There is a document behind the metaphor. On 2 February 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay delivered his Minute on Indian Education. In advocating English-language education, he explicitly described the creation of an intermediary class situated between colonial authorities and the much larger governed population. His phrase imagined people Indian by ancestry yet English in their intellectual and cultural orientation. This was not a later conspiracy invented by an injured nationalist imagination. It appears in the official argument for colonial education itself. [24]

Read the proposal carefully. Macaulay did not command an entire population to forget every inherited tradition overnight. He argued about the allocation of limited educational funds, the relative merits of

English and classical learning, and the usefulness of English to the colonial administration. His famous vision of an intermediary class was both practical and ideological. It offered employment and access, while also organizing prestige around the language, literature, and standards of the ruling power.

What matters for my argument is the asymmetry. A colonial government could define what counted as valuable knowledge, select the language of access to important posts, and create a social ladder whose upper rungs were measured by proximity to the ruler. The ladder could outlive the government that built it. Children would climb it seeking advancement. Parents would celebrate their success. After several generations the ladder might appear natural, even to people who denounced colonialism with great sincerity.

I refuse a simplistic conclusion. English education did not produce only obedient servants. It also provided tools that Indian thinkers used to criticize empire, organize reform, communicate across linguistic regions, and participate in global science. A language cannot be judged solely by the motives of a government that promoted it. An instrument of administration can become an instrument of emancipation. But that possibility is not an answer to my criticism. The decisive question is whether Indians turned the instrument into their own, or whether they allowed the ruler's cultural scale of prestige to become the ruler of their minds.

Macaulay provides a documentary point of departure, not a complete explanation of modern India. Economic inequality, caste, urban employment, globalization, regional languages, family aspirations, and the practical advantages of English have all affected later educational choices. To deny those factors would betray the very logical empiricism this book defends. But neither should we pretend that colonial policy was culturally neutral. The ambition to manufacture an Anglicized intermediary elite was stated plainly. It belongs in the evidence.

7. Imitation: the counterfeit currency of sophistication

There are forms of imitation more humiliating than military defeat because they are presented as voluntary success. A man may adopt the colonizer's accent and imagine that his voice has acquired authority. A school may reward the ability to reproduce imported explanations while neglecting the ability to test them. A bureaucracy may preserve ceremony and distance from ordinary citizens as though public service were a theater of inherited command. A family may interpret a child's mastery of English as evidence not simply of opportunity but of superior human worth.

I am not protesting English grammar, punctuality, modern clothes, or courteous conduct. I protest the counterfeit currency created when the appearance of refinement is mistaken for competence. A gentleman can speak impeccably and know nothing about sewage. A minister can quote British parliamentary procedure and fail to keep a village clinic

supplied. A judge can employ the most polished inherited vocabulary while an ordinary litigant waits years for a comprehensible hearing. What exactly has been civilized in these cases: the public institution or its ceremonial surface?

The language of civility becomes especially dangerous when it instructs the powerless to be patient with the powerful. The colonial official expected deference. The postcolonial official may inherit the expectation. When the citizen objects to unnecessary delay, the citizen is called troublesome. When a worker refuses dangerous treatment, he is called undisciplined. When a student challenges the professor, he is called disrespectful. These judgments can be made in any language, but inherited hierarchies give them the appearance of tradition.

This is why I use an image that polite readers may dislike: brain-dead sheep. The phrase is intended to wound complacency, not to provide a biological description of a population. Sheep follow because they are herd animals. A human being possesses the capacity to ask where the herd is going and whether the path ends at a cliff. The tragedy is not that a human learns from another human. It is that he abandons the faculty by which learning is distinguished from obedience.

A free people should choose good manners because courtesy respects human dignity, not because the former ruler approved them. It should choose efficient institutions because they perform useful work, not because they carry a foreign seal. It should study books because their

arguments survive scrutiny, not because the writer's passport grants any higher rank in the republic of reason.

8. English is a tool, not a throne

English can connect Indian researchers to international scientific literature, commerce, diplomacy, computing, and other nations. It can help an Indian from one language region communicate with another. To reject such a tool because Britain promoted it would be an act of intellectual self-injury. Yet it is equally absurd to treat the tool as a throne from which the worth of every other language must be judged.

A child should be able to master English without being taught to be ashamed of the language in which a grandmother explains the world. A student should be able to learn engineering in the language that permits the deepest understanding, while also acquiring the terminology needed to collaborate internationally. The nation should translate scientific knowledge into major Indian languages, support serious writing in those languages, and refuse the assumption that a sophisticated thought becomes sophisticated only after it has been expressed in English.

Knowledge is not the property of a language. A mathematical proof is not more valid in English than in Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu, or Japanese. A competent court judgment is not just because its reasoning is printed in an elegant inherited legal dialect. A medical instruction that patients cannot understand is not improved by the prestige of its vocabulary. We must ask whom a language policy serves, what it enables, and whom it excludes.

The practical response is bilingual and multilingual competence, high-quality translation, teacher training, open scientific resources, and terminology produced through real technical work. Neither romantic linguistic isolation nor colonial linguistic hierarchy will serve. We need a public culture in which people can use English without worshipping it, learn through Indian languages without imprisoning inquiry within them, and assess every proposition by the quality of its reasoning.

The mind becomes sovereign not when it rejects foreign words, but when it refuses foreign authority the privilege of being automatically correct.

9. Japan: the difference between borrowing tools and borrowing a master

Here lies the reason for my command: Hindus, look East. But understand what I mean. I do not ask India to kneel before Japan after standing up from Britain. I ask Indians to examine the discipline with which Japan studied foreign power and converted selected external knowledge into domestic capacity.

In the early Meiji years, Japan confronted unequal treaties, industrial and military pressure, and the need for institutional change. The Iwakura Mission of 1871–1873 traveled through the United States and Europe. Its delegates investigated foreign political systems, education, industries, and societies while pursuing treaty-related diplomatic aims. Japanese archival accounts record detailed observation, reporting, and the dispatch of students and specialists. The mission did not offer a

magical formula. Its importance lies in a national decision to treat foreign strength as something to be studied rather than merely admired or resented. [25]

Imagine the difference between two questions. The first asks: how can I sound like the powerful foreigner? The second asks: what engineering knowledge, educational practices, administrative methods, and industrial capabilities made that foreign country powerful—and how can those capabilities be cultivated here? One question produces imitation of status. The other produces inquiry into causes. One seeks approval. The other seeks capacity.

A Japanese minister studying a European railway did not have to conclude that Europe owned the moral right to command Japan. A Japanese educator investigating foreign schools did not have to accept the permanent inferiority of Japanese culture. Selective adaptation demanded judgments about costs, institutions, and purposes. It also demanded the humility to admit that foreigners sometimes possessed skills and methods worth learning. National self-respect is not the refusal to learn; it is the refusal to confuse learning with submission.

Japan's experience is not an immaculate legend. Its modernization was bound up with imperial expansion, repression, conflict, and later the catastrophe of militarism. Its own history supplies warnings against national discipline without moral restraints. If we praise its institutional learning while ignoring those consequences, we will have exchanged one mythology for another. The lesson I draw is neither that Japanese

conduct was always exemplary nor that another country's hardships can be wished away through a change of costume. The lesson is that institutions can be observed, tested, built, and corrected.

Japan also reminds us that there is no single cultural route to modern science. The equipment of a laboratory may have international origins; the discipline of experimental testing does not require surrender to an imperial master. A civilization is modern when it can produce, criticize, and improve knowledge—not when its elite successfully performs an imported accent.

10. The test of education is competence, not ceremony

A school that produces memorized obedience may appear orderly. An examination system that rewards reproduction of approved answers may generate impressive numbers of credentials. Neither result establishes intellectual emancipation. The educated mind should be able to ask an original question, distinguish observation from assumption, revise a conclusion, and use what it learns to solve a practical problem.

The university I want is not a temple dedicated to ancient national greatness or to the modern foreign professor. It is an institution in which a claim has to earn its place. The lecturer who quotes Newton must also understand the experiment. The student who admires Nagarjuna must be willing to examine an argument attributed to him. The Marxist who declares the economy dialectical must identify mechanisms and measurements. The nationalist who announces an

ancient scientific discovery must show the dated textual evidence and a defensible relation between the ancient claim and the modern result.

A child who has learned to ask what would disprove an assertion has acquired a stronger defense against manipulation than a child who has memorized ten thousand heroic anecdotes. Teach the former how to build a circuit, interpret a disease statistic, read a contract, test a sample of water, and locate a contradiction in public accounts. Then ask whether the school has actually changed the child's power to act in the world.

The language of schooling is important, but not sufficient. An institution can be intellectually colonized while teaching entirely in an Indian language. It can also become intellectually independent while teaching in English. A mind is colonized when authority replaces evidence. A mind is emancipated when it can test authority, including the authority that speaks in its mother tongue.

11. South Korea: industry is organized knowledge

South Korea's postwar transformation does not justify worshipping the Korean state or copying its historical political arrangements. It does, however, illustrate the power of sustained investment in education, infrastructure, technology, industrial development, and export capabilities. The World Bank describes a transition from postwar aid recipient to a high-income, innovation-oriented economy. That transformation involved more than cultural pride. It demanded organizations capable of making products, measuring quality, training workers, and competing in the material world. [26]

I am interested in the factory as much as the philosophy seminar. An engineer who reduces manufacturing defects has contributed something measurable. A production system that improves reliability has translated discipline into human benefit, though only if workers and the surrounding community are treated fairly. A public education system that gives disadvantaged children access to technical knowledge can widen the population capable of invention. The supply chain, laboratory, workshop, and classroom all become places where claims meet consequences.

South Korea's historical growth also accompanied authoritarian government during important periods. Later political democratization and the struggle for rights matter to its story. To admire its technology and ignore repression would violate the humanist premise of this book. National capacity is necessary; it is not sufficient. A successful state

must protect citizens against arbitrary power as well as equip them with skills.

For India, the question is not whether a Korean corporation is more fashionable than an Indian one. It is whether Indian institutions can build comparable capabilities while respecting a democratic and plural society. Can industrial policy be evaluated openly? Can local suppliers improve through competition and technical support? Can a public school teach science well enough that its graduates need no inherited social privilege to enter an engineering profession? We should study such questions because they produce observable answers.

12. Singapore: a clean street is an institutional achievement

One of my earliest accusations concerned the house and street no one else will clean. Singapore supplies a useful comparison precisely because its visible public order was not produced by meditation upon cleanliness. The city-state adopted public-health rules, invested in housing and sewerage, organized waste collection, and conducted national campaigns. Singapore's National Library records the launch of the Keep Singapore Clean campaign in October 1968 and the accompanying Environmental Public Health Act. Other official histories connect improved public hygiene with housing, safe water, and disease control. [27]

These reforms depended on conditions that cannot simply be copied: a small territorial scale, administrative capacity, political circumstances, and resources organized through specific institutions. Some

Singaporean governance practices raise genuine questions about restrictions on political competition and public criticism. I reject the assumption that a spotless street settles those questions. Human liberty is not an optional decorative plant in a clean city.

Nevertheless, the street is real. Waste does not disappear when a politician recites a national epic. Sewage does not become harmless because a holy man has blessed the neighborhood. Reliable collection, drainage, design, enforcement against dumping, maintenance budgets, technical staffing, and usable toilets do the work. A government that consistently supplies these services deserves credit for practical competence. A government that fails must answer for the failure, whatever the grandeur of the civilization it represents.

The deeper lesson is that civic virtue requires machinery. A personal attitude of cleanliness is helpful; a functioning municipal sanitation system is indispensable. Public conscience without enforcement can become an advertisement. Enforcement without functioning services can become punishment of the poor. The work lies in combining accountable authority, accessible infrastructure, realistic budgets, and habits that people can sustain.

When I tell Hindus to look East, I am not asking them to copy a Singaporean campaign poster. I am asking them to investigate how an institution converts a public problem into a plan, a plan into a budget, a budget into services, and services into a measurable improvement. That

sequence is less glamorous than civilizational rhetoric. It is more useful to a child drinking contaminated water.

13. Vietnam and China: the discipline of correcting economic error

Chapter Ten developed my economic thesis: free markets can be studied as dynamic material systems and need not be rejected simply because one embraces dialectical materialism. East Asia supplies practical examples of institutional revision. Vietnam's Đổi Mới reforms began in 1986 and accelerated afterward, with changes to agricultural incentives, pricing, private enterprise, trade, and economic management. A World Bank examination describes the pressures and shortages preceding reform and the considerable shift toward market mechanisms. [28]

My interest is not in granting ideological absolution to the Vietnamese government. One can recognize the economic consequences of reform while criticizing restrictions on speech and political freedom. The relevant question is whether leaders were capable of revising policies when material outcomes contradicted the claims of doctrine. A doctrine that professes to recognize change yet prohibits a change of policy has become a caricature of dialectics.

China's reform era offers another important case. Policy change, incentives, export growth, investment, infrastructure, education, demographic conditions, and integration into global commerce interacted over decades. The transformation was not a laboratory experiment with one independent variable. It would be absurd to

attribute every outcome to the mere presence of markets, just as it would be absurd to attribute the gains entirely to the authority of the party. Real comparison must include institutional differences, earlier human-capital investments, local experimentation, global demand, and the costs of repression.

There is an irony here for those Indian communists whom I criticize for treating a foreign ideological authority as the owner of dialectical truth. Their professed method should lead them to study material conditions and revise hypotheses. Instead, where party loyalty replaces evidence, yesterday's formula survives by becoming tomorrow's commandment. If economic practices change in countries that call themselves socialist, a serious materialist has a responsibility to study the change, not to denounce the data for insulting doctrine.

I do not present China or Vietnam as perfect societies. Their economic development cannot excuse violations of individual freedom, minority rights, labor dignity, or environmental protection. But refusing to learn from their institutional reforms because their political systems are objectionable would be another form of anti-intellectual vanity. Study the outcome. Study the cost. Separate what is useful from what is coercive. Retain the right to refuse.

14. No eastern master and no western master

Now I must turn the mirror upon my own phrase. 'Look East' can become a form of intellectual servitude if it means exchanging the prestige of London for that of Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul, Hanoi, or Singapore. That would be an absurd ending to a book against borrowed authority. The location of the master would change; the submission would remain.

My command means: abandon the habit of treating the former British ruler as the permanent measure of civilization. Look East because important examples of institutional adaptation exist there, and because those examples are too often neglected when political and cultural prestige flows through old imperial channels. Then look everywhere that human beings have solved problems. A useful idea developed in Nairobi, São Paulo, Copenhagen, or Tennessee is no less useful because it was not invented in Asia.

Do not confuse Japan's industrial discipline with the rightness of every Japanese policy. Do not confuse South Korean technological achievement with a license for abusive working hours or corporate privilege. Do not confuse Singaporean administrative effectiveness with the moral sufficiency of constrained public dissent. Do not confuse Chinese and Vietnamese economic growth with proof that political liberty is dispensable. A civilization that replaces British infallibility with Asian infallibility has merely repainted its intellectual prison.

One test will expose this error. If Japanese evidence contradicts my favored account of Japanese history, will I accept the evidence? If an Indian invention outperforms an imported one, will I give it the credit it deserves? If a British medical procedure saves more lives than its domestic alternative, will I use it without humiliation? If the proposed UDA adopts a policy that injures citizens, will its own members have the freedom to reject it? If my answer to any of these questions depends on national origin rather than evidence, I have already betrayed this book.

15. The imported courtroom: a machine judged by its work

The Imported Courtroom chapter describes a legal system that can alienate ordinary litigants through language, delay, cost, and complexity. Here the colonial inheritance meets the mirror. It is easy to say that Britain built the original machine. That is historically relevant. But the machine has been operated, maintained, modified, and defended by independent Indian governments for generations. Its continued failures cannot all be assigned to a departed imperial administrator.

We must distinguish a legal principle worth preserving from a procedure worth reforming. Judicial independence, impartial evidence, appeal, and equal protection are not bad because a colonial legal system also recognized them. Nor are interminable delays and inaccessible hearings good because they carry an old institutional pedigree. The right answer is neither to demolish everything foreign nor to sanctify

everything inherited. Keep what protects justice. Replace what obstructs it. Build what is missing. Measure the result.

My practical preference is a justice system that speaks to ordinary people in languages they understand, uses trained expertise, supplies transparent reasons, allows meaningful appeal, and guards against the capture of local decision-making by caste and wealth. There is no point in replacing a distant bureaucratic hierarchy with an indigenous village hierarchy that can silence a woman or a poor litigant. The source of the oppression does not decide its moral character. The victim's experience does.

The same test applies to schools, railways, policing, revenue administration, and medical services. Institutions are machines made for human purposes. Their legitimacy is not inherited from the country of their origin. It must be earned by their performance under the rule of law.

16. The injury of empire and the duty of the free

Some readers will object that I am shifting the burden from the conqueror to the conquered. I am not. A thief remains responsible for theft. A colonial power remains responsible for the exploitation and coercion for which it can be historically shown to have been responsible. Indian agency during and after colonial rule does not erase those injuries. Acknowledging internal failure is not an acquittal of empire.

But historical injury and present responsibility are distinct propositions. One names a cause or constraint inherited from the past. The other identifies a choice or duty available in the present. If a bureaucratic procedure was introduced under British rule, the original decision may be theirs. If independent governments maintain a needlessly burdensome version of it despite available alternatives, that contemporary decision is theirs. If colonial educational incentives promoted imitation, the history matters. If today's universities punish independent thought, their present administrators cannot hide indefinitely behind an 1835 memorandum.

There is no fixed year in which all inherited constraints ceased to matter. Colonial legacies can persist through property relations, language, infrastructure, law, and unequal opportunity. Nor is national responsibility evenly distributed: ordinary workers have less power to redesign institutions than ministers, judges, educational authorities, and wealthy employers. Responsibility should be assigned in proportion to authority and realistic capacity. To blame the poor equally with the powerful would be another form of political laziness.

Yet the moral conclusion is inescapable. We cannot demand recognition as a sovereign civilization and then deny responsibility for the conduct of sovereign institutions. Freedom that insists upon the honors of independence while disclaiming its burdens is not freedom. It is a performance of freedom in the costume of an old dependency.

17. Caste, social prestige, and the colonial mirror

The hierarchy of imported prestige did not fall upon an egalitarian society. Colonial authority interacted with indigenous hierarchies of caste, class, and region. The borrowed model could become another instrument with which a privileged group distinguished itself from its neighbors. A man already accustomed to demanding deference at home might find it convenient to borrow the manners of imperial command. The result need not be a simple replacement of one hierarchy by another. They could reinforce each other.

This matters because an argument about intellectual colonization must not become an excuse for caste nostalgia. A Brahmin, merchant, landowner, bureaucrat, or professional does not possess truth through ancestry. An artisan does not lose the right to independent thought because the social order ranks his occupation poorly. An institution that rewards lineage before competence is already practicing a form of intellectual dependency. It depends upon status to do the work that evidence should do.

In Chapter Five I described the traveler at an American immigration counter. Whatever titles and ancestral distinctions he claims in his home society, the officer examining his passport is concerned with identity, documentation, and applicable law. That encounter can be humiliating to someone whose dignity depends on inherited rank. It can also be liberating: it reminds him that public institutions need not organize themselves around his ancestry.

The mirror therefore exposes two forms of borrowed authority, not one: the prestige borrowed from the colonizer and the prestige borrowed from caste. Both tell the individual to value a person by inherited or ceremonial standing rather than by moral equality and demonstrable conduct. A free mind must reject both.

18. What the mirror would demand tomorrow morning

A book may accuse an entire civilization with thunder. The test comes when its readers wake up. What would I ask an Indian teacher, minister, entrepreneur, engineer, municipal officer, or university rector to do differently tomorrow? Not to recite my accusation. Not to hang my portrait in a classroom. Not to issue a declaration that our civilization is already greatest. I would ask them to create conditions in which independent judgment can produce visible results.

The teacher can invite a student to dispute an accepted claim, then require evidence from both sides. The university can publish examination standards and evaluate research by reproducibility rather than prestige. The municipal administration can measure sewage treatment, waste collection, air quality, water safety, and repair times; publish the data; and make responsible offices answerable for failures. The entrepreneur can reward technical skill, honor contracts, and compete by improving value rather than by soliciting political privilege. The official can explain a law in language that citizens understand. The court can shorten avoidable delay and guarantee meaningful review.

The newspaper can distinguish a national achievement from a national boast.

The government can establish publicly auditable pilot reforms, specify in advance what outcomes would count as success, and terminate expensive programs when independent evidence shows failure. Its ministers can resist the temptation to call every criticism anti-national. A public system unable to announce its own mistakes has surrendered the faculty that science uses to advance.

I would also ask citizens to stop treating each technological product imported from elsewhere as an occasion for shame or worship. Study how it works. Ask why it is cheaper, more reliable, or better designed. Build the capabilities to improve upon it. Admit when domestic products fail. The willingness to see failure is not a sign of national weakness. It is a condition for genuine national competence.

If this sounds less magnificent than the restoration of a civilization, so much the better. Great historical claims become honest only when translated into ordinary human consequences.

19. The UDA: cooperation without a new intellectual empire

The United Dharmic Alliance belongs to the constructive destination of this book because it proposes cooperation among civilizations with overlapping historical traditions but no legitimate claim to imprison one another's minds. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Daoist, Shinto, and other Indic and East Asian traditions may share knowledge, protect heritage, collaborate in science, defend security, and exchange cultural resources without accepting a compulsory theology or a final religious authority.

An alliance built against coercive hegemony must not become another source of coercive hegemony. Its members should be able to learn from one another without suppressing differences. Its citizens should remain free to join, leave, criticize, or reject religious traditions. Scientific cooperation should allow results to be challenged regardless of the nationality of the laboratory. Environmental commitments should be tested against measurable outcomes, not merely declared sacred. A civilization cannot defeat intellectual colonization by creating a larger institution that tells everybody which conclusions to hold.

The UDA therefore offers a challenge to its own founders. Are they willing to protect the dissenter who does not admire the alliance? Can its proposed institutions handle disagreements about trade, religion, security, borders, migration, and ecological policy without claiming civilizational infallibility? Can rival countries cooperate on technical tasks while maintaining their sovereignty? These are questions of design, not matters to be settled by the beauty of a manifesto.

The UDA is a proposal, not an existing alliance. The states named in its manifesto have not thereby joined it. I preserve my proposed membership and commitments as a political vision; I do not pretend that a theoretical coalition is already a military, diplomatic, or economic reality. If the alliance is ever to mature, its principles must acquire procedures, resources, limits on power, and mechanisms of peaceful disagreement. The original reason for proposing it will remain: independent societies should be capable of cooperating without subordination to a claim of universal civilizational superiority.

An institution worthy of the word 'Dharmic' in this proposed sense should be judged by the freedom it protects, the knowledge it produces, and the suffering it prevents. Neither an ancient name nor an impressive logo can relieve it of those duties.

20. The objections I will not evade

Modern science, legal methods, constitutional ideas, medicine, and useful administrative practices do not become British property because Britain transmitted them. The theft occurs when the former colonial subject mistakes a channel of knowledge for its rightful owner and the borrowed tool for an authority over his judgment. Learn from Britain where learning is useful. Refuse the old habit of bowing before Britain as the examiner of Indian worth.

Another objection says that many Indians repudiated colonial superiority and generated original reform movements. Yes. From social reformers and anticolonial intellectuals to scientists, teachers, labor

organizers, and constitutional thinkers, Indians repeatedly contested imperial assumptions. My civilizational accusation is a polemical demand for deeper self-examination, not a denial of that record. To pretend there was no resistance would diminish the very inheritance of independent thought that I want recovered.

A third objection says that Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam, and Singapore all achieved what they achieved under very different social and political conditions. Precisely. The differences are reasons to investigate mechanisms rather than turn national names into miracle medicines. A successful policy in a city-state may require radical redesign in a vast federal democracy. Economic growth may coexist with authoritarianism without making authoritarianism the cause of growth or the ethically acceptable price of it. A disciplined comparison must specify what it is comparing.

A fourth objection says that the 'mirror' metaphor can be exploited to blame victims of historical exploitation. It can, if the distinction between guilt and capacity is erased. I refuse that erasure. The colonial power bears responsibility for its acts. A modern minister bears responsibility for decisions within his office. A sanitation worker denied protective equipment is not equally responsible for the policy that placed him in danger. The demand to look in the mirror must fall especially upon those with real institutional power.

A final objection is more dangerous: could this book's attack on colonial imitation become its own form of psychological compulsion?

Could I accuse every dissenting Indian of having a colonized mind merely because he does not agree with me? If I did, I would repeat the offense that this chapter condemns. The claim that a mind is free must be tested by its right to disagree, including with me. The evidence may force me to revise my judgment of particular institutions. I accept that risk. Reason is not a favor I extend only to my supporters.

21. The mirror, and then the world

Political independence without independent judgment leaves a people carrying its former ruler inside its own institutions. The historical injury deserves remembrance. The imitation deserves examination. And the failure to examine oneself deserves a still harsher accusation, because it converts a condition imposed by another into a habit one has ceased to resist.

The point is not to cultivate a new hatred of everything British. The point is to eliminate the inherited privilege of British approval. Nor is the point to turn Japan or any other Eastern country into an idol. It is to recover the ability to see a successful practice, identify its causes, measure its effects, and adapt it without humiliation. The sovereign mind does not ask whether an idea is British, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist, European, or African before asking whether it is true and useful. It gives the evidence the first hearing.

The Hindu who refuses the mirror will continue to find explanations for every failure and excuses for every delay. He may possess a magnificent library of ancestral wisdom and never learn the discipline

of a functioning public office. He may condemn the conqueror's arrogance while preserving its ceremonies in his own conduct. He may repeat the proud language of independence while asking others to decide what he should admire.

I am not asking him to despise himself. I am asking him to grow up intellectually. The adult civilization is not the one that never suffered defeat; it is the one that can inspect its defeats, discard its vanities, protect its citizens, and learn without kneeling. That is the emancipation whose absence this book indicts.

Hindus, look into the mirror. Then look East. Then look everywhere. But never again surrender the authority of your own judgment.

REASON SUPERSEDES BOTH RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION.

Chapter Thirteen — The Heart Surgery: Three Strategic Failures After Independence

1. What the surgeon treats first

When a man arrives at a hospital with a failing heart, the surgeon does not begin by repairing his face. The patient may dislike his appearance; he may have other injuries; some may demand eventual attention. Yet the first duty is to identify the condition that threatens life. That is my metaphor for the strategic failures I believe India's leaders failed to confront with sufficient realism after independence.

This chapter concentrates on three connected subjects: the military and nuclear rivalry with Pakistan, the transformation of Tibet's status and the Himalayan strategic landscape, and the protection of vulnerable minorities after Partition. It does not pretend that caste, poverty, epidemics, education, or corruption were trivial problems. Rather, it asks whether governments confronted the risks to security and citizenship with the urgency those risks deserved.

The metaphor is a warning against complacency, not a medical proof that one political issue causes all others. The language of surgery must not encourage the fantasy that any entire religious community is a disease. The patients of politics are human beings, and the first demand of secular humanism is their equal moral worth.

2. Pakistan: the problem of deterrence

Partition was not merely the drawing of a line. It was the creation of rival sovereign political orders amid mass displacement, killings, lost homes, and competing accounts of legitimacy. My polemical description of Pakistan as a 'rebel province' expresses a civilizational view of the divided subcontinent; it is not its legal status. Pakistan has existed as a sovereign state since 1947. Serious strategic analysis must proceed from that reality even when one disputes the historical justice or wisdom of Partition.

India carried out a nuclear test in 1974. Pakistan publicly demonstrated nuclear capability in 1998, the same year India conducted further tests. These milestones are not a sufficient history of either program. Scientific capacity, external assistance, secrecy, leadership decisions, security fears, and international diplomacy all influenced the development of nuclear deterrence.

The question I press is whether India's leadership adequately anticipated the incentives that would lead a rival state to seek nuclear parity. A government that relies on diplomatic hope when the opposing side is pursuing deterrence risks mistaking aspiration for planning. Yet the opposite error is also serious. To say India 'allowed' Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons implies an ability to prevent proliferation that India may not have possessed without military aggression, extraordinary diplomatic leverage, or costs that would themselves require moral justification.

A more demanding inquiry therefore asks: What did Indian officials know, when did they know it, what alternatives did they possess, and what foreseeable consequences would those alternatives have carried? Deterrence is not a test of masculine bravado. It is a discipline of assessing capabilities, intentions, escalation, and the survival of civilian populations. The courage required is often the courage to refuse an easy rhetorical victory in favor of an effective strategy.

3. Tibet: the lost assumptions of geography

The entry of the People's Liberation Army into Tibet in 1950 and the subsequent consolidation of Chinese control changed the strategic geography of the Himalayas. The region had served important functions in trade, pilgrimage, diplomacy, and the separation of military power. India had to confront a different northern frontier from the one British India had known.

The agreement signed by India and China on 29 April 1954 was explicitly an agreement on trade and intercourse between India and the 'Tibet Region of China.' It addressed trade agencies, markets, pilgrimage routes, and travel and affirmed principles including mutual respect for sovereignty and nonaggression. The agreement is therefore central evidence for understanding how the Indian government dealt with the new situation. It did not simply record a border settlement, nor can its entire significance be reduced to a single phrase.

My criticism is that a government can articulate beautiful principles while underestimating a hard strategic transformation. What were the

available options? Recognition and trade accommodation, stronger border defense, diplomatic protest, support for Tibetan autonomy, internationalization of the question, or some combination? What was practically possible for a newly independent state facing the military and logistical conditions of the early 1950s? Every proposed alternative carries costs, and those costs must be counted.

To say that Tibet's changed status altered India's security environment is historically substantial. To say a particular Indian policy could certainly have prevented that transformation is a much more difficult proposition. A serious book must make the first argument clearly and investigate the second without pretending certainty.

4. Partition's minority question: people behind the percentages

The third question is the one that brings strategy back to human beings. Partition drove immense movements of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs across new borders. The resulting distributions were asymmetric, and the histories of what became West Pakistan and East Pakistan were not the same. Figures for 'Pakistan' in 1941, 1951, and today cannot be compared without correcting for those changes in territory. East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971. Religious census categories can also separate Hindu Jati from Scheduled Castes, making casual comparisons misleading.

The population loss of Hindus and Sikhs from large parts of West Pakistan was real and historically consequential. It is not explained by a single census number, nor does the demographic transformation alone

establish the motives of every family that moved or stayed. Some fled terror, some were expelled, some sought security among co-religionists, and others made decisions under intolerable uncertainty. The same human reality applies to Muslims who fled territories in India. Any morally serious examination must acknowledge the suffering in both directions while permitting scrutiny of the distinct conditions that followed.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics recorded 240,458,089 people in its 2023 census, including 3,867,729 people categorized as Hindu Jati and 1,349,487 in the Scheduled Castes category. Those categories together total approximately 5.22 million, but should not be disguised as a single undifferentiated census label. The fact that a religious minority is comparatively small does not make its rights negligible. A hundred families facing coercion deserve protection no less than a hundred thousand.

India, for its part, retained a very large Muslim population. This made religious pluralism a permanent question of citizenship rather than a problem that could be solved by wishing one community away. Yet it is essential to reject the crude inference that the presence of Muslims causes violence. Political mobilization, competing nationalisms, historical fears, discrimination, organized incitement and state responses all shape communal conflict. The presence of more than one religion is a circumstance; violence is an outcome that requires an explanation.

5. What did the Nehru–Liaquat Pact promise?

The agreement signed on 8 April 1950 committed India and Pakistan to the protection of minorities, equality of citizenship, security of life and property, freedom of worship, and remedies for displaced persons. It also proposed administrative mechanisms to examine and address grievances. That agreement did not undo the mass displacement already suffered. It did, however, express obligations that deserve assessment against what governments actually achieved.

A treaty promising protection is not evidence that protection was secured. Nor is the existence of later persecution proof that the treaty was meaningless at the moment of signing. Both governments' actions, the powers of implementing institutions, enforcement failures, and subsequent political developments must be investigated. The question is whether political declarations were translated into effective security for families with no power to compel their rulers to act.

To preserve minority rights is not an indulgence granted by a majority. It is the measure by which a republic proves that equal citizenship means something when it is inconvenient. The humanist principle at the heart of this book must apply consistently: the Hindu family in Sindh, the Muslim family in India, the Sikh family uprooted in 1947, and the Buddhist family facing repression elsewhere are not pawns to be moved across a demographic chessboard.

6. The failure I can defend

What, then, remains of my accusation after the necessary distinctions are made? More than a partisan grievance. It is an argument that post-independence governments should be judged by their ability to anticipate strategic change, protect vulnerable citizens, and revise inherited assumptions when circumstances move against them.

Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons presents a question about anticipation and deterrence, not a licence to imagine preventable outcomes without studying costs. Tibet's changed status presents a question about strategic geography and the limits of diplomacy, not proof that protest alone could have restored a buffer. The post-Partition minority question presents a question about protection, enforcement, and the moral limits of state power, not an indictment of a whole religion.

This is why the metaphor of heart surgery belongs in a philosophical book rather than a speech. A good surgeon begins with diagnosis. He does not call every symptom one disease. He does not choose the remedy because it flatters his anger. He studies the body, the evidence, the risks, and the alternatives. He operates only when his understanding is better than his impulse.

My demand is that India should examine its strategic history in precisely that spirit. A civilization has no right to call itself rational while treating uncomfortable evidence as an enemy. No people becomes secure merely by describing itself as tolerant, ancient, patient,

or morally exceptional. It becomes secure through institutions capable of protecting life while admitting error and learning from it.

The heart comes first. But the surgeon must remember that the heart belongs to a human being.

Chapter Fourteen — India and China: Dedication, Not Competition

1. The disease of measuring oneself by another man

India must not make the defeat of China its national purpose. That is not patriotism. It is the surrender of one's own purpose to another country's achievements. The runner who cannot choose his direction until he sees where his neighbor is running has already yielded command of his life. Every victory he celebrates belongs, in a peculiar sense, to the rival who selected the course. He has not become free. He has merely become a more energetic imitator.

I reject the familiar sermon that countries must spend their lives competing to be first in everything. They must make every factory, university, scientific discovery, naval vessel, and examination score into evidence that they have humiliated somebody else. The sermon turns development into a race without a finish line and citizenship into the management of national jealousy. If another country builds a hospital, our response is not to ask how its patients are treated. We ask whether our hospital is bigger. If another laboratory invents an affordable medicine, we are less interested in curing disease than in claiming a superior patent. The human beneficiary disappears behind the national scoreboard.

I call that compulsion an Anglo-Saxon disease. This is my polemical name for a habit of thought, not a biological diagnosis of the English-speaking peoples or a claim that they alone have competed. I mean the philosophy that makes domination the measure of accomplishment: beat, surpass, defeat, possess, rank, and then call the result civilization. That philosophy has travelled far beyond its historical carriers. Indians have learned it well enough to imitate its worst excesses while neglecting some of the practical virtues that made industrial societies productive.

India must choose another measure. A nation's first obligation is not to appear higher than China on somebody's chart. It is to secure the dignity, education, safety, health, opportunity, freedom, and intellectual independence of its people. If India improves those things while China improves them too, the result is not an Indian defeat. It is a human gain. I ask a more difficult question than 'Did we win?' I ask: 'Did we do the work that needed doing?'

2. The beauty of dedication

There is beauty, charity, humanity, and compassion in dedication. I want that proposition at the heart of our philosophy. Dedication is not a decorative synonym for ambition. It is the sustained decision to serve a purpose even when no audience applauds and no rival is humiliated.

Consider a physician who devotes her intelligence to making treatment safe and affordable. The patient does not benefit because she has beaten another physician. The patient benefits because she has studied, tested,

corrected, listened, and persisted. A teacher who discovers how to help a struggling child read has created a human good even if no foreign school comes second in the rankings. A civil engineer who makes drinking water dependable is performing a work of compassion that may never produce a national trophy. A farmer protecting the fertility of soil honors living generations and future ones without conquering anybody's field.

Competition can sometimes discipline workmanship, reveal information, and create incentives. Our defense of free markets recognizes this limited and valuable role. But competition is a method, not a metaphysics, and certainly not an ethics. When it is turned into the final purpose of life, it can destroy the very things it was supposed to improve. Companies can compete so furiously for market share that they conceal harm, exploit workers, exhaust land, and manipulate consumers. Nations can compete so obsessively for status that they sacrifice education and medicine to weapons they scarcely know how to restrain. Even the pupil may begin to hate knowledge because knowledge has been reduced to defeating the pupil at the neighboring desk.

Dedication asks what a life is for. Blind competition asks who must lose so that the life can appear successful. This is not a small philosophical difference. It is the distinction between purposeful energy and purposeless agitation. I want the Hindu to become energetic without becoming possessed by rivalry, disciplined without becoming

cruel, ambitious for human improvement without requiring the humiliation of another civilization.

3. The false choice between learning and submission

A people insecure in its own judgment sees only two options: imitate a powerful country or resent it. Neither is intellectual freedom. The imitator yields his judgment. The resentful spectator allows his judgment to be governed by envy. Both make the foreigner the center of their moral universe.

There is a third possibility: learn. Learn from the person who knows something you do not know. Ask what was done, what evidence supports the explanation, which institutional conditions made the achievement possible, and what costs accompanied it. Then test the relevant methods in your own circumstances. Adopt what works, change what does not, and refuse what violates your moral commitments. Learning requires neither worship nor hostility. It requires the courage to be a student.

The Hindu who boasts that ancient India once taught the world should understand what made teaching possible. It required that someone learned, questioned, observed, translated, and worked. It is an absurdity to honor those scholars by announcing that their descendants need never learn from anyone again. The strongest tribute to a tradition of inquiry is to continue the inquiry. A civilization that cannot bear to become a student is not defending intellectual sovereignty. It is defending vanity.

This is why my instruction to India is direct: do not compete with China merely because China is succeeding in fields where India wants to improve. If Chinese researchers solve a problem, read their research. If Chinese manufacturers have mastered a difficult production process, study the machinery, logistics, and training that make it possible. If Chinese cities operate an effective public service, investigate whether its successes are real, what it costs, what safeguards it uses, and whether the method can be adapted fairly. A copied solution without understanding may fail; a studied solution may become the beginning of an original one.

4. The old road of scholars must reopen

At one time India sent scholars to China. That fact should not be treated as a medal displayed in a glass case. It should become a reminder that Asia once possessed a vigorous civilization of intellectual travel. Buddhist scholars and translators moved from the Indian cultural world toward China. Figures such as Paramartha, Gunabhadra, and Bodhiruci contributed to the transmission and interpretation of texts. Chinese pilgrims including Faxian and Xuanzang travelled in the opposite direction, studying and collecting manuscripts in India. Yijing's journeys joined India, China, and Southeast Asia through another network of learning. Their itineraries were not a simple journey from a permanent teacher to a permanent pupil. They were an exchange through which each side changed.

Xuanzang did not lose his Chinese identity by studying at Nalanda. He did not conclude that China was worthless because he found important learning in India. He returned with knowledge, manuscripts, and methods that he worked to make available in his own language. Nor did the Indian monks who travelled east lose their intellectual worth by explaining ideas to Chinese scholars. The exchange itself was evidence of confidence: learned people can cross borders without surrendering their minds at the frontier.

Now it is India's turn to learn from China. There is nothing wrong with it. Indeed, there is something wrong with the pride that would forbid such learning while continuing to proclaim the universal value of knowledge. The direction of intellectual exchange is not fixed by ancestral honor. A civilization does not inherit permanent first place in mathematics, engineering, philosophy, medicine, or administration. It must earn competence afresh, and it must be willing to learn wherever competence is found.

To say this is not to announce that China is superior in everything, or that India has nothing to teach. That would merely reverse the old hierarchy. We do not need a new master. We need a renewed conversation between serious minds. The question is not who historically occupied the teacher's chair. The question is whether both civilizations have enough confidence to change seats.

5. Send our children to Chinese universities

Let us make the proposition practical. Chinese universities today include some of the leading institutions in the world. In the QS World University Rankings 2027, Peking University is ranked thirteenth globally, Tsinghua University fourteenth, Fudan University twenty-sixth, Shanghai Jiao Tong University thirty-sixth, and Zhejiang University forty-seventh. Such rankings are imperfect measurements, constructed from chosen indicators, and should never become the very obsession with competition that this chapter rejects. Yet they are sufficient reason to reject the foolish premise that an Indian student must travel only westward to find a serious university.

Let us send our children to China to study when the course, institution, research group, and living conditions make it a sound choice. Let young Indians study engineering, mathematics, materials science, public health, energy systems, urban transport, agriculture, and other disciplines in which Chinese institutions can offer valuable teaching or research. Let them learn Mandarin where necessary and use English-language programs where those are academically appropriate. Let them work with Chinese classmates, encounter different ways of organizing laboratories, and discover how much can be learned from colleagues whose cultural inheritance is not their own.

This is not a demand that every Indian family send a child abroad. Many outstanding students should study in India, and India should strengthen its own universities. Nor should parents be instructed to disregard academic freedom, personal safety, quality assurance,

language needs, costs, recognition of qualifications, or immigration rules. The principle of free minds follows the student across the border. A prestigious laboratory is not an argument for abandoning independent judgment. A responsible scholarship program should give students transparent information about these matters, especially in fields affected by security restrictions or changing bilateral relations.

The Indian and Chinese governments could pursue reciprocal scholarships, joint degree programs, supervised research partnerships, language training, visiting professorships, and mechanisms for recognizing qualifications. Universities themselves should choose partnerships on academic grounds, not as ceremonial declarations of friendship. Industrial research could concentrate on problems that actually burden human life: cleaner energy, efficient batteries, safer building materials, wastewater treatment, affordable medicine, agricultural resilience, and disaster preparedness. The results should be judged by reliability, reproducibility, cost, accessibility, and public benefit.

The young Indian who returns from a university in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, or another research center should not be treated as a disciple of the Chinese state. She should be welcomed as a scientist or professional who has acquired knowledge and can apply or challenge it. We do not call an Indian who studies in Britain a British subject. We should not call one who studies in China a Chinese political instrument merely because she took advantage of an educational opportunity. The

test is competence, character, intellectual honesty, and fidelity to the rights of others.

And if a Chinese student wishes to study Indian philosophy, mathematics, medicine, languages, computer science, or democratic institutions, let India welcome that student under equally clear protections. The road of scholars must not become a one-way pilgrimage. It should become a living network of inquiry.

6. Do not worship the rankings

There is a danger in my own example. A man may be told that Chinese universities rank highly and respond by replacing his previous reverence for Oxford or Cambridge with reverence for Tsinghua or Peking University. He will have learned nothing about intellectual liberation. He will have merely transferred the object of his imitation. The university ranking is a clue, not a command. Excellence in one discipline is not universal excellence, and research prestige does not settle every question of student welfare or academic freedom.

Students need to ask what a department actually teaches, whether their prospective supervisor publishes credible research, whether experiments can be repeated, whether the curriculum prepares them for useful work, and whether they can question received opinions. A university is a community of inquiry, not a flag. Where its environment punishes permissible dissent, that fact matters; where its research is excellent, that fact also matters. We must be able to hold both truths without demanding that one erase the other.

What I demand is an end to inherited provincialism disguised as cosmopolitanism. For some members of the Indian elite, the word 'international' still seems to mean 'Western,' while the achievements of another Asian society are treated as an embarrassment. This is one more shadow cast by Perfidious Albion upon the mind. An education worthy of the name should destroy that shadow. The student who has learned to evaluate evidence does not need a British, American, Chinese, or Indian accent to tell her what is true.

7. China is not an oracle either

To learn from China does not mean to excuse every Chinese policy or abandon India's security interests. China is a sovereign state with its own political system, priorities, and serious disputes with India. The memory of the 1962 war and the deaths in the Galwan Valley in 2020 cannot be erased by a university prospectus. Border negotiations remain necessary. The governments' discussions in 2026 illustrate an avenue for conflict management, not a completed settlement. Peace requires institutions that can manage disagreement, not a declaration that disagreement has vanished.

The same principle applies to civil liberties. Where Chinese authorities restrict freedom of conscience, speech, or association, those actions must be examined under the same humanist standard by which this book judges laws and practices elsewhere. I refuse the proposition that criticism must end at the frontier of a favored ally. A friend who may

never be questioned is another master. India should not replace an English intellectual priesthood with a Chinese one.

But we must not commit the opposite mistake. A dispute between governments does not prove that Chinese mathematics is false, that a Chinese physician cannot teach, or that a Chinese engineer has no useful knowledge. Political anger and scientific inquiry are different activities. States can protect sensitive information while permitting appropriate research collaboration. They can secure their borders while exchanging students. They can negotiate hard without making every classroom a battlefield.

There is a distinction between vigilance and obsession. India must be vigilant about security, coercive dependencies, and the rights of its citizens. It need not be obsessed with humiliating China. The first is a duty of government. The second can become an expensive distraction from the work of government.

8. Learn the material process, not the slogan

China's economic transformation offers a major field for investigation. The World Bank reports that the reform era beginning in 1978 was associated with extraordinary growth and the lifting of nearly 800 million people out of extreme poverty. That transformation merits study, not incantation. It involved changes in agriculture, manufacturing, investment, export production, infrastructure, and institutions. It also involved difficult costs and continuing challenges: environmental burdens, inequalities, demographic change, and constraints on political freedom. To study the result seriously is to ask both how prosperity expanded and which harms accompanied the expansion.

Here my economic synthesis returns. I am not asking India to adopt the doctrines of the Chinese Communist Party. I am asking it to understand that material conditions change through policy, incentives, experimentation, production, education, and the correction of error. A society that describes itself as dialectical yet refuses to test an economic policy is worshipping words. A society that describes itself as capitalist yet tolerates fraud, dangerous workplaces, and entrenched monopoly is also worshipping words. Neither label builds a factory or treats a patient by itself.

The productive lesson is one of method. Examine an industrial cluster and determine why firms locate together. Inspect the training system that supplies skilled workers. Study the ports and rail links that move goods. Identify what local governments made possible and what

restrictions imposed costs. Measure the effect of competition, trade, technology transfer, and public investment instead of crediting an entire result to a single beloved ideology. Then ask what could work in Indian conditions and what must be rejected because it violates human dignity.

A student who understands this method can learn from China, Germany, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, the United States, or a small Indian town that solved a municipal problem unusually well. The geographical origin of the lesson is an item in its history, not a proof of its truth.

9. The unfinished work in our own streets

Chapter Twelve examines the persistence of British prestige in the Indian mind. I have called the refusal to look in the mirror the Himalayan Blunder. This chapter applies those accusations to education and development. The person who spends an afternoon resenting Chinese achievement but never spends an hour learning how an effective technical school works has chosen rivalry over responsibility. The official who demands national greatness while ignoring a dangerous sewer, a failing clinic, or a classroom without teachers has mistaken the appearance of patriotism for its labor.

The proper response to another country's accomplishment begins at home. If a Chinese city has developed a reliable waste-treatment technique, an Indian municipality should investigate the method rather than manufacture an insult. If Chinese universities have constructed

impressive research facilities, Indian universities should ask how their students and scholars are funded, trained, equipped, and held accountable. If a policy fails in the Indian setting, the failure should lead to revision, not shame or ideological theater.

We cannot outsource our responsibilities even to the countries from which we learn. A Chinese professor cannot perform every Indian experiment. A Japanese factory cannot manage every Indian supply chain. An American medical journal cannot administer every Indian hospital. Our own people must do the work. The only durable benefit of foreign knowledge is the enlarged capacity to act independently.

There is compassion in that work. A technician who maintains a rural water pump may contribute more to the daily dignity of a village than a thousand speeches about national rank. A sanitation administrator who prevents workers from entering a dangerous confined space without protection is answering a moral call. A teacher who refuses to pass on a falsehood merely because it was printed in a prestigious book is restoring intellectual sovereignty. These acts do not defeat China. They serve India. That is enough reason to perform them.

10. Free minds, free markets, and the limits of contests

Some readers will ask whether my criticism of competition contradicts my defense of free markets. It does not, unless one mistakes an instrument for the purpose it is meant to serve. In an open economy, competition may expose inferior products, reveal consumer preferences, discipline prices, and stimulate invention. Those consequences are empirically testable and can be valuable. But none establishes that ceaseless competition is the moral meaning of life or the proper aim of international relations.

Competition is useful where it generates better service under fair rules. It becomes destructive where it rewards fraud, creates preventable injury, or destroys the social and environmental conditions on which productive life depends. Cooperation is useful where people can share discoveries, manage common resources, protect health, and solve problems jointly. It becomes destructive where it conceals coercion or suppresses independent criticism. We must judge both by what they do, not by the slogans attached to them.

A good scientist is dedicated to finding out what is true. She may compete for a grant, but the grant is not the purpose of the experiment. A good engineer is dedicated to building a safe bridge. His firm may compete for a contract, but winning a contract cannot excuse a collapsing structure. A good government is dedicated to the welfare and freedom of its citizens. Its economy may be compared with another's, but the comparison must remain a diagnostic tool. It must not become a reason to sacrifice those citizens to the vanity of a statistic.

This is the kind of free-market philosophy I defend: decentralized initiative in the service of human welfare, constrained by law and informed by evidence. When I say 'free minds and free markets,' I do not mean minds enslaved to market rivalry. I mean minds free enough to decide what is worth doing, and institutions flexible enough to help them do it.

11. The United Dharmic Alliance is not a championship league

The United Dharmic Alliance belongs in this discussion because it must not be conceived as an instrument for beating another civilization's membership totals or proving that one region is inherently superior. That would contradict its declared opposition to exceptionalism. A political alliance of societies with Indic, East Asian, and Inner Asian heritages cannot become intellectually emancipated by turning itself into a continental scoreboard.

Its purpose, as I propose it, is constructive and defensive: freedom of conscience, preservation of heritage, scientific exchange, economic opportunity, environmental protection, human security, and the ability to resist coercion without imitating it. India and China could contribute distinct capabilities. Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other proposed participants could also contribute, but no member should be asked to surrender its judgment to a dominant power. The principle is equality in dignity, not equality of size or capacity, and certainly not obedience to a single capital.

The alliance is a proposal. It is not an existing government, treaty, or common military command. Genuine cooperation would require negotiations, enforceable rights, transparent institutions, and mechanisms for managing disputes among sovereign states. These questions remain to be developed in the chapter that follows. For now the philosophical rule is clear: solidarity must enlarge the ability of people to think and act freely. It must not become another giant institution demanding gratitude for intellectual submission.

A university exchange is a small example of that larger possibility. Imagine Chinese and Indian students solving a water-treatment problem together, each bringing a discipline the other lacks. There is no dishonor in the collaboration. Neither civilization has lost by sharing a discovery. If the resulting technology gives ordinary people clean water at lower cost, the work has succeeded. The answer to the question 'Who won?' is: the people who can now drink safely.

12. The courage to become a student again

I return to the accusation with which I began. A civilization loses its way when it cannot choose a purpose except by observing whom it hopes to surpass. India need not organize its future as a permanent reaction to China's achievements. Its people were not born merely to provide competitors for Chinese citizens, nor were Chinese citizens born as obstacles to Indian self-respect. They were born with lives to live, children to raise, questions to answer, and human problems to solve. A politics that consumes those lives in status anxiety is an expensive form of vanity.

We can be proud that scholars from the Indian cultural world once taught in China. We should be equally proud, if our students now return from Chinese universities with knowledge that improves life in India. The direction of the journey changes; the dignity of learning does not. And we should welcome the Chinese student who discovers something useful in India, because knowledge does not lose its value by crossing a border in the opposite direction.

There is no final teacher. There is no permanent pupil. There is no civilization appointed to issue eternal certificates of intellectual superiority. There are only questions, methods, discoveries, mistakes, correction, and work. The duty of the student is to learn. The duty of the professional is to serve the purpose of the profession. The duty of the citizen is to help build institutions that protect human beings rather than flatter national vanity.

Look East, I have said. But do not replace a British mirror with a Chinese one. Learn from China because it has things worth learning, as we should learn from every society that has developed useful knowledge. Learn without humiliation. Disagree without hatred. Protect sovereignty without making hostility a religion. Dedicate yourself to your vocation without reducing the human world to a competition you must win.

India should not be obsessed with beating China. India should be dedicated to becoming capable of solving India's problems.

And if our children learn something valuable in Beijing, Shanghai, or Hangzhou, let them bring it home. The purpose of that journey is not to return with a trophy announcing that India has defeated China. It is to return with the knowledge, character, and competence to build what India needs.

The begging bowl of the student is not the sword of the conqueror. It is the vessel of the learner. There is no shame in filling it wherever knowledge can be found.

Chapter Fifteen — The United Dharmic Alliance: Many Rivers, One Ocean

1. A charter for living people, not a museum of injured ancestors

The United Dharmic Alliance is not proposed so that the descendants of ancient philosophers may congratulate themselves upon their ancestors. It is proposed because living people need the capacity to protect their freedom, educate their children, preserve their inheritance, care for their environment, and work with other societies without kneeling before them. A banner alone accomplishes nothing. An alliance that produces magnificent ceremonies and miserable public institutions would be another splendid caricature of the civilization it claims to restore.

I begin with a distinction that every serious reader must understand. The UDA does not exist as a treaty organization. No government has joined it. The economic, demographic, technical and military figures in my manifesto are illustrative aggregates, not the resources of an actual joint command, treasury or legal institution. The manifesto is a proposal. Its existence on paper creates neither the consent of states nor the consent of peoples. To exaggerate the alliance's present status would violate the very discipline of evidence upon which this book insists.

Why propose it, then? Because a civilizational inheritance can be a source of cooperation without becoming a claim of superiority. The historic exchanges among the peoples of India, China, Japan, Korea, the Himalayan region, and Southeast Asia were never a single kingdom or a single church. They included Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Daoism, Shinto, Confucian and indigenous traditions, and a thousand local arrangements of language and authority. Ideas traveled; texts were translated; monuments were constructed; practices changed. The lesson is not that everyone was identical. It is that people need not become identical in order to learn from one another.

Many rivers, one ocean: not one river conquering the banks of the others. No nation is appointed the teacher forever. No nation is condemned to be the pupil forever. India once contributed scholarship to China; today Indian students may learn from Chinese laboratories and universities. The intellectual traffic must remain open in both directions. An India that refuses to learn in order to preserve its pride is not independent. It is merely a prisoner of pride. An India that learns and applies what is useful has performed the first act of emancipation.

The central question for the alliance is therefore modest and formidable: can societies with distinct histories create institutions that make ordinary life safer, freer, healthier and more intellectually independent? An institution either helps answer that question or becomes another ceremonial idol.

2. Defense without a theological throne

I propose cooperation among Dharmic and East Asian societies in part because empires have repeatedly dressed political coercion in sacred authority. My charge is against the institutions and rulers who converted theology into a warrant for conquest, coerced conversion, or the suppression of conscience. A scripture is not a deed to somebody else's land or mind.

The image is severe and deliberate: the begging bowl asks; the sword commands. A teacher may offer a text, a question, a translation or a bowl, and may be refused. Persuasion becomes domination when it arrives with confiscation, penal law, unequal citizenship or an occupying army. My institutional rule is absolute: no person may be compelled to accept a religion or punished for refusing it.

If a proposed Dharmic alliance were to make belief in Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Daoism or Shinto a condition of citizenship, it would defeat its own declared purpose. It would have reproduced the system of intellectual captivity it was created to resist. No compulsory savior. No final prophet imposed upon the unwilling. No infallible state philosophy. No civilization is entitled to make its historical memory an instrument of contemporary coercion.

The question of defense cannot be evaded. Sovereign societies need lawful institutions capable of protecting civilians, preserving borders, negotiating disagreements, safeguarding heritage and resisting coercion. But the existence of defense policy does not require the

constant performance of hostility. India need not construct its national purpose around beating China. China need not measure its future by humiliating India. A nation dedicated to public health, engineering, education and honest government may become stronger as an effect of its work, not as the end of a ceaseless contest for superiority.

Dedication is not passivity. Compassion is not helplessness. A country can defend its legitimate interests without making rivalry its metaphysics. The alliance I propose should offer channels of communication, de-escalation, mediation, cultural restoration and cooperative projects before considering more demanding arrangements. Security without freedom would be a prison; freedom without the capacity to protect it would be fragile. Both facts belong in the institutional design.

3. Equal partners, and the individual above the emblem

The founding intellectual commitment is parity. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are not landlords admitting lesser tenants. Daoism, Shinto, Confucian traditions, Bon, Tengriism and East and Inner Asian indigenous traditions are equal partners. No faith leads by chronological priority, by the number of its adherents, by a claim of revelation or by the political weight of its associated state. Many rivers are allowed to remain rivers.

The person who belongs to none of these traditions must be equally free. The religious history of a territory is not the religious identity of every person living there. A Japanese atheist, an Indian Christian, a

Chinese Muslim, a Nepalese secular humanist, or a Vietnamese citizen who rejects organized religion must be protected by the same guarantees of life, conscience and equal treatment. It would be absurd for an organization built around the criticism of compulsory authority to become an authority that owns the consciences of its citizens.

Every person must retain the freedom to embrace, leave, change, criticize or reject a religious tradition. The right must include transitions among the alliance's associated traditions, movements into other faiths and movements into no faith at all. The old community may grieve a departure. It may not imprison the departing member. The future community may welcome the person. It may not claim the right to control that person thereafter. The person is neither property nor a trophy.

This principle is not merely my preference. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to change religion or belief. Article 19 addresses expression and access to information. The UDA's commitments should meet at least these standards, not dilute them beneath a claim of regional particularity. A tradition is not humiliated by the freedom of people to disagree with it; its intellectual confidence is tested by its willingness to permit disagreement.

A larger difficulty must not be concealed. My 2026 manifesto proposes the membership of India, China, Japan, both Koreas, Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and

Thailand, with other relevant Himalayan Buddhist communities; Russia appears as an honorary participant in its illustrative aggregates. Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines are proposed observers. The same manifesto permanently excludes Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives, citing my evaluation of their historic treatment of Dharmic heritage. This is my political proposal, not an existing diplomatic settlement; it is not an assessment of the moral worth of those populations. I preserve its declared boundaries here rather than silently rewriting an authoritative manifesto.

Yet the founding philosophy must be able to ask a difficult question about its own text. If institutions and societies are capable of correction, can any membership rule be beyond public debate? The manifesto's present exclusion can be recorded without declaring the proposal itself infallible. The association's constitutional process must allow members to debate the implications of all charter provisions through transparent and peaceful procedures. No reader should be asked to pretend that permanent political exclusions and universal philosophical revisability are effortlessly identical propositions. A serious institution can live with a tension only by making it visible rather than burying it under rhetoric.

4. Five instruments, none a new scripture

In the alliance I propose, the five instruments have practical assignments: study material conditions, test results, protect equal worth, guarantee dissent, and permit decentralized invention. They will be judged by the functioning institutions they produce.

The alliance must teach these competing perspectives without demanding discipleship. Philosophy belongs in secondary education as a discipline of argument; nobody must adopt my particular tools as a creed.

5. Transparency: the air without which democracy suffocates

Transparency is not a slogan about virtue. It is an operating condition. In darkness, democracy dies. An election does not by itself make a government intelligible. A person may cast a ballot and still be unable to discover who awarded a contract, which official authorized an expense, why a public service failed, or what happened after the citizen filed a complaint. The ballot is a necessary instrument of accountability, but it cannot inspect a machine that has been deliberately concealed.

I propose a simple rule: the business of the public must ordinarily be public, intelligible and reviewable. Government budgets should be available in forms that citizens can understand. Procurement notices, successful bids, contract changes and delivery reports should be open to independent inspection. Administrative decisions should identify their legal basis and decision-maker. Audit findings must be published

rather than buried in inaccessible archives. Public institutions should publish usable local-language explanations, not merely vast digital warehouses of unsearchable paper.

Complete transparency cannot mean the publication of a child's medical record, a threatened witness's address or an individual's private correspondence. The secrecy that protects a vulnerable person is different from the secrecy that conceals the misuse of public power. A competent framework must distinguish them. Privacy, due process and legitimate security needs should be narrowly protected while discretionary public spending, rule-making and official performance remain subject to strong scrutiny.

This is where my three institutional conditions meet: Free Minds, Free Markets and Transparency. Free Minds can ask why a hospital overpaid for supplies. Competitive providers can offer alternatives where appropriate. Transparent purchasing records make price, quality and official decisions visible. None of these guarantees honesty. A business owner may be corrupt; employees may be corrupt; regulators may be captured. That is why audit trails, independent review, whistleblower protections, conflict-of-interest rules and enforceable sanctions are needed. The purpose is not to discover a saint. It is to make concealment harder, detection easier, and correction possible.

A self-correcting society does not wait for a perfect minister. It makes the minister answerable. It does not wait for an immortal honest corporation. It requires disclosure, lawful competition and remedies. It

does not replace public responsibility with endless moral lectures. It builds procedures by which ordinary people can see what has gone wrong and participate in repairing it. In darkness, democracy dies; in the open, it at least possesses the means to correct itself.

6. The locality is the place where philosophy becomes visible

A philosophy that cannot reach a village street has not yet completed its journey. Local solutions for local problems are not a sentimental slogan. They are an argument about knowledge, responsibility and access. The person who walks a flooded road every morning knows its condition in a way a distant capital may never know. The nurse who treats children from one contaminated neighborhood may notice a pattern before an administrative report travels upward. The teacher who sees an empty classroom knows something about the failure of attendance policy. This knowledge must find a lawful route into decisions and budgets.

Decentralization alone does not produce justice. A local council may be captured by caste, wealth, family networks or organized intimidation. A municipality may lack technical skill. A village dispute may require an impartial authority outside the village. Therefore local empowerment must include trained specialists, published procedures, rights protection, independent appeals and accessible audit. Localism without safeguards can turn proximity into oppression. Centralism without local knowledge can turn distance into neglect. The solution is

neither idol; it is a distribution of responsibilities that can be evaluated and revised.

The practical proposal is to establish local problem-solving laboratories, supported by universities and public agencies, where residents identify one problem, gather baseline evidence, compare options, choose an intervention, publish costs and measure results. Water quality, classroom attendance, waste management, road drainage, public-toilet maintenance, vaccination access and soil quality are suitable subjects. The results should be in the language of the people affected. A resident should be able to ask: what was promised, who spent the money, what changed, and what failed?

In a functioning alliance, villages and towns could learn from one another without adopting a foreign institution wholesale. A sanitation system that works in one climate may require revision in another. A digital records platform helpful to a city may not help a remote mountain village without connectivity. Translation is both linguistic and institutional. The purpose of exchange is not to produce replicas of an admired country. It is to expand the number of practical options available to free citizens.

7. Philosophy in the high school, responsibility outside it

I propose compulsory high-school philosophical education because the habits of intellectual independence cannot be expected to emerge automatically from examinations that reward memorization. Students should learn the difference between a claim and its evidence, between a valid inference and a seductive fallacy, between a moral commitment and a material description, and between a public promise and a measured outcome. They should learn to distinguish personal reverence from historical proof.

Dialectical Materialism should be studied as one influential family of materialist and historical approaches to changing systems; logical empiricism as a tradition of clarity, formal reasoning and empirical discipline, including criticism of its historical verificationist excesses; Secular Humanism as an ethical commitment to equal persons and human welfare. Classical Indic skepticism, Nyaya logic, Buddhist epistemology, Jain plural approaches, modern science, political philosophy and critics of materialism should be present too. The aim is not five approved answers. It is the ability to investigate five thousand questions.

Education must not end with philosophical vocabulary. Each student should undertake a supervised civic inquiry: investigate a local environmental problem, interview sanitation workers, examine a public expenditure, map a safety hazard, or assess an evidence-based intervention. A student must learn to identify uncertainty, protect private information and avoid blaming individuals without evidence.

She should publish a clear report that her family and neighbors can understand. Teachers should reward transparent methods and willingness to revise conclusions, not ideological obedience.

International cooperation can help. An alliance university inspired by Nalanda would not claim to resurrect an ancient institution intact. It would establish serious contemporary programs in public health, environmental science, technology, historical languages, translation, comparative philosophy, governance and medicine. Students should cross borders in both directions: Indians may learn from Chinese universities; Chinese students may learn from Indian scholars; Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Himalayan institutions may contribute according to their own strengths. Each student must remain free to criticize the host institution and return home without being enlisted into propaganda.

UNESCO's 2023 Recommendation on education for peace, human rights and sustainable development provides useful independent support for critical thinking, cooperation, respect for diversity and environmental stewardship. My proposed UDA education program is distinct from UNESCO's recommendation. A philosophy of emancipation should learn from external work without stealing its authority or pretending that a proposal has already been adopted.

8. The broom, the gymnasium and the meal

Let the language become as plain as the problems. There is more immediate public benefit in sweeping a filthy street, exercising in a gymnasium and feeding a hungry person than in treating a temple visit or the singing of bhajans as a substitute for these duties. Personal prayer and music may comfort those who choose them. They do not by themselves construct drainage, prevent contamination or deliver nourishment. The point is not to confiscate devotion. It is to refuse to let devotion impersonate civic accomplishment.

All gurus should become sweepers of the filthy streets before preaching anything metaphysical. That is my deliberately brutal challenge to inherited authority. Pick up the broom. Clean the public toilet. Learn what an unsafe sewer smells like and what it costs a worker to enter it. Feed the child before delivering a magnificent address about universal compassion. I would rather see the spiritual leader demonstrate the dignity of ordinary labor than issue another billion-dollar blank check promising world peace while public health remains neglected.

The gymnasium belongs in this argument for the same reason. The body is material. It grows ill and requires care. No philosopher is lifted above the needs of exercise, clean water, sleep, medical attention and physical safety because admirers call him enlightened. A godman who enjoys bodily health is welcome to it. He should not mistake spiritual celebrity for a public-health system. Send him to the gymnasium, and ask him to return prepared for ordinary human responsibilities.

No sanitation worker is inferior to a saint. No profession that keeps another human being alive is beneath the dignity of civilization. Religious institutions may themselves feed people, maintain hospitals or perform charitable work; those acts should be evaluated by the human benefit they deliver, not discounted because of the identities of their sponsors. The moral test is conduct. Sweep the street. Protect the worker. Feed the hungry. Repair the water supply. Then, if you wish, discuss the metaphysics of the cosmos. At least you will have given the living world some evidence of your concern for it.

9. Ecological Dharma is a demanding material program

I want the alliance to declare its environmental commitments without evasion. The final manifesto calls for a complete, planned end to fossil-fuel dependence, vigorous development of solar, wind and genuinely low-emission hydrogen, and protection of clean air, water, soil, forests, biodiversity and organic agriculture. These are aspirations; a serious alliance must turn them into publicly testable programs.

A river does not become clean because a priest blesses it. Its water must be sampled, sources of contamination identified, discharges regulated, treatment facilities maintained and results made public. A forest does not revive because a minister dedicates a commemorative plaque. Restoration requires land stewardship, species knowledge, monitoring and a willingness to change interventions that fail. A child cannot breathe a manifesto. The quality of air must be improved by real changes in energy, transport, industry and exposure.

An orderly transition away from fossil fuels must also reckon with reliability, cost, labor, materials and the conditions of poorer households. Solar and wind systems require grids, storage or other balancing arrangements. Hydrogen varies enormously in its emissions depending upon how it is produced. Organic agricultural practices can bring benefits in some contexts, but food security, soil outcomes and yield must be examined empirically rather than assumed from the label. The ecological proposal must submit itself to science, precisely because it claims to respect life.

An alliance can create shared measurement standards, open monitoring platforms, joint research programs, emergency-response cooperation and professional exchanges. It can finance pilots while publishing successes and failures. It can protect farmers and workers affected by changes in energy and land use. A genuinely Dharmic environmental ethic is not the repetition of a sacred adjective. It is the willingness to prevent damage to beings who cannot attend the conference where the adjective is spoken.

10. From great men to great systems

Gandhi and many who worked with him displayed historical influence, courage and commitment. None of that exempts the institutions of independent India from judgment. A nation dependent on the arrival of another exceptional reformer has not secured ordinary governance. Heroes die; the water system must function the next morning.

What is needed are great systems, great philosophies and great organizations. This does not mean gigantic ministries or institutions beyond criticism. A system is great when it continues to make responsible decisions despite the imperfection of its officeholders; when a dishonest person has difficulty hiding; when a competent worker is not punished for reporting a failure; when a citizen can understand a rule without securing a patron; and when the public can change the rule after observing its results.

Societal correction is itself an open dialectical process. Material circumstances change. Free Minds discover new problems and propose alternatives. Logical Empiricism tests claims against results. Secular Humanism asks who is harmed and whose dignity is ignored. Free Markets may permit many productive solutions to be tried. Dialectical Materialism directs attention to relationships, tensions, change and unintended consequences. Transparency exposes what the institutions actually did. The next round of decisions begins with those findings, not with another promise of infallibility.

I do not propose a world without charismatic individuals. I propose a world in which charisma has no power to exempt itself from proof. The wise person is welcome to speak; the evidence must still be examined. The honest official is welcome to serve; the public must still inspect his accounts. A gifted entrepreneur may build a useful company; its products, wages, impacts and legal duties remain open to scrutiny. Honest conduct is admirable. An institution that can correct dishonesty is indispensable.

Building a great society is not an individual effort. But it is the open responsibility of every individual. This is the distinction upon which the future depends: shared responsibility without a final savior, distributed initiative without abandonment of common duties, individual freedom without indifference to neighbors.

11. An alliance that begins with small, public commitments

The first activities of the UDA should be specific enough that a skeptical citizen can tell whether they happened. I would begin with a multilingual academic exchange platform, a protected cultural-heritage documentation network, joint environmental monitoring, a public-health collaboration, a program for local problem-solving institutions and voluntary mediation between interested participants. Each should have a defined purpose, independent audits, public budgets, data-protection rules and mechanisms for correcting mistakes. Every one should be allowed to end if it fails.

A first charter must distinguish an invited observer, an honorary participant, a member state and an independent civil society institution. It must specify who can sign, who can withdraw, which decisions require consent, what authority is expressly withheld, and how disputes are reviewed. No association should claim power over a member's people merely because its leaders signed an impressive document. Sovereignty and individual rights are not ceremonial concessions.

Its scientists should be free to publish findings that contradict ministerial speeches. Its historians should be allowed to discover that

an admired ancestor did something reprehensible. Its students should be able to leave a program. Its workers should be able to report unsafe conditions. Its auditors should be able to examine expenditure without asking permission from the persons who spent the money. Any institution that rejects these liberties should be asked why it belongs to an alliance of reason.

The manifesto's illustrative comparison with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation must not be mistaken for an invitation to create a race for military totals. The OIC is an existing organization; the UDA is hypothetical. The figures in my two-page manifesto are illustrative rather than independently audited statistics. The measure of the UDA's value should be the freedom it protects, the competence it builds and the cooperative projects it completes, not the size of a theoretical arsenal formed by adding the weapons of states that have not agreed to join.

The same warning applies to its founding traditions. Heritage does not guarantee agreement. India and China have modern territorial disagreements. The Korean peninsula is divided. Members would differ in political systems, economic organization and relations with other states. To list them together is to describe my desired horizon, not to abolish the work of diplomacy. The book refuses the childish assumption that a civilizational map can replace negotiation. Real cooperation must begin with real differences in full view.

12. The alliance's indispensable moral test

I would test the alliance with questions that have no interest in the poetry of its ceremonies. Can a student challenge a famous teacher and remain enrolled? Can a minority family change its religion without punishment? Can a sanitation worker refuse a deadly task? Can the village see the expenditure on its drinking water? Can a journalist ask why a contractor failed? Can two governments disagree without declaring each other's civilization illegitimate? Can a citizen find public information in a language he understands? Can a scientist report that the favored environmental plan did not work? Can a philosopher say that Dialectical Materialism is mistaken about a particular claim and still be treated as a colleague?

If the answer is no, the alliance has failed before its first great conference. If the answer is yes, it has begun to acquire a legitimacy no ancient emblem can confer. Dharma, Dao and Kami need not become competing signatures upon a single compulsory creed. Their historical associations may inspire cooperation among people who are, above all, free to think.

The manifesto says many rivers, one ocean. I would add a condition: every river must be free to flow, and none should poison another. The alliance has no business becoming a new empire of salvation. Its purpose is to make societies less dependent upon empires, gurus, political patrons and infallible economic formulas. An institution is justified by what it enables human beings to do, not by what it demands they revere.

One question remains after all the banners have been folded and the delegates have departed. Is the local school better? Is the river cleaner? Is the public office more honest? Is the worker safer? Is the student freer? If not, begin again. We have not assembled a civilization in order to admire its photograph.

Chapter Sixteen — The Irrational God

Revelation, absolutism, and the politics of unquestionable authority

For two thousand years and more, rulers and institutions have made the same astonishing demand: accept an unverifiable claim as an absolute command, and treat dissent as a crime. My quarrel is not with the existence of Christian, Muslim, or Jewish believers, whose human dignity and freedom of conscience must be protected without exception. It is with the conversion of religious certainty into coercive power. When an assertion is placed above evidence and a priesthood or state is authorized to enforce it, faith has ceased to be one possible answer to human uncertainty. It has become a claim of ownership over other minds.

The record of imperial conversion, sectarian persecution, and religious law needs neither embellishment nor euphemism. Wherever worship was prohibited, departure from a faith punished, or a conquered population made subject to an official religious monopoly, conscience was brought under coercive power. Let the defenders of that power answer the decrees, names, dates, and consequences. Peaceful believers elsewhere do not erase the specific violence under examination.

The monopoly on truth

A doctrine becomes politically dangerous when it insists that certainty must be enforced rather than argued for. Claims of exclusive salvation, final revelation, or chosen status may be held as religious convictions in a free society. They become instruments of domination when their custodians demand criminal penalties for disbelief, legal disabilities for outsiders, or compulsory conversion. The threshold is not a person's private belief in one God or many gods. It is the public attempt to turn one community's belief into everybody else's obligation.

This distinction makes my principle universal. I refuse the supremacy of a prophet over the unwilling just as I refuse the supremacy of a Hindu guru, a caste scripture, a communist party committee, or a nationalist leader over the unwilling. A new Hindu orthodoxy would not defeat absolutism. It would reproduce it with different icons. The true adversary is the unaccountable claim to command the mind.

Conquest is not an argument

Burned sanctuaries, prohibited rituals, punitive religious laws, and coerced submission stand as historical charges against the authorities responsible. Their existence cannot be canceled by invoking charitable missionaries or peaceful exchange elsewhere. Those histories deserve examination too, but they are not an alibi. A civilizational argument becomes stronger when it identifies the actual machinery of coercion instead of assigning hereditary guilt to everyone who later inherits the religion.

If a ruler destroys a shrine, produce the record. If a religious institution punishes apostasy, quote the law and establish how it was enforced. If a missionary acts under colonial protection, document the alliance. If persuasion occurs without compulsion, record that fact without using it to pardon coercion elsewhere. This is how an indictment becomes stronger than propaganda: the exhibits survive the defendant's objections.

The pluralist resource—and its limits

Indic thought possesses an extraordinary range: devotion and skepticism, monism and dualism, Buddhist critiques of substantial selfhood, Jain approaches to many-sided judgment, the arguments of materialists, and a long history of philosophical disputation. That diversity offers intellectual resources for resisting monopoly. It does not prove that Indic societies were never violent, never hierarchical, or never intolerant. A civilization does not become pluralist merely by having many deities. It becomes pluralist when disagreement is possible without humiliation or fear.

Here my criticism turns inward. A society that denounces foreign theological supremacy while practicing hereditary caste exclusion has not overcome absolutism; it has merely located it at home. A temple that praises the unity of being while denying equal human dignity is not the cure for domination. It is one more institution to be examined. The argument for Hindu plurality can be defended only by refusing to make Hindu history immune to criticism.

Nor does plurality require that every proposition be true. Contradictory medical claims cannot all be equally effective; engineering cannot survive by permitting every bridge to remain sound in theory. Intellectual plurality means freedom to propose, criticize, experiment, and correct—not freedom to exempt a cherished claim from the world it describes. The plural mind can tolerate rival arguments precisely because it accepts the possibility of error.

Caste cannot be explained away

Polytheism is not an answer to caste injustice. Nor is the fact that caste hierarchy was not generally exported through a worldwide missionary empire a defense of it. Internal humiliation is still humiliation. To describe hereditary rank as merely a vocational classification evades the long historical record of exclusion and the struggle against it. Reformers such as Phule, Savitribai Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar, Kabir, Ravidas, and many others did not need the verdict of a foreign civilization to recognize a domestic wrong.

If the Upanishadic expression Tat Tvam Asi is invoked as a moral argument for shared worth, the test is practical: does the society stop assigning status by birth? Do schools welcome every child? Can a worker refuse degrading labor? Does the law protect everyone? Metaphysical equality that never enters the village, street, or workplace is consolation, not emancipation.

The secular priesthood

Religious monopolies on truth have unmistakable secular counterparts. A party can make dissent treason; a bureaucracy can make criticism insubordination; a corporation can turn the chief executive into an oracle. No invocation of science, progress, national greatness, or historical necessity should shield power from examination. The cure is not a competing orthodoxy. It is a set of enforceable liberties: audit, open argument, due process, the right to leave, and the power to correct errors.

Communism can become dogma when it forbids revision. Markets can become dogma when their advocates refuse evidence of external damage and exploitation. Democracy can be betrayed when a majority tries to extinguish minority rights. Scientific institutions can also become complacent, which is why science is defined not by an infallible priesthood but by methods of criticism, replication, and correction. My target is always the same: authority that refuses to answer the evidence.

The final question

Humanity faces grave challenges that neither scriptural decree nor civilizational nostalgia can resolve: public health, ecological limits, technological change, migration, war, and economic insecurity. Their remedies will not come from one sacred formula imposed upon all. They require inquiry across borders, respect for persons, cooperation among different traditions, and the courage to discard an explanation when reality defeats it.

If Hindu pluralism is to contribute to that future, it must first pass the examination it offers to others. End caste humiliation. End the demand for gurus as substitute saviors. Permit dissent. Protect every person's freedom to believe, change belief, or have none. Clean the streets before boasting of transcendence. Judge institutions by their consequences. Do not turn plurality into one more banner under which criticism is forbidden.

The irrational god, in this argument, is not a license to despise religious people. It is the symbol of every authority—religious, ideological, national, or commercial—that demands obedience in place of reasons. The free mind answers with a question. The responsible citizen follows with an act. No master is coming to save us. None is needed to begin.

Chapter Seventeen — Public Health Over Caste

The immediate obligation of social self-reform

For Hindu society to flourish, birth-based caste hierarchy must be rejected without qualification. Not next century, not after another religious revival, not when a charismatic teacher grants permission. Now. A society that insists upon inherited superiority while asking the world to respect its civilization has abandoned the most elementary test of respect: how it treats the people within its own streets.

The first measure of a living civilization is not the number of festivals it conducts or the grandeur of its metaphysical vocabulary. It is whether its people can live without avoidable disease, hunger, humiliation, and terror; whether workers can return safely to their families; whether children can attend school without caste insult; whether public institutions can be corrected when they fail. Public health is not only an administrative subject. It is the visible examination of ethical seriousness.

An imported word does not erase an indigenous injustice

The English word caste derives through Portuguese casta, a term associated with lineage and descent. European colonial administrators classified and sometimes hardened Indian social divisions through census systems, legal categories, and official practices. Yet the origin of a foreign word does not establish that hereditary stratification or exclusion was invented by foreigners. Varna, jati, occupation, rank, and localized forms of endogamy had histories that predated European rule. Both historical realities must be confronted. Blaming the vocabulary is no substitute for abolishing the injury.

The internal inheritance of dissent

India does not need to borrow the moral right to criticize caste from any colonial capital. Its own intellectual and reform traditions contain fierce objections to inherited rank. Narratives associated with Satyakama Jabala ask questions about the relation between truthfulness and social standing; the Vajrasuchika Upanishad challenges simplistic claims that spiritual status rests on birth; devotional and social reform movements created new languages of equal worth. These sources vary in date, genre, and interpretation and must be cited precisely, rather than transformed into one conveniently unanimous tradition.

Kabir confronted ritual arrogance. Ravidas imagined Begumpura, a city without fear and oppression. Basavanna and the Sharana movement challenged entrenched social boundaries. The legacies of Chokhamela, Ramanuja, Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule, Periyar, and B. R. Ambedkar

show that the struggle over dignity belongs inside the subcontinent's intellectual history, not outside it. Their disagreements matter; their common refusal to accept humiliation as destiny matters even more.

Conversion is a right, not a substitute for social reform

An individual must remain free to leave Hinduism, embrace another religion, reject all religions, or return without threats. Religious freedom includes the right to leave. It is equally true that changing a religious affiliation does not mechanically erase social prejudice. Studies and accounts of Dalit Christian and Pasmanda Muslim experiences reveal continuing forms of status discrimination in some communities and institutions. The patterns differ and require particular evidence; no honest writer can declare every convert permanently excluded or every congregation identical.

The lesson is not that the oppressed should stay where they suffer. The lesson is that no community can outsource social justice to a change of label. Those who remain Hindu must abolish caste discrimination. Those who leave deserve equal citizenship and complete freedom. Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, atheists, and every other citizen must face inherited discrimination wherever it survives. The human being, not the prestige of a community, is the measure.

My argument goes further. Hinduism is, by and large, open to reform from within because no single worldwide ecclesiastical authority can command every Hindu school, interpretation, or practice. A Dalit can remain Hindu, reject inherited caste privilege, challenge ritual

supremacy, and participate in reconstructing the tradition itself. I argue, by contrast, that Christianity and Islam are not open to rewriting their foundational revelations in that same way: churches and Islamic communities can reform institutions and interpretations, but their central revelatory claims are held to be authoritative. The limits of doctrinal reform and the distribution of institutional power matter to anyone promised liberation by conversion.

I also argue that Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam do not thereby enter the inherited political, cultural, ethnic, and civilizational hierarchies that have historically held influence within those religions. A Dalit Christian does not inherit European ecclesiastical prestige; a Dalit Muslim does not acquire Arab ancestry or Ashraf standing by adopting a new creed. These are arguments about power, status, and institutions—not a denial of converts' equal humanity, their freedom to choose their beliefs, or the ability of believers in either tradition to organize for reform. Conversion is a right. Automatic emancipation through conversion is a myth.

A civic program instead of a ritual escape

The argument must enter budgets, schools, streets, and workplaces. End discriminatory access to temples and public facilities. Enforce equal treatment in housing, education, employment, and policing. Protect sanitation workers with mechanization, training, accountable contracts, and independent inspection. Support the people who expose discrimination. Give children the confidence to question every explanation that justifies unequal human worth.

Let gurus who preach metaphysical purity first demonstrate respect for the dignity of labor. Let the teacher of cosmic unity be willing to sweep a filthy street. Let the devotee who praises compassion feed a hungry person. Let the institution that announces spiritual equality open its doors and its accounts to scrutiny. None of this prohibits worship. It refuses to allow worship to become an excuse for abandoning material obligations.

There is more immediate benefit in cleaning a dangerous street, maintaining physical health, and feeding the hungry than in treating an additional ritual as a substitute for those duties. That is the ethical judgment advanced here: material action must answer to human welfare, not to the applause of a devotional audience. A philosophy that cannot improve ordinary life must not be rewarded for its vocabulary.

The final moral imperative

Reject casteism. Reject regional contempt. Reject the cult of the guru. Reject inherited distinctions that make one person lesser before the law. Replace them with equal citizenship, scientific inquiry, accountable government, independent thought, and serious work. The first struggle is within. It will never be won by waiting for a final prophet or a flawless master.

Better that a corrupt interpretation of religion perish than that the oppression of Dalits continue in its name. Better that an inherited boast be discarded than that an avoidable death remain hidden behind it. A civilization worthy of renewal is not one that forbids criticism. It is one capable of correcting itself.

Conclusion — Hindu Emancipation Is Now or Never

1. The conqueror departed; the mirror remained

Britain's political departure did not remove the colonial habit of intellectual deference. That is where the indictment of our own conduct begins. An external power may impose its institutions, language, hierarchies and habits of deference. But decades after political independence, a living society must ask which habits it continues to preserve, why it preserves them and who benefits from their survival. There is no dignity in denouncing an absent ruler while repeating his assumptions without inspection.

The Himalayan Blunder is not merely that foreign powers once conquered portions of the subcontinent. Conquest was an injury; often a grievous one. The blunder I accuse us of perpetuating is the conversion of injury into dependency, the cultivation of people who wait for a politician, a foreign expert, a holy man or an inherited institution to solve every real and imaginary problem. That accusation is intentionally harsh, and it concerns habits and arrangements rather than a fixed nature belonging to every Hindu. A civilization contains dissenters, reformers, inventors, caregivers, courageous workers and brilliant minds. Their existence proves that fatalism is not destiny. It does not excuse the failure to make independent action an ordinary public habit.

The map records what foreign power took; the mirror shows what we still refuse to change. This is the distinction between historical explanation and present responsibility.

Look East, yes. Learn from Japan's history of institutional adaptation, China's contemporary universities and engineering, Korea's investment in education and technical capability, Vietnam's experience of reform, and every other society whose achievements can be investigated. But do not turn the new teacher into a new master. India must not be born again as a permanent competitor seeking to defeat China at every game. It must dedicate itself to its own responsibilities. Dedication can express beauty, charity, compassion and humanity. The schoolteacher must teach; the engineer must build; the physician must heal; the citizen must inspect the public office. A society devoted to its work needs no foreign rival to tell it that the work matters.

2. The material world is waiting for work, not worship

My indictment of spiritual dependency will offend those who believe that the sight of a saint is a sufficient answer to a public problem. It is intended to offend the habit, not to forbid the person's faith. A society drowning in filth does not require another promise that the soul can transcend the body. It requires clean water, functioning drains, safe toilets, honest procurement, protective equipment for sanitation workers and institutions capable of maintaining them.

No gurus, no babas, no swamis, no sants, no saviors and no mahatmas can save a society from the ordinary duties it refuses to perform. In the

satirical language of this book, send the godmen to the nearest gymnasium for their own physical well-being. Better still, invite them to sweep a filthy street before delivering another sermon on metaphysical purity. Let them clean a public toilet and learn what the people who maintain civilization must do every day. The broom does not ask whether the hand holding it has realized the absolute. It removes filth. A hungry child cannot eat a bhajan. A polluted river does not become potable because someone praises the sacredness of water.

This does not deny the pleasure of devotion, the comfort of song, the right to worship or the charitable work that some religious communities actually perform. It denies those activities the privilege of substituting for measurable civic responsibility. The sanitation worker is not inferior to the saint. The nurse is not inferior to the prophet. The public-health inspector is not inferior to the celebrated preacher. When the question is disease prevention, those who prevent disease are performing the relevant work. Before instructing humanity on the route to heaven, help make the earth habitable.

The material world is wonderfully indifferent to our reputations. A bridge either bears its load or it does not. A water supply either passes testing or it does not. A market either coordinates useful production under lawful conditions or it fails. A child either receives an education or is denied one. We may give spiritual meaning to our activities if we choose. But the empirical consequences remain available for examination, and the public has a right to know them.

3. Five instruments, and the freedom to reject every one

The five instruments are not five scriptures. I have used them to diagnose and repair social problems. Their value is practical, and the reader remains free to reject any one of them.

Teach philosophy and logic in schools as an invitation to think, never as a compulsory creed. Teach young citizens to inspect evidence, debate public decisions, and correct error without asking permission from a master.

4. The three conditions for honest government

I have argued for three necessary conditions in the practice of accountable public life: Free Minds, Free Markets and Transparency. Let me state their relationship carefully. Minds must be free to ask questions, identify defects and propose alternatives. Where appropriate, markets can give people independent options and allow productive solutions to be tested rather than assigned by a single hierarchy. Transparency makes the conduct of public authority visible enough for citizens to judge and correct it. Other protections are also required: equal rights, independent courts, fair regulation, due process and safeguards against intimidation. A three-part formula is a beginning for institutional design, not an incantation that makes corruption vanish.

In darkness, democracy dies. A public office that conceals its decisions invites dependency upon insiders who claim to know what happened. A contract written so obscurely that the citizen cannot inspect it is not

rendered honest by publishing it in an obscure database. The people need intelligible information, available in their languages, in useful formats, showing what was promised, what was spent and what was delivered. Privacy must protect the vulnerable; official secrecy must not protect avoidable misconduct.

I have no patience with the fantasy that enough great individuals will make systems unnecessary. Gandhi and many of those who worked with him may be honored for the courage they displayed. The dead cannot remain forever at the public service counter correcting the living. A society needs procedures that still function when a saint retires, a charismatic leader fails, a minister is corrupt or a gifted organizer dies. It needs systems in which dishonesty can be discovered, decisions challenged, errors repaired and power peacefully transferred. Great individuals may inspire. Great institutions must endure.

Societal correction is an open dialectical process. Conditions change, people propose solutions, evidence tests them, ethics judges their human consequences, citizens criticize the results, and the next decision begins with what has been learned. A completed reform is not a permanent exemption from reform. The capacity to revise is the achievement. The society that pretends to have arrived at final perfection has only invented another language of decay.

5. Responsibility begins nearby

The first tests of emancipation will not occur in the speeches of international conferences. They will occur in the ordinary places where human beings live. Can the school explain why a child cannot read? Can the clinic document why medicine is unavailable? Can the village understand its drinking-water accounts? Can the worker report unsafe conditions and keep his job? Can the person who changes religion remain protected by law? Can the resident inspect the budget and ask why the drain is still blocked?

Local solutions for local problems mean giving people the authority, knowledge and resources to undertake work near them, while retaining the legal rights that protect individuals from local elites. This is neither a cult of the village nor a worship of the capital. Some matters require local insight; others require regional expertise, national financing or international scientific cooperation. Responsibility must be distributed according to the actual problem, then evaluated according to the actual result.

Protect ecology. Protect the soil. Measure the air. Clean the river. Feed the hungry. Maintain the public toilet. Teach the young to reason. Build safe roads. Make courts understandable. Publish the budget. Treat the person who disagrees with you as an equal. The accomplishments that make a civilization habitable are not usually accomplished in one ecstatic moment. They are performed by people who return to their duties tomorrow.

The United Dharmic Alliance is the larger expression of the same philosophy. It proposes cooperation without a claim of civilizational infallibility, equal standing among its associated traditions, freedom of conscience, research and educational exchanges, environmental protection and defense of heritage. It must not become a substitute for local responsibility. An alliance that cannot protect the freedom of the individual member has failed its own beginning. An alliance that knows how to conduct ceremonies but not how to audit a public project has learned nothing from this book.

6. No savior is coming

There is one final temptation: having received a philosophy, the reader may wait for a philosopher to implement it. Having received an alliance proposal, the citizen may wait for a diplomatic miracle. Having been told to think independently, the pupil may wait for permission to begin. This is dependency wearing the clothes of enlightenment. The book would be an enormous failure if its last page produced one more obedient admirer.

No savior is coming. That is not a counsel of despair. It is a declaration of personal agency. No solitary individual can cure all injustice or repair every institution. Yet every individual has a part of the world in which honesty, disciplined inquiry, labor, care and courage can be practiced. Responsibility begins there and expands through cooperation. A great society is not built by one person. It is the open responsibility of every person.

If you save yourself from yourself, you save humanity. The sentence is deliberately larger than its literal mechanics. No human being singly redeems the world by a private exercise of will. Its meaning is ethical and civilizational: confront the dependency, dishonesty, laziness, prejudice, superstition and borrowed certainties that prevent you from becoming a useful participant in common life. Your liberation is not an escape from others; it increases your ability to serve them without demanding their obedience.

Do not wait for the next Gandhi, guru, party secretary, economic genius, emperor, multinational alliance or foreign benefactor to grant you adulthood. Pick up the broom. Open the book. Inspect the claim. Demand the record. Build the institution. Admit the error. Teach a child. Feed a person. Protect the river. Go to the gymnasium if your body needs exercise; go to the library if your mind needs work; go to the meeting if your neighborhood needs an honest decision. Return tomorrow and test whether anything has improved.

This is the meaning of now or never. Not that the whole society can be repaired by sunrise, but that postponing the responsibility to begin is itself the habit that must end. Yesterday's conqueror cannot do the work. Tomorrow's savior cannot be expected to appear. The future of a civilization is made from the consequences of what its living people choose to do.

No final prophet. No compulsory savior. No infallible philosopher. No permanent economic scripture. No eternal ruling caste. No society

exempt from the evidence of its failures. No human being inferior in moral worth by birth. No future promised in exchange for obedience.

HINDU EMANCIPATION IS NOW OR NEVER.

A FINAL DECLARATION — NO MORE MASTERS

The most dangerous illusion is that deliverance must come from somebody else. The nation that waits for a final prophet, an irresistible guru, a benevolent empire, or a flawless political leader has surrendered its future before the struggle begins. Nobody is coming to clean the streets, end caste privilege, repair a school, scrutinize a budget, or protect a worker from a lethal sewer.

Let us therefore cease the endless search for a charismatic substitute for responsibility. Let us end the internal indignities that foreign criticism cannot excuse and ancient achievement cannot absolve. Let us sweep, build, read, investigate, argue, invent, feed, heal, and organize. Let reason enter every institution that has been sheltered from it.

There is no final prophet of political economy, no infallible interpreter of an ancient text, no chosen nation exempt from evidence, no civilization excused from equal human worth. Freedom of mind belongs to the believer who prays, the skeptic who doubts, and the dissenter who refuses both.

THE HINDU DOES NOT NEED ANOTHER MASTER. THE HINDU NEEDS EMANCIPATION FROM MASTERS. HINDU EMANCIPATION IS NOW OR NEVER.

APPENDIX A — THE UNITED DHARMIC ALLIANCE MANIFESTO

Reproduced as the supplied two-page manifesto. The original images are preserved rather than silently edited. Comparative figures require independent verification.



MANIFESTO

of the United Dharmic Alliance

Many rivers and one ocean.

Many rivers. One ocean. Across Asia, monks, scholars, merchants, and pilgrims exchanged knowledge among distinct civilizations. The United Dharmic Alliance (UDA) proposes to renew that inheritance through cooperation, not conquest.

Equal partners. The Indic religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—stand as **equal partners** with Daoism (Taoism), Shinto, Confucianism, Bon, Tengriism, and the indigenous and other spiritual traditions of East and Inner Asia. No faith or civilization leads by birth, size, or supposed divine privilege.

Freedom of conscience. Every person may freely embrace, leave, change, criticize, or reject any religion, including movement between UDA traditions or toward another faith or none. Neither former nor future religion may claim ownership of that person. No intimidation, discrimination, or punishment for belief or disbelief.

NO COMPULSORY SAVIOR. NO FINAL PROPHET. No claim to an exclusive savior, universally binding final prophet, chosen people, infallible revelation, or unquestionable ideology shall be imposed on humanity. Individuals remain free to hold such beliefs; none may compel others to accept them.

Prospective observers. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, recognizing their significant historic Indic and wider Asian cultural connections.

Universal rejection of exceptionalism. UDA rejects inherent racial, ethnic, theological, religious, civilizational, and ideological superiority—everywhere on Earth, including within UDA. No scripture, priesthood, state, or philosophy owns the human mind.

Ecological Dharma. Reverence for life requires defense of the earth. UDA calls for a complete, planned end to fossil-fuel dependence; vigorous development of solar, wind, and genuinely low-emission hydrogen; protection of organic food and farming, fertile soil, forests, biodiversity, clean air, water, and public health.

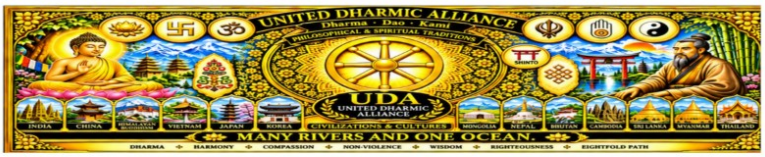
Cooperation in action. The Alliance proposes restoration of heritage sites, safe pilgrimage routes, an international university inspired by Nalanda, mediation between members, and shared scientific and environmental programs. No nation shall dominate the others.

Proposed members. India, China, Japan, North and South Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and other relevant Himalayan Buddhist communities are envisioned as participants. **Russia is an honorary member** and is fully included in the UDA statistical grouping. No state has formally acceded.

Permanent exclusion. The proposed founding charter excludes Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives from every membership or observer category. UDA attributes this decision to what it regards as the repudiation or suppression of Dharmic heritage in these territories. These histories differ, and this charter position does not characterize every citizen.

Preserve every heritage. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Daoist, Shinto, Confucian, and other Asian heritage remains part of world history across all borders. Political exclusion shall never justify erasing or abandoning cultural preservation.

We seek to add a civilizational voice that has too long gone unheard.
Dharma. Dao. Kami. Many rivers, and one ocean.
UNITED DHARMIC ALLIANCE



COMPARATIVE STATISTICS

Proposed United Dharmic Alliance (UDA) vs. OIC

Illustrative 2025–2026 rounded figures; independent source validation is required.
Russia included in UDA; the Korean peninsula includes both Koreas; no double-counting of regions.

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Population	~3.49 billion	~2.02 billion
World population share	~42.7%	~24.7%
Population centers	China, India	Indonesia, Pakistan

2. GDP & ECONOMY

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Nominal GDP	~US$32.5T	~US$9.0T
GDP at PPP	~US$63T	~US$30T
Industrial strength	China, Japan, India	Türkiye, Saudi Arabia

3. MILITARY

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Annual spending	~US$675B	~US$290B
Active personnel	~6.8M	~5.4M
Major military states	China, India, Russia	Türkiye, Pakistan

4. AIR POWER

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Military aircraft	~15,000	~11,500
Fighter aviation	Extensive	Varies by state
Long-range bombers	Russia, China	Limited

5. NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Nuclear-armed states	4	1
Estimated warheads	~6,300	~170
Nuclear states	Russia, China, India, North Korea	Pakistan

6. TECHNOLOGY

Indicator	UDA	OIC
Annual R&D;	>US$900B	~US$70B
PCT applications/year	>115,000	<10,000
Technology centers	China, Japan, South Korea, India	Türkiye, UAE, Malaysia

These are indicative aggregates for proposed UDA countries, not the resources of a unified military or legal alliance. The OIC is an existing intergovernmental organization; UDA remains a proposal. Figures depend on definitions, year, currency basis, and data coverage.

UNITED DHARMIC ALLIANCE

APPENDIX B — NUMBERED ENDNOTES AND SOURCES

References cited in the chapters appear first, in order of first citation. Additional documentary and contextual sources follow. Each citation number in the text identifies the corresponding numbered entry in this register; repeated citations reuse the same number.

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[4] The 2024 NCRB aggregate of 55,698 registered crimes against Scheduled Castes and comparison with 2023 were reported by The Indian Express, drawing on Crime in India 2024. The Government of India's July 2026 parliamentary answers supply narrower counts under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and separate conviction statistics. Treat these as distinct series unless the source table confirms their equivalence.

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[6] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ‘The Epistemology of Religion’ (updated 2025), ‘Religious Experience,’ and ‘Miracles,’ on religious testimony and evidentialism. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-epistemology/ ; https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/miracles/

[7] World Bank, World Development Indicators, 'Population density (people per sq. km of land area),' data for 2024: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST. Derived hectares per person are 100 divided by the reported people-per-km^2, using rounded national figures. This is a total-land measure, not farmland, ownership or habitable-land availability.

[8] Reserve Bank of India, RBI Museum, 'Persian Gulf Issues': https://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/pm_persiangulf.aspx. The RBI states that special notes were issued in the 1950s and ceased circulation around 1970; avoid presenting 1966 as a universal end date for all Gulf territories.

[9] Government of India, Lok Sabha Debates, 7 February 2025, Ministry of External Affairs response on Indians in GCC states; total 9,371,779 residents, including workers, professionals and others: https://sansad.in/getFile/debatestextmk/18/IV/07.02.2025.pdf?source=loksabhadocs.

[10] World Bank, Dilip Ratha, Sonia Plaza and Eung Ju Kim, 'In 2024, remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are expected to reach $685 billion,' 18 December 2024, citing an estimated US$129 billion received by India: https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/in-2024--remittance-flows-to-low--and-middle-income-countries-ar. This is worldwide remittance inflow, not a Gulf-only figure.

[11] International Labour Organization, 'Sponsorship reform and internal labour market mobility for migrant workers in the Arab States,' 23 July 2023: https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/sponsorship-reform-and-internal-labour-market-mobility-migrant-workers-arab.

[12] International Labour Organization, 'What has changed for migrant workers in Qatar?' and 'Overview of Qatar's labour reforms': https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Country-Focus/world-cup-qatar and https://www.ilo.org/resource/overview-qatars-labour-reforms.

[13] International Labour Organization, 'ILO and Qatar sign new 4-year programme to advance labour reforms,' 4 March 2024: https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-and-qatar-sign-new-4-year-programme-advance-labour-reforms.

[14] Government of India, Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 3124, answered 19 March 2026, 'Indian Workers in Gulf Countries': https://sansad.in/getFile/annex/270/AU3124_g5ev2M.pdf?source=pqars. Summed total for calendar years 2021–2025 is 33,396, using Annexure A's eight consular-post rows. This includes all recorded causes of death, not a demonstrated count of workplace deaths; no inference about causation is made from the aggregate.

[15] Bertrand Russell, Freedom and Organisation, 1814–1914 (1934), Chapter XVIII, “Dialectical Materialism,” p. 220. The quoted 25-word excerpt is attributed to that passage and should be checked against the exact printing before final typesetting. Publisher contents: https://www.routledge.com/x/x/p/book/9780415250009; reproductions of the

surrounding passage exist but should not substitute for textual comparison with the edition used.

[16] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, Chapter 25, “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,” sections addressing concentration, centralization, competition, and credit. Historical primary text: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm. The chapter interprets rather than endorses Marx's account.

[17] International Monetary Fund, “Reforming the Soviet Economy,” Finance & Development (1991): https://www.elibrary.imf.org/abstract/journals/022/0028/002/article-A006-en.xml. Describes systemic planning problems and late-Soviet reform dilemmas; a complete history would also examine other economic historians.

[18] World Bank, “Lifting 800 Million People Out of Poverty,” April 1, 2022: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/01/lifting-800-million-people-out-of-poverty-new-report-looks-at-lessons-from-chinas-experience. The figure uses the historical international extreme-poverty line; not a claim that poverty disappeared by all standards.

[19] World Bank, Vietnam economic reform and macroeconomic performance, 1985–95: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/986961468762928440/pdf/multi-page.pdf; World Bank overview of early Đổi Mới: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/293421468760749350/pdf/multi0page.pdf.

[20] World Bank, Vietnam Country Overview, accessed November 2026: https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/vietnam. The World Bank reports upper-middle-income reclassification in July 2026 and emphasizes international trade, education, institutions, and public services as well as market reforms.

[21] Bertelsmann Transformation Index, BTI 2026 Cuba Country Report: https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CUB; Reuters, September 3, 2026, “Cuba rolls out more free-market reforms amid US pressure”: https://www.reuters.com/world/cuba-rolls-out-more-free-market-reforms-amid-us-pressure-2026-09-03/ . Both domestic institutions and external restrictions require investigation.

[22] U.S. Energy Information Administration, Venezuela Country Analysis Brief, February 8, 2024: https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/venezuela/. Identifies mismanagement, sanctions, and wider crisis among factors damaging the energy sector. This is not an identification strategy for the causal contribution of each.

[23] Documentary questions and sources for further examination: Communist Party of India statements regarding Quit India, wartime changes after June 1941, contemporary accounts of the Telangana struggle, and documentation of 1951 consultations in Moscow. This chapter treats these as research questions, not conclusively settled claims.

[24] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian Education,' 2 February 1835. Primary-source transcription of the 1835 minute, including the proposal for an intermediary class and the privileging of English education:

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Minutes_on_Education_In_India%2C_Written_in_the_Years_1835%2C_1836_and_1837/Minute_by_Mr._Macaulay_%282_February%2C_1835%29. The minute supports the historical policy proposal; it does not independently prove that every later Indian preference was caused by it.

[25] Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR), National Archives of Japan, 'The Iwakura Mission' exhibition, including diplomatic objectives, the study of foreign institutions and industries, and educational observations: https://www.jacar.go.jp/english/exhibition/iwakura_en/ and https://www.jacar.go.jp/english/exhibition/iwakura_en/column/column2.html; National Diet Library, 'Iwakura Mission': https://www.ndl.go.jp/modern/e/cha1/description07.html. The historical mission is an example of institutional learning, not a guarantee of all subsequent Japanese policies.

[26] World Bank, 'Republic of Korea' overview (accessed November 2026): https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/korea. Economic development and technological change do not settle questions about authoritarianism or human rights.

[27] National Library Board, Singapore, 'Environmental Public Health Act': https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=d70897c2-abe0-4591-80d7-748e737436d6; National Heritage Board / Roots, 'Pioneers of Pollution Control': https://www.roots.gov.sg/stories-landing/stories/pioneers-of-pollution-control/story. The causal role of campaigns should be understood alongside infrastructure, public administration, investment, and enforcement.

[28] World Bank, 'Vietnam — From Crisis to Growth' (historical account of Đổi Mới reform, macroeconomic difficulties, agricultural reform and market incentives): https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/293421468760749350/pdf/multi0page.pdf. Comparative claims about China and Vietnam require attention to chronology, social conditions, global trade, and policy differences. The source is a historical technical report, not a blanket endorsement of current political regimes.

Additional Sources and Contextual Research

[29] Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question 3023, 18 March 2026: https://sansad.in/getFile/annex/270/AU3023_rq8bAC.pdf?source=pqars. Discusses reporting methods and the NAMASTE sanitation-worker safety scheme.

[30] The Dalit Project, “Sewer and septic tank deaths,” data comparison updated October 2026: https://data.dalitproject.org/sewer-deaths/. Collects differing parliamentary reporting series and civil society estimates; figures should not be conflated.

[31] Ambedkar's prefatory explanation to Annihilation of Caste records the cancellation of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal conference and the disagreement over publication of his address.

Columbia University's Ambedkar timeline and published reproductions of his works corroborate the chronology.

[32] The historical chronology of Periyar's Self-Respect Movement is commonly given as 1925, with organizational development in 1926; academic and historical records distinguish its launch from later institutional activities.

[33] Sources consulted: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/crime-cases-saw-dip-but-cyber-offences-rose-in-2024-ncrb-data-10676671/ ; https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2290065; https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/timeline_files/timeline_content06.html; https://ambedkar.navayan.com/book/annihilation-of-caste-part-1/ ; https://www.tnhc.org.in/docs/proceedings/Chidambaram-2012.pdf.

[34] Richard M. Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States,” Journal of Islamic Studies 11, no. 3 (2000), pp. 283–319, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/11.3.283. His method and documented corpus should not be confused with a total count of all temple destruction.

[35] Richard M. Eaton, interview, The Diplomat, January 2024, https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/richard-eaton-on-the-desecration-of-hindu-temples-in-india/. Discusses rival royal shrines, political symbolism, Indra III and Kalapriya, and the interplay of political power and temples.

[36] Romila Thapar, Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History (2004), publisher/library summary https://find.uoc.ac.in/Record/178612/Description. The book and its underlying references are the primary basis for precise quotations.

[37] “Somnath Mandir in a Play of Mirrors,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (2023), https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-royal-asiatic-society/article/somnath-mandir-in-a-play-of-mirrors-heritage-history-and-the-search-for-identity-of-the-new-nation-18421951/A7809AEE9FC17740CD76CA0239CD6048. On colonial reuses of the Somnath narrative.

[38] Indian Express, “The temple that Aurangzeb razed: Evidence from history on Gyanvapi and Kashi Vishwanath” (2024), https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/the-temple-that-aurangzeb-razed-evidence-from-history-9129714/lite/. Presents competing interpretations and the Persian chronicle; Persian chronicle translations may differ in wording and interpretation.

[39] Eaton's separate discussion of subsequent temple protection in Indo-Muslim states is relevant to avoiding universal assertions, https://franpritchett.com/00islamlinks/txt_eaton_temples2.pdf.

[40] Islamic legal descriptions of the Kaaba as qibla (direction of prayer) are relevant to doctrinal distinctions; https://islam.museum/en/concept/kaaba/. Further cite authoritative sources on the Western Wall and Hindu murti theology in the final scholarly notes.

[41] World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 1866, “The transition from centrally planned to market economies: comparative experiences of China, Vietnam, Central and Eastern

Europe and the former Soviet Union," 1998. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/452691468771862991/pdf/multi0page.pdf. The paper highlights differences in outcomes and the need to consider initial conditions as well as policies.

[42] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 18–19 (1948), United Nations: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights. Article 18 explicitly protects freedom to change religion or belief. The Declaration is a moral and international reference; its practical implementation varies by jurisdiction.

[43] Constitution of India, Article 25, authoritative text published by India Code/Ministry of Law and Justice: https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/showfile?actid=AC_DH_62_1008_00005_00005_1561028196113&filename=the_constitution_of_india.pdf&type=actfile. It protects freedom of conscience, profession, practice, and propagation subject to constitutional limitations. This is distinct from an absolute legal guarantee against every form of coercion.

[44] Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.65, Kalama Sutta, English translation and commentary by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Access to Insight: https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html. The discourse cautions against accepting teachings simply from tradition or authority and evaluates their practical ethical results; it should not be mischaracterized as a blanket endorsement of personal intuition.

[45] B. R. Ambedkar, Constituent Assembly closing speech, 25 November 1949; official archive of Supreme Court of India: https://api.sci.gov.in/AMB/pdf/Closing%20speech%2025%20Nov%201949.pdf. Address discusses the dangers of political hero-worship, constitutional method, and the relationship of social equality to democracy. Review original in full before using any additional direct quotation.

[46] John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (1859), Chapter II, 'Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion'; public-domain text: https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/onliberty/full-text/section2/. His argument about the costs of silencing opinion provides a useful comparison, not the source of the author's independent philosophical synthesis.

[47] Comparative historical/economic assertions elsewhere in this manuscript require the separate Chapter Nine sources (World Bank on China and Vietnam, economic historical studies, external sanctions and resource dependence) and Chapters Six–Eight notes. This chapter makes philosophical arguments from those cases; it does not treat them as a controlled economic experiment.

[48] Historical chronology accompanying 'The Himalayan Blunder': Encyclopaedia Iranica, 'Delhi Sultanate' (establishment in northern India around the turn of the thirteenth century); Library of Congress, India: A Country Study, historical chronology of the Delhi Sultanate, Mughal era, British East India Company, and British Raj, https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/in/indiacountrystud00heit/indiacountrystud00heit.pdf. These

distinct periods do not constitute one uninterrupted fourteen-century captivity of the entire population.

[49] United States National Archives, Marshall Plan (Economic Cooperation Act of 1948), https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/marshall-plan; Library of Congress, “For European Recovery,” https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/marshall/marsh-overview.html. European recovery involved domestic joint planning and foreign assistance.

[50] United States Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52,” https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/japan-reconstruction; Japan Ministry of Finance, “Fiscal and Monetary Policies in the Reconstruction Years,” https://www.mof.go.jp/english/pri/publication/policy_1945-1971/Part1-Preface.pdf.

[51] UK Office for Budget Responsibility, “300 years of UK public finance data,” https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/300-Years-of-public-finances-Accessible-PDF.pdf; National Archives (U.S.), archival background on Sweden’s wartime neutrality, https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-84-sweden.html.

[52] Library of Congress, Soviet Union: A Country Study, reconstruction chapter, https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/so/sovietunioncount00zick/sovietunioncount00zick.pdf. The different wartime experiences of Germany, Japan, Britain, the USSR, Norway, Denmark and Sweden must not be conflated.

[53] QS, World University Rankings 2027. Peking University #13, Tsinghua University #14, Fudan University #26, Shanghai Jiao Tong University #36, Zhejiang University #47. Rankings are composite comparisons and do not certify academic freedom or program-specific quality. https://www.topuniversities.com/qs-top-uni-wur

[54] Times Higher Education, Best Universities in China 2027 (published October 2, 2026), independent comparison of leading Chinese institutions. https://beta.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-china

[55] Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 'Unveiling Xuanzang and the Xuanzang Spirit,' on Indic Buddhist translators in China and Chinese pilgrims in India; British Library International Dunhuang Programme on Faxian and Xuanzang. https://ignca.gov.in/divisionss/kalakosa/area-studies/east-asia- programme/across-the-himalayan-gap/23786-2/ ; https://idp.bl.uk/discover/learning/buddhism-on-the-silk-roads/articles/transmission-of-buddhism/buddhist-travellers-and-pilgrims/

[56] Tsinghua University international admissions and 2027 international graduate admissions; program languages and international entry requirements vary. https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/Admissions.htm; https://yz.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/

[57] Embassy of China in India, October 22, 2026 visa-processing notice; applicants must check current requirements and applicable approvals before planning travel. https://in.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/embassy_news/202610/t20261022_12044936.htm

[58] World Bank China overview, reform, growth, poverty and structural challenges. https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/china

[59] China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25th India-China Special Representatives talks, August 25-26, 2026, eight stated outcomes. Indian and Chinese territorial interpretations remain contested; official statements do not constitute final resolution. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202608/t20260826_12011002.html

[60] Reserve Bank of India, 2026 economic commentary describing merchandise trade imbalances and bilateral commerce, relevant to supply-chain dependence and resilience. https://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_ViewBulletin.aspx?Id=24109

[61] Author, UDA_Manifesto_FINAL_2026(1).pdf (two-page authoritative proposal supplied with this project, reproduced unchanged in Appendix A). Proposed participants, exclusions, honorary status and unverified comparative figures are authorial positions, not treaties or actual joint military capacities.

[62] United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 18 and 19, adopted 10 December 1948: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights. The text protects freedom of thought, conscience, religion, change of belief, opinion and expression.

[63] UNESCO, Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, adopted 20 November 2023, especially paragraphs on analytical and critical thinking and respect for diversity: https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental. This is independent educational guidance, not endorsement of UDA or the author's five- philosophy proposal.

[64] Government Lok Sabha Unstarred Question 2730 (4 August 2026): 498 deaths, 1 January 2019–30 June 2026; aggregated and compared at https://data.dalitproject.org/sewer-deaths/. See also NDTV report 5 August 2026: https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/nearly-500-died-while-cleaning-sewers-or-septic-tanks-since-2019-centre-11866683

[65] The Lancet Countdown, India 2025 Data Sheet, air pollution and health indicators: https://lancetcountdown.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/India_Lancet-Countdown_2025_Data-Sheet-2.pdf. Model-based attributable mortality and monetized premature mortality must be described precisely.

[66] Anguttara Nikaya 3.65, translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu: https://accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html. Compare alternate scholarly translations; avoid saying that the discourse endorses testing exclusively by individual experience.

[67] Rigveda 10.129 Nasadiya Sukta; Brihadaranyaka Upanishad debates involving Gargi and Yajnavalkya; Bhagavad Gita, especially chapters 1–3; Nyaya and Buddhist epistemology in

scholarly editions. Verse wording, context and interpretation vary across translations and scholarly traditions.

[68] Richard M. Eaton, scholarship on temple desecration in premodern India, alongside historiographical critics and site-specific sources. His documented set must not be equated with a total count. For Ayodhya, consult the Supreme Court of India judgment (2019) and the archaeological evidence it discusses.

[69] B. R. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste (1936), with editorial history; original sources for Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and Jyotirao Phule; NCRB Crime in India 2024 reports and later parliamentary data.

[70] World Bank migration and remittance data, Indian Ministry of External Affairs parliamentary answers, International Labour Organization reports, and individual Gulf-country labor regulations. Population denominators, nationality, cause-of-death definitions and employment categories must be distinguished when comparing series.

[71] Reserve Bank of India monetary history (Gulf rupee); archival histories of the Communist Party of India and Telangana struggle; original UDA_Manifesto_FINAL_2026(1).pdf as the authoritative authorial proposal, with statistical tables marked indicative pending independent validation.

[72] Russell: Bertrand Russell, Freedom and Organisation, 1814–1914 (1934), Chapter XVIII, "Dialectical Materialism," p. 220. A short passage attributed to Russell is used to distinguish philosophical and economic propositions; it does not establish the author's market argument. Comparative evidence on planning and market reforms is discussed separately.

[73] Bertrand Russell, Freedom and Organisation, 1814–1914 (1934), chapter 18, p. 220; https://books.google.com/books/about/Freedom_and_Organization_1814_1914.html?id=3_XSJ0s1wiMC

[74] Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," Journal of Islamic Studies (2000); see discussion at https://scroll.in/article/769463/we-will-never-know-the-number-of-temples-desecrated-through-indias-history-richard-eatondamn

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[76] World Bank, China and Vietnam agrarian reforms and poverty reduction (2008), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/393301468310739175/pdf/439660PUB0Box310only109780821372746.pdf

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[80] Constitution of India, Article 348, India Code: default language for Supreme Court and High Courts, with specified exceptions. https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/16124/1/the_constitution_of_india.pdf

[81] India, Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3371, answered 7 August 2026, statistical annexure for 30 July 2026: Supreme Court 95,954; High Courts 6,466,970 pending. https://sansad.in/getFile/lsapps/loksabhaquestions/annex/188/AU3371_Lq6K9K.pdf

[82] Ministry of External Affairs, Agreement on Trade and Intercourse Between the Tibet Region of China and India, 29 April 1954: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/RTI-V-08-03-2024.pdf

[83] Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population by Sex, Religion and Rural/Urban, Census 2023, Table 9: Hindu Jati 3,867,729; Scheduled Castes 1,349,487; total population 240,458,089. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/census_tables/tables/table_9_national.pdf

[84] Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Nehru–Liaquat Agreement description, 8 April 1950; https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erelcontent.aspx?lang=2&reg=48&relid=59464

[85] NCRB: The Indian Express cites 55,698 registered cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes in 2024 and 57,789 in 2023. A Government of India Press Information Bureau response gives 55,685 (2024) and 57,766 (2023) for cases registered under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. These are distinct series; the figures must not be substituted for one another. Sources: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/crime-cases-saw-dip-but-cyber-offences-rose-in-2024-ncrb-data-10676671/ ; https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2290065

[86] Population density: The World Bank EN.POP.DNST 2024 series lists India at approximately 488 and China at approximately 150 people per square kilometer of land area. Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST

[87] Gulf deaths: India's Ministry of External Affairs, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question 3124, answered 19 March 2026, Annexure A, lists a sum of 33,396 for calendar years 2021–2025 and 34,596 after including January–February 2026. The source does not classify each recorded death as an occupational fatality. Source: https://sansad.in/getFile/annex/270/AU3124_g5ev2M.pdf?source=pqars

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[89] United States Supreme Court, Johnson v. M'Intosh, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823); original judgment available through the Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/resource/usrep.usrep021543/

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