Journal of the Harvard Club of India

India
at 75

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce the inaugural edition of the Journal of the Harvard Club of India to the country, and to a wider global audience. We offer to you a delectable array of some of India's most prominent thought leaders as they outline their vision for the country today, tracing where we have been and how much further we need to traverse to preserve the sanctity of our beloved Republic. The Harvard Alumni community is proud to have a significant number of voices among these luminaries. The landscape of the Journal comprises a *tour de force* of the arts, music, history, politics and technology and so much more. We are deeply grateful to the authors for taking the time to pen their thoughts and provide invaluable insights into our country, and the region as a whole. It is our hope that the resultant tapestry presented here will enliven your spirits with its richness and ensure that we all continue to do our best to add to the strength of this land.

The past and current club leadership deemed it important to build a repository of ideas and thought-provoking views on India as it celebrates 75 years of Independence. I thank Shobhana Rana, my predecessor and immediate past president of the club, for shepherding the Journal to completion and for her wise counsel whenever I have needed it.

I wish to thank the Editorial Board, the Executive Committee members and all members of the Harvard Club of India, as well as all the other members of the Harvard community and the Harvard Alumni Association, for their encouragement and support of this edition. We trust that you will enjoy it as much as we have relished giving it life.

Dr. Sanjay Kumar
President
Harvard Club of India

THE INDIAN REPUBLIC TODAY: WORK IN PROGRESS

Pinky Anand

The march of the Indian Republic has been extraordinary. We are called a subcontinent and, as a subcontinent, we have challenges that are diverse and often difficult as they have no precedent. With time, we have navigated these challenges, trying to create a balance which reflects not only our individual identities but also our collective identities and aspirations as a nation.

The Indian Republic is a hard-won battle with memories of an overlord ruling our lands still alive. The annexation of India started with the victory of Robert Clive, the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency, over Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, in 1757. India was then slowly but surely annexed, to the extent that, by the historic battle of 1857, the country was left as an economic gold mine for the biggest corporate of the time, the East India Company. India was subsequently taken over by the British Crown and became a part of the various colonies of Great Britain.

It is in this context that, I believe, India's freedom is hard earned. After our territories having been annexed for more than 200 years, India launched one of the biggest revolts in living memory. Today, when we look back at it, we can see that for a country as wide and as diverse as the Indian subcontinent, it was a very difficult move. The mass uprisings and rebellion have given us India or 'Bharat'. It was indeed a battle well fought.

Freedom, however, was merely the first step. We were free from foreign yoke, no doubt, but for a country to be truly free, there has to be freedom in the minds of its citizens. There has to be harmony and a feeling of belongingness to a country and a sense of duty towards its society. To achieve that goal, the fledgling state of India commissioned a body to create the Indian Constitution. Headed by the incomparable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, our Constitution is a tome, aspiring to keep, at its core, basic human rights and principles, ensuring to us human and fundamental rights and acting as the *parens patriae* (Latin for parent of the people) to its citizens.

Reaching Out to the People

Populism, and populist policies, served us well during our fight for Independence. The Father of the nation, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as 'The Mahatma', was behind one of the largest mass movements in the Indian freedom struggle. The civil disobedience movement later also became a template for the South African freedom struggle and was greatly lauded for its principles of non-violence and effectiveness. Populist ideology was writ large in Gandhi's anti-modernist rhetoric and was an effective tool to bring the British Government to its knees. It launched an offensive that aligned all sections of society, from the educated elites to the farmers, artisans and landowners. It has to be agreed that it was only on the back of these movements that India's freedom was achieved, and thus the Constitution framed, promising our citizens that the Government would be for the people, by the people and of the people. This was reflected in the document drafted.

Although the Indian nation was built on a populist movement, there is always a distinction between 'populist' and 'popular'. The difference lies in a leader or a Government that undertakes roles that might be difficult, or not appeal to a section of people, but have an overall positive impact on the state. Strong leaders are often not populist, but they are usually popular and, in retrospect,

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are remembered for their decisions, which at that time may have received substantial criticism. The political conduct of these leaders reflect their authenticity in taking decisions that might not appeal to some sections of the society; we can easily see that the idea of vote bank politics does not play a very large role in their election campaigns.

Cultivating Constitutional Morality

Today, when independent India is 75 years old, it has become more important than ever for us to look deep into our painstakingly drafted Constitution and embody and bring to the fore its true essence. The building pillar of our Constitution is its essence, what we very recently have come to debate as 'constitutional morality'.

Constitutional morality means adherence to the core principles of constitutional democracy. The question that often plagues us is whether it is a subjective idea or an objective one. Does it limit itself simply to the provisions and the writ of the Constitution? Or, does it have a subjective quality to it, taking on its own life, and applying itself to the changing social dynamics of today's world, while deriving its essence from the thread writ in our Constitution? At 75, I think the country has now found its answer, time and again interpreting the Constitution as a living breathing body, capable of applying itself to the challenges of the new world, yet always keeping in mind its basic nature and preserving its core essential values. The concept of constitutional morality, however, does not limit itself to simply human rights; it encompasses within its paradigm constitutional values such as the rule of law; social justice; democratic ethos; popular participation in governance; individual freedom; judicial independence; egalitarianism and sovereignty. Though its meaning is clear, the

real world applications of these principles are a different ball game altogether.

There exists a contrarian view on the subject, which states that ideas such as constitutional morality are subjective and widen the scope for judicial discretion, delay and the uncertainty of law. The need for constitutional morality, however, is reflected in the following incident. While moving the Draft Constitution in 1948, Dr. Ambedkar quoted George Grote, the English historian who was noted for his works on ancient Greece: "The constitutional morality, not merely among the majority of any community but throughout the whole, is an indispensable condition of government at once free and peaceable; since even any powerful and obstinate minority may render the working of a free institution impracticable without being strong enough to conquer the ascendancy for themselves."

If we do not adhere to the essence of the Constitution and interpret it without following the ideology behind it, it is quite possible to pervert the Constitution without changing its form. That is what is taking place in India; that was exactly what Adolf Hitler did in Germany. Without altering the form of the Weimar Constitution, he destroyed the entire constitutional spirit and, ultimately, the Constitution itself. Professor Wadhwa in 'D.C. Wadhwa vs. State of Bihar' quotes the Roman legalist, Julius Paulus (204 BC): "One who does what a Statute forbids, transgresses the Statute; one who contravenes the intention of a Statute without disobeying its actual words, commits a fraud on it."

Our Constitution has been drafted for the better administration of the country. When popular ideologies, emotions and sentiments are muddled up, it leads to subjectivity of judicial decisions causing the interpretation to be populist, rather

than an attempt to interpret the intention behind the Constitution. If all judgments are given on the basis of popular view or personal or natural sentiment, then the primary reason for which the Constitution was drafted will be violated. There will be no uniform platform or guidelines for imparting justice and all decisions will be personally inclined. The morals of a society, or any group of people, are at best dynamic; they change from time to time, depending on the prevailing circumstances or the environment in which these are created. An example that has always remained in my mind regarding this is what I was told about Afghanistan—a few decades ago, it was a hub of knowledge and had a chic society (if I may be excused for the term). Women used to drive, nightclubs were open to both sexes and Kabul had a roaring nightlife. Today, this society lies desolate and war torn; the entire thought process of what is acceptable or not has changed in the years of strife that the country has, unfortunately, suffered.

Interpreting the Constitution

We call the Constitution the sovereign power of our nation and hence it becomes necessary for the judiciary to keep in mind its basic structure while rendering decisions. The judiciary has the onerous task to sometimes give decisions that might not seem to be acceptable; but it has to balance these notions of custom to the essence of what the Indian Constitution holds. The judiciary also has the unenviable duty to try and interpret the Constitution in a way that upholds the current morals of society. Constitutional morality lends itself to this complex process.

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This trend is evident from the path-breaking judgments that derive their essence from the fountainhead of constitutional morality. The Court relied on the doctrine to strike down the age-old inequitable practice of 'Triple Talaq'. Another judgment was the Sabarimala one, although I have a caveat, as it is in review before the Supreme Court. The core of these judgments was the same—to uphold the idea of equality and freedom of religious practice. Although these principles are not specifically addressed in the Constitution, they have evolved, drawing from this core value.

In the Sabarimala judgment, the conundrum was the bar of the entry of women in the temple of Lord Ayyappa, by legal sanction by Rule 3 (b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules 1965. The validity of the rule and other provisions restricting the entry of women was decided by the Supreme Court. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in Sabarimala followed the path of Ambedkar. The Court, by a majority of 4:1, struck down the practice that barred the entry of women into Sabarimala. It held that the exclusion of women between the ages of 10 and 50 years from entering the shrine violates the Constitution and its guarantee for equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender.

Another landmark judgment which recognised the essence of the Constitution was Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India, where Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was read down to exclude the

Victorian mores of homosexuality being a sin and illegal. The Supreme Court drew upon this doctrine to evolve freedom of choice to decriminalise homosexuality and uphold the human right to be able to choose your own sexual partner. The Chief Justice of India, while debating on the nature of the Constitution, stated: "Constitutional morality is not confined to the literal text of the Constitution, rather, it must seek to usher in a pluralistic and inclusive society...It is the responsibility of all three organs of the state to curb any propensity or proclivity of popular sentiment or majoritarianism... Any attempt to push and shove a homogeneous, uniform, consistent and a standardised philosophy...would violate constitutional morality. Freedom of choice cannot be scuttled or abridged on the threat of criminal prosecution and made paraplegic on the mercurial stance of majoritarian perception."

As a testament to the dynamic nature of the Constitution, Justice Rohinton Nariman concisely explained the rationale for reading down the Indian Penal Code, holding that "homosexuality is not a psychiatric disorder", and that same-sex sexuality is a normal variant of human sexuality, much like heterosexuality and bisexuality. Also, there is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be altered by treatment. Justice Nariman relied on the Latin maxim, *cessante ratione legis, cessat ispa lex* (when the reason for a law ceases, the law itself ceases) to strike down Section 377. The rationale for the section, Victorian morality, had long passed, he said.

The Chief Justice of India, while debating on the nature of the Constitution, stated: "Constitutional morality is not confined to the literal text of the Constitution, rather, it must seek to usher in a pluralistic and inclusive society..."

"It is not left to majoritarian governments to prescribe what shall be orthodox in matters concerning social morality. The fundamental rights chapter is like the North Star in the universe of constitutionalism," he emphasised.

Another paradigm shift ushered in was the decriminalisation of adultery. Adultery was criminalised in the Indian Penal Code, since its inception and in the statutes before. Unfortunately, the criminality attached to the offence was created in such a way that only the man responsible was liable for any action of adultery. The all-pervasive Victorian ideal that women do not have the agency to choose to be in a relationship outside the marriage, or even be in a position to make the choice to be involved with a married man, was the theme song. With the change in times and the feminist movement, the ideal was displaced and debunked; however, the law remained static in India. The Supreme Court, keeping in mind the principles of equality and its new world applications, refused to allow the law to continue, deeming it in violation of our Constitution.

Justice Chandrachud, in his concurring judgment, held that the law was also based on sexual stereotypes that view women as being passive and devoid of sexual agency. He held that there was "manifest arbitrariness" in Section 497, which deprived a woman of her agency, autonomy and dignity. "Section 497 lacks an adequately determining principle to criminalise consensual sexual activity and is manifestly arbitrary," he said.

Justice Chandrachud also questioned how the law failed to recognise the agency of a woman whose spouse was engaged in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. According to Justice Misra, "Parameters of fundamental rights should include

rights of women. Individual dignity is important in a sanctified society. The system cannot treat women unequally. Women can't be asked to think what a society desires."

Both these judgments regarding the decriminalisation of adultery and homosexuality drew from the Aadhar judgment, recognising the Right to Privacy as a fundamental one.

Upholding the Constitution

Our nation has three pillars of governance—the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. In layman terms, we understand the role of these as, the legislature makes the laws, the executive executes the laws, and the judiciary upholds the laws. It is in this third pillar that constitutional morality lies. The conscience of the judiciary is reflected in the way the Constitution is upheld and interpreted. Dr. Ambedkar raised the question of whether we could presume such a diffusion of constitutional morality when he stated: "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic." He ended by observing, "In these circumstances it is wiser not to trust the Legislature to prescribe forms of administration. This is the justification for incorporating them in the Constitution."

Another significant stride taken by the Indian Republic is according the status of fundamental right to education, incorporating the Right to Education Act within its annals and creating a law for mandatory education. A huge reason why India was viewed as the land of snake charmers was due to the lack of formal global education. While our ancient texts and scriptures are superior to many, it was the lack of global education that held us back. Education was also necessary to improve opportunity access to our masses and an important tool to improve, if not eradicate, the menace of poverty that has plagued our country for as long as memory goes. This was in furtherance to Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka in 1992, when the Supreme Court interpreted the Constitution to have in itself the implied right to education as a fundamental right under Article 21A.

The Supreme Court has been instrumental in several such laws, where the Constitution has been interpreted to have contained within itself rights such as the right to clean air, or the right to livelihood, despite the letter of law not having spelled it out in as many words.

Independent India at 75 is a work in progress. We laid down the structure of our country in 1947 and from there, it has been a constant endeavour to create, adapt and reinvent a dynamic Constitution consistent with the evolutionary process of the times and the demands of civil society. There are multiple lines along which India can be divided. In the face of all the diversities in contemporary India, with all its varied cultures, religions, worldviews, there is one thing that holds the nation together and it is constitutional morality. For a society as pluralistic as India to function and thrive, there has to be an acceptance of individual identities. Further, a balance needs to be

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maintained between the needs of the individual and the collective. Otherwise, there will be no peace and no stability. The judgments of the Supreme Court in Sabarimala, Triple Talaq as well as the decriminalisation of homosexuality may not adhere to the popular view of society. Indeed, they have been deeply controversial and have, in essence, divided factions of the population. There was a furore over Sabarimala temple entry, some claiming that the true women devotees of Ayyappa would themselves not go to the temple, their faith would not allow it. The Triple Talaq judgment dealt with the extreme razor-thin line between religion and rights accorded in a secular society. The thread that emerges is that populism may not produce the desired goals of equality and good conscience consonant with current-day ethos. This is where constitutional morality kicks in to forge the way ahead and bridge the gap between yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Pinky Anand was the Additional Solicitor General of India for two terms and is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India with a distinguished practice in diverse areas. She is the recipient of the French National Order of Merit conferred by the President of the French Republic. A Harvard Law School graduate and Inlaks scholar, she has received several awards for excellence in law.

CHOOSING SIDES: INDIA'S AND AMERICA'S DANGEROUS CHOICES

■ **David A. Andelman**

The Indian subcontinent is rapidly becoming a talisman of America's waning power and influence in the region and in many other parts of the world. Most frightening, the United States appears to be choosing sides in a losing battle to assure peace not only in India and Pakistan, but far beyond.

The error American administrations have been making far back into the past of the subcontinent is the same one that Democrats and Republicans alike have been committing most recently—tilting (or at least being perceived as tilting) resolutely toward India rather than maintaining a more even-handed balance between Pakistan and India. This position has only helped fuel the rise and now the return of the Taliban that will make this entire region all that much more dangerous in the post-American period in Afghanistan.

Rendering this period all the more dangerous is the parallel perception that this entire region is up for grabs—effectively unchaining some of the major powers, but especially China and Russia, each with expansionist aspirations. All of this can only serve as a pernicious challenge to those who aspire to establish or maintain liberal democratic systems across the region. What America should be doing, and clearly this may be met with less than glee in many circles in India, is for the United States to demonstrate that it cares equally about the maintenance of democratic governments in every nation on the subcontinent and is prepared to do its best to assure such an outcome.

I have personally covered, as a journalist for *The New York Times*, military takeovers in two nations on the subcontinent—when General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and his military junta seized power in Pakistan, overthrowing the democratic regime of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Al Bhutto in July 1977, and the military coup in Bangladesh in August 1975, when I spent hours talking with the then Foreign Minister and one-time President of Bangladesh, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. I also came to know General Zia quite well and dined in his modest home on the fringe of the military cantonment in Rawalpindi. Both gentlemen expressed their devotion to democratic ideals, though clearly neither was fully prepared to adhere to them. India, too, has had a succession of leaders who have professed a devotion to democracy, although during Indira Gandhi's Emergency I came into personal contact with her edict that no *Times* journalist would be admitted to her nation and was left stranded for hours on the tarmac at New Delhi airport, unable even to enter the (air-conditioned) terminal.

None of these circumstances has turned me from my determined belief that the United States needs to chart as independent and neutral a force as possible between each of these nations. And the stakes have clearly multiplied since the development and growth of powerful nuclear arsenals in both India and Pakistan. Moreover, as I came to learn from discussions in both capitals, the principal targets are each other. The vast bulk of these arsenals are not targeted at any external enemy—not China with whom both have clashed from time to time on their frontiers, nor Russia, nor further afield North Korea whose missiles could be within easy range of the entire subcontinent. I am persuaded that more than any other single reality, this deeply-held antipathy has had the most pernicious influence on political, diplomatic, certainly military and intelligence, but even social and cultural developments in both societies. No nation should be held hostage by its armaments, nor should any ally be forced to choose sides for any reason bearing on these fundamental realities. Yet this is precisely the situation America and its own allies have been forced into. Choose one side or another. Truly a Hobson's choice—in other words, no real choice at all.

India has long, and quite justifiably, worried about its frontiers. In 1884, the Raj, the British rulers of India, which comprised the entire

subcontinent including what is today India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and large stretches of Afghanistan, came to the conclusion that they no longer wanted responsibility for the wild territories of the Hindu Kush and what lay beyond to the west and south. These lands stretch from the impenetrable mountains they straddle on the north where they merge with the Karakoram Range, the Pamirs and the eternally tense point where China, Pakistan and Afghanistan converge, onward to the south where they connect with the Spin Ghar Range near the Kabul River.

There have been tribes in these forbidding hills of Afghanistan for 2,000 years or more. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote in 440 BC of the Pactrians, one of the "wandering tribes" that occasionally helped comprise armies of Persia. These were the Pashtuns of the time of the Raj, who still dominate much of the mountains, caves and valleys of Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Territories of Pakistan.

When the British assumed control over this vast region, including at least in theory a large stretch of Afghanistan, there was resistance. Twice in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British troops battled forces of the Emir of Afghanistan. The first began in November 1878 when forces moved quickly into the Emir's territory, defeating his army and forcing him to flee. The British envoy, Sir Louis Cavagnari and his entire mission who had arrived in Kabul in September 1879, were promptly massacred to the last man, touching off the second Afghan war. This ended a year later when the British overran the entire army of Emir Ayub Khan outside Kandahar in southeastern Afghanistan, not far from the frontier that was about to be established. These wars, the diplomacy, manoeuvres and experience dealing with the Afghan people who the British

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encountered, persuaded the Raj that the price for retaining control was simply far higher than it was willing under any circumstances to pay.

So, in 1884, Lord Frederick Hamilton-Temple Blackwood, the Marquess of Dufferin, Viceroy and Governor of India, named Henry Mortimer Durand a member of the Afghan Boundary Commission. This was a critical post on at least two different levels. First, Russia was also beginning the first of what would turn out to be a succession of attempts to push its own frontiers down into Afghanistan. Afghanistan was seen by the Russians, then the Soviets, then the Russians again, as a potential buffer against encroachment from the British Empire of that period, the potentially hostile and disruptive tensions on the subcontinent today. Ironically, Britain of the 1880s viewed Afghanistan through a similar prism—eager for a firm line that could not be crossed and that would keep the wild mountain tribes and the legions of Russians at bay. Durand headed off into the tribal lands of the North-West Frontier Province, beyond which lay Afghanistan. In 1885, a Russian delegation appeared as well at a neutral meeting place—the Zulfikar Pass. On July 16, 1885, *The New York Times* published a "special dispatch from Jagdorabatem via Meshed" of a "reported advance to Zulfikar Pass," that comprised "a large number of Russian reinforcements [that] has arrived at Merv and Pul-i-Khisti during the past fortnight". At the same time, "the British Frontier Commission [was] moving nearer to Herat—the Afghans determined to resist

invasion". If this sounds sadly, desperately familiar, it is because it was. History has never failed to repeat itself in this part of the world. Durand and his commission did finally succeed in arranging a truce and, most important, an agreement to establish a line to which his name was quickly attached and has persisted in some fashion or other until today. The Russians agreed to its provisions since it allowed their forces to control the sources of several critical canals. But it would be some years before any of this became reality. First, it was up to the Emir of Afghanistan to agree. In April 1885, the British Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, gave a lavish banquet in Rawalpindi where the Emir praised the friendship between the two countries, as well as Durand. The Viceroy of India promptly named him his Foreign Secretary, the youngest in the history of the British Empire. Over the next eight years, Durand travelled frequently to the hostile lands along the frontier, which he and his British colleagues saw as populated by "absolute barbarians…avaricious, thievish and predatory to the last degree". In 1893, Durand planted himself permanently at the frontier, sitting day after day with the bearded Emir, a series of rudimentary maps spread out before them to carve out the line that would define their mutual border. The one last sticking point was Waziristan—then, as now, a sprawling, provocative and unsettled territory on the fringes of two empires. This was one stretch that Britain wanted very much to retain for the Raj, largely as a buffer. Durand could hardly

understand the Emir's apparently desperate desire to retain a place that "had so little population and wealth". Why? Durand asked. A simple one-word explanation. "Honour," the Emir responded. This was easily satisfied by tripling the Emir's annual "subsidy" from the British Empire from six to 18 lakh rupees ($ 8,000 to $ 24,000). On November 12, 1893, the agreement was signed, though the Emir really had no idea what he was signing since the original was written in English, which he neither spoke nor read.

Sir Olaf Caroe, who served as the last governor of the North-West Frontier Province in what was then India, and a first-hand expert on the Durand Line which defined the western border of the territory he governed, observed that "…the Agreement did not describe the line as the boundary of India, but as the frontier of the Emir's [-ur-Rahman] domain and the line beyond which neither side would exercise influence. This was because the British Government did not intend to absorb the tribes into their administrative system, only to extend their own, and to exclude the Emir's authority from the territory east and south of the line…The Emir had renounced sovereignty beyond the line." But a host of would-be interlopers from Soviet invaders to Taliban freedom fighters to al-Qaeda terrorists, not to mention American forces and their NATO allies, ever fully came to appreciate that reality.

Afghanistan still refuses to recognise this line, describing it as a colonial mandate imposed by force of will, though Pakistan freely accepts it as part of the legacy inherited, along with its freedom, at the time of the British exit from the subcontinent. It remains one of the longest-standing, firmest, yet utterly violent, unsettled and admittedly quite porous such red line.

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Cemetery of Empires

There is no doubt that Afghanistan stubbornly retains its name as the cemetery of empires. With the departure of Britain from the region, the Russian empire, then the Soviet regime, now perhaps again Russia will be trying to establish some hegemony of a part or all of the region. Communism came to an end in Russia largely on the heels of the Kremlin's failure at the end of the last century.

The United States has come close to concomitant failure in this century. Now it is very much up to India to makes certain that democracy itself does not come a cropper as a result of the failures or profound imbalances poorly conceived and disastrously executed.

Which is how we come now to the regime of Narendra Modi. The current Indian Prime Minister came to power at a most opportune moment. Three years before the arrival of Donald Trump, Modi was already in the process of asserting his control over India as the nation's 14th Prime Minister—and making it quite clear what it would take to cement his allegiance or friendship with any of a host of foreign powers coming to pay court. But it was not until the arrival of Trump as President of the United States in January 2017 that Modi truly found his soulmate. Ironically, however, Trump was not the first American President to have expressed his eagerness to embrace India's deeply conservative leader.

On June 5, 2016, *The New York Times* observed, "There are few relationships between President Obama and another world leader more unlikely than the one he has with Prime Minister Modi." *The Times* continued that the two "have a public warmth" that has been on display at each of their seven meetings—two at the White House.

Of course, there are any number of reasons that American presidents across the political spectrum have found themselves attracted to Indian leaders. And never more so than today. First, India is on the verge (likely within the next five years) of passing China to become the world's most populous nation. Certainly, it already is the most populous democracy, which itself makes it an appealing ally to a nation such as the United States anxious to find a like-minded counterweight to help neutralise Chinese expansionist ambitions in Asia and beyond. Of course, India's massive economy and an exploding consumer sector make it equally attractive to American firms wanting to do business there. But the icing on this already quite alluring cake is India's geographic positioning and the reality that its neighbour and effectively arch enemy is also an ally of the utterly anti-democratic Taliban who have just seized control of Afghanistan.

None of which is to suggest that this is a good idea. Playing favourites, especially among regional competitors, is never a wise method of conducting diplomacy. Yet that is largely what America has been doing lately.

One might have thought that with the arrival of Joe Biden, determined to chart a decidedly different course from his predecessor, that there would be at least a subtle shift, if not a 180 degree turn. Not hardly. The nature of the early contacts between the two Governments is indicative. So far, Modi and the Indian Government have been favoured with visits by America's Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. The only senior American visitor to Pakistan during Biden's first year has been the Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman, who Prime Minister Imran Khan refused to meet, calling Blinken's remarks about Pakistan "ignorant".

Path for Peace

I have long believed that a substantial and accelerating tilt toward India is what has destabilised the subcontinent, led to an unmitigated disaster in Afghanistan and only expanded the advantages of China and its own expansionist interests. As I have written for CNN, what Joe Biden and Blinken have not wanted to tell Americans, and certainly would never admit to Narendra Modi, the path for peace in Afghanistan, and the removal of a vast well of contention and violence throughout the subcontinent, runs not through New Delhi, but through Islamabad.

Even Russia and China have learned this lesson and are scrambling. Their early support for the Taliban is part of hedging their bets over the reaction in their own homegrown Muslim communities—the Chechens and the Uyghurs, respectively. Neither country wants Afghanistan to give safe harbour to Muslim liberation groups they consider to be terrorists. Still, they, along with Pakistan, which provided refuge to the Taliban for years, are prepared to play into the vacuum America is leaving—in Afghanistan and more broadly as well.

The fact is, there is little that could compel the Taliban to meet the conditions for a full US troop withdrawal. The group is stronger now than it has been since 2001, and it recognises its current position of strength—especially with the support of its neighbouring ally Pakistan. If America is to get out—someday—there is one critical step that must be taken, starting now.

The US must become very good friends with Pakistan—even if that means easing away from our close ties with India. Pakistan shares a 1,640-mile border with Afghanistan, otherwise known as the Durand Line, which was established by the British in 1893. It is effectively one of the world's most enduring and contentious red lines. Pakistan, and especially the Inter-Services Intelligence, the military's intelligence arm, has cast itself as the Taliban's protectors and underwriters in a bid to limit India's influence. India, in turn, is wary that Pakistan will use Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks against its territory.

A Pakistan that is at least more neutral could be prepared to reverse its role in bankrolling, arming, training and providing sanctuaries in the wild frontier provinces, all of which, as Human Rights Watch observes, "contribute to making the Taliban a highly effective military force". Trump made no secret of his tilt toward India and Narendra Modi, which only unsettled Pakistan's Imran Khan, a charismatic, Oxford-educated cricket champion who sought to maintain some relationship with Washington. While a new administration arrived in Washington in January 2021, it does not seem to be changing course when it comes to fostering a closer relationship with Pakistan.

The first of Biden's calls with the Quad—the Prime Ministers of Japan, Australia and India—may have helped bolster American security interests in the South and East China Seas, but it did nothing to improve the United States' position in Afghanistan. When Blinken and Austin made their first foreign visit to Japan and South Korea, Austin went on to visit India, utterly ignoring Pakistan.

Moreover, with the United States and its NATO allies now gone from Afghanistan, the whole equation has morphed again. There is no real sense that Pakistan has withdrawn any of its support from the Taliban. Nor, at the same time, is there any sense that the United States has begun to pivot back to a more even-handed set of relationships on the subcontinent. Yet, not in decades, has the United States had need of a more

sympathetic understanding, let alone accommodation from Islamabad.

There is still the possibility, of course, that Afghanistan will prove to be the cemetery of the Taliban. But the alternative is hardly more appealing. Imagine how pernicious would an Afghanistan that is in thrall of ISIS-K be. How safe would India find itself?

So, somehow, the Biden administration must be persuaded to understand the necessity of an even-handed and balanced approach to both nations on the subcontinent. I am confident that such an approach would redound especially to the benefit of India, assuring its safety in what is becoming an increasingly dangerous and challenging neighbourhood. I should hasten to reassure my Indian readers that this should by no means be seen as an abandonment in any sense of the world's largest democracy. Rather, India should recognise its own advantages in encouraging the United States to demonstrate—if Washington is unable or unwilling to recognise this itself—that the safety of Pakistan is intimately entwined with the security of India. Pakistan's continued underwriting of the Taliban and its excesses, without encouraging Afghanistan's new rulers to adopt positions that can integrate them into the community of responsible nations, can only further endanger India. Is this the endgame India should be seeking?

It is critical to examine the neighbourhood. Who is waiting there on the fringes of all these countries? Russia and its near-abroad (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), whose strings Vladimir Putin controls so definitively from the Kremlin, is as interested as his predecessors back a thousand years to cement and control what could be a potentially existential threat to the southern

India should recognise its own advantages in encouraging the United States to demonstrate—if Washington is unable or unwilling to recognise this itself—that the safety of Pakistan is intimately entwined with the security of India

reaches of the greater Russian empire. While China shares only a sliver of its frontier with Afghanistan, it is becoming increasingly interested in who might be pulling the strings in Afghanistan, but especially Pakistan and by extension India with whom China does share a substantial and often tendentious frontier. As relations between the United States and China remain frozen, the leadership in Beijing, especially Xi Jinping, will have every incentive to improve relations with nations that are seen to share an unhappy relationship with Washington

It should be in the interest, however, of none of these countries—Russia and the Stans, China, Pakistan or India—to see Afghanistan utterly fail. Yet it is already on the very brink of failure. At the end of October, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), long the best single source of monitoring for what goes on in that nation, reported some chilling statistics:

■ The number of Afghans requiring humanitarian assistance in 2021 has reached half of Afghanistan's total population, nearly double that of 2020, and a six-fold increase compared to four years ago.

■ By September 2021, 14 million people—or one out of three Afghans—were on the brink of starvation.

■ Wheat production is expected to drop by 31 per cent in 2021 compared to the previous year, with a 62 per cent reduction in areas under cultivation, leading to a shortfall of 2.46 million metric tonnes of wheat.

- Kazakhstan reported that it is unwilling to export its wheat to Afghanistan, given the country's inability to pay, increasing the risk of famine.
- By mid-2022, poverty levels in Afghanistan could increase by between seven and 25 percentage points, compared to 2020, with Afghanistan facing near universal poverty, with 97 per cent below the poverty line.
- The Afghani (AFN) currency depreciated dramatically against the US dollar, devaluing the AFN and further diminishing Afghan households' ability to purchase food and other necessities. Afghanistan does not have the technical capabilities to print its own currency.

A failed, increasingly desperate state border on the subcontinent can be of no benefit to India. So, what is to be done? Sadly, America continues to grasp at straws. And India remains largely on the sidelines. Yet, as the only nation on the subcontinent with an ongoing working relationship with America's leadership, it needs to step up, and quickly. Modi must help make Biden understand the value of dealing openly and even-handedly with Pakistan. First, of course, Modi himself needs to accept this reality, as does the entire leadership of the Government of India. It is in their interest and indeed the interest of the entire globe. Nothing will be gained by the further isolation of Pakistan, or Afghanistan for that matter, and India will only be potentially the most proximate loser. Peace across the subcontinent, India's neighbours moving toward a condominium, can only help as India itself moves into the position of the world's largest and most consequential nation.

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AN EXEMPLARY REPUBLIC

■ **Vikram Bahri**

A personal, nostalgic reflection on the Republic of India as it stands today, seen from the perspective of the author's grandfather, Sardari Lal Bahri, who was a refugee from West Punjab (now Pakistan). Also, a Harvardian presents a SWOT analysis for India...

Jawaharlal Nehru's famous words at the birth of Free India truly encapsulate the aspirations of this great nation and its people: "At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." Refugees from Pakistan's West Punjab included many industrious entrepreneurs who were going to become stakeholders of Modern India, as we know it today. My paternal grandfather, Sardari Lal Bahri, founder of the Jaipur Golden Transport Group, wrote his own script, which is a small, yet consequential, part of this colossal epic, the Republic of India.

Born in a rural family in Sargodha District, West Punjab, in 1905, Sardari Lal Bahri was the oldest of seven children. The untimely death of his father left him in a sink-or-swim situation at the age of 12. His widowed mother sent him to the nearest city of Sargodha to learn a craft for earning a livelihood.

"From the moment I first saw them in the city, I fell in love with automobiles," my grandfather confided in me. In the early 1920s, Sardari Lal had become a proficient driver, among the few who dared to drive those moody beasts of steel and wood. Not many people know that the earliest buses ran on coal, such as a steam engine locomotive.

These coal-powered buses also served the needs of goods transportation for the populace. Traders would go to different towns for their work and usually return with wares or produce for trade/self-use. The birth of India was preceded and, in many political ways, conceived by the end of the Second World War. Many surplus transport vehicles from the war were now available for civilian use. Sardari Lal Bahri made innovative and productive use of these war-beaten trucks, which ran on diesel and were more pliable and versatile than any of the automobile dinosaurs they had used before.

As my grandfather always lamented, "The Republic of India was born with a silver spoon of opportunity but in rags of colonial apathy."

Ground for Growth

In 2009, Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen, at the launch of his book, *The Idea of Justice*, prophetically declared, "India is a nascent democracy and, by nature, democracies always evolve and flourish." In my view, in the 73 years since becoming a Republic, India has fascinatingly evolved and flourished. I may be accused of partisanship and optimism, but that is the DNA of every refugee, anywhere in the world. In spite of wars, natural disasters, sectarian strife and, sometimes, condescending world opinion, India has stood its ground with resilience and aplomb. My grandfather came with almost nothing and created one of India's largest trucking companies. He believed that we have to strive to succeed; waiting for change or opportunity is akin to waiting for rain with your mouth open to the skies.

In these momentous years, the Republic of India has provided the essential ground for growth that helped many entrepreneurs become iconic success stories, including:

■ Freedom from foreign rule/bias/tyranny.
■ Protection from internal and external strife.
■ Vibrant democracy to be able to choose one's own leaders.
■ Laws and liberties to live with respect.

Obviously, there would be detractors to my views and that is perfectly all right for this is not a case of attempting to show the glass half-full. India is not only an exemplary Republic when compared to neighbouring States conceived from similar circumstances but it shows character to even those nations that flaunt "Republic" in their middle name.

The Republic of India @ 73: SWOT Analysis

During my study at Harvard we were made to do SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analyses for various business situations. As an ode to the wonderful experience of learning at Harvard, I am going to attempt a SWOT for India.

Strengths

- **Largest democracy in the world:** Enough has been said about this unique distinction which we carry with pride.
- **Young workforce:** As much as it imposes a challenge to a nation, a youthful nation grows and develops to the needs of its citizenry.
- **Brilliant minds:** We have some of the brightest brains in the world who have excelled in every area of human development.
- **Software nerve centre of the world:** With a dramatically digitalising world, India is rightly acknowledged as its back office.

Weaknesses

- **Resources constraints:** As much as the Republic wants to shrug the endemic afflictions of poverty, ill health and illiteracy, these demons continue to hinder India's march towards becoming a developed nation.
- **Sectarianism:** Since pre-Independence, crusaders such as Gandhi have been relentlessly trying to eradicate sectarianism with little success. The challenges posed by this demon and its affiliates—communalism, casteism and regionalism—pose a daunting challenge to growth.

- **Income and wealth disparity:** Unfortunately, since Independence, the disparity in income and, therefore, wealth, opportunity and growth, has been skewed. This poses a great challenge to a democracy where a very small percentage of wealthy taxpayers pay for the subsistence of the country.

Opportunities

- **Digitalisation:** In the digitalised twenty-first century, the traditional wealth indices are rapidly getting obsolete. Rather than a nation's wealth of oil and natural resources, its demographic dividends are being evaluated and compared. India stands a strong chance of winning in this new race.
- **Competitive workforce:** Owing to immense competition for scarce educational and infrastructural resources, our students have learnt to strive and succeed at most international forums/institutions. India's diligent workforce (both, blue- and white-collared) is globally admired for its brilliance and fortitude.
- **Inclusive and conducive global environment:** The twenty-first century, in spite of its challenges, is the safest, healthiest and most inclusive century. There are no imperialist armies or subjugated colonies. The international community is ready to help, educate, invest and thrive with India.

My grandfather came with almost nothing and created one of India's largest trucking companies. He believed that we have to strive to succeed; waiting for change or opportunity is akin to waiting for rain with your mouth open to the skies

Threats

- **Nuclear proliferation:** The biggest threat to India and to the world comes from human beings. Man has created too many sophisticated weapons of death. With intemperate neighbours, India needs to learn to live with them in a multi-polar world.

- **Pandemics:** The fragility of humanity was exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we grow towards a smarter, connected and better world, we are always going to be susceptible to powers beyond our realm.

Indeed, the Republic of India is, today, in the yardstick of nation-building, a toddler with a wobbly walk and unsure step.

Looking ahead, I conclude with the words of Robert Browning in his famous poem, 'Rabbi Ben Ezra': "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be…"

Vikram Bahri is a New Delhi-based businessman who is actively involved in the businesses of Logistics, Healthcare and International Trade. He is also a Trustee of Jaipur Golden Hospital, where he leads his family initiatives in philanthropy.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR: THE WASTED YEARS

■ **Vijay Bakaya**

The problem of Jammu and Kashmir has been the most persistent since India's Independence in 1947. The situation reflects years of neglect and vacillation as well as the missed opportunities of resolution for this land of ethereal beauty, where its people are caught in the crossfire of history and politics.

Ever since India attained its Independence from colonial rule on August 15, 1947, its former state, now union territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), has remained the most talked about subject among the academicians, politicians and historians of the world. During this long and variegated discourse, a narrative has taken shape around an assumption that the territory of Jammu and Kashmir is a matter of dispute between India and Pakistan, having arisen at the time of the partition of India, when the accession of this princely state took place.

Half-truths, misinformation and tendentious interpretation of events have often blurred historical facts. While unsolicited offers of mediation have been made from time to time by some countries, most have nudged both, Pakistan and India, to resolve issues through dialogue. However, hardly any country, except those which are India's permanent friends, has accepted the finality of accession. A perception persists even after 75 years, among a majority of Muslim countries, that J&K should have acceded to Pakistan and not to India, as it was a Muslim majority state and was contiguous with Pakistan, a Muslim majority country. In their view, this mistake can only be corrected by a referendum. This mindset is reflective of the fantasy harboured by some that history can be rewritten retrospectively. The thought process is born out of a conflict between fiction and reality; between perception and truth; between objectivity and bias.

The historical fact, however, is that out of the 565 princely states in India, Jammu and Kashmir was the only state whose relationship with the Indian Union had not been decided at the time of its Independence, as the ruling Maharaja Hari Singh had sought time to decide whether to go to Pakistan or India. He had to give up his vacillation in the face of an invasion by the tribals of Pakistan, supported by its army. This compelled him to decide in favour of accession to India, which could help militarily only if he became part of the Union of India. This decision of the Maharaja would also have had a closure, like the decision of other Maharajas, had it not been taken under duress and had the Prime Minister of Independent India, in a gesture of gratuitous magnanimity, not promised that the wishes of the people would be ascertained later on; had he not ordered a unilateral ceasefire in the country's counter offensive against the invaders and, finally, had he not referred the issue to the United Nations.

Matter of Speculation

The promise that the Prime Minister made was not necessary because under the Constitution of that time, the rulers of the princely states had the authority to decide, on behalf of the people, whether they would like to join with Pakistan or India. All other princely states took their decision before August 15, 1947, but why Maharaja Hari Singh dithered has remained a matter of speculation.

There is evidence to believe that Pakistan was deliberating on Maharaja Hari Singh's request for more time; a standstill agreement was contemplated and India did not intervene. It can safely be said that if Pakistan had not forced Hari Singh's hand, the fate of J&K would have been decided after a leisurely process of cogitation by Hari Singh of the pros and cons of joining India or Pakistan. The fact remains that he acceded to India and signed the same Instrument of Accession that other princely states had signed, with the same caveats, on October 26, 1947. Thus, there was no dispute.

But still, there are those who voice their concern about this 'Kashmir Dispute' in various forums and also refer to the UN Resolution of 1948. They forget that it is no longer relevant, as its first condition that Pakistan (declared in the Resolution as aggressor) should vacate nearly 14,000 sq km of the land of J&K occupied by it by force before the people's wishes can be ascertained has not been fulfilled by Pakistan, which has defied and also distorted the purport of this Resolution. It blames India and many erudite scholars tend to agree that India is not implementing the Resolution of the UN, which calls for self-determination. This debate has mystified the Kashmir dispute so much that all are asking for a solution but no one is able to offer one.

The Kashmir Dispute

Against this backdrop, the 'Kashmir Dispute' gets highlighted in essence as a demand for reversing a decision taken 75 years ago by an authority empowered by the law of the time to do so, on behalf of the people. The larger dimension of such a liberal and flexible attitude towards agreements/ treaties signed in the past through a legitimate process is that there is no finality about any such decision and it has to be endorsed by every new generation. This thinking can lead to instability and is dangerous. But for argument's sake, even if this were accepted to be the norm in international law, it has already been tested in the context of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, known as the Sher-e-Kashmir (Lion of Kashmir), was the most charismatic leader of Kashmir and had supported Hari Singh's decision to accede to India. He was Prime Minister of J&K up to 1953. He was, in a strange twist of history, arrested by his good friend Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister

of India, for treason and conspiracy to declare J&K independent. While in jail for 11 years, he formed a political outfit called the Plebiscite Front. This Front was, however, banned from engaging in any political activity but clandestinely it spread the message that the future of J&K was to be decided by the people in a referendum. All this, while elections were held in which this Front could not participate. Elected Governments, however, carried forward the developmental agenda and, by the time Sheikh Abdullah was released in 1964, the idea of a referendum had lost its intensity.

After 1971, when Pakistan was dismembered by India and Bangladesh was formed, Sheikh Abdullah seems to have realised the futility of his demand and, in 1975, he signed an Accord with Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, to disband the Plebiscite Front and to give up the demand that the wishes of the people have to be determined whether they would go to Pakistan or stay with India. He was made Chief Minister by removing a duly elected one. Subsequently, in the elections held in 1977, following the Accord, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah asked for a vote for Jammu and Kashmir being an integral part of India. In an overwhelming mandate through an internationally acknowledged free and fair choice, the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh voted for Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his National Conference Party to govern the state as part of the Republic of India. This watershed milestone was the last in the chequered journey of J&K. From here on a new era began in

While unsolicited offers of mediation have been made from time to time by some countries, most have nudged both, Pakistan and India, to resolve issues through dialogue

which uncertainty ended and Sheikh Abdullah resumed his unfinished task of revolutionary land reforms, ensuring people's participation in decision making and giving them a place in the sun.

During the 22 years between 1953 and 1975, after the initial convulsion of rage and betrayal caused by Sheikh Abdullah's arrest subsided, there was no restless urge among the people for Pakistan. They happily got involved in the vibrant era of development and cultural renaissance, which was ushered in by Chief Ministers committed to the idea of India. The youth were engaged in sports and healthy outdoor activities as part of their school curriculum. To protect them from distractions, many were sent to professional colleges in the rest of the country, so that they could return as doctors, engineers and so on. Peace and tranquil happiness spread among the people. This alarmed Pakistan, which waged a war in 1965.

The people of Kashmir rose in solidarity against the aggression to thwart any attempt at subterfuge and sabotage. "Beware you aggressor, the Kashmiri is prepared" was the clarion call. A ceasefire was declared under international pressure and, in Tashkent, an agreement to restore the status quo ante was signed. This was a lost opportunity. India could have bargained as it was in a position of strength for burying the ghost of the 'Kashmir Dispute'.

Lost Opportunities

Thereafter, people lived their normal lives. Literacy improved; women came out of their homes to work as entrepreneurs and in the field of education and the economy prospered as infrastructure rapidly proliferated. During this period, there was no expression of any attachment to the idea of Pakistan and, after 1971, when India dismembered East Pakistan to help bring Bangladesh into existence, independent of West Pakistan, the Kashmiri realised that Pakistan was just a pipe dream.

At Simla (now Shimla), in 1971, in the agreement by its name, India again lost an opportunity. It gave away 90,000 Prisoners of War without receiving anything in return except a commitment by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, that he would go back and make his people accept the reality that the pursuit of Kashmir was a chimera and take steps to cement friendship with India. Instead, back home, he announced that Pakistan would fight India for a hundred years and bleed it with a thousand cuts.

During the late sixties, features that distinguished J&K from the rest of the country, by means of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, were diluted. The head of Government was designated as Chief Minister instead of Prime Minister; the head of state was designated as Governor instead of Sadre Riyasat and the jurisdiction of all Constitutional bodies such as the Election Commission, the Supreme Court, the Comptroller and Auditor General was extended to the state. What remained was a separate Constitution, which was a replica of the Indian Constitution—two flags (national and state) and the right of the Assembly to accept or reject Acts passed by the Parliament. It was in this background that the Accord of 1975 came as a momentous denouement of all attempts of the past to finally get the fact of Accession accepted by all.

Many elections were held in which people participated enthusiastically for the issues of development. They began to feel gradually reconciled and happy with their fate in India. They led a life like any other citizen of India, enjoyed religious freedom and people of all faiths—Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists—lived in harmony in a

shared cultural ethos. Everyone had the right of free expression, the right of free movement and economic liberty. They participated with gusto in the national festivals and got used to peace and the absence of crime. The only violence they resorted to was verbal, or, in reaction to some provocation, they pelted stones.

Peace prevailed, discontent was absent and the urge for Pakistan remained subdued among the Muslims of Kashmir, especially as the goal of prosperity seemed more achievable. This restfulness in the population, particularly Kashmiri Muslims, did not suit Pakistan. The dispute had to be kept alive, discontent had to be generated and means other than conventional war, which had not succeeded, had to be found. Thus, Operation Tupac was conceived in the late 1980s by Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, former President of Pakistan. The components of the plan were to lure the youth from Kashmir for training in arms, which had found their way from Afghanistan; to indoctrinate them with hatred for India and to push them back into Kashmir to fight for the freedom of the Muslims from Indian "oppression". They were made to love the thought of 'Dying for the Cause' and 72 virgins in heaven would be their reward.

These youth came back in droves in 1990, with guns in their hands and passion in their eyes and hearts. They promised to get freedom for a population which was already free. For a while, there was euphoria all round and these "freedom fighters" were applauded and honoured. But, soon, their aura disappeared as they got unmasked as brutal killers and not crusaders for liberation. They had to resort to coercion to make themselves heard. Fear and terror engulfed society. This led to the tragic exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus.

The psyche of the Kashmiri Muslims who stayed back was chilled by a nightmare in which they saw blood, heard bullet shots and grenade blasts and lived through curfews, cordons and searches

There also seemed to be a design to make them leave. Hundreds of them, intellectuals, professionals and young entrepreneurs were brutally killed on the streets and in their homes on the pretext that they were agents of India. In panic, the whole population of Kashmiri Hindus abandoned their houses, orchards and fields; no one stopped them. They lived for many years in tents and ghettos, 300 miles away in Jammu, unable to understand why fate was so unkind. Their children grew up in a quagmire of despair and the old and infirm died, carrying with them a deep hurt of uprooting and a painful nostalgia for their past, which they could not recover. Today, they still yearn to go back to the valley of limpid streams, sylvan meadows, apple-filled orchards and green undulating pastures. But, they have no homes to go back to. The psyche of the Kashmiri Muslims who stayed back was chilled by a nightmare in which they saw blood; heard bullet shots and grenade blasts and lived through curfews, cordons and searches. They imbibed a vocabulary associated with oppression.

The people lived in a phantasmagoria in which threats and diktats under assumed names, emanating from unknown sources, regulated their day-to-day lives. They saw suicide bombers and mutilated bodies. They heard terrorists being glorified and troops being reviled. They saw innocents being mistaken for militants and shot dead by soldiers. They saw innocents being mistaken for informers and shot dead by militants. They saw daily turmoil and mayhem. All this

caused hysteria and stress on a large scale and, all the while, the cause for which this price was being paid remained unrealised.

The Kashmiri Muslim was left wondering whether the dream he welcomed was the same that was being pursued through terror. The observer and the analyst talked about mindless brutalities and human rights violations. No one asked who picked up the gun first. For six years after 1990, the administration concentrated on fighting the terrorist on the one hand and alleviating the suffering of the victim and maintaining essential supplies on the other. But, after 1996, a semblance of normalcy returned and the devastated life of the people was salvaged through humane welfare measures taken by an elected Government.

Jammu and Kashmir started moving ahead again on the road to prosperity, but the damage had been done; the mind had been scarred and the soul had been shaken. The post-1990 born generation of both Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus is deeply scarred. They are the creatures of turmoil. The Muslim youth nurse anger against India and want Pakistan; the Hindu youth nurse anger against the Muslim and want a homeland. This is the end result of all attempts made by successive political dispensations to solve the 'Kashmir Dispute'.

The solution found in 1975 should have closed the chapter but, ironically, it has sharpened the focus on the dispute as never before. The abrogation of Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution is the latest attempt. The Muslims of Kashmir have been devastated by brutality, which was alien to their spirit; the Kashmiri Hindu has been devastated by being violently uprooted. They have tried to cope with this nightmare. The Muslim youth, who has been used by Pakistan to die for a lost cause, is still caught in a mesh of false dreams and the Kashmiri Hindu is busy in the pursuit of replanting himself in a homeland.

Both are in search of a messiah who can hold their hand and guide them on the road to peace and contentment; who can retrieve for them the paradise of Kashmir they have lost; who can return to them their wasted years.

For Vijay Bakaya to be allotted to J&K after he qualified in the IAS in 1970 was like the return of the native. Thereafter, he had the opportunity to work as a civil servant in a state which threw up challenges all the time. He reached the peak of the hierarchy and retired as Chief Secretary after 36 years of an eventful career.

SEEKING VISIBILITY AND A VOICE

■ Ela R. Bhatt

Only when it is organised can the informal sector come into its own and be effective. Only when unions and cooperatives join hands to get themselves heard can a Second Freedom be achieved. The contribution of women, in particular, is the pivot of change that needs to be consolidated

The most sustained experience of my life since India's Independence has been the search for the Second Freedom, the economic empowerment of the poor, toiling women of India. For me, this half-century has seen constantly renewed fulfilments, in spite of failures, disappointments and even opposition in my public life.

As the struggle for Independence was won, the atmosphere in the universities and civic life was full of restless enthusiasm to rebuild the nation. I am a product of that early atmosphere. I eagerly remember those days in the university when I had enthusiastically joined the upcoming student leaders, including my future husband. I was a timid college girl, yet I had gathered the courage to join the efforts, like so many other young people at that time, to try and make personal and public meaning of the recently-gained freedom from foreign rule.

Our teachers sent us out to the people of India, particularly to the rural poor. Our parents had their doubts, but they did not stop us from our journey. Over a period of time, we realised that the right to vote was not enough for the poor and for the women. They wanted a voice and visibility. As the poor, they wanted more than just day-to-day survival. As women, they wanted opportunities to learn and to act. As workers in India's unorganised sector, they wanted to be a part of the labour movement. As Dalits and minorities, they wanted to move in from the margins to the mainstream. Yes, they wanted a voice and visibility. It took still more years for us to realise that this was not possible without access to and ownership of economic resources by the poor women. Coming out of their state of exploitation by family, society and the state, these women wanted to enjoy what I call *Doosri Azadi*: Second Freedom. The First Freedom, political power, the country had achieved in 1947. The Second Freedom, economic power, is yet to be achieved. As I understood Mahatma Gandhi, economic self-reliance was as important for him as political independence. He called economic poverty "a moral collapse" of society. True, political change or technological change does not necessarily remove poverty because it does not remove economic exploitation. The problem of poverty and the loss of freedom, according to Gandhiji, are not separate.

I have seen, at close quarters, how a SEWA member experiences economic freedom. When she has a roof of her own, a farm of her own, a well of her own, or trees of her own and, as she moves towards full employment at her level, she has more 'operational freedom' on a day-to-day basis in her world of work. She arrives at a bargaining position in the dealings with the local vested interests, inside or outside her own home. Land reforms, the green revolution and water management were the nationwide initiatives of the early years. It is in the later years that they gained operational meaning.

As soon as I obtained my law degree, in 1954, I joined the Textile Labour Association (TLA) founded by Gandhiji in 1917, a unique trade union built on the philosophy of trusteeship. The union aimed at the total development of the workers, not just economic. The TLA was known as 'a laboratory of human relations'. Here, I learnt the first lessons of the trade union movement.

> The First Freedom, political power, the country had achieved in 1947. The Second Freedom, economic power, is yet to be achieved. As I understood Mahatma Gandhi, economic self-reliance was as important for him as political independence

In 1971, migrant women, working as cart-pullers in Ahmedabad's cloth market, came to me. The women who lived on the footpath were seeking help for better living conditions. The next month came the head-loader women of the same cloth market, agitated about very low rates of payment (30 paise per trip for carrying a bale of cloth from a wholesaler to a retailer). They felt exploited by the traders. Then followed the used-garment dealer women who were in search of credit facility from the recently-nationalised banks. These women were paying 10 per cent per day as interest rate to the moneylender. They felt enslaved to the lenders. The women vendors of downtown Manek Chowk market came seeking protection from police harassment.

And, then, came Hawa Bibi of Patan, a *bidi* (a type of cheap cigarette made of unprocessed tobacco wrapped in leaves) roller who had lost her work after 20 years from the contractor who first started rejecting 50 per cent of her rolled *bidi*s, complaining they were "bad". Ultimately, he stopped giving her any material to roll *bidi*s. Losing her livelihood, a very agitated Hawa Bibi came to the TLA office seeking ways to get justice. The Labour Commissioner's office had told her that she was not a "worker" because she was "not working". Working in her home and on piece rate is not considered 'work' by law. That was 1971.

In 1972, some of these urban, poor, self-employed women workers came to the meeting that I called in a public garden where we formed our trade union. We called it the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). Gandhian thinking has been the source of guidance for us in forming the SEWA union. We wanted to be both, workers and citizens, and not remain on the margins of society.

> Why a women's union? Because there is a significant relationship between being a woman, working in the informal sector and being poor. In the informal sector, there are more economically active women than men

Only two things were clear in my mind then. First, when 89 per cent (now 92 per cent) of the working population of the country engaged in the self-employed and the informal sector economy is outside the labour movement, there is no labour movement worth its name. Second, about 80 per cent of women in India are rural, poor, illiterate or semi-literate and economically very active. So, in the women's movement of India, it is these women who should be playing a leading role. Their major pressing concerns were of economic survival: poverty and exploitation. To fight them, the poor have to organise and build collective strength—only that much I knew. We had seen that among the poor, all women work. A labour union of poor women was the answer we found.

Why a women's union? Because there is a significant relationship between being a woman, working in the informal sector and being poor. In the informal sector, there are more economically active women than men. Also, women are poorer than men in the sector, because women are working in lower income activities, most often as casual workers, sub-contract workers, petty vendors and hawkers.

Organising the Informal Sector

But nothing is easy. The Registrar of Unions was not ready to register us as a trade union in 1972, because we did not fit into his definition of a trade union. For him, garment workers, cart pullers, rag pickers, weavers, shepherds, embroiderers, *dai*s

(midwives), forest produce gatherers were not 'workers'. The Indian Census did not count them among the working population, neither did our economists. Such invisibility of women's informal work kept them powerless as producers, traders and workers. This has become a matter of serious concern about equity ever since. If women's invisible, informal work were to be fully counted, both the share of informal workers in the workforce and the estimates of the contribution of the informal sector to the total output would increase.

Organising the informal sector is of absolutely critical importance to the informal sector workers themselves and, more broadly, to the labour movement. Only when they are organised, can the informal sector workers gain visibility and a voice. That is when they can demand that their needs and concerns be addressed at different levels. Without being organised, they remain invisible to policy makers and isolated from mainstream social and economic institutions, particularly if they are women. Because of their invisibility and isolation, their problems are not well understood (if at all).

SEWA, as a trade union, started in 1972; it has a membership of 530,000 self-employed women. SEWA also organises members tradewise in cooperatives, amounting to 86 cooperatives so far. Joint action of trade unions and cooperatives has been the strategy of SEWA, in order to make a presence felt in the national economy.

For SEWA, women's empowerment means full employment and self-reliance. When there is an increase in her income, security of work and assets in her name, she feels economically strong, independent and autonomous. Her self-reliance is not only considered on her own individual basis, but also organisationally. She has learnt to manage her own organisation. She sits on the boards and committees of her own union and cooperative and takes decisions. She has learnt to deal with traders, employers, officials and bankers on equal terms; where earlier she was a worker serving her master. She knows that without economic strength she will not be able to exercise her political rights in the village panchayat. However, basically, she has to have adequate work, which ensures her income as well as food and social security and that, in turn, ensures at least healthcare, childcare, insurance and shelter. Unlike those in the formal sector, the workers and the producers in the unorganised, informal, self-employed sector have to attain full employment on their own, through their own organisations.

Another component of empowerment for poor women is self-reliance; self-reliance in terms of financial self-sufficiency and management, as well as in terms of decision making. For them, collective empowerment is more important than being individually powerful. With collective strength, she is able to combat the outside exploitative and corrupt forces such as moneylenders, the police or blackmarketers. As her economic strength and self-reliance grows, a woman's respect within the family and the community soon follows.

Kamala, a *bidi* worker, became a senior organiser in SEWA. Today, she heads her caste council. She is helping the community take larger decisions. Her SEWA union committee has been a training ground for her public life.

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Which types of organisations can lead to empowerment? Not those that are charitable in nature or are controlled by one person. The truly empowering ones should belong to the women workers themselves. It should be owned by them and democratically controlled by them too. The dairy cooperative of the women in village Rupal put up a severe fight to the land grabbers (men) of the village who wanted to usurp the cooperative's fodder farm. 'Vanraji', the Women's Tree Growers Cooperative, fought the *bharwad*s (shepherds) in court, to retain the waste land acquired from the Government for collective plantations. 'Haryali', the Vegetable Vendors Cooperative, managed their cooperative so well that from their surplus, they gifted a building to the SEWA union. The union helped the vendors in the cooperative to win a case in the Supreme Court to establish their right of place in the Manek Chowk Market of Ahmedabad where they have been vending for the last three generations, when they were being pushed out by the authorities.

These organisations help their members to enter the mainstream. The SEWA Cooperative Bank was able to bring the illiterate, poor women workers and producers to the mainstream, formal banking system. They are now able to deal with the Reserve Bank of India at par with other Government banks; the auditors of the Federal Bank have to discuss (may be for the first time) banking and audit issues with the Board of Directors of SEWA Bank, who are self-employed women representatives of artisans, labourers, hawkers and vendors, sitting together at the same table. This provides a unique opportunity for exposure and dialogue to both sides. Sure, the SEWA Cooperative Bank would not have been able to perform effectively if there was no SEWA, the umbrella union organisation of self-employed women. Similarly, SEWA would not have been able to take up causes effectively if there was no standby, in the form of SEWA Bank, to provide financial support to SEWA Members.

The collectiveness of the organisation generates tremendous power and strength for its members, even in their individual lives. Famidabi of Bhopal, a *bidi* worker, on her way to attend the *bidi* workers meeting in Ahmedabad, dropped her *burqa* forever. Karimabe, the leader of the *chindi* (cotton waste cloth) workers of Dariapur, openly confronted her own brother who represented the employers. She represented the *chindi* workers while negotiating a wage rise with the Labour Commissioner.

When women organise on the basis of their work, their self-esteem grows and they realise the fact that they are 'workers' and 'producers' and active contributors to the national income and not merely somebody's wife, mother or daughter. While participating in the organisation and management of her cooperative or union, her self-confidence and competence grows; a sense of responsibility grows and leadership within her grows. A SEWA-UNESCO study of 873 SEWA leaders found that 52 per cent of them perceive themselves as the head of the household and 20 per cent as joint heads. The same self-worth is reflected in their answers: It is necessary to be (i) economically strong, (ii) for women to own assets, (iii) since women work equal to men, they should have equal

rights. Of all the women surveyed, 100 per cent answered as above and 67 per cent of the leaders also added to the last statement, saying that women work more than men.

When women are workers/producers and form their own organisations, they are also able to break new grounds. For instance, teachers and mothers forming SEWA's Childcare Cooperative; doctors and *dais* forming healthcare cooperatives and traditional midwives running drug counters at municipal hospitals, thereby propagating the use of rational drugs vis-à-vis brand-named patent drugs. Another example is 'Soundarya', the Cleaners' Cooperative that won a historic court case by establishing their right to negotiate employment conditions with the Company's Employees' Union.

SEWA has made an effort to federate these cooperatives, serving their needs for technical and managerial assistance in production and marketing while SEWA Bank provides the financial services.

Cooperatives and trade unions are two structures which satisfy the needs of women workers and small producers of the weaker sections, because these organisations are member-owned, member-controlled and democratic in nature. They are both part of already established, mainstream, national and international structures with networks all the way down to their members. Both cooperatives and trade unions started as movements of the poor, disadvantaged working class. It is only in the last few decades that trade unions have become a movement limited to those in the formal sector, that is, in industrial plants and offices and cooperatives, a vehicle for mostly the better-off farmers and traders. We need to go to the roots of the cooperatives, which arose from the labour movement.

Interaction between cooperatives and trade unions is mutually strengthening to each other, in order to make a dent in the national economy and in raising the bargaining power as well as the political visibility of the poor.

Influencing Policy Impact

SEWA has consciously and consistently perceived its role as influencing the policy-making process by participating as a representative organisation of the unorganised sector workers. For them the bargaining and negotiating is with the state and public policies. This means creating impact to influence, educate and reorient the direction of change as envisaged by policy makers. It may be making amendments in the law or lobbying for new laws for home workers or street vendors or it may be related to reclaiming the right to have access to credit or raw materials or information, know-how or market infrastructure. Grassroots workers at national and international levels are involved in formulating policies; hence, as a representative organisation of self-employed workers, we have to be effective at all these levels.

Planning for the Future

The future of women workers or, in fact, all workers is the most challenging. Today, some basics of trade unionism are changing, with globalisation, through the enormous increase in the power of transnational corporations. There is a decline in the state's role of administering the social compromise, which the transnational capital no longer needs because it now operates at a global level where it can escape the political control of society at the national level. Also, trade unionism is changing, and will change further, through the rise of a global labour market. Countries underbid each other in an effort to preserve or attract foreign investment.

At the end, it is the workers who suffer. This is why the challenge of the globalisation of capital is, above all, a challenge of unions' internationalism. In fact, it seems that a real trade union movement is yet to be built.

Therefore, we as women workers have to consider a political agenda, a trade union agenda and, most important, an organising agenda. At a world level, only 13 per cent or so of wage workers are organised into unions and, if the informal sector is added, this figure would drop to 4 or 5 per cent. In Japan, it fell from 56 per cent to 25 per cent during the last decade and, in the USA, it fell from 35 to 13 per cent. Northern Europe is an exception where the workers have held their own.

Much of this has to do with the changing structure of the enterprise. Most companies are reducing direct employment to a core workforce and then subcontracting their operations. A modern company is mainly the coordinator and the work is done on its behalf by others. Sub-contracting cascades down from one sub-contractor to the other, eventually ending up with the home-based worker, with conditions and wages worsening as one moves to the outer circle.

What the unions have not done is to follow their members and to follow the work. Their membership has shrunk, as has their core constituency. This is the story of industrialised countries. We in India, too, are moving on the same track. For this reason, the organising of the informal sector is a vital necessity for the trade union movement, also in what remains of the formal sector. The informal sector is growing everywhere, in both, industrialised and developing countries. The European Union used to call it 'atypical' work, but what is becoming 'atypical' is permanent, regular, paid employment.

Interaction between cooperatives and trade unions is mutually strengthening to each other, in order to make a dent in the national economy and in raising the bargaining power as well as the political visibility of the poor

The good news is that workers in the informal employment are taking the situation into their own hands. Being workers, they do what workers do naturally, whenever they have a chance: they organise.

Successful organising in the informal sector, and also in the service trades, means women in the trade union movement. If we are serious about organising the majority of workers, it needs to open the unions far more to women than has been the case so far. We women need to enter the union movement in a big number. Our number has been in the informal sector, not the formal sector, because a vast majority of workers in the informal sector are women, including all those in casual, temporary, part-time employment. Opening trade unions to the informal sector workers or women not only means taking them on board along with the specific demands of women, but also changing the work style and the culture of the trade unions' movement.

These workers rarely engage in typical collective bargaining, although they do social bargaining. This calls for a re-thinking on what is a worker and what is a union. This kind of organising can only be done by unions that see themselves as a social movement; it cannot be done by companies.

This brings me to our structures. We need to ask ourselves whether our present structures are the most effective ones to respond to the challenges of globalisation. I am not only referring to the need to overcome the fragmentation of the movement because of a multiplicity of organisations who

perpetuate political divisions, which have already become irrelevant.

Other questions arise. What sense does company-based unionism make at a time when companies are merging or are being taken over so frequently? Do industrial unions make sense at a time when such boundaries are shifting in economic reality and also workers change employers several times in their working lives, with periods of unemployment in between? Why should they have to change unions every time they change employment?

As Dan Gallin says, can we think of one union card for life? Should we not make our organising job easier for the members? We need to think again about the role of general unions in the new organising context. Who can be our allies in the labour movement? I suggest cooperatives. We have to study to what extent a joint action of union and cooperatives can be a strategy to impact the Government policies in the new economy.

Last, borders are dissolving in larger political and economic entities. Trans-border unions is another thought that needs to be considered today. International unionising has become a necessity when globalisation imposes stresses on union organisation. These will be pressing questions for women workers in the near future. In essence, the informal sector is the future of the labour movement, where women will be leaders.

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DOES GANDHIJI MATTER ANY MORE?

■ **Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty**

A look at the relevance of Gandhiji's thoughts on the Indian economy, rural and urban, in relation to India's development policy. His thoughts have assumed great relevance as a direct commentary on and a critique of current proto-colonial policies pursued by the Indian Government and for their bearing on the origin of the ongoing pandemic and environmental crisis. Care needs to be taken that Gandhiji is not sacrificed at the altar of globalisation, corporatisation and commercialisation.

Gandhiji is conveniently not around so that one can pay him lip service and forget about following him. Gandhiji improvised every item in the inventory of saintliness: austerity, poverty, silence, chastity and charity, without being baptised or ordained, and attempted to apply his principles to the here and now.[1] His advice, not to sow dragon's teeth and create further trouble,[2] would be relevant in political as well as economic domains today. Gandhiji's pursuit of an ecological rather than a technological civilisation, co-existence rather than conflict, is now given only lip service. The real Swaraj, Home Rule or Self Rule, in Gandhiji's definition, would be based, not on the exchange of colonial for proto-colonial majority rule, King Log for King Stork, for abuse of authority by a predatory few, but by the acquisition by everybody of the capacity to resist authority when abused.

For Gandhiji, the talisman for democracy is the respect for the voice of the poorest and the humblest. So, he said, "Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much for you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him? Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore control over his life and destiny? Will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?" Speaking to Louis Fischer about his socialism, he inscribed, on a handbook of Marxism, the words, "All for each and each for all". He described democracy as the art and science of mobilising the entire physical, economic and spiritual resource of the people in the service of the common good of all. He spoke about the action of an individual becoming irresistible and all-pervasive in its effect, when he reduced himself to zero.[3] He asked for the elimination of all caste distinctions, inter-caste marriages and asserted that all Hindus should take pride in being called *bhangi*s. To him, among saints, Shera was a barber, Sajana, a butcher, Gora, a potter, Raidas, a cobbler, Khamela, an untouchable, Tuka Ram, a Kunbi. He added that the subjection of Indians to the empire was retributive justice meted out to Hindus by God. If they considered untouchability as part of religion, they could not attain Swaraj.[4] He lived and described himself as a farmer, weaver, spinner, and scavenger, used a steel nib in a country-made glass inkstand, and lived on a diet of goat's milk and fruits. He adapted John Ruskin's Gospel of Labour from his book, *Unto this Last*, and the philosophy of body labour, working with the poor, from Tolstoy's affirmations in his essays, 'What I Believe in My Religion', or 'Death of Ivan Ilyich'. Yet, he himself said, "Let no one say that he is a follower of Gandhi…I know what an inadequate follower I am of myself."[5]

Gandhiji described the village as an ecological organism based on the dignity of manual labour, as against the technology of large-scale manufacturing. He opposed the extractive British colonial economy, in which land was turned into a commodity, impoverished, mortgaged and auctioned to pay dues, in cash, not in produce, and people were driven to death in famines. The Paisley and Manchester mills were enriched by the British at the cost of Bengal silk weavers, who were forced to sell to monopoly purchasers, buying without paying duty, in free trade. The East India Company guaranteed the industrial assets of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and transferred to India the liability of a huge public debt, including interest on borrowing. The cost of numerous wars, conducted by the British outside India, the Indian Railways, used by

the British for moving army and trade, were financed from India's revenues, on which their profits were imposed as a charge. The British policy has been brought back as a policy of internal colonisation, free trade and large infrastructural investments, steered by a few favoured corporate agencies, at the expense of rural India, in complete reversal of Gandhiji's policy. He proposed a revival of village republics as industry hubs, based on a household-centred, decentralised, cooperative system of functions and services, production and consumption, for subsistence and self-sufficiency, and installed the spinning wheel as a symbol of lost identity. In his plan, the village was not to be a mere appendage to the city, which, rather, had to meet the needs of a village. He preached an ethics of living, husbanding of natural resources, non-fiscal water and forest management, biomass budget, a symbiotic, mutually beneficial association, for natural metabolism, of animal, human, humus, micro and plant life. He suggested an approach of non-violence to the earth, respect for soil as a living laboratory rather than inert matter, cattle-based organic farming, cottage crafts as ancillary to agriculture, small-scale, diversified cooperative farming, for developing an equitable and just economy.

The universal access to multidisciplinary, vocational and moral education, advocated since the inception of the Indian Republic, and incorporated in the National Education Policy 2020, was part of Gandhi's scheme at Wardha in Nai Talim, which proposed educational reconstruction, based on an equilibrium of body, mind and spirit, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and self-help, to create a non-exploitative social order, based on freedom and equality of all to grow.[6] His Tolstoy Farm was built as a model village republic

> Gandhiji suggested an approach of non-violence to the earth, respect for soil as a living laboratory, cattle-based organic farming, cottage crafts as ancillary to agriculture, small-scale, diversified cooperative farming, for developing an equitable, just economy

of peasants and workers, which abjured private property and accepted community ownership and responsibility. Gandhian principles of sustainable development were founded on micro-level regional planning, focused on rural reconstruction and the reversal of the proto-colonial policy of compromising ability to cater to the future needs for survival and well-being, to meet present consumerist luxury needs, for the profit and self-aggrandisement of a few. His self-contained but interdependent village republics would control the means of mass production and produce for themselves, using intermediate rather than mega technology, minus boom bust interventions and the soul-destroying competition of unregulated markets. These principles were practiced and elaborated by J.C. Coomarappa at Sabarmati, for village renewal.

In 1934, Gandhiji resigned from the Congress to carry on his campaign against untouchability, promote village industry and education, based on craft and labour. In an article in *Harijan*, which appeared two days after his death, he wanted the Congress to dissolve into village industries associations, Loksewak, Harijan and Go Sewak Sangh, to serve villages. He asserted that the Congress had won political freedom to win economic, social and moral freedom. It must get out of the weedy and unwieldy growth of rotten and pocket boroughs, which has, since then, infected all political parties today.[7]

Gandhiji's apprehension that democracy could not survive without people having the courage to defend it, is proving to be a reality. The policy of the current dispensation in the Central Government is to create a virtual, proto-colonial economy, in which the villages, instead of being nurtured for a self-governing, interdependent economy, are being transformed into colonial outposts for exploitation by a few select large urban corporate groups. A systematic assault is being made on the federal and democratic structure and rule of law and equality before law, enshrined in the Constitution. The saintly image of Mahatma Gandhi is avidly pursued by India's rulers today, through dramatic gestures, while his principles are thrown to the wind. The name of Lord Rama, used by Gandhiji to unite people, is being used to divide people, on the basis of religion, caste and partisan loyalty, while Rama's itinerary through the hills and forests of the country, inhabited by the poorest of the poor, is being destroyed by giving environmental clearance for infrastructural projects in these fragile and sensitive areas. Hundreds of thousands of the poor have been dying in unplanned, precipitate, total lockdown, migration, demonetisation, citizenship issue-based agitation, lack of relief and implementation of schemes, suicides due to loss of employment, without any count available to the Central Government. The Central Government is responsible for a drastic fall in GDP, unprecedented budget deficit, unregulated pollution, and marginalisation of nearly 90 per cent of cultivators, owning less than two hectares of land, by throwing them before corporate assault. The Indian Government has furthered the colonial policy of exploiting rural labour for parasitical urban industry, negating the Gandhian concept of village republics. It has imposed the Farmers' Produce, Trade and Commerce Bill to resume the colonial policy by opening the rural hinterland to free trade by corporate agencies. By an expansive definition, cash crops, food, fodder, articles of animal husbandry have been included in this trade as agricultural produce. A euphemism such as choice-based, alternative markets has been used to obscure the blatant objective of ensuring e-commerce, agribusiness and cartelisation by large corporate urban hoarders, who can dictate a homogenised market through contractual transactions, in subinfeudal alliance with large village landholders, through unregulated production, collection, aggregation, at all levels, wholesale, retail, processing, exporting and milling. The Central Government has assumed overriding powers over states in appeal or dispute resolution.

In order to work towards the objective of generating rural employment, using rural labour, resources, knowledge and skills, the Government has to reverse the amendment in the Environment Impact Assessment procedures, and stop condoning *ex post facto* violations of environmental precautions, for pursuing mega developmental, infrastructural projects, focused on contract-oriented construction. Gandhiji's concern with sustainability would not favour the pursuit of machine learning for skilling village labour for urban industry, which is hardly developed to absorb the labour. The Make In, Digital, Skill, Smart, Startup India projects of the Central Government must be reoriented to generate employment, using labour in rural Bharat, instead of harvesting such labour, through machine learning, for corporate industry in urban India, which is hardly developed to absorb such labour. The Swachh Bharat Mission has to be implemented with care for water sources, with local help, rather than through contractual labour. It assumes quite incorrectly that India is Swachh and only Bharat is Aswachh, which has been disproved by the spread of the pandemic to

villages from polluted, industrialised cities, through massive migration and reverse migration, a direct consequence of the denial of Gandhiji's suggestion to create village-based employment.

At this time, when an agitation by farmers is going on against Farm Bills, rushed through the Parliament as Ordinances, without prior consultation with the Opposition, it is appropriate to remember the background of the agitation of farmers, led by Gandhiji at Champaran and Kheda. He fought oppressive taxes, imposed in the midst of crop blight and the British attempt to force farmers to plant indigo in place of food crops. Under his direction, Sardar Patel led the farmers in Kheda, Gujarat, which was afflicted by flood and drought, to oppose ruthless extraction of revenue. The respect professed for multilingualism, diversity and the local context in the 2020 National Education Policy is being violated in practice by concentrating on machine learning, for employing rural children in industrial pockets, instead of orienting education for containing them in local employment. The artificial divide being created by such policies between India and Bharat must be given up, so that the villages are nurtured, on the Gandhian principle, for a self-governing, interdependent economy, instead of being transformed into colonial outposts of urban India.

Urban Economy

Gandhiji did not deny the existence of India's fabled cities of Hastinapur and Indraprastha—Delhi, Agra and Jodhpur. He thought out, articulated and implemented his concepts of Satyagraha, pluralism, ethics and tolerance in Johannesburg in 1906, Ahmedabad mill workers' protest in 1918, Bombay anti-Rowlatt Act movement in 1919,

Gandhiji wanted to destroy capitalism, not capital, through the trusteeship of superfluous wealth, in a joint enterprise of labour and capital, with reciprocal rights and duties for benefit of the poor

epic post-Partition fasts in Delhi and Kolkata, and in missions to London. However, he spoke of the machine civilisation based on labour-saving devices and life-corroding competition as synonymous with the atrophy of human limbs.[8] During his visit to the Great Paris Exhibition in 1899, he saw the Eiffel Tower as a monument to human folly, a trinket for children, but was fired by people's devotion before the image of the Virgin in the Notre Dame. According to him, Christianity was disfigured when it went to the West and the region had to be delivered from itself to save the world from destruction. At Ahmedabad, he issued 16 leaflets, announcing the dignity of ordinary and necessary chores. He spoke of one who eats without offering sacrifice in bread labour, as eating stolen food. He was speaking after Bondaref, Tolstoy and the Rig Veda. He wanted to destroy capitalism, not capital, through the trusteeship of superfluous wealth, in a joint enterprise of labour and capital, with reciprocal rights and duties for benefit of the poor. A true labour collective would automatically attract capital, removing distinction and conflict between capital and labour. Even if the capital or talent were foreign, he wanted them to be under effective Indian control. His model for urban development would abjure current resource and capital-intensive approaches of using land, water and forests far in excess of actual need, while discharging unmanageable amounts of waste. It would reorganise the migrant slums and colonies into decentralised, self-sustaining wards, and animate them with a sense of community

ownership, control and responsibility, for cultural and environmental self-determination, elaborated in his book *Hind Swaraj*. It would be based on his principle of "more from less, for more", for getting greater performance rather than bigger profits, from fewer resources, for more people. His model would logically lead to replacing motorised vehicles by selective pedestrianisation, reducing the distance travelled to work, improving cardiovascular respiration in traffic, and dispensing with urban conurbation.

Universal Cooperation

Gandhiji's proposal for a cooperative commonwealth of rural India, based on the decentralisation of authority and self-help, was based on the postulate that, to the extent the people of India were enabled to do things for themselves independently of the Government, to that extent India was free. It was a warning against the trap into which developing countries were walking with their eyes wide open, a trap described by Aldous Huxley as one of electricity plus heavy industry minus birth control, equalling misery, totalitarianism and war. Gandhiji was India's pledge to its own future unity and final synthesis.[9]

Gandhiji tried to convert Homo Sapiens into Homo Humanus. He placed social rate of return over economic rate of return; use over exchange value; seed diversity over commodity diversity; combined rationality in ends and means of existence, and showed the way to span the widening gulf between growing gross national product and shrivelling human lives. He proposed the dispersion rather than concentration of industry, production by masses against mass production, equitable rather than equal distribution, and demonstrated the possibility of a globalisation from below. He treated human and non-human communities as part of the same living organism of nature and created bio-cultural safety protocols, to arrest the reduction of all sacred and ecological categories to economic and production categories. His plea for justice, economic and social, liberty of thought and expression, equality of status and opportunity, recognised as Constitutional goals, remains to be realised.

Gandhiji's approach of development without destruction has to be resumed to strive for a self-sufficient moral rather than an exploitative economy, to care for rather than exploit the earth, to satisfy needs of all rather than the greed of a few, for subsistence rather than affluence. Such an economy would be managed with rural urban cooperation attracting capital through non-violent combination. He quoted the example of the beehive as a principle for his action programme, geared to Sarvodaya, uplift of all. The swarm hangs in cluster, clinging to one another at hiving time. It does not rise or fly together and can be shifted to another place only when one bee spreads its wings and flies away, for others to follow. Gandhiji set the example for the faint-hearted today by flying out alone in a quest for freedom of body, mind and soul.[10] In *Hind Swaraj*, he spoke of this lonely quest, based on moral economics, voluntary poverty and non-possession. He preached passive resistance, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, not only against the arms race, tyranny, intolerance and criminalisation, but also against economic inequality and environmental degradation. He anticipated Prof. Mahbub ul Haq, the harbinger of Human Development Reports, when he listed the seven deadly malaises contributing to the unsustainable nature of contemporary civilisation as wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; science without humanity; knowledge without character; politics without principle; commerce without morality and worship without

sacrifice. Policy-makers have to go back to him to move away from the current path of growth without equity, described by Prof. Haq as jobless minus new employment; ruthless, sharpening income disparities; voiceless, without political freedom; rootless, with erosion of cultural, socio-economic identity; powerless, with squandering of resources, required by future generations. If Gandhiji had lived, it would have become necessary to assassinate him again and again. His assassination is going on every day, every minute, through the deliberate violation of his theory and the practice of economy, governance, polity, treatment of individual, minority, women, the poor and socially disadvantaged, his pursuit of self-abnegation, non-violent non-cooperation, or an egalitarian democracy and economy.[11] The UN flag was at half mast at Gandhiji's assassination, which should become, metaphorically, a perpetual feature, with the slaughter of all the principles he embodied and practiced in his life.

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LONG JOURNEY HOME: INDIA'S 'TRYST WITH DESTINY' IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

■ **Swagato Ganguly**

India is a critical hub for connections across the continent. What we need is to turn from landscapes to seascapes in our vision to reconnect with our friends and contend with our detractors. If we can overcome the challenges and focus on the opportunities, we would have gone a long way towards fulfilling our goals that were outlined in 1947.

As India's Independence was dawning, the Indian Council for World Affairs convened, at Jawaharlal Nehru's urging, a grand meeting of Asian leaders in Delhi—the 'Asian Relations Conference'. Delivering the conference's inaugural address on March 23, 1947, Nehru told his audience, "One of the notable consequences of the European domination of Asia has been the isolation of the countries of Asia from one another. India always had contacts and intercourse with her neighbour countries in the northwest, the northeast, the east and the southeast. With the coming of British rule in India these contacts were broken off and India was almost completely isolated from the rest of Asia."

While passages to and from India came to be yoked to Britain's during the era of European domination of Asia, India had, prior to that, always been a great trading power. And its most intimate contacts had been with its Asian, Arab and African neighbours, through the old Silk Route or across the Indian Ocean rim. Seventy-five years after India's Independence, the dynamic Asia of yore has come to be revived although, for a multiplicity of reasons, India's reconnection with it can at best be seen as partial. South Asia today, for example, is among the least economically integrated regions in the world—having crawled backwards, in some respects, since 1947.

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Nehru's Pan-Asianist Vision

Part of this can be attributed to the poisoned chalice of Partition, Independence's doppelgänger that continues to weigh heavily on the subcontinent's present. Many would also find fault with the ideational constructs embedded in Nehru's pan-Asianist vision, which foresaw India and China as the principal poles of a revived Asian order and overlooked the impediments in the way, such as a radical communist movement seizing power in China or the advent of territorial nationalism in Asia generally.

That pan-Asianist approach would push Nehru into decisions that seem utterly alien by the standards of today's realpolitik—such as passing over the offer of a permanent UN Security Council seat to India when the Americans and then the Soviets proposed it during the 1950s. This was because Nehru thought that including communist China's representatives was a more important question for the UN to ponder. Such acts of noblesse oblige have few rewards in geopolitics, as India was to discover repeatedly. Indeed, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is something the Indian establishment would give an arm and a leg for today; but it remains out of reach, not least because of China's stonewalling of it.

There has also been a misreading of history in India, with durable consequences. The British envisaged Indian history as a wave of foreign invasions, thus setting up precedents for their own conquest of India. This, as scholar-diplomat Shivshankar Menon has argued, has had the unfortunate effect of centring the subcontinent's history around the Indus and Gangetic plains, bypassing the south as well as India's coastal areas, which have

rich histories as vibrant trading and manufacturing centres. Relatedly, in keeping with the classical Latin dictum of *divide et impera,* taught to the Raj's administrators, India's history was periodised in religious terms, which may have culminated in Partition and continues to be internalised in contemporary South Asia, fueling conflict within and across nations.

The Colonial Experience

Responding to the historical trauma of the East India Company's conquest of India, the nationalist imagination has tended to be leery not only of multinational corporations in general but also of Indian businessmen who might potentially collaborate with them (such as Jagat Seth did with the East India Company, easing its path to power). This perspective ignores several nuances of history. For one, the Company was granted monopoly rights over all trade with India and Asia and was in bed with the British state in all sorts of ways, including by being bailed out when in financial trouble. In other words, if the Company represented capitalism, it hardly functioned within a well-regulated free market where rival corporate entities competed with each other on a reasonably level playing field; rather, it represented the worst excesses of collusive 'crony' capitalism. For another, it was allowed to maintain an army that was double the size of the British army itself by 1803—a situation that can hardly be replicated in modern times.

A certain reading of the colonial experience produced a general tendency of circling the wagons. It predisposed the nationalist imagination towards being excessively jealous of national sovereignty, whatever the opportunity cost,

> **Responding to the historical trauma of the East India Company's conquest of India, the nationalist imagination has tended to be leery not only of multinational corporations in general but also of Indian businessmen who might potentially collaborate with them**

and to be suspicious of the West and of free markets—giving rise to the problem of what Arvind Subramanian, recent Chief Economic Advisor to the Government, calls "stigmatised capitalism". By keeping markets on a tight leash, India refused to follow in the footsteps of the more uninhibited and freewheeling ways of East Asia's 'tiger' economies. Moreover, the 'foreign hand' is a spectre that returns often in national politics, strongly in the 1970s and once again in contemporary times.

Independent India stressed self-reliance, autarky, import substitution and leaned towards state control of the economy's "commanding heights". Economic crises have triggered limited moves towards reform and deregulation, as happened after the 1991 "balance of payments" crisis and after sanctions were imposed on India for conducting nuclear tests in 1998. But these have been tactical rather than strategic responses to India's economic problems, with their underlying impulses running dry soon after the immediate crisis had passed.

Thus, even as Nehru's 1947 address to the Asian Relations Conference revealed a yearning for connectedness, those hopes have often been dashed. In April 1955, picking up from the 1947 conference, representatives from 29 Asian and African nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss peace, decolonisation and the role of the Third World in the Cold War. However, Bandung proved to be a limited success from the Indian point of view.

When Nehru, as one of the key organisers of the conference, made an impassioned speech, spelling out his vision of non-alignment and the need to steer clear of Cold War geopolitics, those principles did not find universal resonance. If India saw itself as a natural leader of Asia due to its size, ancient civilisation and early start as an independent nation, that view was not widely shared. Nehru's assessment of non-alignment and renunciation of geopolitics did not gel because many delegates represented nations already aligned to one or the other of the Cold War blocs, including the People's Republic of China, who Nehru made a point of inviting to the conference as well as of closely supporting its delegate, Premier Zhou Enlai (Filipino delegate Carlos Romulo noted how Nehru played "mother hen" to Zhou through the conference).

Following the formation of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, initially a group of five countries, fearing communist subversion and with close security ties to the United States, India was approached to become a full dialogue partner in 1975 and 1980, but spurned both the approaches. New Delhi also remained cold to northeast Asian nations such as Japan and South Korea, and shunned Taiwan. As a result, India was locked out of a region that enjoyed rapid export-led growth and development, spurred by Japanese investment, during the 1970s and 1980s. By the end of the Cold War, India's maritime and trade linkages across much of the Indo-Pacific region had degraded considerably.

This prompted a rethink during the 1990s, not only because the Cold War had ended and the Soviet Union's dissolution made the rationale for non-alignment ring hollow, but also because East Asia's 'miracle' economies themselves offered possible models of what India might want to emulate to chart a path out of its relative economic stagnation and the persistence of mass poverty (although, as noted above, this was never a path that India would adopt uninhibitedly). Thus, not only India's economic policies but also its foreign policy underwent realignment in the early 1990s with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao at the helm, and 'Look East' was born. Since then, 'Look East' has been re-branded as 'Act East' with the advent of the Modi administration—broadly along the same parameters but with more attention paid to the security dimension of India's presence in the Indo-Pacific.

India was accepted as a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1995. It became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, featuring security dialogues among key players in the Indo-Pacific region, in 1996. The first ASEAN-India Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2002, and this conference became an annual feature. A milestone for India's 'Look East' policy was reached when the ASEAN-India free trade area came into existence on January 1, 2010, bringing together a market of 1.8 billion people with a combined GDP of $ 2.8 trillion. Since then, trade between ASEAN and India has almost doubled, reaching $ 87 billion in 2019–20. However, strains have emerged in the trade relationship, as both sides have complained of

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significant non-tariff barriers, while India would like rules of origin for imports from ASEAN—which often result in Chinese goods gaining low-tariff access to the Indian market by being re-routed through ASEAN nations—to be toughened.

India's relationships with other East Asian powers, apart from China, have also improved considerably. Japan started paying more attention to India during the nineties, after overcoming its disappointment with New Delhi's 1998 nuclear tests. It has poured in around $ 31 billion in investments into the Indian economy over the last two decades. It is also the top overseas funder of infrastructure projects in India. Japanese financial and technical aid, for example, contributed a great deal towards the construction of New Delhi's world class metro network.

Similarly, India has enhanced its engagement with South Korea and Australia in recent times. It has signed comprehensive economic partnership agreements with South Korea (2009), Japan (2011) and Singapore (2005). Within South Asia itself, India signed the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) with its neighbours, which came into effect in 2006. SAFTA has seen India's bilateral trade with its South Asian neighbours, a weak spot since Independence, grow from $ 6.8 billion in 2005–06 to $ 28.5 billion in 2018–19. This uptick in trade, however, has mostly been with Bangladesh and Nepal, with Pakistan a notable exception.

A Re-emerging Economy

If we go back in time, seventeenth century India was—relative to global norms—urbanised, commercialised and an export superpower. According to British economic historian Angus Maddison, India's share of the world economy

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declined from 24.4 per cent in 1700 to 4.2 per cent in 1950. Its share of global industrial output dipped from 25 per cent in 1750 to 2 per cent by 1900. China showed similar declines, but over the last four decades has transformed itself into the world's factory hub and is recuperating its former historical position more powerfully than India. More broadly speaking, the Indo-Pacific region, estimated to account for 60 per cent of global GDP and two-thirds of global GDP growth currently, may be reverting to its historical mean. It may make sense, therefore, to speak of India not so much as an emerging economy but as a re-emerging economy, in the midst of a high-growth region which has embarked on a journey of re-discovery.

It is worth remembering that the period when India enjoyed unprecedentedly high rates of growth happened to broadly align with the era of 'high' globalisation before the financial crash of 2008; the subsequent wave of populist and nativist rulers who decry global interconnectedness brought that era to an end. While it may be correct to argue that the financial crash itself is owing to flawed policies that marked the globalised era, which were instrumental in ushering in the populist wave that was to follow, enhanced protectionism and turning away from global markets will not do much to restore growth. Even if that happens to be the zeitgeist of the day, India would do well to adopt a contrarian approach by opening itself up, both economically and politically, to global markets

and ideas. Global and regional circumstances do influence India and this needs to be taken into account in its thinking to a much greater degree.

Apart from the internal barrier of a proclivity to turn inwards and hide from the world, there are some external roadblocks it must face. Partition's poisoned chalice has meant that Pakistan sees India's growth and progress as detrimental to its interests. While ancient India may have prospered by connecting to the old Silk Routes, modern India finds that its access to continental Asia, across its land borders to the north, is hindered or blocked. Since China inflicted a humiliating defeat on India in the 1962 war, it has acted, in concert with Pakistan with which it has an all-weather strategic alliance, to constrain India's choices—perhaps as a pre-emptive strike to prevent the emergence of a potential rival in continental Asia.

India needs to turn to the oceans for connectivity and the Indo-Pacific littoral looms large in importance. New Delhi could take a leaf out of the proclamation made by China's President Xi Jinping in 2015: "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned". Under Xi, China has emerged as a relentless geopolitical actor, intent on revising the post-World War Two liberal international order in ways that it considers more favourable to itself. It has, for instance, made expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea through which a lot of India's (and global) trade passes, by declaring a 'nine-dash line' that encloses most of it—ignoring the ruling of an arbitral tribunal set up by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that repudiated those claims. Alongside, it is rapidly expanding its military and naval power, has acquired ports through the Indo-Pacific region and militarised and used coercive grey zone tactics in its land and maritime boundary disputes with its neighbours, including with India.

This represents a challenge to Indian interests, but also opportunity. The challenge arises because apart from its land routes, India could also find sea routes blocked. That is why India has, of late, become a votary of a "free and open Indo-Pacific", a phrase originally coined by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan (which faces similar challenges). That very challenge, however, could lead India to rediscover the Indo-Pacific, in the manner that Nehru dreamed of in 1947and thus become a stimulus for action.

China disavows the term "Indo-Pacific" and never uses it in its lexicon because, as opposed to the earlier "Asia-Pacific", it gives India a certain geopolitical weight and seems to get away from China's centrality in Asia. However, as Australian strategic thinker Rory Medcalf has written, the Indo-Pacific region "has become the global centre of strategic and economic gravity, just as the North Atlantic was for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries". This has driven the United States to execute a "pivot to Asia" when President Obama was at the helm and then, during the Trump administration, to formulate a full-blown "Indo-Pacific strategy"; while European nations, too, are beginning to articulate their Indo-Pacific strategies. This, then, could become India's moment of opportunity.

Indo-Pacific Navies

If sea lanes are to be kept open then India will have to project naval power, but India's Navy has long been seen as the "Cinderella service" of its armed forces. However, there are signs that this is starting to change as more resources are allocated to the navy, which is stepping up to its role of being a "net security provider" in the Indo-Pacific region. It has cooperated with ASEAN as well as other Indo-Pacific navies to carry out combined patrolling against

piracy and other threats, and played a role in humanitarian relief, following the cataclysmic 2004 tsunami. It also participates in joint military exercises. For example, starting 1995, it has been organising the biennial Milan exercises, generally near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which is drawing in an ever-larger number of navies belonging to neighbouring countries. For the 2022 edition of Milan, the navies of as many as 46 nations have been invited. India has also enhanced other defence contacts with Southeast and Northeast Asian nations, especially Japan.

Security collaboration between India and the United States is also growing and the armies, navies and air forces of both countries now routinely hold joint exercises, which in some cases are meant to enhance interoperability between them. India has also entered the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with three other major Indo-Pacific powers—Japan, Australia and the United States. The Quad, as it is known, shares the goal of ensuring a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and a "rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas", and holds joint naval exercises titled Operation Malabar. The Quad has also pledged to respond to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Indo-Pacific region, leveraging the strengths of each of its four members and roping in three more Indo-Pacific states to form a "Quad Plus"—South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand.

If joining the Quad can be characterised as a strategic pivot by India towards East Asia, this year has seen the makings of another 'Quad' that could be India's pivot to West Asia. In October, US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, participated in a virtual meeting with the foreign ministers of India, Israel and the United Arab Emirates to discuss "expanding economic and political cooperation in the Middle East and Asia, including through trade, combating

Following the end of the Cold War, the 'non-alignment' course that Nehru set for Indian foreign policy has given rise to new avatars

climate change, energy cooperation and increasing maritime security". If these 'Quads' come to fruition, India will have broken through the strategic roadblock it faces on its land borders to the north, by utilising its extended coastline and revitalising long-standing maritime links to its east and west. The two 'Quads' could be a platform for a ramified and full-blooded Indo-Pacific policy on India's part, utilising its geographic centrality in the region. It is to be noted that China, too, has a comprehensive and ambitious Indo-Pacific policy even if it decries the name—the 'Road' part of Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative" (the 'Belt' part is constitutedby Beijing's equally comprehensive plans for the Eurasian landmass).

Following the end of the Cold War, the 'non-alignment' course that Nehru set for Indian foreign policy has given rise to new avatars variously labeled 'multi-alignment', 'strategic autonomy' or 'non-alignment 2.0'. However, as fresh geopolitical competition shapes up in the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi may no longer have the luxury of serially choosing its alignments. Instead, it will have to make some hard choices. Indeed, it may best be positioned to gain leverage and actively shape the world order if it embraces a role as a 'swing state' determining the Indo-Pacific balance. It may be worthwhile recalling what Nehru himself once said: "there is no non-alignment when it comes to China".

Another hard choice it will have to make is in the realm of geoeconomics, an essential building block for a successful geopolitic. Here, as already noted, turning inward will not do, if India is not to repeat the mistakes of its past. It must not only be

open to ideas but also open itself to free trade and investment deals, reversing the tendency of upping trade barriers and raising average applied tariff over the last four years. A return to the export pessimism of yesteryear will only produce the same results as yesteryear; as India's middle class is a limited one, rapid GDP growth has necessarily to be driven by buoyant exports. As economists will point out, an import tax is also an export tax. If imports grow faster than exports, the solution to that is not so much raising barriers as raising India's economic competitiveness. This is a task the political class must devote itself to, instead of resorting to short-term populist measures. A closed and insular India is unlikely to elicit much support or interest, let alone excitement, among its South, East or West Asian neighbours.

At present, looking at recent initiatives in India's neighbourhood such as 'Look East/Act East' or the Quad, while New Delhi is making up for past neglect with some smart forays in expanding its geopolitical role in the Indo-Pacific region, this seems decoupled from a ramified and well thought through geoeconomic perspective. The Quad, too, need not be conceived of purely in terms of security or humanitarian aid, but can have an economic component as well. A weak economy cannot provide a sufficient foundation for an effective multilateral or plurilateral diplomacy that wins friends and influences people in India's neighbourhood, or even for the projection of power that being a net security provider requires.

If these gaps can be filled, then Nehru's dream of a larger Asian federation—with India as a critical hub for connections across the continent—may turn out to be not so much ill-founded as merely premature. And, India would have gone a long way towards fulfilling its 'tryst with destiny' that was voiced when it won freedom in 1947.

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LESSONS FROM COVID-19: A PLAN FOR ACTION

■ **Meenakshi Datta Ghosh** ■ **Dr. Rakesh Sarwal**

The need for a National Public Health Agency in India is of crucial relevance today. Along with a responsive public health system, we need to focus on preventive healthcare and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The country, as it marks its 75th year of Independence, must remember that it is essential to bring in structural change for effective public health governance.

The COVID-19[1] pandemic has exposed the inadequacy of public health systems worldwide and drawn attention to the fact that governance matters. This was an emergency that required a more coordinated, multisectoral response, inside as well as outside of the Government. We, in India, cannot afford to lose sight of the important learnings that have emerged.

Public health, or the science of the health of populations, is variously defined as protecting and improving the health of people and communities, as also "fulfilling society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy".[2] Modern public health involves 12 essential functions to ensure healthy people. Let us begin by taking a look at what national public health agencies, such as the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), are empowered and mandated to do (Table 1).

At the core of all public health functions is surveillance, which leads to corrective action. Concurrently, high-quality laboratory testing is an essential component when initiating a public health response to public health emergencies, natural disasters, emerging threats and even bio-terrorism. In the late 1990s, one among several missions identified for US federal departments and agencies was the ability of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to identify threat agents, conduct epidemiologic investigations and provide public health as well as medical and pharmaceutical support. The CDC articulated the importance of accelerating progress towards a world safe and secure from infectious diseases. It engaged the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), a membership organisation in the United States representing the laboratories that protect the health and safety of the public, and other partners in strategic discussions in order to determine how best to meet the overarching goals of "prevent, detect and respond". This ensured that all existing resources were brought to bear in the effort to strengthen infectious disease detection systems.

The Laboratory Response Network (LRN) is the US's laboratory emergency response system for biological, chemical and radiological threats and other public emergencies such as natural disasters. Founded in 1999 by the Association of Public Health Laboratories, CDC and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to improve US readiness for bio-terrorism, the LRN began with only 17 laboratories and has, since, expanded to approximately 160 member facilities, which include both domestic and international laboratories and thousands of sentinel clinical laboratories, which form the foundation of the system.[3]

Table 1: Essential Public Health Functions

1. Disease surveillance	7. Governance
2. Disease prevention	8. Financing
3. Population-based healthcare services	9. Health promotion
4. Emergency preparedness	10. Health protection/legislation
5. Social participation	11. Research
6. Communication	12. Human Resources

Source: https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272597

The basis of the LRN is a unified operational plan and standardisation of laboratory testing. This enables a test result generated from one LRN member laboratory to be the same as a result generated from another network laboratory, thus providing for rapid, high-confidence results to inform public health decisions. The LRN has many strategic partners. This allows for links between local, state and federal public health laboratories on the one hand and, simultaneously, with sentinel clinical, food, veterinary, environmental and agricultural laboratories; as well as with international laboratory centres.

Figure 1 indicates the LRN Structure[4] for responding to biological threats. The national, reference and sentinel laboratories work as an integrated network that builds on individual laboratory capacity. This greatly strengthens the overall response to public health emergencies.

Figure1: Laboratory Response Network Structure in the USA
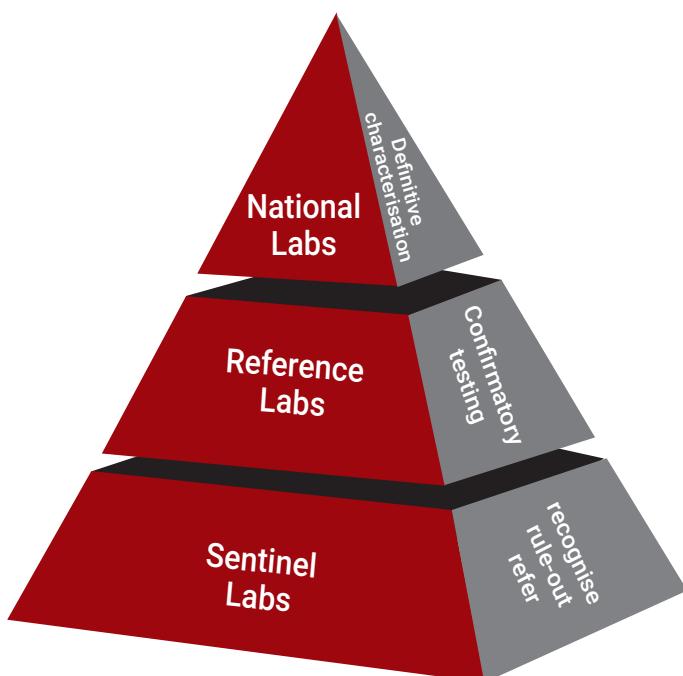
Figure 2 demonstrates how disease surveillance is meaningful only if feedback and reporting is obtained and synchronised from public and private healthcare providers, clinicians and laboratories.

Figure 2: Disease Surveillance Cycle
CDC ATLANTA

Source: Lesson 1: Introduction to Epidemiology. Section 4: Core Epidemiologic Functions. CDC Atlanta.

Constitutional Provisions in India

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the critical need for India to acquire a modern public health structure. Despite facing a triple burden of diseases,[5] undernutrition and maternal mortality, the emerging challenges of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the problems directly related to globalisation, such as pandemics and the health consequences of climate change, we need to put in place a system that can identify, track and prevent disease, while continually promoting the health of its people.

Upfront, a critical foundation of any public health action is data. However, data on vital statistics, cause of death, burden of disease(s), with routine and regular updates in real time, to guide public health action are largely missing or inaccurate.[6,7,8] Against this backdrop, containing two spells of the COVID-19 pandemic was a herculean task, well accomplished by a national effort. The Constitution of India categorises responsibility for Government functions into three, based on whether these are in the exclusive realm of the Central Government, in the domain of the State Governments, or whether they are a joint responsibility, the last listed in the Concurrent List. The fact remains that the Union Government has a salient role in the management of epidemics and health emergencies (Tables 2 and 3), a task entrusted to the Ministry of Health (MoH), Government of India.

However, serious anomalies are visible. While the Centre exercises a great deal of power through fiscal control, planning and policy making, supported by the knowledge and expertise of the national institutes, responsibility for health outcomes, public health and enforcement of legislation remains with the states.

Table 2: Constitutional Provisions on Public Health in India

Part and Article of the Constitution of India	Reference to Public Health
Directive Principles of State Policy—Article 47	The state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties
Sixth Schedule (Articles 244 [2] and 275 [1] on Administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas): Provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram	3. Powers of the District Councils and Regional Councils to make laws (f) any other matter relating to village or town administration, including village or town police and public health and sanitation
Seventh Schedule (Article 246 on the subject matter of laws made by the Parliament and by the legislatures of states)	
List I—Union List	28. Port quarantine, including hospitals connected therewith
List II—State List	6. Public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries
List III—Concurrent List	18. Adulteration of foodstuffs and other goods

Table 3: Distribution of Business as per Allocation of Business Rules, 1961 (Second Schedule)

> **Union Territories Business**
>
> 9.   Public health hospitals and dispensaries
>
> **Union Business**
>
> 8.   Matters relating to epidemics: Problems connected with supply of medicines, effects of malnutrition and shortage of drinking water leading to various diseases as a result of natural calamities
>
> 12. (h) Prevention of the extension from one state to another of infectious or contagious diseases affecting human beings
>
>   (i) Prevention of adulteration of foodstuffs and drugs

Public Health Agencies in India

The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)[9] was set up in 2009 by enhancing the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD). It is the nodal agency for disease surveillance and has its mandate limited to the investigation of disease outbreaks, referral diagnostic services countrywide for communicable diseases, besides training and research. There is no designated agency in the country to gather, collate and process routine health intelligence, plan and manage public health. Though the Allocation of Business Rules clearly assigns the responsibility of managing epidemics to the Central Government, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), COVID-19 saw multiple agencies, such as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a research organisation that guides elements of the national response, having to supplement these functions; leading to overlap and gaps. Further, the NCDC has not been able to grow to the stature of, for instance, the CDC in the USA. A number of factors have contributed to the present

stalemate. Dual responsibility between the Centre and the states has added a layer of complexity.

With the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), the NCDC sought to maintain a decentralised laboratory-based, IT-enabled disease surveillance 'hub and spoke' system for epidemic-prone diseases, assisted by a trained Rapid Response Team (RRT). This role and the functionality of the NCDC was, however, never dovetailed into the primary and secondary public healthcare set up at district levels and below. The absence of any publicly available dashboard for disease trends greatly limits action on the NCDC's surveillance data or insights. The IDSP and the state labs reporting COVID infections did not employ any statistically significant sampling methodology, such as that used in the Sentinel Sites of the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). Thus, their findings were neither robust nor replicable.

The NCDC has remained within the MoHFW under the aegis of the Director General of Health Services, under-staffed and under-funded, minus comprehensive all-India coverage. It does not have

the mandate or the authority to perform essential public health functions and is not accountable for public health failures.

When COVID-19 struck in India, the NCDC could not be immediately called upon to connect the dots. In these circumstances, it has never been easy to monitor disease burden and trends in the country. It has been even more difficult to detect, diagnose and control outbreaks until these become widespread, at which point public outcry compels public action. In constraining its public health efforts within a tightly controlled department with scant public health orientation, India may be continuing to lose touch with "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and improving quality of life".[10]

India has been unable to grow a public health cadre. This is costing us dearly.

The Way Forward

Most developed countries have in place a Public Health Act that defines the roles, responsibilities and powers of authorities responsible for promoting the health of populations. In the USA, it is known as the Public Health Service Act.[11] Notification of diseases is an international obligation under the International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005,

Table 4: Key Features of Public Health Function in the Exemplar State of Kerala

1. A designated agency with the authority to perform public health functions, including by directive to state agencies. It is responsible for providing basic sanitary and healthcare services and for the health of the population in its jurisdiction

2. This empowered agency holds public consultations, seeks expert opinion and coordinates with other departments

3. It lays down guidelines on preventive activities to be carried out to achieve public health objectives, as surveillance

4. The agency has the power to collect data from the public and private healthcare establishments in the state on public health matters, analyse it and advise the Government

5. It issues guidelines for the declaration of public health emergency and lays down standards for public heath regulatory and promotional functions such as surveillance; it also enforces regulations

6. The agency holds the power to direct any person and/or establishment to carry out or desist from any activity, or to change any condition, as deemed necessary for promoting public health

7. It has an annual health status report and plans for local areas to prevent disease, safeguarding and improving the health of populations in their jurisdiction

8. The agency conducts public health investigations for the prevention of disease and promotion of health

9. Evaluation of the performance is done through implementation of their plans

10. A public health cadre

Source: From the Kerala Public Health Ordinance, 2021, accessed from https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_states/kerala/2021/Ordinance%2044%20of%202021%20Kerala.pdf

of the World Health Organization (WHO) to which India is a signatory and requires effective nation-wide disease surveillance capacity. Of the eight essential country-level core capacities (CCs) listed in the IHR of the WHO, at least five fall one way or another, within the realm of disease surveillance and laboratory testing and tracking. These are CC 3 (surveillance), CC 4 (response), CC 5 (preparedness), CC 6 (risk communication) and CC 8 (laboratory).

States such as Kerala[12] have in place public health legislation that provides a legal foundation to agencies authorised to perform public health functions down to the village levels.

In India, we have the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897, a colonial era law that was put in place to address the outbreak and mass spread of the bubonic plague in Mumbai (then Bombay). The law authorises the Centre and states with special powers that are required to implement containment measures to control the spread of disease. It does not provide a comprehensive framework for handling an 'epidemic disease'; it does not prescribe or specify agency, authority and responsibilities, or the need for the citizen's involvement, or public health-related communication. The absence of a public health legislation, designating and empowering a national nodal agency with the responsibility for preventing disease and promoting health, has led to national disease control programmes running in vertical silos; overlaps between agencies as well as glaring gaps in authority and accountability. A legislation focused on preventing and managing epidemics has been awaiting legislative approval since 2017,[13] but still falls short of addressing the larger issues of public health governance.

With hindsight, a national legislation[14] (Public Health Bill, 2017) pending in the Parliament could very quickly be strengthened in consultation with the

In India, a roadmap for a robust disease surveillance system in the country has been laid in Vision 2035, a NITI Aayog Report that recommends a network of labs and an empowered agency to collect surveillance information

states and, based on the experience of states such as Kerala, updated and enacted. Since, currently, no agency in the country is either empowered or accountable and responsible for performing essential public health functions, including disease surveillance, India needs a national public health agency with a footprint across all states and union territories to collect, collate, analyse and disseminate health information. The proposed National Public Health Agency needs to be given the independence required for its effective functioning and be preferably placed at an arm's length from the programme divisions of the Ministry. The Indian Constitution gives the Central Government sufficient powers to enact such a law and operate a national Public Health Agency on the lines of a National Investigation Agency, or the Goods and Services Tax Council.

In India, a roadmap for a robust disease surveillance system in the country has been laid in Vision 2035,[15] a NITI Aayog Report that recommends a network of labs and an empowered agency to collect surveillance information, based on updated legislation. The Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) will integrate the data on the incidence of disease spread across different portals, so that the information disseminated is comprehensive and publicly accessible. The Disease Surveillance Cycle needs to be spelled out fully in the new National Public Health Act, with no caveats or exceptions made.

Health Governanace

It is time to pursue the recurrent demand for an Indian Medical Service, along the lines of other civil services such as the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Foreign Service and the Indian Police Service. A Parliamentary Committee has recently favoured forward movement in this direction.

The High Level Group of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, too, has recommended the creation of an Indian Medical Service. Medicine is now being appreciated as much as a social science, which cannot be straitjacketed into an exclusively clinical, medical treatment approach. Any Indian Medical Service would need to encompass a diversity of skill sets.

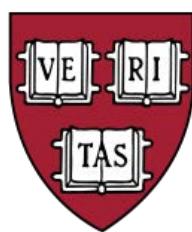India needs stewardship at block, sub-division, district, state and national levels to establish more effective health governance, with an eye on cross-sectoral health policies and integrated strategies that will enhance monitoring, evaluation, besides accountability mechanisms and capacities. Along with the MBBS trained doctor, we need as much a focus on the prevention of ill health as well as the promotion of healthy lifestyles. This will come about only if we make space for family medicine specialists, integrative medicine trained personnel, public health specialists and so on.

In the circumstances, it might be prudent to adopt a more inclusive nomenclature such as the Indian Health Service, which would bring in healthcare-oriented training and mindsets to man positions at district and below district levels, as much as in State Governments as in the National Government.

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Meenakshi Datta Ghosh, IAS, HKS, is a career bureaucrat. As Secretary, Local Self-Government, she has led consensus among 13 Central Ministries and State Governments to devolve the implementation of development programmes to local governments. As Special Secretary and Director, NACO, she reversed business as usual, introduced treatment in India, de-stigmatised HIV/AIDS and accelerated its decline. She is the principal author of India's National Population Policy which, even today, guides our socio-demographic goals. She is also the principal author of the National Action Plan for Blood Safety, 2003. This mandates the accreditation of blood banks, storage of blood in frontline facilities, and revelation of HIV status to the result-seeking donor.

Dr. Rakesh Sarwal IAS, PG (Medicine), Ph.d, Public Health, John Hopkins University, USA, has, as Additional Secretary and Principal Advisor Health, Niti Aayog, led 'Best Practices in the performance of District Hospital in India', 'Vision 2035: Public Health Surveillance in India', 'Health Insurance for India's Missing Middle', and 'Study on the Not-for-Profit Hospitals in India'. He launched the Maharatna Scheme (as Joint Secretary, Department of Public Enterprises); the AYUSH Research Portal (as Joint Secretary AYUSH), besides numerous initiatives in Tripura. His interests include yoga, mentoring and gardening.

LEVERAGING INDIAN START-UPS

■ **Sunil K. Goyal** ■ **Mohit Hira** ■ **Rajat Swarup**

At a time when the economy has been adversely impacted, it is important to look at ways in which employment can be generated by unlocking funding options for start-ups who create livelihood. From governmental policy changes to individual mindset shifts, this is a detailed perspective on investment opportunities to spur economic growth in India.

India is a land of entrepreneurs, of start-ups, of men and women who have often risked everything they have to set up a business on their own—with or without investors. And, contrary to popular belief, you do not have to travel to India's Silicon Valley, Bangalore, to find them; nor do you need to set up virtual meetings because they exist all around us.

Consider the auto driver who ferries you to work. Or the Ola cab driver. Or even the roadside *chaiwallah* who serves up hundreds of steaming hot cups of tea to the MBAs who hop down from their airconditioned offices…every one of them is an entrepreneur, a start-up if you like. None of them may fit the stereotype of the disruptive techie we usually invest in, but they inspire us every day. Each of the millions who set up a small business or abandon a secure job to strike out on their own are entrepreneurs. And every time someone sets up a venture of his (or her) own, they initiate a virtuous cycle that impacts society by creating livelihood opportunities.

Historically, in post-Independence India, it was the public sector and the Government who were responsible for job creation. Even the Provident and Pension Funds of that time channelled our investments to Government securities as they were contributing to the growth of the economy. But, as India unshackled its economy in 1991 and society matured, innovation and entrepreneurship

At a time when the country is faced with an unprecedented unemployment crisis, every job created will make a positive difference to a household and will alter the immediate local economy as well as the revival of the national economy, over time

increased. Today, in many sectors, economic growth is being led by start-ups.

As early-stage venture capitalists, we have had a ringside view of ups and downs, of excitement and despair, and, eventually, of reinvention. At YourNest, we invest in founders who we call 'Challengineers', whose persistence and unwavering belief in an idea ensures that, as an individual, s/he is able to build an institution that doesn't just reward investors but also impacts society in multiple ways, including employment generation.

An International Labour Organization (ILO) report estimates that COVID-19 led to 114 million people losing their jobs in 2020, globally. In August 2020, ILO estimated that 4.1 million Indians had been rendered jobless by the pandemic—a figure that is probably on the lower side. At a time when the country is faced with an unprecedented unemployment crisis, every job created will make a positive difference to a household and will alter the immediate local economy as well as the revival of the national economy, over time. While data always tell a story, it is often more useful to spot trends that emerge from these figures: NASSCOM confirmed that, "in 2019, technology start-ups created 60,000 new jobs" and this is likely to increase even if we see a blip in 2020-21.

With a record number of Unicorns being created in the first five months of 2021, and each of them helping generate employment, India continues to consolidate its position as the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. We should now aim to become the world's largest and the best start-up ecosystem. This is not wishful thinking, not something that can transform our country at multiple levels. We are now at an inflection point where beyond the handful of Venture Capitalists (VCs) who are supported by institutional

and individual investors, every Indian citizen can be a micro-funder of start-ups and thus spur employment. Consider a few initiatives that some of us have been advocating:

Unlocking Wealth in Charitable Trusts

Religious trusts are major repositories of wealth donated by disciples and followers. The Vatican, for instance, is reported to be worth $ 10 billion or more; media reports indicate that the richest temple trust in the world—the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram—is, even by conservative estimates, valued at approximately $ 17 billion without accounting for the value of its accumulated antiques, which could multiply this amount by at least 10 times. Many similar temple trusts such as those of Tirupati Balaji, Shirdi Sai Baba, Vaishno Devi, Siddhi Vinayak and Golden Temple are known to conservatively hold on to their wealth or invest it only in Government securities. Almost all of them also saw a surge in so-called donations during the 2016 demonetisation.

A Government that has advocated and executed projects to boost almost all the sectors of the economy, must also focus on this locked-in wealth. While current rules prevent charitable institutions from deploying the contributions from their funds in anything that is not specifically mentioned, is it time to reform this too? A policy change can potentially go a long way in bringing in more funding options to India's entrepreneurs and start-ups.

Imagine the multiplier effect on employment generation if thousands of Government-recognised start-ups begin seeing capital inflows via these religious institutions. At present, the wealth in funds/trusts is mandated to be invested/ deposited as per their respective guidelines and there is no provision for investments in alternate investment funds (AIFs). Even if these trusts/funds invest 5-10 per cent towards entrepreneurship or venture capital, it will facilitate the creation of the largest pool of capital for venture capitalists in the next decade.

In effect, we will create a cascade of entrepreneurship and job creation. If the policies pertaining to investment/deposit of such trusts/ funds are amended to include investment in AIFs Category-I, then, by further investment in start-ups, they can generate direct and indirect employment in huge numbers, giving a boost to the economy.

From our own experience, we know this is possible: as of June 2021, YourNest Venture Capital (AIF Category-I) has generated over 1,800 direct and many more indirect jobs from 27 invested start-ups across its two funds, most of whom are enterprise-driven, B2B (business to business) firms. These jobs were created by investing Rs. 173 crore. Now imagine the quantum leap in employment if start-ups were funded from currently idle assets.

In addition, these start-ups have also generated innumerable employment opportunities indirectly through their partners. In 2020–21 alone, about 170,000 jobs were created by recognised start-ups and a recently-released report by Startup India states that almost 550,000 jobs have been created by approximately 50,000 start-ups over a five-year period. To enable India's charitable/ religious trusts to invest a part of their corpus in the start-up ecosystem, we need an amendment of Section 11(5) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, which pertains to modes of investments/deposits made by charitable/religious trust. This section can include "Investment by acquiring of units of SEBI registered AIF (Category I & II)".

If we remain focused on the fact that idle wealth should be unlocked for the benefit of the economy, then employment generation will get an actual boost, leading towards a positive rush in the Indian economy.

Access to Capital

Despite multiple efforts of structured funding, access to capital remains a challenge for start-up founders. If they had access to debt funding and if we could multiply angel investors 100 times from, say, 3,000 to 300,000, we could start seeing clear action.

MSMEs continue to face problems in converting their trade receivables into liquid funds and B2B start-ups usually wait 45-120 days to realise their sales revenues, though they have to fund for GST and TDS from their own resources shortly after invoicing.

A fine piece of legislation called 'Trade Receivable Discounting System (TreDS)', an online bill discounting platform that helps cash-starved MSMEs raise funds by selling their receivables, is inaccessible to start-ups who do not have the threshold of Rs. 500 crore revenue and cannot avail this facility. Once the platform opens up to individual investors who can fund invoice discounting, they will earn a higher rate of interest than mere fixed deposits; cash-strapped start-ups will also benefit immensely.

Despite multiple efforts of structured funding, access to capital remains a challenge for start-up founders. If they had access to debt funding and if we could multiply angel investors 100 times from, say, 3,000 to 300,000, we could start seeing clear action

If we can multiply the base of angel investors, we will be able to rotate High Networth Individuals (HNI) capital faster. While demonetisation helped bring idle capital into the banking system, it got allocated to listed equity market, debt mutual funds and insurance funds, which do not create jobs. We need to now tap another idle asset of the wealthy to recycle their funds and trigger a bigger economic activity.

Exercising the Active Choice in the National Pension Scheme

Today, investors in the National Pension Scheme (NPS) are allowed to participate in the high growth start-up sector by committing a portion of their investments in what is termed an 'Active Choice'. But, the perception towards the NPS is that of a mere tax-saving instrument where we make a tax-free contribution of Rs. 50,000 a year or contribute 10 per cent of our basic pay voluntarily and then don't bother about it. Most investors have no idea where and how their savings are allocated by NPS or its impact.

Active Choice allows individual and corporate contributors (Tier 1 contributors) to allocate up to five per cent of their NPS investments to assets in Category A that represents 'Alternative Investment Funds', including instruments such as CMBS, MBS, REITS, AIFs, InvITs, among others. SEBI has enabled the growth of these polling vehicles, called Alternate Investment Funds, through well-developed regulations in 2012.

Consider a few data points: The total Assets Under Management (AUM) under Tier 1 as of February 26, 2021, amounted to a staggering Rs. 42,822.73 crore. However, a mere 0.16 per cent, Rs. 68.37 crore, has been chosen by

active investors to be deployed in Scheme A. Default options of Equity, G-Sec and Corporate Bonds are the most preferred (in that order). The analysis shows that, of the Rs. 68.37 crore under Scheme A, 66 per cent is managed by private-sector pension fund managers. In comparison, the same set of managers hold 54 per cent of the total assets invested.

Clearly, there is an opportunity as well as a responsibility among private and public sector pension fund managers to inform and educate NPS subscribers to exercise their Active Choice and shift the permissible five per cent to Scheme A. Depending on the Government to do so is a convenient passing of the buck—as always, we relinquish our responsibility and miss a larger opportunity in nation-building—investing in listed companies and Government bonds has minimal impact on employment generation. Instead, a sustained campaign to shake off inertia and get subscribers to invest in Scheme A actively will have a quantum impact on the distribution—Rs. 68 crore can grow 31x to Rs. 2,141 crore.

Imagine if this pool were available to start-up founders and the multiplier effect on job creation and the nation's catapulting as a formidable start-up ecosystem on the global stage. If we become a nation of "micro-funders", we will help create a new set of start-ups across sectors. Nothing will boost employment in India's landmark Independence year more than this.

Everyone of us can, and must, contribute to job creation and wealth generation in a way that makes India a benchmark for other economies.

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THE PARSIS IN INDIA: SMALL IN NUMBER, BUT STRIKINGLY SIGNIFICANT

■ Coomi Kapoor

The Parsi community has made some of the greatest contributions to the country's growth since the eighth century, when the early settlers came to India from Persia and made it their home. Dwindling numbers have not taken away from the fact that, as India celebrates its 75th year of Independence, the contributions of several leading Parsis have helped shape the nation.

The extraordinary success of the Parsi community in India is a striking example of the country's plurality. The Parsis are descendants of a small group of Persian refugees who practised the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism and fled to the west coast of India between the eighth and tenth centuries. India gave them space and acceptance and they, in turn, enriched the environment of their adopted homeland, especially over the last two-and-a-half centuries. The community can boast among its ranks some of the best-known names in modern Indian history, prompting Mahatma Gandhi to remark, "In numbers the Parsis are beneath contempt, in contributions beyond compare."

Affectionately termed the 'Grand Old Man of India', Dadabhai Naoroji was a founder of the Congress party and one of the original spokespersons of the Swadeshi movement. He was also the first Asian to be elected to the British Parliament. Bhikaiji Cama, an ardent woman revolutionary and an important figure in India's freedom struggle, unfurled the precursor of the Indian flag at a conference in Germany, almost 40 years before the country won its Independence.

A fierce nationalist and a stubborn, eccentric, highly principled inventor, Ardeshir Godrej's best-known innovations included indigenous locks and vegetable oil soap. The brilliant scientist, Homi Bhabha, was the father of India's nuclear programme. And yet another prominent Parsi, Sam Maneckshaw, was the first Indian Army Chief to be elevated to the rank of Field Marshal after leading India to its most decisive military victory ever—the 1971 war against Pakistan, which led to the formation of Bangladesh.

Feroze Gandhi was an independent thinking, crusading Parliamentarian who married Indira Nehru. He fathered India's pre-eminent political dynasty, though the Gandhis, with political shrewdness, changed the spelling from the anglicised 'Ghandi' to that favoured by the Mahatma and opted to stick with their mother's Hindu faith rather than their father's Zoroastrianism. And the descendants of the founder of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, are Parsis who made their home in India; businessman Nusli Wadia is Jinnah's only grandson.

Zubin Mehta, one of the twentieth century's most renowned conductors of Western classical music, is a Parsi. As was Farrokh Bulsara, though he did not advertise his Parsi origins, preferring to be known as 'Freddie Mercury', the iconic lead singer of the rock band Queen. And, as the world reels from the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, it is a pair of Parsis, Cyrus Poonawalla and his son Adar, to whom we turn in hope as the world's largest producers of vaccines.

The Parsis are among the wealthiest communities in India. Probably the country's largest industrial group and certainly its most diverse and respected, the Tata Group, is controlled by a Parsi, Ratan Tata. The founder of the 153-year-old company, Jamsetji Tata, is considered the father of Indian industry. Among his many visionary ideas was the steel industry, a hydropower plant and India's first institute of higher education in science and technology, the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru. The Tatas retained very little of their wealth but used it instead for philanthropy, setting up many pioneering welfare institutions, including the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the Tata Centre for Cancer Research and Treatment, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the Tata Centre for

the Performing Arts. Today, some 66 per cent of Tata Sons, the group's holding company, is controlled by charitable trusts. In fact, the Tata Trusts is one of the world's three largest philanthropic trusts.

Followers of the prophet Zarathustra—who is believed to have been born in Central Asia and lived sometime between 1500 BC and 2000 BC—the Parsis practise Zoroastrianism, considered the world's oldest monotheistic religion. Older than Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it exercised a profound influence on these later religions on issues such as heaven, hell and the Day of Judgement. They see themselves as inheritors of the glorious traditions of two great ancient Persian empires, the Achaemenid (550-330 BC) and the Sassanid (AD 224-651). After Persia came under Arab control following the Battle of Nahavand around AD 642, the Persians who refused to convert to Islam were persecuted.

Some migrant Persian Zoroastrians are said to have landed in three ships at the Sanjan port in Gujarat around the eighth century. Historians believe that the Parsis did not come at one point but in batches over the next two centuries. The local people referred to the new arrivals as Parsis since they come from the Pars region in Iran.

As early as the fifteenth century, some in the community had moved from their traditional occupations of agriculture and artisanship to trade. They were trading from Gujarat with merchants in Persia, Arabia and Southeast Asia. It was with the arrival of Europeans in India that the Parsis really came into their own, perhaps because they eschewed caste, appeared to have few religious and social taboos and were uninhibited about mixing with foreigners. Added to this relative openness was the adventurous spirit of a migrant

Perhaps even more than their early entry into commerce and industry, the key to Parsi success can be attributed to the emphasis they placed on education, realising that this was the road to advancement

community that knew it had to seize every opportunity to establish itself in its new homeland. They learnt the languages of the Europeans and developed a reputation with their colonial masters for hard work, honesty and integrity and become agents for various Portuguese, Dutch, French and English companies. As their wealth increased, these merchants went on to become brokers and money lenders.

The Parsis were among the first residents of the islands of Bombay, other than the fisherfolk. In fact, they came to Bombay even before the islands were gifted in 1688 to England by the Portuguese king as part of his daughter Catherine's dowry. In 1736, Lovji Wadia, a renowned Parsi Surat-based shipbuilder, was commissioned by the East India Company to move to Bombay and construct a dry dock. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Parsis were one of the most important mercantile communities in West India. The phrase 'trade with China' euphemised what was mostly the export of opium, which had officially been banned for domestic consumption by the Chinese authorities. Parsi traders obtained opium from Central India and sold it to Chinese smugglers and, in return, imported Chinese goods such as tea, silk, copper and gold. The Jivanji brothers were the first Parsi to travel to China in 1756 and establish a firm in Canton. They later took the name 'Readymoney' to indicate their affluence and their willingness to lend money.

A Parsi surname is usually indicative of a person's background. Unlike Hindu surnames,

which often denote caste, Parsi surnames usually indicate a place of origin or occupation. They have a plethora of surnames indicating specific professions such as Reporter, Master, Contractor, Doctor, Vakil (lawyer), Daruwala (liquor seller), Kapadia (cloth merchant) Clubwala, Canteenwala and so on. There is even an actual surname, Sodawaterbottleopenerwala, from which a popular Parsi restaurant has taken its name.

In the nineteenth century, the richest Parsi by far was Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, who had extensive trade ties with China. He became the first Indian baronet, the first Indian juror and a director of the first savings bank in Bombay, which was opened in 1835. His philanthropy was legendary and not limited to his own community. He set up more than 125 charitable institutions. The entire causeway linking Mahim to the mainland, for instance, was constructed by Sir Jamsetjee so that people would not need to hire a ferry to get from Bandra to Mahim. When the British imposed a grazing fee on cattle owners, he bought grasslands where all the city's residents could graze their cattle for free. This area is still known as Charni (grazing) Road.

Wealthy Parsis are responsible for many of the iconic buildings, statues and structures that are the landmarks of the older part of Bombay, including the ornate Flora Fountain, once the city's centre and the stately Bombay University convocation hall with its gothic facade. Several of South Mumbai's main arteries, Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Madame Cama Road and Nariman Point, are named after Parsis, as are many of the city's pioneering institutions such as the Sir J.J. School of Art, the Sir J.J. Hospital, the Petit Library and the Jehangir Art Gallery.

Cynics sometimes say the opium business was the ugly secret behind Parsi wealth and charity. And while it is true that the China trade played a major role in the amassing of several Parsi fortunes,

it was essentially education and early entry into industrialisation under British colonial rule that was responsible for the community's prosperity. By the mid-nineteenth century, after the first Opium War (1839-42), Parsi merchants began to retreat from the China trade and search for new areas to do business. The Parsis were at the vanguard of industrialisation and commerce in West India. It was thanks to a Parsi, Jejeebhoy Dadabhoy, that steam navigation was introduced on the west coast of India. The impetus for establishing the cotton industry in Bombay owed much to the Parsis. Three Parsi families—the Petits, the Wadias and the Tatas—dominated the manufacture of cotton in Bombay. Until 1925, the community controlled about 30 per cent of Bombay's cotton mills.

Perhaps even more than their early entry into commerce and industry, the key to Parsi success can be attributed to the emphasis they placed on education, realising that this was the road to advancement. The statistics are telling. In 1860, for instance, there were more Parsi students in high schools in Bombay compared to all other communities, despite the fact that they constituted a mere 10 percentage of the city's population. In the early 1920s, Parsis formed .03 per cent of the country's population, but they earned 7 per cent of the engineering degrees, 5 per cent of the medical degrees, 2 per cent of the science degrees and 1 per cent of all Western degrees granted in India.
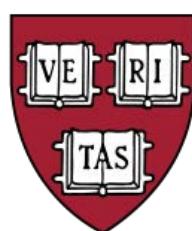
There are well-known Parsis in fields as diverse as law, finance, medicine social work, cinema and sports. Author Amitav Ghosh pointed out that "Many, if not most, of the institutions and practices which define modern India can be traced back to Parsi origins." The Bollywood film industry evolved from Parsi theatre, and the first Indian cricket team was formed in 1848 by Parsi members of the Oriental Cricket Club. A few years later, the Parsi

Cricket Club beat England during its 1886 tour to India—a historic feat. In the twentieth century, the heyday for the Parsis in cricket was in 1961–62 when Nari Contractor led the Indian cricket team against the West Indies. The Indian Eleven included four Parsis—Polly Umrigar, Farokh Engineer and Rusi Surti, apart from Contractor.

The Parsi legacy is so inextricable from contemporary Indian history that much is either forgotten or unremarked upon. For instance, few are aware of the pioneering role played by a Parsi businessman in the growth of India's dairy industry, established in the 1920s in Anand, Gujarat. Most Indians are also ignorant of the fact that the chikoo fruit, native to Central America, was introduced to India by the Parsi textile magnate Sir Dinshah Petit. The first indigenous biscuit, the *surti batasa* or butter biscuit, was created by Faramji Dotivala, who was experimenting with stale bread from a bakery bequeathed to him by the Dutch after they left Surat. The Parsi soda manufacturing firm, Pallonjis, predates Coca-Cola and Pepsi; old fashioned, uniquely Parsi, beverages, such as raspberry soda and bottled mango juice, are still served at Parsi weddings.

The ability to borrow and amalgamate is also evident in the innovations of Parsi food, perhaps one of the oldest examples of fusion cuisine. The Parsis combined the flavours of Persia, where fruit and nuts are common embellishments in savoury dishes, with the spices of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa. They also borrowed elements from the cuisines of the British and Portuguese and, occasionally, from the French.

That so many from the community have excelled and found a place in the annals of contemporary Indian history is all the more remarkable when weighed against their numbers. Today, there are an estimated 50,000 Parsis (the 2011 census put it at 57,000 but the number has declined since) in a country of over 1.3 billion people. Since the Parsi population has been declining at a rate of around 10 to 12 per cent each decade, demographers estimate that it will soon be down to 23,000, putting it in the category of a vanishing tribe. The continued existence of the Parsis hangs in balance. Parsi numbers may, however, be declining precipitously but the indomitable spirit of the people and their outsized influence on India cannot be easily snuffed out.

Coomi Kapoor is Consulting Editor to the *Indian Express* newspaper chain. She has also worked for *India Today, Sunday Mail, India Post, Motherland* and *The Illustrated Weekly*. Her book *The Tatas, Freddie Mercury and other Bawas* was recently released. Her earlier book, *The Emergency*, was a bestseller.

FIRESIDE CHAT WITH SEEMA KUMARI

■ Dr. **Sanjay Kumar**

Excerpts from a conversation with a young girl from Dahu, a remote village in Jharkhand, who has proved that both, physical and psychological journeys are possible through grit and determination. A daughter of labourers, Seema has faced considerable challenges, yet managed to excel in football, graduate from the Yuwa class of 2021 and receive a full scholarship from Harvard University.

Sanjay: Seema, how does it feel when a superstar such as Priyanka Chopra tweeted about you after hearing about your admission to Harvard? I quote, "Educate a girl and she can change the world. Such an inspiring achievement. Bravo, Seema, I can't wait to see what you do next."

Seema: When I first saw the tweet, I just could not believe it but, after a few hours, when people started messaging me and my principal also mentioned it, I was so excited.

Sanjay: Let's trace your journey to the present day, beginning with your childhood. If you could tell us about your family because, I am sure, they must have worked very hard to raise kids like you.

Seema: Mummy, Papa and my elder brother live in a joint family with my uncles and aunts, we are 19 in all. Dahu is around 25 km from Ranchi. Here, parents do not give much freedom to girls and they are considered a burden, and want to get them married at the earliest. When I was a child, I also used to think that they will get me married soon and I will have to live a life like the other women in the village, with domestic violence. Then, during Yuwa 2009, which was held in Hutub village, Franz Gastler, an American, asked the girls what they wanted to play and they said football.

> My experience with Yuwa started in 2013, when we were attending workshops where we learnt about child marriage, domestic violence, personal hygiene, menstruation and so on

Sanjay: Which year was that?

Seema: 2012.

Sanjay: How old were you at that time?

Seema: I was nine. I joined them and really enjoyed playing football. Then, after some days, I got shoes and socks, which we never wore. In 2013, for the very first time, some girls went to Spain to play in the Donosti Cup tournament. I wished I could also go out there and see other countries. In 2014, we played the USA Cup.

Sanjay: What was the turning point in your life?

Seema: When I started learning about my own society, about child marriage, domestic violence and gender discrimination and realised that these should not happen.

Sanjay: How has playing football changed your life?

Seema: I started making a lot of friends.

Sanjay: Did you see any changes in yourself?

Seema: I think I was becoming more confident; I was really scared of the ball at the beginning. I was working in a team and becoming a responsible person, I was also the vice-captain. I was handling a few responsibilities.

Sanjay: How has your experience with Yuwa changed your life?

Seema: It started in 2013, when we were attending workshops where we learnt about child marriage, domestic violence, personal hygiene, menstruation and so on.

Sanjay: Did you have to deal with any cultural shock when you went to the US?

Seema: A lot. I hadn't been to a grocery shop before and when I went there, there were so many things…packed, canned and frozen food. Those were all new for me.

Sanjay: It must have been quite a challenge. How did you feel after coming back?

Seema: I didn't know how to react to people's comments.

Sanjay: You are a role model for many girls in your village in Jharkhand. What's your one suggestion to the Government of Jharkhand for adolescent girls?

Seema: Child marriage is something that should not happen, which is in the Constitution.

Sanjay: Indeed Seema, education is the key. I am sure there are many students listening to us and they would be interested in knowing about your application process. When did you decide to apply to colleges in the US and how did you start?

Seema: I started by applying to many colleges that I would be eligible for. My English wasn't that good as I had not studied in an English medium school. As I could not take the TOEFL or the SAT/SET, I was looking for other options. I didn't ever think that I would get into Harvard. The first college I applied to was Ashoka University and I got a full scholarship. I had applied to 22 colleges, one in India, one in Singapore and 20 in the US. I got into Ashoka Middlebury College and Trinity Hartford. I heard from Harvard, Columbia, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania. I checked UPenn first and then turned to Harvard where the interview went off very well. My admissions officer was super nice and she made me feel as if she was an old friend. I took a loan from Yuwa.

Sanjay: Were you worried about life at Harvard?

Seema: The life of a typical Harvard student is really hard.

> I didn't ever think that I would get into Harvard. The first college I applied to was Ashoka University and I got a full scholarship. I had applied to 22 colleges, one in India, one in Singapore and 20 in the US. I took a loan from Yuwa.

Sanjay: You are both, smart and intelligent.

Seema: Not really. There are many things that I have to learn, such as essay writing and stuff like that. But the community is really welcoming.

Sanjay: I'm sure you will not face any trouble and you will be taken care of. Tell us, who is your inspiration?

Seema: My parents, who work really hard. Also, people such as Sundar Pichai inspire me. And then, of course, Priyanka Chopra; the way she has been helping with education and gender equality is motivating. Bill Gates as well, he has been trying to help the world with the Gates Foundation.

Sanjay: Seema, what next?

Seema: I have applied for the Global Student prize. If I get into that I will have some finance to start an organisation for women that would help to fight domestic violence. I would also like to write books about women as well as books for children. I did start writing one a year-and-a-half ago and I hope it comes out really soon.

Sanjay: What is this book about?

Seema: My journey and a lot about Yuwa.

Sanjay: How did you manage during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Seema: It was a very difficult time for me. I had to work hard and be a good time manager.

After I graduated in March, besides working on my book, I really have not done much, just watching movies on my laptop with my cousins.

Sanjay: What is that one factor that keeps you motivated at all times?

Seema: Right now I just feel that I have a very bright future which I should be working hard for. The trust and love that my parents have given me is incomparable. If I am independent, I want to take care of my family, my brother, the way they have helped me. I would love to travel with them.

Sanjay: What will you miss about your village?

Seema: Celebrating festivals.

Sanjay: Do you want to give any message to the youth of your age or in general?

Seema: Appreciate your family because they are with us no matter what. Also, just believe that whatever you want will happen, you need to be patient.

Sanjay: So, patience is key and whatever you want to do, you must pursue in order to succeed. Seema, it was a pleasure talking to you and we, especially the Harvard Club of India and the Harvard community, are there to support you.

Dr. Sanjay Kumar is President of the Harvard Club of India and also the India Country Director of the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute.

REFLECTIONS ON CULTURE AND HERITAGE

■ **Dr. Chuden T. Misra** ■ **Dr. Navin Piplani**

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, better known as INTACH, has played a pioneering role in the cultural sector in India and South Asia. Today, it is well placed to set out a fresh agenda for culture and heritage in an India that looks forward to charting new pathways for heritage and, at the same time, addressing the global challenges of sustainable development, climate change and gender inequality.

India, in 1947, bruised after 200 years of British rule, emerged with a regained sense of self-worth. It was obtained after a long and spirited fight with the colonial invaders and traders who had, perhaps, shipped away not only the grains and food of the people of Madras and Bengal, reducing them to skeletons, but practically all the artefacts, jewels and much more from a country that was fabled to be so rich that all the ships of Europe were heading towards it in the 1500s and 1600s. Thus, it is obvious that the founding fathers who were building India on the debris of colonialism had very little time to cogitate too deeply on saving the vast and precious heritage of India. Nonetheless, it is to their genius that we owe the fact that, while framing the Constitution of India, the Central Legislation mentions the allocation of responsibilities to the Union and state to enact, legislate, administer and maintain the ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains in India. These form the tangible Protected Heritage of India.

Being a country with a rich and diverse culture of a subcontinental proportion, India is dotted with cultural assets from Ladakh to Kanyakumari and Kutch to Dibrugarh; in a cultural timescape cradling a long and uninterrupted history of civilisations. While travelling across the country, one has always wondered—is there any corner of the land that does not have its own historical, natural or cultural distinctiveness?

What makes India incredible—is it its culture and heritage? What makes Indians irresistible—is it their values and traditions, which evoke considerable amazement of the living heritage it presents? This 'living' aspect of India's heritage is most significant and one that connects the past, present and future. A connection that nurtures a strong trans-cultural and inter-generational sharing of life values.

Undisputedly, the cultural landscape and value systems have evolved and transformed over the past several millennia and continue to do so. However, there are certain historical markers that would have shaped and refined the collective understanding of culture and heritage as a nation. Without getting into the rhetoric of partisan history and colonial suppression of the ancient, historical and recent past, we will cast our view on the developments that shaped India's perspective on heritage since the late nineteenth century.

Archaeological Survey of India

It was in February 1871 that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was set up as a dedicated department of the Government and Lord Cunningham was appointed its first Director General. The department was entrusted with the task of undertaking a complete survey of the country and preparing a systematic record and description of all 'architectural and other remains that are either remarkable for their antiquity, their beauty or their historical interest' (ASI website). Since then, the ASI has been doing a commendable job towards the documentation, protection, preservation, conservation and management of ancient monuments and sites in India.

The ASI functions under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. It is the custodian of 3,686 ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains, the protection and preservation of which is governed by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR), 958, revised in 2010. The revised Act is known as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010. These sites receive legal protection and are, therefore, known as 'protected sites'.

The ASI is also the nodal agency, acting on behalf of India as a state party, for the nomination of heritage sites to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage List. To recall, the cultural and natural heritage and sites that are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, anthropological, artistic, scientific, conservation or natural beauty perspective are known as World Heritage Sites. This is the highest level of recognition accorded to a heritage site and brings prestige and pride to the inscribed site and the country within which the site is located. Currently, India has 40 World Heritage Sites, including both, natural and cultural heritage. Dholavira, a Harappan city in Gujarat and the Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple in Telangana are the most recently (July 2021) inscribed sites on the World Heritage List.

In addition to these 3,600-plus iconic monuments and sites, there are around 5,000 heritage buildings and sites that are under the protection of the Departments of Archaeology of the respective states. Add to these a few thousand more sites, which are protected by urban local bodies and municipalities. This would bring the total to about 10,000 monuments, historic buildings and archaeological sites which are under 'legal' protection of the Central, state or local Government. This number may seem impressive when considered in isolation.

Now, compare this to that of island nations such as the United Kingdom, which has about 500,000 'legally protected' monuments, structures and sites, and New Zealand, which has about 143,000 heritage buildings and sites under the protected list. Suddenly, the number of protected heritage and sites in the Indian subcontinent starts to appear incredibly few and embarrassing. One

wonders—is that all that a historically and culturally rich nation such as India, at least 10 times larger than the UK and NZ, has to showcase and celebrate as 'heritage'?

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

This is the key question that was perhaps asked by some of the leading thinkers and cultural practitioners, that proved to be a turning point, and yet another historical marker in the field of culture and heritage. In answer to this critical thought lies the birth of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) on January 27, 1984.

It was for the care and conservation of innumerable historic buildings and sites across the subcontinent, those that were not under any kind of legal protection, that INTACH was founded as a membership-based non-government organisation (NGO). It is the largest NGO in the country, working for the documentation, conservation and management of 'unprotected' heritage and sites. In this sense, the mandate and responsibility of INTACH is much wider and greater than that of the ASI, State Departments of Archaeology (SDA) or allied Government Departments.

The primary task entrusted to INTACH, at its inception, was listing and documentation of the 'lesser known' or 'unknown' architectural heritage and sites. From none (in 1984) to about 75,000 (in 2021), the passion and efforts of INTACH volunteers have come a long way and demonstrated that there is much more to 'incredible India' than a few thousand iconic monuments. The listers have gone deep and beyond the known urban limits, into unknown territories, forest lands, river islands, mountain sites, rugged valleys, sandy deserts, abandoned villages and so forth to literally dig

out the history and culture of India manifested in these hundreds and thousands of historic buildings and heritage sites.

INTACH has penetrated the cultural, social and geographical fabric of India with 200-plus chapters at the state and local levels. It is the chapters, technical divisions, conservation laboratories and thousands of volunteers that work hand-in-hand to help INTACH achieve its rather ambitious mission and objectives. INTACH has been working on conservation projects, technical guidance notes and handbooks, heritage education for the youth, awareness programmes, policy and research as well as training and capacity-building activities across the subcontinent and overseas.

The technical divisions address almost all the aspects of heritage—Architectural Heritage; Art and Material Heritage; Natural Heritage; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Heritage Education and Communication; Crafts and Community; Listing; Heritage Tourism; Knowledge Centre and INTACH Heritage Academy for training, research and capacity building. The conservation laboratories are strategically located in Delhi, Lucknow, Bhubhaneswar, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Jodhpur and Mumbai in order to provide scientific investigation and conservation treatment facility covering a large part of the country and a diverse section of society.

However, for the innumerable 'unprotected' heritage of India, the challenges are far greater and task much more complex. In the absence of any institutionalised framework for the conservation and care of this vast cultural resource, a need was felt to develop a policy document that would guide the conservation of unprotected heritage. Here again, INTACH took the lead and formulated

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a Charter for the Conservation of Unprotected Architectural Heritage and Sites in India (2004), popularly known as the INTACH Charter. It was authored by Prof. A.G. Krishna Menon, an eminent conservationist, assisted by the co-author of this paper, a conservation architect trained at the University of York.

INTACH Charter

We reproduce the preamble of the INTACH Charter containing the essence and conceptual differences of the idea and practice of conservation between India and the West:

'*Drawing* upon the experience of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in conserving the unprotected architectural heritage and sites of India within an institutional framework for two decades;

'*Respecting* the invaluable contributions of the Archaeological Survey of India and State Departments of Archaeology in preserving the finest monuments of India;

'*Valuing* ASI's pioneering role in promoting scientific methods of practice and establishing highest standards of professionalism in preserving monuments;

'*Acknowledging* the importance and relevance of principles enunciated in the various international Charters adopted by UNESCO, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), et al;

'Conscious however, that a majority of architectural heritage properties and sites in India still remain unidentified, unclassified and unprotected, thereby subject to attrition on account of neglect, vandalism and insensitive development.

'Recognising the unique resource of the 'living' heritage of Master Builders/*Sthapatis*/*Sompuras*/ *Raj Mistris* who continue to build and care for buildings following traditions of their ancestors;

'Recognising, too, the concept of *jeernodharanam,* the symbolic relationship binding the tangible and intangible architectural heritage of India as one of the traditional philosophies underpinning conservation practice;

'Noting the growing role of a trained cadre of conservation architects in India who are redefining the meaning and boundaries of contemporary conservation practices;

'Convinced that it is necessary to value and conserve the unprotected architectural heritage and sites in India by formulating appropriate guidelines sympathetic to the conducts in which they are found;

'We, members of INTACH, gathered here in New Delhi on the 4th day of November, 2004, adopt the following *Charter for Conservation of Unprotected Architectural Heritage and Sites in India.'*

The majority of India's architectural heritage and sites are unprotected. Many unprotected sites are still in use and the manner in which they continue to be kept in use represent the 'living' heritage of India. This heritage is manifested in both tangible and intangible forms, defining the composite culture of the country. The Charter lays out the conservation ethics of authenticity, conjecture, integrity, rights of indigenous community, respect for the contribution of all periods,

inseparable bond with setting, minimal intervention and minimal loss of fabric, reversibility, legibility, demolish/rebuild and relationship between the conservation professional and the community.

It is critical to note that the National Conservation Policy and the INTACH Charter are not in conflict with each other. The two are complementary to each other, and strengthen the conservation context in India by responding to the needs of both—protected and unprotected heritage. The two approaches to heritage conservation and management are distinct and address the issues and challenges that are specific to context. With evolving concepts and understanding of heritage, the conceptual boundaries of monumental and non-monumental heritages are getting redefined. The notions of intangible cultural heritage and living heritage, which are intrinsic to monuments, sites and urban heritage, are gaining attention. The role of community participation is being recognised as key to the safeguarding and management of cultural assets.

It would be worth looking at one of the key projects undertaken by INTACH to showcase its inclusive approach to heritage conservation. INTACH follows the mandate—find out what needs to be conserved and conserve it. The former involves the extensive listing of historic sites; and the latter focuses on the preservation and restoration of the historic fabric, including adaptive reuse of the built heritage.

One such mapping was done under the 'National Mission for Clean Ganga'. INTACH

It is critical to note that the National Conservation Policy and INTACH Charter are not in conflict with each other. The two are complementary to each other, and strengthen the conservation context in India

undertook the task to identify the built, natural and intangible heritage, in a holistic manner, associated with the sacred river Ganga. Along the entire stretch from Gaumukh to Ganga Sagar, a geo-cultural area of 2,510 km was surveyed for the initiative. More than 2,000 unknown heritage sites, unprotected by the Government, have been discovered and listed along the Ganga in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Since pre-historic times, civilisations have depended on the Ganga for sustenance; this sacred relationship between a city and its river has also been highlighted in a state-of-the-art, Virtual Experiential Museum in Man Mahal, Varanasi. The museum was designed and curated by INTACH, and the project was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture. It exhibits the cultural expanse of the ancient city, ranging from its historicity to its architectural landscape, multi-ethnic intangible heritage, mythological significance and sacred geography.

One of the challenging works undertaken by INTACH right at the ghats of Ganga in Varanasi is the conservation and adaptive reuse of the Balaji Ghat palace (built in 1735), which had partially collapsed by 2000. The funding was from the World Monuments Fund (WMF) and American Express (Amex). INTACH's work on this project was recognised with the "Certificate of Exceptional Accomplishment awarded in recognition of outstanding efforts towards positive change during the 2012 World Monument Watch".

The documentation and conservation process implemented by INTACH has created archives of its own, which never existed before and, thus, established conservation priorities and benchmarks

> **Since pre-historic times, civilisations have depended on the Ganga for sustenance; this sacred relationship between a city and its river has also been highlighted in a state-of-the-art, Virtual Experiential Museum in Man Mahal, Varanasi. The museum was designed and curated by INTACH**

in the recording of heritage within India. The active involvement of the organisation in preserving the cultural heritage across the country has led to widespread awareness and encouragement at a local level. Thus, the organisation has become a guiding tool over the years for the emerging professionals and enthusiasts within this field.

The breadth and depth of knowledge generated over the years on matters related to the culture and heritage of India is now being made accessible and transferrable from the education and training perspective. In 2018, INTACH instituted its own Post-Graduate Diploma in Heritage Studies, which builds upon the accumulated intellectual wealth of the organisation. The multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary course cuts across the various technical divisions, and is set up under the aegis of INTACH Heritage Academy and INTACH Knowledge Centre. The primary aim of the course is to nurture students into well-rounded professionals and 'guardians of heritage'.

Some of the key benefits of this one-year full-time course include gaining an informed perspective on the protection, preservation and continuity of the significant aspects of culture and its expression; developing a critical understanding of the history, theory and ethics of heritage conservation; learning practical skills by working alongside traditional master craftsmen and heritage specialists; building connections with heritage experts, cultural practitioners,

research organisations, and being part of a wider conservation community; and, immersing in stimulating debates at masterclasses, seminars and continuous professional development modules. The diploma and allied courses have gained considerable success, not only in India, but in a wider international context. It is a strategic vision to scale up the INTACH Heritage Academy into a world class education and training institute with its own campus, infrastructure and facilities.

It is indeed evident that INTACH has played a pioneering role in the cultural sector in India and wider South Asia. It has emerged as a thought leader in the region with its guiding presence in several neighbouring countries, namely, Nepal, Cambodia and Thailand. With its invaluable expertise and experience, INTACH is appropriately placed to set out a 'new agenda' for culture and heritage in the 'new India'. Like the entire nation, INTACH looks forward to articulating new pathways for heritage in a wider context and addressing the global challenges of sustainable development, climate change, gender inequality and so much more.

Dr. Chuden T. Misra is Member Secretary, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.

Dr. Navin Piplani is Principal Director, INTACH Heritage Academy.

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA: SHOWING THE WAY

■ **Sujit S. Nair**

After a hard-won Independence in 1947, the most challenging moment for India was to give shape to the aspirations of its people. A Constitution had to be drafted for the country's newly-formed status as a guide to securing justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for the generations to come.

We will be celebrating our 73rd Republic Day on January 26, 2022. When India became independent on August 15, 1947, a drafting committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, was set up to draft a permanent Indian Constitution on August 29, 1947. And, on January 26, 1950, the Constitution of India came into effect. It was a guide to let all of us know our duties and fundamental rights. As the country's supreme law, it established the powers, procedures and duties for different Government institutions.

American politician, Patrick Henry, has an interesting view on how the Constitution should be regarded by the common man. He believes that it is not an instrument for the Government to restrain its people; it is an instrument for the people to restrain the Government. I do hope that the Republic of India starts strictly enforcing those laws by which the common man can be empowered to demand answers from people in positions of power, without any fear of retribution. Our Constitution is probably one of the best in the world, but where we lack is in the implementation of the laws mentioned in it. This has led to the common man being let down by the system and not receiving the protection that he has a right to by the laws of the land. I hope that the Republic of India at 73 starts strictly enforcing checks and balances so that the citizens are protected from powerful people in the Government.

> Our Constitution is probably one of the best in the world, but where we lack is in the implementation of the laws mentioned in it. This has led to the common man being let down by the system

Values of the Constitution

I believe that the Constitution of India provides the framework for the Government to carry out a number of positive steps that can address the hopes and aspirations of the common man and help society achieve its goals. Over the course of the past few centuries, Indian society has developed deeply entrenched inequalities based on caste, creed and so on. If the country strictly enforces the laws enshrined in the Constitution, we can evolve into a twenty-first century progressive society that is free of caste and various other forms of discrimination.

Basic rights to citizens, which the Government is not allowed to trespass, have been provided by our Constitution. This has been achieved by specifying certain fundamental rights, which the Government cannot violate. I hope that, after 73 years, the country can enforce these aspects of the Constitution so that the people of India can lead a more meaningful life.

Given the diversity of our population, the Indian Constitution has set up a few basic rules that will ensure that there will always be minimal coordination among the leaders representing the various strata of society, including religion, caste and so on.

These rules of engagement are important because without them we will have a situation where people will feel insecure as they will not know what the members of other groups could do to them. India must intensify those mechanisms which will ensure that these rules are known to society at large and, hence, provide an assurance to its citizens that everybody should follow them and, in case the rules are not followed, they will be liable for punishment.

There are strict laws in our Constitution to prevent corruption among public servants who can be imprisoned or fined if they do not adhere to them. I would like to see an India where these mechanisms are further implemented. I believe that our Constitution has a number of provisions to ensure that all citizens get access to adequate nutrition, clothing and housing. If the country can diligently deliver these rights to its citizens, we will not hear stories of people dying of starvation or homelessness. I hope to see a day when India implements these social security benefits so that the basic requirements of its citizens are taken care of by the state, irrespective of the financial situation of the individual.

I hope to see a day when India implements these social security benefits so that the basic requirements of its citizens are taken care of by the state, irrespective of the financial situation of the individual

It is important for us as Indians to be aware of our fundamental rights and duties. It is also important for us to carry out our fundamental duties and commitments. Actions performed by even one citizen can change lives; when these actions are amplified by other members of society, it can have a positive impact on the entire country. Therefore, we also have a responsibility to assist the Government in building a strong and powerful nation.

Sujit S. Nair hosts summits at the European Parliament and the UK Parliament to promote trade and relationship in the EU-India-UK trilateral corridor.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

■ **Dr. Ganesh Natarajan**

India is at a cross roads. With an economy ravaged by COVID and hostile attacks by China threatening its defences, the country is in a weak position in the league of nations and has to make concerted efforts in diplomacy, economic growth and industry progress to claim a place at the high table of successful nations. This article analyses the possibilities and sets out pathways by which the country can succeed.

Where are we in the league table of successful nations?

Two Sides of the Coin

Just in the past two weeks, three occurrences have raised fundamental questions in my mind about the 'Idea of India'. A proud Indian who grew up reciting the pledge, 'India is my country and all Indians are my brothers and sisters'; sang patriotic songs at the podium when the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited my hometown Ranchi in the sixties and still stands up and sings the national anthem when it is played at a movie theatre, a Rotary Club meeting or any other place and time, I have had unwavering faith in our "tryst with destiny". But, as we near an India at 75 milestone in 2022 and take stock of our achievements and shortcomings, it is good to ask some immediate questions, even if there are no immediate answers.

Occurrence 1: We have witnessed the unedifying sight of corpses wrapped in yellow shrouds dumped on the banks of the Ganges and an intrepid reporter travelling by boat, road and foot to get to the root of these uncounted deaths. And the reporter, writing a column in an American newspaper, laments about India's neglect of both the living and the dead in the COVID crisis.

Occurrence 2: There have been sullen acts of commission and omission of some of the world's large social media giants to neither implement nor question the rules that are part of the IT Act, in the full conviction that the millions of users and followers would dissuade India from going the China way and banning some of these biggies for the country.

Occurrence 3: An amazing initiative has emerged in the city of Pune, where a COVID Response collaborative of industry, Government, civil society and citizens has not only raised over Rs. 100 crore (US$ 15 million) for relief and equipment to hospitals but also shaped an exemplary response to the second wave of COVID.

What do these occurrences tell us about the psyche of our country, 75 years after Independence? For one, successive governments and we the people, who had the ability to make a difference, have let down the aspirations and hopes of our country to truly make India a global success story. Except for brief patches in our history and a few industry sectors such as IT Services, where India has been able to hold its head high after proven prowess, we have remained sadly an underdog and watched rather than participated in the successful march of many nations in the West, the leap to economic success of the Asian Tigers a few decades ago and, more recently, the success of even Vietnam and Bangladesh in delivering value to their citizens beyond what we are doing. Today, we are surrounded by unfriendly countries such as China and Pakistan and our former allies in our neighbourhood are being wooed by the mighty dragon. The future could be sad if Chinese carriers start prowling the Indian Ocean because China believes its only possible equal is the USA.

The core malaise that India has struggled with is that the institutions of the country have not kept pace with fast growth expectations and the private sector has often played a 'wait and watch' game and avoided significant investments. There has been a tendency for the Government to get into the business of business, micromanage the economy and expand the administrative state, increasing the uncertainty for private sectors from India and abroad and reducing incentives to invest and compete. The erosion in the rule of law has also resulted in asymmetry of the behaviour of officials and politicians towards private entrepreneurs and

there is a dire need to scale back state intervention and create an environment where entrepreneurs can partner with the Government to truly build the nation.

Are there solutions that we can start developing that can get us back in the reckoning? Let's peel that onion slice by slice.

The China-India-US equations

In just one year, China's talk of an Asian Century has been proved to be idle rhetoric and multiple questions have been raised about China's clear desire to be the dominant power in Asia and, eventually, the world! When the conflict erupted in Doklam and then Ladakh, the immediate response was to mobilise our troops and the Indian Army gave a fitting reply to the aggressors. Some economic responses followed with the banning of Chinese apps and an emotional boycott of Chinese goods. But is that a recipe for the future? Or can there be a response guided by strategic patience and collaborative policies with the USA and other democratic powers that can change the geo-political equations of the world?

A paper we have recently published at the Pune International Centre attempts to see these problems on a larger scale, in terms of space, time and force. How can diplomacy and economic policy work in an intertwined fashion, to best further India's interests? At present, India is in a weak position when compared with China. Whether we look at GDP numbers, state capacity, and the capabilities of the best firms, the extent of internationalisation, the mastery of science and technology or the quality of the top intellectuals—China is significantly ahead of India. And economically, we are currently no match. China in 1962 was at roughly Indian levels of GDP. China's economy has risen from US$ 305 billion in 1980 to 14 trillion in 2019. In the same period, India's rose from 189 billion to 2.9 trillion.

Given the deep suspicion that exists regarding China's intentions in various parts of the world today and the poor demographics of Chinese society's ageing population, there are good reasons why selective investments in key industry segments can enable India to have less dependence on China and, in many sectors, compete and succeed to put India in the lead, as we have done in IT Services. India can grow at eight per cent while China may only grow at four per cent to emerge at a level of 40 trillion for India vs 53 trillion for China by 2041. In some industry segments, such as rare earths and telecom, we must at least move towards 'atmanirbhar' or self-reliance. In others, such as chemicals, pharma and automotive, we can endeavour to be an alternative supply chain to China. And in places where we have missed the bus in the past, electronic hardware and textiles, we can and must move towards global dominance.

To move in this direction, there is a case for three groups of restrictions: Limit companies controlled by the Chinese state from a controlling stake in a hotlist of sensitive infrastructure assets; steering clear of Chinese-controlled technological standards; and disrupting surveillance of Indian persons. These three areas require careful, sophisticated work and strong government and industry partnerships. On the diplomatic front, confronting China alone would be unwise. It is essential to build coalitions. There are three groups of natural allies for India—the great democracies of the world, who worry about the global prominence of an authoritarian China; the countries on China's borders, who are all facing difficulties just as India is; and the countries in India's region who can potentially have positive exposure to Indian success, given that proximity matters greatly in cross-border economic and cultural activities.

India's natural ally at a time when China's aggressive postures threaten the world is the USA. With the Biden administration having just taken over, India has to go beyond the QUAD partnership with that country and Australia and Japan and forge a strong axis with America. Both countries are in favour of a rules-based alignment of democratic intent resulting in multilateral policies in Asia as well as the rest of the world. Wariness of China's ability to arm twist them through supply chain restrictions in key industrial areas should give India an opportunity to position itself initially as the principal China Plus One partner for manufacturing and, eventually, as a credible alternative supply chain hub.

The US, in its urgency to get the country back on a high-growth track, is expected to be self-centred and India will have to make efforts to be seen as a democratic and reliable partner. This also places a responsibility on Indian Governments to seize this opportunity by being a true partner with predictable policies that make it easy for large American investments in our country. We have to proactively build economic and trade partnerships without trade or non-trade barriers on either side or a complete avoidance of retrospective taxation or recurrence of Harley Davidson type issues in any product category. This is a partnership that has to be nurtured and can play a big role in countering the large threat of China. Diplomacy needs to play a much bigger role in future domestic policy making, than has ever been the case in Indian history.

From Coalitions Outside to Collaboration Within

After battling COVID for more than a year and experiencing the world's worst decline in GDP, there is no doubt that we have to develop a united front to face the challenges of the present and future and put India on a 20-year growth path. Let us break up these internal imperatives into five areas and see where we stand and how we can build success in each of these fronts.

1. **Industrial renaissance:** India needs to look at robust industrial growth and become a China Plus One alternate supply chain source in many areas and even attempt to be globally dominant in some areas like we have done in IT. While there are sectors such as rare earths, where China is dominant with large natural deposits in the country, India can restore the balance in chemicals and telecom and restore the balance in agriculture with a judicious choice of organic produce, grains, fruits and flowers to augment the massive rice and wheat production that we are seeing. In specific sectors such as electronics and electric mobility, India does have the ability to invest heavily, provide productivity-linked incentives and woo both, global and Indian majors to be large investors in the design and manufacturing for the core ICT layer and autonomous, electric and connected vehicles for the new economy. We have been guilty of letting manufacturing slip in share of GDP over the years, losing out to a galloping services sector but the 30 billion dollar incentives through the PLIs and the imperative to accelerate the investments in manufacturing facilities demonstrate a new intent to redress the situation, essential for our ambitions to result in real growth.

2. **Healthcare and pharma:** Today, India is in a truly abysmal state in healthcare, particularly in the small towns and villages where primary healthcare centres are woefully under-equipped. In the cities, private healthcare is dominant and creating a huge divide between those who can pay for expensive medication and hospitalisation and those who look to the Government to take care of their needs. The Ayushman Bharat initiative, with its

focus on bringing a minimum level of healthcare to all in the "aspirational" districts, has yet to scale and it is hoped that post COVID, the burning platform will ensure serious transformation across the country.

In the pharma segment, while Indian-made COVID vaccines such as Covaxin have more than matched the efficacy of Chinese vaccines, the Indian drugs industry still has large dependence on Active Pharma Ingredients (APIs) sourced from China, which makes the entire industry vulnerable. A recent announcement by the Government to work with specific companies to commence the production of APIs is a good step but there is a lot of catching up to do for India's pharma market, valued at around US$ 20 billion, to approach China's enormous size of over US$ 140 billion. A challenge, which, like in the case of ICT manufacturing, can prove to be an area where India can scale rapidly.

3. **Education, innovation and research:** While the scale of education in the country, at school, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, has been huge, not enough has been achieved in terms of technology incorporation in the pedagogy or quality of institutions. As a quick comparison, the top Chinese University (Tsinghua) is at Rank 23 in The Time Higher Education Supplement while the Indian Institute of Science, the top Indian University, is ranked above 300. Indian orientation is very much towards STEM but full-stack capabilities in social sciences, humanities and the fine arts has been woefully lacking. Research output has been very weak in the country with the publication of peer-reviewed papers far inferior in quantity and quality to both the US and China. This also calls in question the capability for innovation, which at both, university and corporate levels have been low, with R&D investments as well as patent filing being low in comparison with peers and what should ideally be in evidence to build market leadership

position in key economic sectors. Barriers between academia and industry needs to be removed to enable collaboration in all areas of intellectual capacity development.

4. **Employment and entrepreneurship:** This has been an area of concern in the country for the last three years and more with formal full employment lower than desirable and partial and under-employment prevalent in the rural and small town economies. COVID has also pushed many citizens below the poverty line and a major effort is needed to create sustainable livelihoods. It is clear that the traditional formats of skilling people for jobs and motivating young folks to become entrepreneurs has not been very successful. The Skills India Mission and the National Skills Development Corporation had good intentions but could not deliver the aspiration needed in youth to choose a skills programme and pursue it through to completion and subsequent employment. Similarly, the Start-Up India Mission worked for the highly motivated youth, particularly in the tech sector, but didn't really enable youth looking for jobs to create large organisations. In recent times, the success of Pune City Connect in creating a 10,000 slum youth trained and 60 per cent placed model has given hope that new models can and will emerge. The success of the Aspen Institute's Global Opportunity Youth Network initiative, supported by Accenture and Pune City Connect, is also enabling new modes of micro and nano entrepreneurship to evolve. India lives in hope.

5. **Collaborative models:** Everything is possible in this country and anywhere if there is a shared vision and a vision that the community can evolve, which inspires all the participants in an ecosystem to get involved and take actions towards that shared vision. The success of Pune City Connect over the last five years and

the Pune COVID response programme, Mission Vayu, in the first and second wave of COVID in Pune has underlined this collaboration success. In both cases, corporations, Government, social enterprises, civil society and passionate citizens have come together and worked with a sense of purpose and large doses of commitment to make success happen.

From Here to There— The Path is Clear

India at 75 is a land of enormous potential but unfulfilled promises. There has been great intent displayed by many outstanding citizens in public service, administration, industry, research and academia. No country can boast better or more sincere leaders than Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, Ratan Tata, Kumarmangalam Birla, Raghunath Mashelkar, Baba Amte and dozens of others. But time and again, we have fallen short and we stand today, after a COVID battering, in danger of being relegated to a second rate status in the league of nations. However, the confidence still exists in all passionate Indians, none more than this author, that, as a country, we will rise to the challenge and prove that we have it in us, in the words of our sage Swami Vivekananda to "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached".

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INDIA @ 75: DRIVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION THROUGH AN URBAN RENAISSANCE

■ **Hardeep S. Puri**

India's urban areas are of great significance to the growth of the country, as has been highlighted by the threats presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The country has launched a comprehensive programme for planned urbanisation with the intent to mainstream climate change, gender equity, resilient infrastructure and heritage conservation into Indian urban development. For, ultimately, humanity's fight against social and environmental ills will be won or lost in our cities.

As India celebrates its 75th year of Independence with the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', it is important to pause and reflect on how far we have come as a nation as well as how far we still have to go to meet the aspirations of almost 1.4 billion people. Such significant milestones naturally provoke introspection, particularly in light of the two recent global phenomena that have made us all the more mindful of the need for nation-building: first, the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely tested our capabilities and forced us to consider existential issues such as the choice between life and livelihood; and the second, the looming danger of irreversible climate change, which continues to make us examine the way we co-exist with nature.

In both cases, be it the acute character of the pandemic or the insidious stress of climate change, our towns and cities were invariably at the forefront of the response. The threat from the systemic shocks that arose due to these two challenges—just like with other challenges in the past—was felt not just on our cityscapes, but also on our socio-economic structures. At the same time, this drove home the recognition that our urban areas were the hubs of innovation and productivity that helped us beat the worst of the pandemic, and are now anchoring India's sustainability agenda to combat climate change.

While the pandemic made it even more urgent to strengthen our urban systems in the last two years, I would say that the true journey of transformation for India's cities had begun much before the pandemic first reared its ugly head. To be precise, this process started seven years ago when our honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modiji, revolutionised India's approach to urban development and led an urban renaissance that is internationally acknowledged for its foresight, vision and holism. Under his guidance, India has witnessed the most comprehensive programme for planned urbanisation undertaken anywhere in the world. While doing so, he also led the mainstreaming of climate change, gender equity, resilient infrastructure and heritage conservation into Indian urban development.

Since I was invited to join the Council of Ministers in September 2017 and given charge of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for the Government of India, I have had the unique privilege of being actively associated with the Prime Minister's vision for this multi-faceted urban rejuvenation. In many ways, the integrated nature of these urban interventions is a microcosm of India's development ambitions. At this inflection point for India, where our response to myriad socio-political challenges will determine the country's overall growth for decades to come, I believe we will continue to need robust and innovative urban solutions that are guided by citizen-centric policies.

I posit that India's urban agenda will be integral in our pursuit of the tenets of economic progress, social equality and environmental sustainability. Whether it is reducing poverty and income inequality, developing universal access to health, education and digital technology, increasing livelihoods through industry and innovation, or optimising our energy consumption, urban areas will have to be crucial drivers and facilitators in achieving

> **At this inflection point for India, I believe we will continue to need robust and innovative urban solutions that are guided by citizen-centric policies**

the respective goals. Accordingly, we devised a novel strategy of a pyramid of urban development to suit the needs and context of individual cities guided by the Gandhian principles of Sarvodaya and self-sufficiency. There was a recognition that a 'one size fits all' model would not work for India's diverse urban areas. Thus, we had the Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban (SBM-U) where all the urban areas in the country were required to be Open Defecation Free (ODF) to achieve the basic tenets of cleanliness and hygiene. Building on top of this, we had the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Urban (PMAY-U), which aimed to drastically increase housing stock in the towns and cities of the country. Above these two foundational needs was the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) mission which involved 500 cities with a population of more than one lakh, each developing sustainable water and sewerage systems, and other civic amenities. And, for the 100 leading cities of India that needed to enhance their technological infrastructure to manage civic services, we conceptualised the Smart Cities Mission (SCM).

The individual successes of these missions aside, the biggest takeaway has been the sheer increase in investments for urban development in the last seven years. To illustrate this, it is worth noting that the total expenditure on urban development from 2004 to 2014 was about Rs. 1.57 lakh crore. Between 2015-21, this figure is about Rs. 11.83 lakh crore, roughly translating to a 700 per cent increase in investments in less than 70 per cent of the time.

While the pandemic and climate change, which require coordinated global efforts, have definitely been big factors in this transformation, there are

> **The best-performing cities globally contribute five times more to the national GDP than comparable Indian cities today. We will need a similar density of economic activity and complexity from our cities to meet our economic aspirations**

also many national priorities that have made such scale of urban development necessary. If India is to be a 10 trillion dollar economy by 2030, it is imperative that its cities lead the economic thrust. By 2030, it is estimated that 70 per cent of the national GDP will come from our cities as rapid urbanisation facilitates increased economic activity and efficiencies of agglomeration. However, urbanisation by itself is not sufficient for economic growth. The best-performing cities globally contribute five times more to the national GDP than comparable Indian cities today. We will need a similar density of economic activity and complexity from our cities to meet our economic aspirations.

To do this, it is important to address the infrastructure deficits that will arise from the rapid urbanisation and complex migrant flows which we are already witnessing. More than 870 million people are expected to reside in India's urban areas by 2050—almost double that of today. A natural consequence of this massive transfer is going to be that our urban areas will be the major contributors of climate change as well as the worst affected from it.

The increasing urban footprint will make more energy demands in our cities, which are estimated to already be responsible for about 44 per cent of India's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions—emanating chiefly from transport, industry, buildings and waste. India was the seventh most affected country by climate change in 2019, with most of

the impact of extreme weather events being felt by Indian cities. One report even estimated that as many as 360 million people could be exposed to extreme heat in 142 Indian cities by 2050.

The COP-26 Summit served as a further reminder of the collective cost of climatic depredations. It was reassuring to see world leaders come together to commit significant resources and plan collaborative action to reduce the global carbon footprint. Our Prime Minister was a source of inspiration to the world when he announced India's aggressive agenda against climate change through the seminal 'Panchamrit' (five-point) Action Plan which envisages India becoming a net zero emissions country by 2070. This commitment—which, incidentally, is one of the shortest time spans proposed between peak emissions and net zero status by a developing country—reflects India's firm belief that the roadmap to prosperity lies in sustainability.

The Prime Minister also committed that by the end of this decade, India will meet 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy; installed capacity of non-fossil fuel energy in India will stand at 500 GW; emissions intensity of the country's GDP will drop by 46-48 per cent from 2005 levels; and that its carbon emissions will be lower by one billion tonnes. These targets will enable India to build the necessary infrastructure to advance the emissions peak and, ultimately, achieve the net zero emissions target.

These five targets will be met because of the rich civilisational legacy India has in the area of sustainability. We have promoted indigenous and

frugal solutions for centuries before the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated. India's flagship urban programmes—known for their focus on circular economy, resilience and inclusion—were launched in June 2015, almost a year before the SDGs were adopted globally. Through these missions, not only will we achieve the targets of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), I am also certain that the improved urban ecosystems in India will result in positive impacts on other SDG goals such as poverty, health, education, energy, industry and innovation, and climate action.

India's commitment to not follow the path of carbon-intensive development, unlike the big carbon-emitting nations in the past, does not mean that we will deviate from the objective of catalysing economic growth through our development policies. This broader context explains why India initiated climate initiatives as early as 2008, including, most notably, the National Action Plan on Climate Change. Since then, India has embarked on an ambitious path through the International Solar Alliance, the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, and the commitments at COP-26.

Innovative Initiatives

The National Mission for Sustainable Habitat, which is one of the eight Missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and is anchored by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, is one such initiative designed to increase sustainability. Through this mission, we have promoted measures such as balanced planning of residential areas and growth centres, Energy Consumption Building Code,

Fortunately, most of our urban areas are still quite 'young'; this gives us a rare chance to embed a low-carbon mode of urban development in these areas

use of building material with low-carbon footprint, and multi-level stakeholder engagement to create public awareness. Another innovative initiative is the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework. We have harmonised climate change policies and Government programmes across the country, thus enabling Indian cities to accurately build roadmaps for reducing their dependence on non-renewable energy. Fortunately, most of our urban areas are still quite 'young'; this gives us a rare chance to embed a low-carbon mode of urban development in these areas.

All the urban programmes launched by the Government of India are geared towards achieving this objective. The Swachh Bharat Mission—Urban, which I consider to be the fulcrum of India's urban transformation, is a shining example of the holistic approach adopted towards urban reforms and sustainability. Not only did we construct over 73 lakh toilets in urban areas and increase the waste processing capacity from 18 per cent in 2014 to more than 70 per cent as of November 2021, we also brought about holistic behavioural change in our citizens towards Swachhata. Somewhere along this journey, the Swachh Bharat Mission morphed into a Jan Andolan that built confidence in every stakeholder and citizen regarding the commitment of this Government.

Now, we are targeting to become a 'Garbage-Free India' under the recently launched Swachh Bharat Mission—Urban 2.0 (SBM-U 2.0). With a budget outlay of Rs. 1.41 crore—nearly 2.5 times that of the first iteration—this programme will provide the impetus to city governments to comprehensively plan measures for sludge management, waste water treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in single-

PMAY-U has also promoted low-carbon building technologies through the Global Housing Technology Challenge, where six Light House Projects, consisting of about 1,000 houses each, are being constructed

use plastics, management of construction and demolition (C&D) waste, and bio-remediation dump sites.

AMRUT 2.0, with a total outlay of Rs. 2.87 lakh crore, was launched alongside SBM-U 2.0 to realise the aspirations of the new urban India by making all our cities 'Water Secure'. Building on the surpassing achievements of AMRUT, AMRUT 2.0 will expand the coverage from 500 cities to all the statutory towns of India. It will provide 100 per cent coverage of water supply to all households through 2.68 crore tap connections and 100 per cent coverage of sewerage through 2.64 crore sewer connections.

Alongside the basic needs of water and sanitation that AMRUT and SBM covered, this Government also prioritised the fundamental need of housing through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana—Urban (PMAY-U), under which nearly 1.14 crore houses have been sanctioned. Beneficiaries have already moved in to almost 52 lakh housing units while the other houses are at various stages of completion. Most of the housing has been developed by utilising energy-efficient and green methods that have incorporated sustainable land-use practices. PMAY-U has also promoted low-carbon building technologies through the Global Housing Technology Challenge, where six Light House Projects, consisting of about 1,000 houses each, are being constructed.

Above these basic urban needs comes the Smart Cities Mission, which has successfully embedded a culture of innovation in urban

development. The tangible impact of the Smart Cities Mission is there for all to see—with a total outlay of more than Rs. 2 lakh crore, over 5,100 urban projects across domains as diverse as waste management, mobility, e-health and solar energy have been sanctioned. Going beyond mere asset creation, we now have examples of rooted excellence; for instance, Indore, which has developed a successful Carbon Credit Financing Mechanism, or Erode, with its micro-composting network. Through such demonstrative urban projects that can successfully be scaled and replicated, we are in a position to have contextual solutions for all the urban centres of India.

We have synergised other flagship initiatives such as Digital India Mission and Make in India to fully harness the potential of our cities. The recently-launched National Urban Digital Mission signifies the importance of co-creating solutions for our urban citizens through a shared digital infrastructure. During the pandemic, we leveraged the technology ecosystems developed under SCM to manage reporting and monitoring in 80 cities through Integrated Command and Control Centres, which were designated as 'City War Rooms'.

Regional City Governance

If the pandemic taught us anything at all, it was that we needed to better integrate urban services through stronger cross-functional governance at the city level where people and socio-economic activity do not fall neatly into administrative jurisdictions. It is crucial that we build intelligence

A regional outlook towards urban areas best captures the economic characteristics of cities, and helps identify suitable policies for local economic development

rather than just data footprint. Initiatives devised under the SCM such as the Data Maturity Assessment Framework and India Urban Data Exchange will be helpful in building a credible national database that integrates urban services data. While a shared digital infrastructure with harmonised data management and monitoring and evaluation will help greatly, our urban local bodies (ULBs) and states also need to develop regional coordination mechanisms through enabling policies and platforms to ease city management.

In many ways, a regional outlook towards urban areas best captures the economic characteristics of cities, and helps identify suitable policies for local economic development. It is at this level of governance that we can develop the necessary supply chain linkages, diversify economic activity, and pool labour and capital. Even as we engage through economic interventions, there is cognisance that greater legislative and policy support for metropolitan planning may be needed in the country to support metropolitan and development authorities in executing their differentiated strategic roles.

The status quo understanding that ULBs cannot be responsible for the economic growth of cities must be done away with. This perspective ignores that ULBs are responsible for various economic determinants at the city level such as land-use planning, labour mobility, ease of doing business compliances and shared public infrastructure. Robust regional networks and integrated planning will lead to enhanced investments and spatial strategies that incentivise growth. Regional city governance may also be the solution to the problem of managing large and urbanising cities.

Cities have to be understood as 'system of systems' where complex

actions across the dimensions of work, leisure, social interaction and cultural norms intertwine in countless ways to shape the built environment in relation with the natural environment. These are not simple processes that can be codified or curated solely through normative urban planning tools such as the Master Plan, which is India's only statutory document for planning urban infrastructure, land use and development control. It needs an appreciation of land markets, and heritage and cultural characteristics alongside the understanding of local urban economics. Inclusive Master Plans that have dynamic land-use criteria may be more suitable to India's current urbanisation patterns and can lead to balanced urbanisation right from the start.

Alongside economic interventions, regional mobility solutions are also essential in making city-regions efficient. There has been a paradigm shift in India's urban mobility agenda under the Modi Government. Before 2014, very few cities planned transportation solutions alongside their Master Plan. When mobility is lacking, poorer residents, who cannot afford to stay away from business districts, cluster to create slums where demand for infrastructure outstrips supply. To have mobility means to have access in an affordable and safe manner; access that was denied to the urban poor. In response, the National Urban Transport Policy, which was launched in 2014 under the guidance of the Prime Minister, focuses on moving people rather than vehicles.

Today, public transport and Non-Motorised Transport options are being incentivised and supported across the board. Currently, 732 km of metro line are operational in 18 cities and a network of 964 km of metro network is under construction in 27 cities, thereby reducing traffic congestion and the associated air quality and emissions concerns.

We have also advocated for Transit-oriented Development and higher Floor Space Index (FSI) in and around transit nodes to improve access. To further alleviate the stress of GHG emissions, we believe that the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid and) Electric Vehicles Policy—also known as the FAME policy—will lead to as much as a 30 per cent share of Electric Vehicles on the road by 2030.

It is important to acknowledge the role that the private sector, think tanks, civil society and citizens have played so far. To give you an example of our commitment to adopting participatory approaches, we received more than 5.5 crore feedback messages and reviews from citizens as part of the Swachh Survekshan 2020 under SBM-U. As the linkages between industry, government, academia and civil society become more substantive, it is encouraging to see the greater value addition that business is providing to the urban sector in India. From collaborating on novel waste management solutions to e-governance, urban policy-making has truly become a collaborative outcome in the last seven years.

Local Governments

While various policy instruments and national missions provide a framework for urban development, we are keen to ensure that urban interventions are locally planned and implemented. It is high time that the spirit of the 74th Amendment is embraced. Local government is the best interface between policy and people, and its speed of response and contextual understanding of issues cannot be easily replicated by the Centre or State Governments. The latter are playing a facilitative role in transitioning ULBs from operational approaches to outcome-oriented management

by providing the necessary incentives, funds and capacity augmentation of personnel and systems. An area that requires immediate focus is local urban financing. Our ULBs must improve their dealings with the capital markets and build private sector partnerships to close the urban infrastructure deficit.

There can be no doubt that the pandemic, just like climate change, is going to permanently alter the urban fabric of our country and our perception of urban living and work. Historically, such shocks have led to permanent changes in urban landscapes—the disciplines of urban planning and urban design can trace their genesis to such disruptive events. The cholera outbreak in the late-nineteenth century led to the biggest cities of the time such as London and New York adopting new standards for urban health and sanitation.

It seems that we are at a similar moment again. Humanity's fight against social and environmental ills will once again be won or lost in our cities. India's story is no different. With more than 1.1 billion doses of vaccines administered in a record time of 10 months up till November 10, 2021, Indians can begin to look past the pandemic and consider how they will work, live and play in the new normal. Our cities need a similar kind of dose to be immunised. I believe that under the urban renaissance initiated by Prime Minister Modi, India's self-reliant and productive cities will soon alchemise the socio-economic transformation that the country seeks for its citizens.

Hardeep S. Puri is the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs; and Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India.

THE SOUTH ASIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: BUILDING BRIDGES FOR PEACE

■ **Nirupama Rao**

As India celebrates its 75th year of Independence, we find that the South Asian region is full of conflict; there are threats and turmoil all around. It is here that music, with its soothing nature and ability to heal, has an important role to play. The political rhythm takes on a new beat when countries come together in harmony and this is where the South Asian Symphony Orchestra becomes a 'baton for cooperation'.

Diplomacy, in its essence, is about people. One of its core purposes is to reach across borders and to build bridges across divides. South Asia has been an arena of conflict, but it is also the crucible of an ancient and enduring civilisation, a place of rich cultural traditions, vibrant dance and song. It is a region that has absorbed and assimilated influences from the world outside. Today, however, it is, unfortunately, one of the least integrated regions in the world.

Political tensions and the legacies of history have kept the nations of South Asia apart. The threat of conflict has never receded. The subcontinent—another name for our region—is beset with various woes, including religious radicalism and terrorism, the threat of nuclear war, depleting natural resources and environmental pollution. Yet, despite the political boundaries that divide the eight nations of South Asia—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka—there is an urge among the people who inhabit this space to co-exist in harmony with each other, so that their tomorrows can be better than their todays, so that their children are assured a brighter future.

A symphony, as Gustav Mahler said, "must be like the world. It must embrace everything." We, at the South Asian Symphony Foundation (established in 2018), created the South Asian Symphony Orchestra because we believe music speaks the language of peace. There is magic to music; it rises above the strife between nations. The right to music is a basic human right. Our musicians come from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka and also from the South Asian diaspora who have made their homes in the United States and Europe. Some of them are as young as 13 and 14, some are refugees from war, they are drawn from different walks of life. One of our young Afghan members says that music has changed his world and that his aim in life is to 'overcome the sound of war with the sound of music'.

In two concerts held in Mumbai and Bengaluru in 2019, the South Asian Symphony Orchestra demonstrated what South Asians can do when they collaborate, with true commitment and discipline, in a celebration—through music—of the shared geographical and cultural space we call South Asia. One of the pieces they played in this debut concert was 'Hamsafar—a Musical Journey through South Asia'—which drew inspiration from the songs sung in the different countries of the region. As the word 'Hamsafar' suggests, we are all fellow-voyagers, as we strive to realise a better future for the people who inhabit the region.

Transcending race and religion, and drawing strength from diversity, orchestras become vectors of peace. They are microcosms of the world as it can be—a world defined by cooperation, coordination, generosity, mutual empathy and self-control. Orchestras cultivate the art of listening, they prioritise balance and equipoise. Their aim is to create that 'perfect' cadence, a union of the spheres.

Symphony Orchestras are not common in South Asia. Building a world-class Symphony Orchestra takes years of rigorous training and demands the highest standards of excellence. Our work has only begun. However, the musical talents of South Asians

Transcending race and religion, and drawing strength from diversity, orchestras become vectors of peace. They are microcosms of the world as it can be

are truly rich and outstanding. South Asian music composers have won fame worldwide. Our young musicians have the talent and the determination to excel. Integration within South Asia and also integration between South Asia and the rest of the world must become stronger. Music offers one way of doing this. The happiest part of this whole experience has been to witness the passion, commitment and discipline of our musicians in the South Asian Symphony Orchestra.

In the words of a recent World Bank study, 'The region's music mirrors its society, tells stories, expresses emotion, shares ideas and acts as a form of historic record. Promoting regional platforms for music can protect these traditions while helping the South Asian community connect.' The study called the South Asian Symphony Orchestra a 'baton for cooperation', noting that the project is not financed by governments, but by Indian donors and corporate sponsors, making it 'a unique initiative of by and for the people'.

The pandemic we are currently battling has meant that our Orchestra has not been able to meet in person, but we have ensured that its message and meaning are not diminished. Our journal, *Accord*—www.sasf. substack.com—keeps our community of musicians and our well-wishers connected. Our YouTube channel—https://youtube.com/channel/UCPBYXhKWAfO5aBuu0cilj8g—carries recordings of our concerts, discussions and webinars elaborating on the theme of building a South Asian identity through music. Currently, we are planning our next concert in Chennai, in the late summer of 2022.

The South Asian Symphony Orchestra takes South Asia to the world, and brings the world to South Asia. As an exercise in integration and platform-building, we hope it can provide an alternate vision for a region that has long been fraught by geopolitical rivalries—a vision of hope and healing.

Nirupama Rao was Foreign Secretary in the Government of India (2009-11) and has earlier served as Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka and Ambassador to the People's Republic of China. She was Ambassador of India to the United States from 2011 to 2013. On retirement, Rao was a Fellow at Brown University. She is the founder-trustee of the South Asian Symphony Foundation. Rao is the author of *The Fractured Himalaya: India, Tibet, China 1949 to 1962.*

TACKLING UNSEEN BLACK SWANS, SEEN BLACK ELEPHANTS AND KNOWN BLACK JELLYFISH IN INDIA

■ Tobby Simon

The world is witnessing huge changes and there are plenty of opportunities for India. Its governments will have to be alert to what the future is likely to bring to the Republic and be aware of potential threats. For, global governance is no longer about individual leaders plotting their own course. Instead, it involves bringing together some of the finest and most avant-garde thinking in contemporary societies, replacing competition with collaboration.

In the post-pandemic era, as international systems undergo tectonic shifts and the world gravitates towards a multipolar order, several opportunities lie in wait for the Indian Republic. To capitalise on this potential, successive governments will have to identify and insulate themselves from future shocks. This entails a more informed appreciation of the 'unconventional threats' that beleaguer humankind.

One such form of threat most stakeholders are familiar with—'the black swan'—describes the disproportionate effects of previously unobserved, high impact and hard to predict events. Indeed, it is such rare occurrences that often grab global headlines. There are, however, two additional metaphors worth considering—the 'Black Jellyfish' and the 'Black Elephant'. The former refers to issues that are well-known and comprehensible but turn out to be complex and uncertain in the long run, with a long tail and can deliver a nasty sting at the end. The latter represents a cross between the 'Black Swan' and the 'Elephant in the Room', where the challenges are visible to everyone, but no one feels compelled to deal with them. In other words, they signify the blind spots that arise due to cognitive bias, powerful institutional forces, short-sightedness and failure (or unwillingness) to read signals. An organisation's inability to identify,

comprehend and implement policies that address such matters can magnify the risk factors involved and incur high latent costs.

For India, it is critical to prepare for all these types of threats that are out of the ordinary and not bound by convention. Although infrequent in nature and operating in contravention of dominant rules and societal norms, unconventional threats can metamorphose and acquire a more conventional hue when there are changes in the surrounding framework. For instance, in the build-up to the First World War, many military experts had classified submarine warfare as an unconventional threat. This was because Germany had announced the renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic, with their torpedo-armed submarines preparing to attack any and all ships, including civilian passenger carriers, sighted in the war-zone waters. During the course of the war, by employing U-boats on a large scale, they had used this force asymmetrically against the Americans and their allies. By the beginning of the Second World War, however, the use of submarines became more widespread among major maritime combatants, thereby transforming a hitherto unconventional threat into a conventional one. Hence, it is important to assess these threat landscapes, consisting of these unseen Black Swans, seen Black Elephants and known Black Jellyfish.

While globalisation has been the most progressive force in modern history, it continues to raise several questions concerning the diffusion of wealth. With many citizens perceiving greater integration as being fraught with risk, there has been a recent spike in xenophobic, protectionist and nationalist rhetoric. Unfortunately, the institutional capacities to manage

> **While globalisation has been the most progressive force in modern history, it continues to raise several questions concerning the diffusion of wealth. With many citizens perceiving greater integration as being fraught with risk, there has been a recent spike in xenophobic, protectionist and nationalist rhetoric**

such global issues have not kept pace with the burgeoning complexities of modern society. Although international establishments such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization and World Bank have arguably registered successes in the twentieth century, they have increasingly failed to adapt to evolving realities in recent years. Meanwhile, at the national level, politicians and policy-makers have found it arduous to strike a balance between the compulsions of domestic politics and the benefits of universal connectivity.

A **failure of governance** has contributed to the proliferation of unconventional threats. As observed by Maya Tudor, an Oxford scholar, the incapability of a state to meet the rising aspirations of its people in an inter-linked world can further the rise of populism. When such populism fails, it deteriorates into mobocracies and anarchies.

Rising income equalities, as measured by the Gene coefficient, represents another area of concern. Due to growing automation and 'uberisation' of the world, along with the ascendancy of platform companies, wealth has become concentrated in the hands of a few. While disparities between countries may have reduced, the inequalities within nation-states have increased. Such a yawning gap between the haves and the have-nots of society is particularly discernible in terms of income, wealth, education, social mobility, prosperity and political heft. If left unchecked, this can be a veritable recipe for disaster.

The **escalating cost of education** is equally perturbing. As higher learning becomes more expensive, and a large section of the population is deprived of its benefits, social media networks find it easier to generate echo chambers and

> Unless there is some form of accountability, a progressively expanding and unregulated information space can blur the difference between fact and opinion. This makes individuals more susceptible to misinformation as well as radicalisation

manipulate the human mind. As was recently observed in the context of the US elections, online filter bubbles can polarise populations, erode trust in institutions, perpetuate uncertainty and fuel grievances.

Therefore, the **weaponisation of information** through deep fakes and disinformation should be actively resisted. Otherwise, it will provide opportunities for state and non-state actors to deter and coerce adversaries in an asymmetrical manner. Unless there is some form of accountability, a progressively expanding and unregulated information space can blur the difference between fact and opinion. This makes individuals more susceptible to misinformation as well as radicalisation. More broadly, the agility and ultra high-speed networks of interacting smart devices can be potentially exploited by malicious actors, thereby posing substantial challenges from a societal, organisational and personal point of view.

The **poisoning of Artificial Intelligence (AI) defence systems** can also not be discounted. As a growing number of security companies embrace AI for anticipating and detecting cyber-attacks, Black Hat hackers may attempt to corrupt these defences. Even though AI capabilities help to parse signals from noise, if they fall into the hands of the wrong people, they can be leveraged to launch sophisticated assaults. Generative adversarial networks (GANs) that pitch two neural

With respect to the future of biosecurity, India and the rest of the world must be prepared to deal with threats that emanate from a thawing of the permafrost

networks against one another may be deployed to determine the algorithms of such AI models.

Finally, all governments need to account for the new classes of accidents and abuses that may be spawned by **'twenty-first century technologies'**. For the first time, the benefits of nanotechnology, robotics as well as genetic sciences are well within the reach of individuals and small-scale actors. They are no longer required to build large facilities or acquire rare raw materials to derive value from them. Knowledge alone can drive the application of such capabilities.

In other words, it is important to acknowledge that weapons of mass destruction have been replaced by knowledge-enabled mass destruction. This destructive potential is further amplified by the power of self-replication.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that governments and other non-partisan think tanks undertake research that forewarns policy-makers and the strategic community about **predictable surprises**. In 2015, the Synergia Foundation, a Bengaluru-based strategic think tank, had analysed the emerging hazards posed by the Internet of Things (IoT). Apart from examining the potential cyber threats for businesses and governments, it had formulated a framework for fostering dialogue at a global level and understanding the impact of digital threats to critical infrastructure and the IoT. With the recently discovered cyber-attacks such as SolarWinds in the US and RedEcho in India, the need for such research has been clearly augmented. Even incidents such as the Juspay

data breach have underscored the need to incessantly monitor threats from the deep and dark web, a vulnerability that the think tank had first reported in 2014.

As early as in 2008, the Synergia Foundation had also foreseen that pandemics would pose serious threats to national security that goes beyond health. It had simulated the impact of an avian flu attack to more than 300 policy-makers, business leaders and academics. Eleven years later, this prognosis has now been proven right.

With respect to the future of biosecurity, India and the rest of the world must be prepared to deal with threats that emanate from a thawing of the permafrost. As global warming continues at an unprecedented rate and parts of the planet witness record-breaking heat waves, the Earth's ancient and forgotten pathogens, which have been trapped or preserved in the permafrost for thousands of years, may re-emerge with new vigour. It is exceedingly important to ascertain such risks and devise strategies for countering them.

Building robust supply chains that are resilient to disruptive factors is yet another need of the hour. The downfall of Ericsson in the early 2000s, owing to its failure in proactively managing supply chain risks, acts as a cautionary tale today. Indeed, most of the successful tech behemoths, such as Apple, Google, Intel or Dell, have retained their value since the 1990s through robust supply chain engineering. Drawing on these lessons from history, it is absolutely critical to work with relevant partners and bolster supply chain risk management in other sectors. By ideating about such unconventional threats and charting a roadmap for the future, a think tank can successfully transition into a 'do tank'.

Forging Ahead

At the end of the day, the rate of change and the level of uncertainty are such that they may outpace good governance. In light of this reality, it is critical for problem-solving networks to upgrade themselves by becoming more distributed and work in concert with each other.

Global governance is no longer about individual leaders plotting their own course. Rather, it entails a collation of some of the finest and most avant-garde thinking in contemporary societies, which replaces competition with collaboration. High-performing organisations and individuals, both in the public and private sector, should strive to devise complementary solutions. The more valuable their contributions, the greater their influence.

To accomplish this vision, a novel approach that places strategic adaptability at its core will be required in the days to come. Resolving the tension between foresight and inherent uncertainty is the holy grail strategy for thwarting unconventional threats. Any inert failure to predict such risks can trigger chain reactions that unleash catastrophic consequences.

Tobby Simon is the Founder and President of the Synergia Foundation, a strategic think tank based in Bengaluru.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES: ENABLING EASE OF LIVING

■ **Abhishek Singh**

In a post-pandemic world, digital technology has impacted almost every aspect of our lives. From remote working and online education to telemedicine and e-commerce—it is not possible to progress without it. With the flow of information becoming seamless, we realise that the digital era is influencing not just our lives and economy but also society and politics.

As we celebrate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and 75 years of Independence, we find ourselves at the cusp of history. We are the fastest growing economy in the world and have a young population that is going to yield dividends in the years to come. We are the world's top IT services provider and our start-up ecosystem is most vibrant; we have added 37 unicorns in 2021 itself. Technology, coupled with availability of data, skilled workforce and an expansion of compute power is unlocking value in all sectors. Healthcare and agriculture are seeing new solutions with applications of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). Farmers are able to plan their agri-operations better, with precision agriculture powered by analytics and Internet of Things (IoT); they get better prices for their produce. E-commerce and technology have opened new avenues by connecting producers with consumers in real time.

The COVID-19 pandemic opened the doors to remote working and has transformed the way people work and collaborate. More women are able to join the workforce if they can manage the family, work with flexi hours and work from home. Technology is also driving innovation. A connected world, with easy availability and access to data, is resulting in entrepreneurs coming up with innovative solutions and creating value. With the 5G revolution round the corner, it certainly seems to be India's opportunity to make the 20s 'India's Techade'.

While India has been regarded an IT superpower, the foundations of the digital era were laid in 2015, when the Prime Minister launched the Digital India programme on July 1, 2015. He laid down the vision: "I dream of a digital India where high-speed digital highways unite the nation; 1.2 billion connected Indians drive innovation; technology ensures the citizen-government interface is incorruptible."

True to this vision, India has implemented some large-scale IT projects that are truly transforming governance and bringing transparency and accountability, resulting in the empowerment of citizens. The motto of Digital India is 'Power to Empower' and the story of the last seven years has been the story of digital transformation, digital inclusion and digital empowerment. These investments made in technology proved to be useful in order to ensure continuity of normalcy during the COVID-19 pandemic. When businesses were shut and people were on the verge of losing their livelihoods, direct benefit transfers of funds to the poor and needy helped them manage difficult times. Similarly, the poor were able to get food grains; students could access e-content through portals such as Diksha and healthcare was remotely enabled through eSanjeevani. Digital India is a testament to our capability of building digital solutions at scale—for the country and for the World.

Laying Down the Foundations

Our ability to implement IT projects at population scale is unparalleled. India is the only nation in the world with a biometric identity system, Aadhaar, that has more than 1.30 billion people enrolled. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platform launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is an interoperable payment switch that enables financial transactions, including low value transactions, from one financial institution to another, instantly and at zero cost. In October 2021, the value of UPI transactions exceeded US$ 100 billion.

DigiLocker, or a digital vault for documents for citizens, is another platform that is enabling paperless governance. Citizens can store their Aadhaar numbers, driving licences, banking and insurance documents, even academic documents, in the DigiLocker and access it anywhere, anytime, as legally valid documents. Today, DigiLocker has more than 87 million registered users and provides access to almost 4.57 billion issued documents.

Aadhaar, UPI and DigiLocker have laid down the foundations of a faceless, cashless and paperless governance. These are the true public digital platforms and can be leveraged as basic building blocks for delivering services of various departments to citizens in an integrated manner where they see the Government as one entity rather than multiple departments offering different services through different channels.

Enabling Financial Inclusion

The implementation of the Aadhaar project has solved one of the key governance challenges for a country of our size and complexity. The inability to prove identities had led to the exclusion of a vast majority of Indians from accessing financial and other welfare services. The Jan Dhan Scheme permitted access to financial services to almost 438 million Indians by opening their no-frills bank accounts as well as Jan Dhan bank accounts, based on just the Aadhaar numbers. More than 55 per cent of the beneficiaries are women; thus this scheme has not only enabled financial inclusion but also gender empowerment. Along with providing every person a digital identity that is unique, lifelong, online and authenticable, and financial inclusion through the Jan Dhan Scheme,

The Jan Dhan Scheme permitted access to financial services to almost 438 million Indians by opening their no-frills bank accounts as well as Jan Dhan bank accounts, based on just the Aadhaar numbers

Aadhaar and UPI have further brought in a complete transformation in digital payments.

The implementation of FASTag and the Bharat Bill Payment System has been of great convenience for citizens and has also brought about efficiency in logistics and bill payments. Financial inclusion in the form of Jan Dhan bank accounts and exponential growth in digital payments has led to increased access to financial services of credit through Mudra loans and insurance through schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and PM Jan Aarogya Yojana. Aadhaar also enabled the ecosystem of Direct Benefit Transfers that has brought in transparency and accountability in governance.

Direct Benefit Transfers

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) has revolutionised the way beneficiaries get welfare funds in their bank accounts without any leakages or delay. This is one of the best examples of how technology can directly benefit welfare schemes. So far around Rs. 19.54 lakh crore have been transferred directly through DBT. During COVID-19, DBT has been a major lifesaver. Cumulative savings have been huge, with the bulk of the savings resulting from elimination of 'duplicates', fake and non-existent beneficiaries. This identification of fake beneficiaries was primarily possible by linking bank accounts to Aadhaar and ensuring that only genuine beneficiaries are given welfare benefits and ghost, fake and duplicate beneficiaries

are eliminated. Aadhaar is not mandatory in DBT but is preferred for identification. The key component of DBT is electronic transfers without intermediaries; this has resulted in efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability in the implementation of schemes through the use of modern technology and IT tools.

DigiLocker: Enabling Paperless Governance

Apart from identity, a key governance challenge has been the need for certificates of different kinds that citizens require from various Government authorities from time to time. With an objective to reduce the hardship of citizens and allow them access to their documents and certificates in digital format, DigiLocker allows issuers of documents—various public authorities—to issue documents digitally in the DigiLocker.

Citizens have access to their own documents; with their credentials and with their consent they can grant access to anyone requesting for these documents.

National Academic Depository

The Ministry of Education has also declared DigiLocker as the National Academic Depository (NAD) where academic documents of school boards, universities and colleges are being made available. Almost 1,000 higher education institutions and 28 school boards have been onboarded on NAD with more than 42 crore academic records already available. The New Education Policy has brought in the concept of a National Academic Bank of Credits (NABC), which seeks to build a system to facilitate the integration of the campuses and distributed learning systems by creating student mobility within and between universities. Through this system, students can earn credits and, if needed, transfer and redeem the same when they move from one university to another. Almost 100 academic institutions have been onboarded on to the NABC system so far. This initiative is truly transformational and the verification services being offered by NAD and NABC are resulting in a reduction in dropout rates and enabling more people to continue and complete their education.

An interesting use of DigiLocker was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when the Delhi University used the DigiLocker verification services to verify the Class 12 marks electronically; granting admission to more than 100,000 students in the undergraduate courses in 2020-21. Students were unable to come to the University physically due to COVID-19 protocols and the entire admission process was completed digitally, without the need of any paper documents.

Similarly, the Karnataka Police used the DigiLocker services for verifying the academic credentials of applicants for constable posts; this resulted in reducing the recruitment cycle by almost six months. This is truly transformational.

eSanjeevani: Telemedicine Solution

The need for digital transformation in the health sector has become more acute. Telemedicine has become the norm and the eSanjeevani project has enabled tele-consultations, resulting in accessible and affordable healthcare. The service offers both doctor-to-doctor and doctor-to-patient consultations. From around 5,000 monthly consultations before March 2020, the

eSanjeevani system is logging more than two million consultations every month. This was done by scaling up the infrastructure needed for handling such volumes. India has built in the capacity to build population scale tech solutions that are able to meet the needs and challenges of a country of our size and magnitude.

Aarogya Setu and COVID-19

During the pandemic, in order to address the challenges of identifying contacts of asymptomatic patients, Aarogya Setu, India's contact-tracing app, was launched. It has been playing a critical role in augmenting the efforts of frontline health workers in controlling the spread of COVID-19 by effective contact tracing.

The app was launched on April 2, 2020 and has over 200 million users—more than all such contact tracing apps combined across the world. It works on Bluetooth technology to find out who an infected person might have come in contact with in the last two weeks and take necessary action accordingly. It detects other devices with Aarogya Setu installed that have come in Bluetooth proximity of your phone and captures this information. In the unfortunate event of any of the recent contacts testing positive for COVID-19, the app calculates the risk of infection, based on duration and proximity of the interaction, and recommends suitable action. This is displayed on the home screen.

The information is also sent to health authorities to proactively administer appropriate medical intervention. Data analytics, based on the location data of those who have tested COVID positive, has also been used to predict emerging hotspots; this has proved to be useful in containment of the spread of the virus.

MyGov Initiative

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be as much of a communications challenge as it is a health issue, requiring the coordinated efforts of all the stakeholders. Given the nature of the virus, the most effective response to containing its spread has been behavioural change interventions such as the usage of masks, handwashing and social distancing.

MyGov has been playing a key role in supporting the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in these interventions and has effectively leveraged social media for effective communications. MyGov Corona HelpDesk, a Chatbot on WhatsApp, was launched in March 2020 and has emerged as one of most credible sources of COVID-19 information for people across India. It has been accessed by over 54 million users as an integral source of authentic information during the pandemic and served as a crucial step in fighting the public health crisis.

In July 2021, MyGov introduced a feature through which users can download their vaccine certificate from the Chatbot and also book vaccination appointments. Millions of people are taking advantage of this easy-to-use interface to navigate the new reality of vaccination appointments, certificates and receive authentic information about COVID-19. This ease of access in getting vaccination details from the CoWIN portal has been possible through the use of an open application programming interface (API). The API Setu project has built a platform for enabling swift, transparent, safe and reliable information exchange. It has almost 1,000 published APIs and is enabling faster delivery of services; allowing citizens to be in control of the information they seek and their own information.

CoWIN Portal

The CoWIN portal—India's vaccination platform—has been a remarkable initiative that has digitally enabled the world's largest vaccination drive. The COVID vaccination exercise is an extremely complex one as it covers the entire population with multiple vaccines; two doses of vaccines with different intervals for different vaccines and a need to track those who have been vaccinated, as also to have a mechanism for verifying the vaccination status of people. The CoWIN portal has successfully recorded more than 1.17 billion doses and has the capability to scale up as needed. The portal also handles the logistics of vaccine supply and management, including maintenance of cold chain and managing allocation of vaccinators. The open APIs of CoWIN allows its integration with various portals and has enabled opening up of the economy as more and more people get vaccinated.

Since the CoWIN portal is based on Open Source, India has offered to share the solution with other countries for managing their vaccination programme. It has also been planned to scale the CoWIN portal into a Universal Vaccination Portal where other vaccines such as BCG, DPT, MMR, Polio and Tetanus can also be managed. This will greatly improve our vaccination programmes and ensure that everyone is covered.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission

The eSanjeevani telemedicine portal and the CoWIN vaccination portal will ultimately be part of the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission (ABDM), which aims to develop the backbone necessary to support the integrated digital

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health infrastructure of the country. It will bridge the existing gap among different stakeholders of the healthcare ecosystem through digital highways. The ABDM shall create a seamless online platform "through the provision of a wide range of data, information and infrastructure services, duly leveraging open, interoperable, standards-based digital systems" while ensuring the security, confidentiality and privacy of health-related personal information. The core building blocks include Unique Health Identifier (UHID); Health Locker, a privacy and consent management system with citizens in control; national portability, a standard based system for Electronic Health Records (EHR); applicable regulations, health analytics and, above all, multiple access channels such as call centres, India Digital Health portal and health apps. This initiative is going to truly transform access to quality healthcare for all. It will also enable access to health records in a secure manner through the DigiLocker.

Similar public digital platforms are being set up for agriculture, education, logistics and other sectors, which would be built on the basic building blocks of Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, with a consent framework to offer integrated services to citizens on a whole-of-Government approach. This would ultimately lead to building up an e-Services marketplace which would enable proactive delivery of services rather than reactive. It will be a framework for discovering services across departments and states that one is eligible and will allow citizens to not only discover

services but to also apply for them and track them. It would permit departments to publish services on the marketplace, based on standards and protocols that allow easy access to citizens through multiple channels such as the web, mobile and Common Service Centres (CSC). This is expected to bring in transparency and accountability in the delivery of services.

Digital Inclusion

For a country of our size and complexity, a very important aspect, while enabling e-Services, is to ensure addressing the challenge of the digital divide and enabling access of services to citizens across the country. The network of around 400,000 CSCs, set up in rural areas, is enabling access to public services as well as financial inclusion, telemedicine, eLearning and business services. The CSCs are classic examples of grassroots level entrepreneurship that is creating value for the nation. They have been critical partners in accelerating the pace of the adoption of technology in an equitable manner and provide access to digital services in an assisted mode to people who do not have access to devices, connectivity or the skills to navigate a portal or an app for getting e-Services.

UMANG App

Most Indians access the Internet through mobile phones. In order to enable access to services through mobile phones, UMANG (Unified Mobile App for New Age Governance) was launched in November 2017 by the Prime Minister. UMANG facilitates ease-of-access to citizens by giving them an avenue to use major Government services from a single mobile app. Almost 40 million users have access to more than 1,290 services of the

Central Government, State Government and local bodies on the UMANG platform in 13 languages. UMANG accelerates mobile delivery of services of any Government department by offering them integration with Aadhaar, DigiLocker and GovPay in a seamless manner. With an objective to enable inclusion, UMANG has launched services in 'Assisted Mode' where these services can be accessed at CSCs and other kiosks which offer e-Services.

UMANG services are also being launched through an Artificial Intelligence Voice Bot and Chatbot that will make them more accessible to poor and less literate people. It will expand the reach of Government services and enable access to services to people without Internet access or smartphones. These services will be available through feature phones and landlines also.

Challenges

The implementation of major IT and e-Governance projects in the last few years has helped India improve ease of living and ease of doing business. However, in order to sustain this and fully realise the potential that technology has for us, we need to address a few issues. These include the data governance framework, cyber security and building future skills.

Data is the new oil; it needs processing and protocols for refining it to make it more useful. In order to create value with the zettabytes of data being generated, we need to quickly put the right legislative and policy framework in place. Hopefully, the Data Privacy Bill will become a law soon and the policy for sharing of non-personal data be notified. This will usher in an era of creating data businesses and enabling data-driven growth along with AI/ML solutions that can transform healthcare,

agriculture, education and manufacturing. Natural Language Processing (NLP) solutions can result in more content and services, including voice enabled, in vernacular languages that will help the next 500 million Indians to get on to the Internet.

The second challenge that we need to address is cyber security—having the right cyber and information security policies is an absolute necessity for an Internet economy. This requires investments in cyber security and building capacities to ensure data and application security.

While India is regarded as the garage for IT solutions and we are among the best when it comes to skilled workforce, we need to invest more in upskilling and reskilling our workforce in emerging technologies such as Data Science, AI, ML, Blockchain, IoT and AR/VR. Programmes such as FutureSkills Prime, being implemented in partnership with industry, will go a long way in ensuring that we maintain our cutting edge.

As India enters its Amrit Kaal, the roadmap for the next 25 years is clear. By 2047, when we complete a hundred years of Independence, technology will help us leapfrog into the league of developed nations by enabling access to quality education, healthcare and livelihoods for all Indians. We will be a knowledge society, a model democracy for the world, an India that has bridged the digital divide and among the world's best when it comes to ease of living. It will truly be the New India that we all will be proud of and aspire for. The time has come for India to lead the world with its tech prowess. To quote our Prime Minister: *Yahi Samay Hai, Yahi Samay Hai, Sahi Samay Hai!*

Abhishek Singh is an officer of the 1995 batch of IAS with experience of working in Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and the Government of India. His passion is leveraging technology for improving governance. He is presently posted as Chief Executive Officer, MyGov. This is a citizen engagement platform of the Indian Government. He has additional charge of President and Chief Executive Officer, National e-Governance Division and Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Digital India Corporation. He also leads the implementation of the key Digital India initiatives.

THE JOURNEY OF A REPUBLIC IS THE STORY OF A MATURING DEMOCRACY

■ **Ajay Singh**

When India was born as a free nation, some experts made dire predictions about its lifespan. Close to 75 years later, the people of India have not only proven them wrong but have also enriched the very democratic system itself.

June 3, 1947, was the day when the British Government and the Indian leadership acquired a rare unanimity of purpose. In a series of broadcasts—first by British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, followed by Viceroy Lord Mountbatten—the British laid bare their plans to quit India. Indian leaders, from Jawaharlal Nehru, along with Sardar Baldev Singh and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, endorsed the British decision and expressed their readiness to take up the challenge of building not one but two new nations—India and Pakistan (to be carved out after partitioning British India).

Nobody was under any illusion that freedom would entail a seamless transfer of power. Riots had broken out in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, united Punjab and Bengal. Violence had erupted in many parts of the country, including near Gurugram—at Delhi's doorsteps, much to the chagrin of the Government led by Nehru. Muslim League leaders often cited attacks on Muslims as justification of their two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan.

Mahatma Gandhi, as a one-man army, had stood up against this madness that seemed to be pervading the soul of the nation. Though the partition of the country was a foregone conclusion, the enormity of its social cost had Gandhi worried. Having failed in all his efforts to keep the country united, his next worry was about the steps to be taken for the future of a fledgling nation that was to acquire freedom soon and was beset by fissiparous forces raring to pull its social fabric apart. The road to freedom was paved with an uncertainty of the highest order.

Trauma and Scepticism

It was in this context that many Western scholars of history, politics and sociology were sceptical of India's future. Given the diversity of society in the country and its partition on the basis of religion, there was a fear that a vivisection of India on its many fault lines would be an inevitable prospect. While arguing his case for Pakistan, the Jinnah-led Muslim League often referred to these social divisions and asked for a plebiscite in Calcutta to seek people's opinion if they wanted to remain with India or move to Pakistan (East Bengal then). Jinnah believed that a sizeable population from the backward castes would choose to go with Pakistan. The demand was rejected outright by none other than the redoubtable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The moment Cyril Radcliffe drew the lines on the map to divide the nation, India's tumultuous journey began on August 15, 1947. It took nearly two years for the country to grow into a Republic by giving itself a Constitution which envisaged a universal franchise without discrimination on the basis of religion, region, caste or gender. This was a unique feat for a nation which had just attained Independence. Thus began an era of competitive electoral politics in India which was dominated by the Congress. The unique feature of this party was that it was an umbrella organisation in which ideologically divergent groups and socially incompatible organisations thrived. The Congress Socialist Party, for example, was part of the Congress till it chose to part ways

The subversive characteristics of certain movements on the basis of language, region and ideology had caused alarm initially but eventually got defanged and subsumed in electoral politics

after Gandhi's assassination in 1948. Even in the south, the Dravidian movement and Leftist insurrection in Telangana were gaining ground.

Interestingly, the subversive characteristics of certain movements on the basis of language, region and ideology had caused alarm initially but eventually got defanged and subsumed in electoral politics. Here, I intend to delineate the journey of the Republic that began with a degree of scepticism immediately after Independence but eventually matured into a vibrant Republic imbibing a true democratic spirit as we celebrate the 75th year of Indian Independence in 2022. This journey is indeed marked with important milestones that need to be identified to set a course for the future.

Congress Reconfiguration

So let us begin with the acrimonious parting of ways by the socialist bloc from the Congress in 1948. It was at Gandhi's insistence that the socialist leaders committed to Marxism (Fabian socialism was not in vogue till then) remained an integral part of the Congress while they maintained their distinct identity. Prominent among them were Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay and Aruna Asaf Ali who did not subscribe to Gandhi's views on non-violence and his economic philosophy that laid emphasis on villages instead of industrialisation. At the same time, they genuinely believed in the overthrowing of the foreign power through people's revolution. This group came to believe that in the Quit India movement of 1942, it had gained sufficient traction to flex its muscle and enforce a course correction in the Congress.

Despite ideological differences on certain issues, the socialist group was tied to the party because of their unqualified respect for Mahatma

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Gandhi. He was the binding force that kept the diverse forces intact under the umbrella of the Congress. The situation, however, changed considerably after Independence. Unlike in the past when the British were the common enemy for them all, the factions within the Congress had started pulling in different directions. Gandhi's assassination finally severed their bond. What really caused the break-up was a resolution carried out in the All-India Congress Working Committee at the insistence of Sardar Patel that any member of the party would not owe allegiance to any other political group. As a result, the Socialist Party, in its Nashik convention in March 1948, decided to sever all connections with the Congress.

The split was led by Acharya J.B. Kripalani who had been the Congress president in 1947 but faced a hostile Sardar Patel whose command over the working committee was overweening. Kripalani found his hands tied as party president and often vented his frustration in private conversations and press statements too. Myron Weiner, in his seminal work, 'Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System' (Princeton University Press, 1957), vividly describes Kripalani's dissatisfaction at being consistently ignored within the party. Kripalani, who eventually resigned, had many axes to grind with the Congress leadership and his resolve to lead a powerful socialist group was strengthened by his personal humiliation as well. In his resignation letter, he lamented, "It may be due to the fact that all of us are not united on

basic policies or it may be that this cooperation is lacking because I who happen to be President of the organisation do not enjoy the confidence of my colleagues in the Central Government. If that is so, then I should be the last person to stand in the way of what is necessary in the interest of the nation." Kripalani's decision was irrevocable, so the issue was not discussed in the party.

Government-Ruling Party Axis

For the first time, the tension between the Government and the ruling party's organisational leadership was not only quite palpable but it also snowballed into an existential crisis for the party. It was in this context that Gandhi had made the suggestion of winding up the party after Independence. Against this background, the socialist leadership got quite emboldened to believe that they would prove to be an effective alternative to the Congress. What is believed to have strengthened their confidence is the fact that socialism, particularly of the Marxism-Leninism variant, had in the first half of the twentieth century captured the spirit of the time. Nehru's fascination with this ideology was quite evident in the subsequent events that led to his face-off with Patel loyalists led by Purushottam Das Tandon after Patel's death in 1950. Nehru soon re-established his supremacy within the party by getting himself elected as its president and choosing not only the working committee members but also handpicking candidates for the first general elections of 1951-52.

The purpose of discussing this bickering within the Congress and its ramification on national politics is to establish that internal contradictions were in full play in the ruling party and had bedevilled the functioning of the Government at the top level.

However, the issue was settled within the Congress once the dominance of Nehru as the sole leader of the party was established beyond doubt. In Nehru's lifetime, this dominance remained unchallenged even as regional forces gained ground in certain state elections. The communist victory in Kerala, the rise of the Dravidian movement in southern India, trouble in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-eastern states, and consolidation of socialists including communists, and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as political parties in the 1960s had set the stage for a vibrant multi-party democracy.

A Defining Decade

The 1960s was the defining period for Indian politics. Nehru had been the darling of the masses, but his follies that led to humiliation in the war with China in 1962 dented his image. He was reduced to a pale shadow of his former self. Yet, such was his towering stature that the decade began with a query, "After Nehru, who?", which persisted till his daughter, Indira Gandhi, took charge. In the meantime, the latter half of the sixties saw the emergence of the regional forces and national parties getting consolidated on the plank of anti-Congressism. In 1967, all major states of the country were ruled by a non-Congress Government, either under the banner of Samyukta Vidhayak Dal ('Joint Legislators Front') or other coalitions led by anti-Congress parties. While the communists gained ground in Kerala and West Bengal, the BJS made significant inroads in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh.

The socialist grouping now led by Ram Manohar Lohia posed a formidable challenge to the Congress by raising political awareness about the empowerment of backward castes. One of the

election slogans of that time defined the zeitgeist by seeking reservation on the basis of social backwardness, as defined by the caste hierarchy. The forward-backward division was sharpened in order to highlight the privileged position traditionally enjoyed by the upper castes. The Dravidian movement, which was initially guided by a prominent atheist ideologue, Periyar Ramasamy Naicker, also focused on caste divisions in Tamil Nadu and eventually catapulted C.N. Annadurai as its undisputed leader. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam led by Annadurai replaced the Congress in the state that was once its bastion.

This was one of the most politically prolific periods in Indian history and the grammar of politics underwent a sea change. Though a tumultuous time in every sense of the term, it also witnessed the maturing of the democracy in a newly-independent country whose future had once seemed uncertain to international experts. Except for Nagaland where a seditious and secessionist movement had gained ground, regional parties emerged as a challenge to the Congress and later got subsumed into the political mainstream and conformed to the democratic framework drawn by the Constitution. The hegemony of the Congress, however, came under severe challenge all over the country even though Indira Gandhi won the 1971 general elections with nearly a two-third majority. Her victory was largely credited to an emotive slogan, "Garibi Hatao (remove poverty)", which she had shrewdly coined to project herself as a messiah of the poor.

Post-Independence, poverty and food grain shortage were palpable realities that afflicted a large section of society. India was full of teeming millions whose life sustained on the 'ship to mouth'

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supply chain, in which food grains imported from the United States were distributed to stave off starvation. Despite the poor quality of food grains, people subsisted on them even as they bottled up their anger against those who were identified as pro-industry. This was the precise reason why Indira Gandhi practically decimated the opposition and significantly marginalised stalwarts of the pre-Independence era. A series of steps such as the abolition of privy purses, nationalisation of banks and strict enforcement of the 'licence-permit Raj' had reaffirmed her image as a leader committed to the cause of the common people.

The Emergency Years

Her triumph, however, turned out to be short-lived. Nine months after the elections, Indira Gandhi led the nation in a war with Pakistan in December 1971. Pakistan was dismembered and Bangladesh was born. Indira Gandhi emerged as a decisive and astute leader. Her popularity, however, soon proved to be her undoing as she developed authoritarian tendencies with every passing day. Within two years, she faced student agitations in Gujarat and Bihar and tried to suppress them with the use of force. This triggered trouble all across the country and the massive anger against her found a popular expression as opposition leaders rallied against her under the Gandhian stalwart and socialist leader, Jayaprakash Narayan. Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency that restricted citizens' rights and

empowered the state to exercise unbridled power by subverting all institutions, including the judiciary and the press. Her dictatorial streak only added to the popular anger against her. She had to lift the Emergency and eventually hold general elections in 1977 in which she lost to the Janata Party (a conglomerate of several opposition parties). This was the first time that a non-Congress Government was installed at the Centre by a group of leaders and regional parties that represented certain geographical regions with limited social appeals, in sharp contrast to the all-pervasive influence of the Congress.

Within two years, the Janata Party experiment collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions. Its leaders sparred bitterly, leading to the mid-term elections in 1979, in which Indira Gandhi returned to power. This period significantly altered the political axis of the country and confirmed that non-Congressism was a viable option. The search for political alternatives through ballots began in earnest in almost all parts of the country and led to a phase of political uncertainty in some states. Though it was usually characterised as a phase of uncertainty, it created a conducive atmosphere for the growth of regional parties and local aspirations that might not appear to be in sync with the conventional politics of uniformity. Diversity started getting expressed in the form of political assertions on the basis of caste, language, region and often religion. The emergence of these political forces was looked at with doubt initially but found acceptance in due course.

> Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984, by her own Sikh security guards, as a sequel to a series of episodes of separatist militancy in Punjab, was the worst denouement of politics of religious separatism sponsored by Pakistan

The End of an Era—and the Beginning of Another

Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984, by her own Sikh security guards, as a sequel to a series of episodes of separatist militancy in Punjab, was the worst denouement of politics of religious separatism sponsored by Pakistan. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, rode on the sympathy wave and won the 1984 Lok Sabha election with an overwhelming majority, pushing all opposition parties to the margins. Though Rajiv Gandhi enjoyed absolute majority in the Parliament, the search for alternatives to the Congress continued. From the peak of popularity, the Congress had gone to the nadir by the end of his term, as Rajiv Gandhi faced allegations of his involvement in a slew of corruption cases including those of the HDW submarine deal and the purchase of Bofors gun.

Rajiv Gandhi's dramatic ascendancy, meanwhile, had also been marked by a phenomenal decline in the organisational structure of his party. Its nationwide network of committed workers was in complete disarray as a new group of footloose power-brokers replaced the committed cadre. This triggered massive resentment within the party, causing a situation of revolt within the organisation. The outcome was the emergence of V.P. Singh as a challenger to Rajiv Gandhi. By the end of 1989, Rajiv Gandhi had lost his charm on account of political follies and emerged as a much maligned character after allegations of corruption singed him, his family and friends. What compounded his mistake was his too-clever-by-half approach in resorting to religious polarisation as a tool for support mobilisation. He got the Parliament to overturn the Supreme Court's verdict that gave alimony to a

divorced Muslim woman, Shah Bano, and retained the primacy of the Muslim Personal Law. A few months later, he got the doors of the Ram Mandir, under the dome of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, opened and thus also opened Pandora's box. Each move was aimed to endear Rajiv Gandhi to a community by pandering to its religious sentiments.

Another Experiment, Another Agenda

In the absence of a robust party structure, the demoralised cadre of the Congress seemed to be totally adrift from the top leaders who were ruling the country. This political vacuum was filled by a V.P. Singh-led ragtag coalition of parties, known as Janata Dal, that had rallied around him with the sole purpose of defeating the Congress. Since the purpose of this coalition was limited, the Janata Dal, like the Janata Party a decade earlier, proved to be a flash in the pan of Indian politics. Internecine bickering plagued the Janata Dal right from the beginning. A cornered V.P. Singh unleashed a genie out of the bottle by declaring the implementation of the Mandal Commission report which had recommended reservation in education and Government jobs for 'other backward classes' (OBCs). What V.P. Singh did was nothing new but a logical outcome of Lohia's battle cry of the mid-1970s when he had vociferously demanded power-sharing for the OBCs. It triggered a reaction against V.P. Singh and massive protests erupted in most parts of Hindi heartland against reservations.

The Mandal move was, among many others, a challenge to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) too. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) had joined

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the 1977 Janata Party, but when the experiment ended in 1980, the BJS came out of it and formed a new party, BJP, which sought to correct (as it saw) imbalances of secularism. The OBC reservation could be furthering the divisions in the Hindu society that the BJP was aiming to unite.

L.K. Advani, who was heading the BJP then, countered this move by launching a Rath Yatra to press the demand for building a Ram Temple where the Babri Mosque stood at Ayodhya as the site was long believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram. The campaign captured people's imagination as it was mobilised by a robust structure of the party's organisation, further bolstered by the organisational strength of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The chariot campaign, moving across the country, was stopped at Samastipur in Bihar by Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, a Janata Dal leader, resulting in the fall of the V.P. Singh Government as the BJP withdrew support to the Government. Chandra Shekhar, a Janata leader, stepped forward to become the Prime Minister, with the help of the Congress. His seven-month term ended the transient phenomenon of Janata Dal which V.P. Singh himself has once termed a "silly experiment".

But there is no doubt that this brief political experiment contributed significantly in strengthening Indian democracy by giving political expressions to subterranean social forces which had been suppressed in conventional politics.

Though 1989-99 can be categorised as the most unstable phase of Indian politics, it was nonetheless an age of the prospering of Indian democracy. The tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu by the Tamil separatists in 1991 triggered a groundswell of sympathy for the Congress in southern India, leading to the installation of a Congress regime headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao. Coming to power in 1991 when India's economy was in a precarious situation, Narasimha Rao unleashed a series of economic reforms that ended the socialist legacy of 'licence-permit Raj'. The Government, which lacked majority, was supported by regional parties as coalition partners, though Narasimha Rao, towards the end of his tenure, managed to weave together a majority by weaning away many MPs from other parties. Once again tarred by corruption charges, the Congress lost the 1996 elections, giving way to a 13-day regime by BJP—its first—led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The unstable political equation got temporarily stabilised when the Congress supported the United Front (UF) Government, first led by H.D. Deve Gowda and then by I.K. Gujral till 1998.

The Rise of the BJP and Regional Parties

The BJP's emergence as a formidable force at the national level came to the fore in 1998 when it emerged as the single largest party and formed a Government with the support of its allies, together called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Though the Government lasted for 13 months as the AIADMK's mercurial leader J. Jayalalithaa pulled the rug from under its feet, the party got the people's mandate once again

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in 1999 with more reliable allies this time. The Vajpayee Government, in the third attempt, finally completed its full term in 2004, when the Congress-led coalition, United Progressive Alliance (UPA), emerged victorious. Despite many hiccups, the coalition led by Congress chief Sonia Gandhi ran the Manmohan Singh Government for two full terms—something that had not happened for several decades. After Nehru and Indira Gandhi, Manmohan Singh became the third Prime Minister to have an uninterrupted run of 10 years in the Government. And he is the only Prime Minister to last so long in a coalition Government in which the ruling party (the Congress) was in minority.

The unique feature of this phase was the assertion of political parties representing social bases on regional and even caste lines. For instance, the emergence of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Lalu Prasad Yadav, Janata Dal (U) led by Nitish Kumar, Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and later his son Akhilesh Yadav, and Bahujan Samajwadi Party led by Kanshi Ram and later Mayawati was initially looked at with doubts. But as these parties acquired power in states, they gradually acquired all the essential characteristics of mainstream politics. The casteist idioms of some of these parties gradually gave way to accommodative politics as they found it necessary to have alliance with other social groups. So it hardly came as a surprise when the BSP, originally championing

the Dalit cause, started winning over Brahmins to expand its social base. Similarly, the Samajwadi Party has been trying to expand its base by co-opting non-Yadav OBCs, Rajputs, Banias and Brahmins. What essentially began as casteist mobilisation gradually mutated into a competitive political aggregation of castes by these parties. Once again, democracy has not only defanged these parties of their inherent insidious afflictions but also readied them for inclusive and genial disposition in electoral politics. That is why regional parties have acquired the position of principal political pole in many important states where national parties such as the Congress and the BJP have been reduced to the fringe.

The BJP's victory in 2014 and its return in 2019, along with the continued political stability in most states, give a clear sign of graduation of India into a matured and confident Republic, which is uncompromising on its unity while fiercely retaining its diversity. While debates rage across the world about the efficacy of the democratic versus authoritarian model, the Indian experiment stands out as a shining example, primarily because of the inherent democratic spirit of its society since time immemorial.

Ajay Singh is Press Secretary to the President of India.

PATRIOTISM VERSUS NATIONALISM

■ **Dr. Shashi Tharoor**

A struggle is going on between the two ideas of India. One is based on the narrow concept of Indianness, whereas the other, broader and more inclusive, points towards an India anchored in the institutional and constitutional pillars of civic nationalism. Twenty-five years away from its centenary, all citizens, patriot or nationalist, will have to choose the India they want to help build.

In our 75th year of freedom, Independent India finds itself divided between the advocates of 'Hindu nationalism' and those who cling to an increasingly derided secular pluralism. In the new Hindutva dispensation, dissent against the transformation of the state is denounced not merely as negative but as anti-national and unpatriotic. Who, then, is a patriot, and who a nationalist?

In many Indian languages, the distinction between patriotism and nationalism is expressed through terms derived from Sanskrit; in both Hindi and Malayalam, nationalism is 'rashtrabhakti', devotion to the state or polity, whereas patriotism is 'deshbhakti', connoting love of homeland. A patriot celebrates what he is born to, not as something inherently superior to other places or forms of being, but as right for him because it is his.

Patriotism can be seen in things such as the pang of nostalgia for one's own patch of land, the space closest to one's own sense of being; singing of the national anthem at international sporting events; the pride in your country's athletes winning medals at the Olympic Games; the celebration of a country's Independence Day, or similar national occasions; growing misty-eyed over a familiar old song, a garment worn, or a typical dish served; and in the admiration expressed for servicemen and women for their courage, dedication and heroism in keeping a country and its residents safe.

Patriotism is far less ideologically-driven than nationalism, takes the successes of others in its stride and does not involve the same destructive devotion that nationalism does. A patriot loves his country as he loves his mother—because he belongs to it, and it belongs to him. Patriotism does not demand perfection, nor does it require to be consummated in the state. Indeed, as the writer Badri Raina puts it in an article published in *Mainstream Weekly* in June last year, patriotism leaves us free to value other peoples' love for their own countries, "and free to find fault with what we may be lacking without letting bravado or false claims distort those realities. Nationalism, like religious faith, permits no such room. It asks of us that we propagate that we outshine all other peoples, cultures, climes, countries in every sphere of life because of some divine origin or exclusive right to perfection...Patriotism accepts the great reality of diversity; nationalism seeks to obliterate diversity and aims to create the world in its own abstract theology of supremacy."

Patriotism, the older of the two words, dates back to the seventeenth century. It has long impelled passionate behaviour in defence of national ideas, which has led some to confuse it with nationalism; after all, patriotism has prompted tens of thousands of people to accept untold sacrifices, even give up their lives, for their country. But while a patriot is prepared to die for his country, the nationalist is willing to kill for his state.

Scholars across a vast literature have identified five major elements in nationalism: the yearning for national unity (and even uniformity); the requirement of exclusive loyalty; the striving for national (rather than individual) freedom; the aspiration for exclusiveness and distinctiveness; and the quest for honour and prestige among nations. This last is where the biggest problem

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lies, for this quest for honour and prestige easily becomes an urge for domination. When a nation's dignity requires the defeat of others, when your honour is seen through the need to assert your superiority to others, nationalism can easily degenerate into chauvinism, belligerence and the rejection of coexistence.

Whereas nationalists believe that their nation and what it represents is unchallengeable, patriots love their country not out of misplaced vanity but out of love, not just because of its attractiveness but in spite of its flaws. Patriots can acknowledge their countries' failings and strive to correct them; nationalists believe there are none, and refuse to accept any that are laid out before them. As Raina writes, "Patriotism acknowledges that where I live is my beloved space, warts and all…It recognises that our streets are shabby, our lanes full of clutter, our habits shoddy, our resistance to rationality often grossly debilitating, our defiance of law a routine habit of mind, our male chauvinism shameful and violent, our casteism or racism or communalism deleterious to the most desirable ideals of human rights and human oneness…Patriotism recognises that things may be better in other countries", and yet, patriots love their land with all its imperfections and work to remedy them.

George Orwell, the English writer, articulated the difference between patriotism and nationalism most effectively in his celebrated 1945 essay on nationalism: "By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose

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of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality."

In my recent book, *The Battle of Belonging*, I have argued that India's is a civic nationalism, anchored in the Constitution and its liberal democratic institutions, a nationalism of belonging rather than of blood. Speaking for myself, when I refer to my own nationalism, spurn any non-Indian allegiance, and proudly wear a tri-colour lapel-pin every day, I am really subscribing to a patriotism that rests on this conception of India—a love of my country because it is mine, anchored in the institutional and constitutional pillars of civic nationalism. To me, Indian nationalism derives its political legitimacy not from ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or any of the immutable trappings that people acquire from birth, but from the consent and active participation of our citizens, as free members of a democratic polity.

For our nationalism to rise above the 'Hindi-Hindu[tva]-Hindustan' idea of India proclaimed by the present ruling dispensation, we must preserve the idea of India embedded in the Republic our founding leaders created—sustained by liberal democratic institutions, constitutionalism that guarantees freedom of speech and association, and representative democracy that empowered the individual citizen irrespective of caste or creed, region or religion, language or literacy. When our present rulers tell us that to disagree with them is

anti-national, or that to be a true Indian one must be a Hindi-speaking Hindu, we can answer by pointing to the Constitution, whose idea of India they so shamelessly disregard. The true Indian patriot will tell you that in our democracy you do not really need to agree all the time — except on the ground rules of how you will disagree.

Dividing our people into majority and minority, Hindu and Muslim, Hindi-speaker and Tamil, nationalist and anti-national, is fundamentally un-Indian and fails to reflect the real nature of our society. The suggestion that only a Hindu, and only a certain kind of Hindu, can be an authentic Indian is an affront to the very premise of Indian nationalism. Uniformity comes at the price of unity; the insistence on conformity destroys the imperative of consensus. An India that denies itself to some of us could end up being denied to all of us.

There is a struggle currently taking place between two ideas of India. One rests on a narrow conception of Indianness; it is intolerant of difference and suspicious of diversity, and seeks revenge upon history by perpetrating new wrongs today. The other is broader, capacious and inclusive, accepting of difference and embracing diversity, secure that these are best accommodated in democratic institutions and processes sustained by our constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms. Which idea prevails will determine the character of the India that will celebrate its centenary a quarter of a century from now.

Our nationalist heroes created a nation built on an ideal of pluralism and freedom: we have given passports to their dreams. On this auspicious occasion of Deepavali, a triumph of light over darkness and that of good over evil, let us affirm our determination to fight for an idea of Indian nationalism that embraces diversity, accepts difference and celebrates plurality. Only that kind of inclusive nationalism will allow every single Indian, of every faith, region or mother tongue, the freedom to be a proud patriot.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor is an Indian former international diplomat, politician, writer and public intellectual who has been serving as Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, since 2009.

A SCREEN AND A MIRROR: SEVEN DECADES OF INDIAN CINEMA

■ **Vani Tripathi Tikoo**

(With research inputs from Akshat Agrawal)

As the country grew, so did its cinema, which traversed a fascinating journey through different genres and styles. A look at cinema after 1947, highlighting how films came to shape, and indeed be shaped by, the social, economic and political realities of the world's largest democracy in the post-colonial era.

The advent of cinema was a revolutionary development for our collective experience of storytelling and art. Here was a powerful medium that transcended structural boundaries that accompanied its predecessors. Unlike literature or high art, with their need for a grounding in theoretical education, moving images projected onto a screen in a dark room were breathtakingly simple. At the same time, they had the potential to carry forth profound sentiment, expression and messages, arguably with greater impact than wordy tomes or beautifully framed watercolours.

While visual storytelling existed in the form of theatre and live performances long before film, its growth meant that these were no longer confined to locations marked by social status—this mass medium was different from the opera or Broadway, which were restricted to the leisured classes. The cinema was inherently public, both in terms of its consumption and, consequently, its impact on the popular psyche.

As cinema grew, its potential was recognised and put to use, often to horrifying effect—D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) glorified racism and hatred, leading to a resurgence in the popularity of the Ku Klux Klan, which it depicted as a heroic force fighting to maintain white supremacy in the United States. A few decades later, filmmakers such as Leni Riefenstahl were patronised by the leadership of Nazi Germany, with Adolf Hitler and his Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, supporting the production of films such as *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and *Olympia* (1938) to showcase their vision of an Aryan Germany, mobilising popular support for their horrific ideology. Both these examples came to underline the rousing power of film, although used for evil, over the minds of the people who watched them.

Around this time, India had already seen its first 'talkie', *Alam Ara* (1931) and, by 1935, film studios had come up in major cities such as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

Thus, at the time of India's Independence in 1947, cinema already had a long and storied history, and had grown increasingly sophisticated as an art form, a commercial product and a vehicle for powerful ideas. Yet, perhaps, nowhere else had films occupied the position that they came to in a free India—as an integral building block of a national identity in a new country striving to define, both for itself and for the rest of the world, its character, concerns, anxieties and aspirations. In a new political entity of continental diversity, struggling with the challenges of basic human necessities such as food, shelter and education, a study of cinema provides a uniquely rich insight into the creation of real and perceived community identities.

While there exists a vibrant history of pre-Independence cinema in India, this essay seeks to focus on the period after 1947, and how films came to shape, and indeed be shaped by, the social, economic and political realities of the world's largest democracy in the post-colonial era.

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Indian Cinema through the Decades: A Retrospective

While India has produced a staggering variety of films in the last seven decades, encompassing a range of themes, perspectives, aesthetics and storytelling styles, one can cull out certain broader trends that are reflected in films of a particular period. This is by no means an attempt to paint all cinema within a particular period with broad, generalising brush strokes, but rather an attempt to identify common aspects reflected within popular cinema of the time that were informed by the dominant contemporary ideas and attitudes, and, in turn, played a part in shaping popular conceptions and culture.

The first decade after Independence, unsurprisingly, was characterised by films that told stories located in the heady tumult of a nascent nation. While Independence brought with it optimistic idealism for the future of a new society, it also brought a reckoning with the issues that the country was faced with. Films of this era were often deeply sociological, depicting the divide between urban and rural India, the rich and the poor, the old and the new, in the backdrop of Nehruvian socialism and the yet fresh wounds of Partition. Ritwik Ghatak's Bengali New Wave masterpiece *Nagorik* (which was completed in 1952 but did not see a theatrical release until 1977) told the story of refugees from East Bengal in Calcutta, contrasting the older generation's sense of nostalgia for a lost home with the cautious optimism of their children for a new future, even as they faced uncertainty and deprivation. Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), inspired by a Rabindranath Tagore poem and Italian neorealist cinema, dealt with the exploitation of small peasants by landlords, and the inhumanity of the zamindari system against the backdrop of industrialisation. It told the story of Shambhu (masterfully portrayed by Balraj Sahni), a poor farmer robbed of his meagre land holdings by a landlord seeking to build a new mill—forcing Shambhu and his family to eke out a livelihood in Calcutta, a harsh and unforgiving existence, their two *bigha*s of ancestral land a lost hope.

The experience of the rural Indian in its metropolises was also the subject of Amit and Sombhu Mitra's *Jagte Raho* (1956), which solidified the trope of the naive villager confronted with the callous attitudes of city dwellers who would not so much as spare him a drink of water. These films offered evocative, sombre looks at the gulf between the promise of Independence and the cruel realities of everyday life, with the poor and marginalised continuing to struggle for survival. Tying up this decade of exploratory, didactic cinema in 1957 were two films destined for classic status—B.R. Chopra's *Naya Daur* (1957), which captured the conflict between tradition and modernisation quite literally through a race between a bus and the horse-drawn cart it sought to replace, and Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957), which turned Nargis into a personification of the nation, and instituted the trope of the self-sacrificing mother who upheld her values even at great personal cost. In its first decade, thus, Indian cinema reflected a

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nation in flux, dealing with its traumas and standing on the cusp between an old society and promises of a new one that did not always match up to the vision projected by its leaders.

This period was followed by a more forward-looking tone in cinema, although socially relevant and critical films continued to be made. Bimal Roy's *Sujata* (1959) saw a rare portrayal of the evils of caste in mainstream cinema, with the struggles of the eponymous protagonist played by Nutan contextualised by B.R. Ambedkar's work against caste-based discrimination and the practice of untouchability. On the other end of the spectrum was *Junglee* (1961), Subodh Mukherjee's light-hearted romantic comedy that immortalised Shammi Kapoor's brash yahoo-ing character, a young man from a privileged background who defies the stiff upper lip conservatism of his mother to romance Saira Banu's character across the class divide. Many films followed in *Junglee*'s particular brand of class conflict—situated within the context of romantic relationships, characterised by dictatorial rich parents and resolved in a happy ending. This period also saw great works of contemporary literature being adapted on-screen, bringing them to wider audiences—*Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam* (1962) was Guru Dutt's production of Bimal Mitra's Bengali novel of the same name, and Shailendra's *Teesri Kasam* (1966) was based on a short story by Hindi novelist Phanishwarnath Renu. Celluloid gave these stories a new life, with both films earning national awards and finding their way into nearly every list of India's all-time great films.

The sixties also saw the infusion of greater colour and a shifting focus in cinema, with modernity vesting in the individual. Master filmmaker Satyajit Ray gave us *Mahanagar* (1963), the story of a middle-class homemaker who enters the workforce, reflecting the growing consciousness around women's emancipation and the patriarchal biases faced by the working woman both at home and at the workplace. The Malayalam film *Chemmeen* (1965), directed by Ramu Kariat, and Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965) also reflected a growing questioning of social mores, with women characters who were not happy merely being accessories to men in a marriage, but were complex individuals with their own motivations and weaknesses. Basu Chaterjee's *Sara Aakash* (1969) took a critical look at the institution of arranged marriage and the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes.

In contrast to the sociological analysis of the last decade's films, which centred on larger societal setups such as the urban-rural divide and questions of class, the sixties were marked by a questioning of status quo much closer to home—in the 'private' realm of family and marriages. Outside the home, films also looked at our trials and tribulations as a nation. Two years after India's disastrous war with China in 1962, Chetan Anand released *Haqeeqat* (1964) and dedicated it to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the soldiers of the Indian Army. The war drama, India's first of its kind, focused on the Battle of Rezang La and the last stand made by the men of 13 Kumaon, invoking feelings of patriotic self-sacrifice with brave soldiers and what scholar Gita Vishwanath has called a 'nationalistic mother' producing sons for the battlefield.

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The seventies in India bore the indelible imprint of a very different kind of 'nationalist mother'. Indira Gandhi, who had become Prime Minister in 1966 and split with senior Congress members in 1969, emerged as a larger-than-life matriarch of the country, consolidating her place in politics, and also in the popular imagination in this decade. Under her patronage, the Films Division of India produced films such as *Our Indira* (1973) and *The Indian Woman: A Historical Reassessment* (1975) portraying the Prime Minister as the compassionate yet firm maternal *neta*, overseeing social upliftment and progress at home and representing India at venues such as the United Nations. This was also the era of the 'angry young man', the disaffected, disillusioned young Indian, pioneered by Amitabh Bachchan and created by the bombastic writing duo of Salim-Javed who wrote films such as Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer* (1973) and Yash Chopra's *Deewar* (1975), which offered Indians violent catharsis against growing urban poverty, crime and a corrupt system that exploited the weak. The suffering of the protagonists of these films often reflected the broken promises of the state, making the violent revenge enacted by them in the climax a potent emotional payoff for viewers.

While these Amitabh Bachchan starrers pulled in the crowds, this was also the period where Shyam Benegal made his directorial debut with *Ankur* (1974), a stunning specimen of the 'parallel cinema' that had been pioneered by the likes of Ray, Ghatak and Guru Dutt. The success of this film, which examined the feudal structures that continued to exist and oppress in rural India, ushered in a new era for parallel cinema. Benegal went on to cement his status as a pioneer with *Nishant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976) and *Bhumika* (1977). These set the stage for such future works

The films of the seventies, thus, reflected the political turmoil of the time, both indirectly through stories of revenge against corruption and injustice and more pointedly through political films made despite zealous censorship

as Saeed Akhtar Mirza's *Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyoon Aata Hai* (1980) and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989), Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Elippathayam* (1982), Sagar Sarhadi's *Bazaar* (1982) and Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala (*1987).

Off-screen, growing political disaffection, student agitations and labour union strikes by many real-life angry young people led to Indira Gandhi declaring Emergency in 1975, initiating a dark period of increasing authoritarianism, cracking down on dissent and the erosion of democracy. Gulzar's *Aandhi* (1975), a political drama whose protagonist bore a striking resemblance to Mrs. Gandhi, was banned when Emergency was declared, and was not allowed a proper release until her fall from power in 1977, despite the director insisting the story had nothing to do with her. Then there were also films such as Amrit Nahta's *Kissa Kursi Ka* (1976), which explicitly took aim at the excesses of the Emergency—famously prompting Sanjay Gandhi to have the original reels burnt. Undeterred by the destruction of his work, Nahta remade the entire film and released it two years later, offering a darkly humorous look at how politicians tried to seduce the public, personified in a meek, mute Janata played by Shabana Azmi, and filling the film with references to the Gandhis and their acolytes.

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despite zealous censorship. Across the country, filmmakers used their craft to critique dominant structures—*Agraharathil Kazhutai* (1977), a Tamil film by avant-garde filmmaker John Abraham, satirised Brahminical bigotry and superstition, while the Kannada *Ghatashradhha* (1977), by Girish Kasaravalli, told the story of society's mistreatment of a widow through the eyes of a young boy, underlining how a woman's body seems to belong to everyone but herself in a patriarchal society.

The eighties were a chaotic time for Indian cinema, with many looking back on it as a low point for its garish aesthetic and focus on *masala*—sex, romance and violence. Mithun Chakraborty's portrayal of a working class boy rising to become a *Disco Dancer* (1982) was met with hoots and whistles in theatres, and Raj Kapoor's *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985) broke Bollywood taboos around sex and nudity with its depiction of Mandakini's character under a waterfall in a white sari drawing crowds and ruffling feathers. *Mr. India* (1987) was another out-and-out entertainer, with Anil Kapoor's invisibility wielding everyman going up against one of Bollywood's most colourful and memorable villains, Mogambo, portrayed masterfully by Amrish Puri. However, the decade also gave us films such as *Arth* (1982) where Shabana Azmi's female protagonist decides she doesn't need a man after her husband cheats on her. The independent woman who is not content to be a victim and refuses to take her husband back was a milestone for female portrayal in Indian cinema.

Gangster films also saw influential entries with Govind Nihalani's *Ardh Satya* (1983) where

Om Puri portrayed a jaded cop who blurred the line between upholding the law and breaking it, and Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Parinda* (1989), which offered an emotionally turbulent look at the psyches of the men of the underworld. Tamil cinema was rocked by Mani Ratnam's *Nayakam* (1987), a *Godfather*-inspired gangster film. Another gem of this period was Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (1983), a hilarious satire on systemic corruption across politics, business and the media, made on a shoestring budget and starring some of the best talent of the age—Naseeruddin Shah, Ravi Baswani, Om Puri and Satish Shah. Often considered the greatest Hindi comedy film of all time, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* was produced by the National Film Development Corporation, which had been set up by Indira Gandhi in the preceding decade and aimed to promote quality independent Indian films. The NDFC also co-produced Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), which swept the Oscars in 1983 with 11 nominations and 8 wins. Cinema of this decade reflected and reacted to an India that was gradually opening up to technology and influences from around the world.

This process of the world coming to India was only accelerated by the economic reforms of 1991. The liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation policies opened up the economy, leading to unprecedented consumerism, and evoked a new aspirationalism in the middle class. Commercial films carried on in the decadent trend started in the eighties, with stereotyped characters, trope-filled plots and extravagant song and dance numbers. Instead of a focus on writing and storytelling through film, Bollywood largely came to rely on the 'star system'—the idea that leading actors would draw the masses to the theatres. The slapstick comedies

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of Govinda were accompanied at the box office by traditional family dramas such as Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) and *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (1999). Romantic-musicals such as Yash Chopra's *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997), Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) and Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) became exceptionally popular, with the last becoming one of the highest-grossing Indian films ever and heralding Shah Rukh Khan as the undisputed king of romance of the time. More of these films reflected an increasingly international sensibility, with their characters being non-resident Indians (NRIs) straddling the line between traditional Indian family values and the desire to follow their heart and live independent lives. These stories captured the fascination of a new Indian generation that increasingly saw its place on the world stage.

At the same time, the political tumult and communal tensions of the nineties, the influence of which can still be felt today, were captured in films. Notable examples include Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* (1995), a Tamil film which sets the love story of a Hindu man and a Muslim woman against the backdrop of the bloody communal riots that traumatised the home of Bollywood two years prior, and Mahesh Bhatt's *Zakhm* (1998), an eerily prescient look at the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. As it approached the new millennium, India grappled with questions of identity and ideology, coming out of its cocoon of protectionism not only economically but also in social terms—a sentiment perhaps best captured by the wildly successful 1998 marketing campaign for Pepsi—*Yeh Dil Maange More!* (This Heart Wants More).

The twenty-first century ushered in an infusion of fresh ideas and approaches in Indian

If the nineties were about the world coming to India, now was the time of India going to the world, with a more self-assured sense of itself. Nationalism, too, made a comeback in new avatars

filmmaking. The grant of 'industry' status by the Government opened films up to institutional funding and consequent corporatisation, leading to greater professionalism and efficiency in film-making. The deregulation of cinema halls and the growing relevance of cable and satellite rights, as well as distribution rights across the world, expanded opportunities for revenues, allowing innovative films to be financed. The year 2001 saw a succession of films that moved away from formula-driven templates, such as Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*, which imagined a cricket match between a bunch of oppressed villagers and their British overlords and bagged an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film. The same year, Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai* followed three privileged young friends on a trip to Goa, becoming the iconic road trip movie for a generation, with its upper-class protagonists navigating the ups and downs of friendship and love while sporting goatees and driving sports coupes. The focus on the stories of the upper class continued with Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) dealing with themes of sexual assault, homosexuality and the clash between traditional values and an ascendant modernity against the backdrop of an extravagant Delhi farmhouse wedding.

If the nineties were about the world coming to India, now was the time of India going to the world, with a more self-assured sense of itself. Nationalism, too, made a comeback in new avatars with Farhan Akhtar's *Lakshya* (2004) portraying a directionless urban youth finding meaning in

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military service. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* (2006) told the story of Delhi University students going from a carefree bunch portraying freedom fighters in a film to becoming firebrand revolutionaries themselves against a corrupt political system. Meanwhile, Shimit Amin's *Chak De! India* (2007) brought patriotism to the sports field with the rousing story of a Muslim coach leading the Indian Women's Hockey team to victory while facing Islamophobic backlash to his failures as a player. Films also increasingly explored 'taboo' topics such as the marginalisation of homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic through Onir's *My Brother...Nikhil* (2005) and fractured father-son relationships through Vikramaditya Motwane's *Udaan* (2010) depicting real situations and the uglier side of families.

The post-2010 period has seen an explosion of cinema that might have once been considered parallel or arthouse films, but which have met considerable commercial success as well. As lines between mainstream and parallel blurred, Anurag Kashyap's gritty *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) became a modern cult classic with its epic saga of three generations of gangsters in the coal mining district of Dhanbad, Jharkhand, replete with stylised violence and profanity-laden dialogue. More films took cinemagoers from the big cities to the smaller towns and villages of India, with the success of Aanand L. Rai's *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011), Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's *Bareilly ki Barfi* (2017) and Sharat Katariya's *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) proving that audiences cared more for evocative

storytelling than glitz and glamour. This also underscores the transition of cinema from a mode of escapism to one of introspection—with films such as Shree Narayan Singh's *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* (2017) and R. Balki's *Pad Man* (2018) tackling issues such as the lack of sanitation and menstrual resources in rural India.

After incremental steps down the decades, women-led films also began to be given their due in earnest, with Vikas Bahl's *Queen* (2014), Anubhav Sinha's *Thappad* (2020) and Navdeep Singh's *NH10 (*2015) portraying female leads as complex individuals with their own motivations, struggles and imperfections in a variety of situations—from the lighthearted to the harrowing. More characters have broken the mould of women in mainstream cinema being objects to further the plot, taking on the system, exploring their sexualities unapologetically and living their idea of modernity—one that is not limited to metropolises but also incorporates small-town sensibilities in a continuous, ongoing process of exploration and introspection.

As Indian cinema heads into a new decade, the 2020s are in many ways the best time to be a filmmaker in the country. The streaming revolution has taken India by storm over the last few years, and the popularity of OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hotstar has changed how films are created, distributed and consumed. Streaming has reduced the cost of entry into filmmaking, and creators have become emancipated by the ability to reach wider audiences than ever before. This, combined with the lack of stringent censorship online, has enabled the boom of the 'originals', or the creation of films that deal with topics once considered too niche or taboo for commercial success. It has also enabled

experimentation with non-linear storytelling and encouraged filmmakers to look at the fissures and wounds of our society through creative filmmaking. The COVID-19 pandemic, which this decade started with, has also had its impact on Indian cinema—with the Internet making up for the lack of theatrical releases, streaming is more vital to the film industry than ever before. Viewers, too, have become more discerning and demanding, consuming content from around the world, such as Spanish and Korean films and television series. This has also raised the bar for Indian content, which must necessarily compete with the high production values and technical prowess at an international stage. This is a time of unprecedented opportunities for Indian filmmaking and a great time to be a movie buff in India.

In many ways, the Indian film industry has matured along with the country itself—no longer a youngling struggling to define its identity, it has grown into a confident, vibrant creative industry that makes powerful, moving art and tells important stories to the nation and the world. And it promises to keep going—Indians have always been known for their love of stories, from the epics of ancient India and folklore to the latest Netflix original series, and film has been wholly integrated into this tradition. Films will continue to be our favourite form of storytelling and, in doing so, remain an important part of the story of India itself.

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HOW INNOVATIVE SOCIAL CHANGES CAN BUILD A NEW INDIAN POLITICAL PLAYBOOK

■ **Ghanshyam Tiwari**

Seventy-five years of Independence and we find an interesting drama playing out in the country. It is one that is forever evolving and has various conflicting elements, ranging from hope and despair to love and hate. The players are intense; the stakes high. The future looks promising.

India at 75 is a gripping political theatre playing stories of hope, despair, belief, treachery, unity, disunity, love, hatred and much more. And this theatre is also expanding from stage to stage. Its citizenry is not merely a passive audience but a rising force with free expression and unencumbered aspirations. This relentless march of India towards a democracy where more and more people from diverse and often marginalised or disconnected communities are ready to take the political stage is a torch of hope for a stronger and better nation.

Politics is always an open but noisy window to the soul of a churning country. Simplistically put, politics is a clash of interests in the society. So, a diverse representation in politics brings a wider spectrum of interests into it, making it vibrant, fierce and inclusive. Power is the quest to secure the overpowering of one set of interests over others. In a diverse democracy, the ground beneath the march of power changes often and unpredictably. This may tear a nation or make it resilient. However, what makes India resilient year after year is the uninhibited capacity of its democracy to widen the space for more interests and diverse representations, powered by an ever-changing star cast.

A key question is—what does the future star cast on the political theatre look like? How about the present star cast? What is going to be a playbook for the future star cast to build a stronger and better country? Is the present playbook telling a good story? Is it a good playbook for the country? Not all questions need a definitive answer and large-scale concurrence. This is one such set. When one starts comparing the composite profiles of leaders in the Parliament and various legislative assemblies with those in the past, a disappointing tale will unfold. When one compares the level of debate and discourse in democracy, the disappointing tale will become more disheartening. And, in case one wants to experience a heartbreak, one can simply analyse the state of the other foundational institutions in India—the Judiciary, Election Commission, Media, Police, Universities and more. However, a civilisation of over 5,000 years, built on the philosophy of Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, is not just a nation state bound by modern models of statecraft, but also an insurmountable force of humanity, spirituality and goodness.

So, the play is not lost. It never will be. There is much more to see.

India lives and breathes in the one million habitations that share a common narrative of history, many tiny and tectonic aspects of culture and philosophy, and mostly bind themselves with magical glue that makes us One Nation. The political theatre of present and future will see more and more participation from a wider set. People and communities who have never played a role in statecraft at the national as well as regional scale are increasingly participating as equals. More than anything else playing out, this one dimension changes everything. For example, India will see more women in politics as voters, influencers and leaders in the next decade than ever before. The Dalit voices are becoming formidable with every passing day and will take centre stage in ways not seen and imagined before over the next two decades.

With more information available at their fingertips, greater aspirations

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in their eyes, and an ever-growing set of younger role models in public theatre, the youth of India are ready to take charge in ways not seen before. Such a deepening of democracy, strengthening of communities at the grassroots level, and emergence of diverse unserved agenda is exciting and will make the future playbook different, in comparison to the present one. Inequality, especially economic inequality and vulnerability, specifically to shocks such as pandemic, climate change, international conflicts and social unrest, fuelled by out-of-control technology, will be some of the darker forces in this playbook. However, when more than 1.3 billion people live with freedom of expression and spiritual love for goodness and a collective sense of a nation, darker forces dilute. Notwithstanding the dark forces, India will thrive.

Building a simplistic and rhetorical narration of politics, hope and fear is an elementary strength of politics and politicians. An easy way to probe for reality and conviction in the vision and tale is to test the ideas that one is implementing towards a futuristic vision. The idea test is like pinching oneself when one is unsure about a dream and reality. Let's build the idea test further with a view on politics of positive change in present times. Most politicians in India are visibly riding tigers that are fierce but many of which are growing older by the day. These tigers are hollow media narratives, caste, communal conflicts, politics of regional identity, dynastic legacy, corporate scale corruption, ground level fixing, inward looking insecure organisational politics and opportunistic activism. Such a playbook of politics is becoming increasingly predictable and often merely leads to a seat on the power table not towards the driving seat of changemaking. This is an opportunity for

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the future star cast—the idea to pursue politics with a vision to drive change rather than secure a shaky seat at the power table.

Many ideas can be exciting in the quest towards the politics of changemaking. The most important attribute that leaders on this track must have is self-belief, which blows away insecurity and professional capability that builds public entrepreneurship for solving long-standing as well as new problems and improving lives. In times of the pandemic, many such ideas came to the fore. For example, several Members of Parliament came together, cutting across party lines and joined hands to form Parliamentarians with Innovators for India (PIIndia.org) to engage with innovators for solutions that impact lives at a large scale. Such forums will enable more politicians to think about innovations and more innovators to think about politics. India is witnessing an ever-growing success story of young entrepreneurs creating massive wealth and international brands for building large-scale ventures. At some point, this powerful tribe will also venture into politics with a mission of public entrepreneurship, defined as ideas for society that offer collective benefits rather than individual returns.

When the future of the political theatre is riding on a new playbook, one must look at the stories that are already emerging in this realm. India has the largest young population in the world with millions of more children born in India than any other country every year. No doubt, education is

the best passport for most children to march towards success. Today, India is a hotbed of companies that are taking education to the last mile at the lowest cost possible in any part of the world and with a focus towards solid outcomes. For example, a start-up named Prepshala is seeking to remotely groom students at $ 5 a month, starting with live teaching of English. Similarly, the road to livelihood is going to be built on a spectrum of skills that the youth is able to acquire. India is entering an exciting phase where new models will enable large-scale skilling and matchmaking on a continuous basis. A study with support from the World Bank, under a project named JobExchange.org, showcases the road that is easy to build. India is a nation where creativity has thrived at the grassroots level for thousands of years. Standardising school education led to breaking away of the traditional pathways to creativity. The New Education Policy speaks about Lokvidya as a model for bringing back grassroot-level creativity, especially in rural schools. A project named Artshala is starting to work towards building a district-level network of artists and craftsmen to offer creativity boot camps in rural schools.

The power of a strong nation resides in a healthy population. India has a formidable set of holistic health and nutrition approaches built over generations of yogis and scholars across the country. When matched with modern medicines and padded with the family-based care that is a household culture in the country, India may be looking towards building health for all as an achievable goal. Several incredibly talented and trained doctors are working towards such a holistic approach in healthcare. The list is endless.

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No vision of India can be exciting without ensuring that girls and women have a more than equal opportunity in the country to live free, dream big, and participate in every theatre of change. Take healthcare. The primary customers of healthcare in any society are girls and women. A young mother needs a doctor for herself and her infant, unlike a young father. In contrast to this, the primary service providers in healthcare are men. Over two-third of the healthcare professionals in India are men. Shifting the gender axis on health will definitely raise the quality of care. An initiative named DoctorBeti seeks to do just that. When one looks at the appalling levels of female labour force participation today, one misses the fact that the story is much worse in rural districts where girls are not even expressing the idea to seek training and work. Again, a Job Exchange study is looking towards concrete measures to solve this problem. For every obstacle that has blocked girls and women, solutions are here and paving a new way.

When we look at the political and social representation of women, the numbers appear disappointing. Once again, the initiatives that are emerging, often led by young and brilliant girls with confidence and conviction, are set to change the landscape. For example, WeUnlearn or Women in Politics or Indian School of Democracy or Netri are ideas with formidable teams and missions to disrupt the landscape. When politics is broken down to sub-components, one must look at who are the voters, who are the influencers and who the leaders are. The time has come to form and

scale initiatives that enable a 16- to 25-year-old girl to create her own political agenda anchored on the female aspiration. The time has come to look at how more and more women can be on the charts as the social, economic, religious and political influencers even in a rural district. These are ideas that have wings and will soar in just the next few years and change the future playbook.

Why do ideas and new ventures of social change matter so much? They matter because the new age politicians can ride such ideas to be the future star cast. This is the road to the driving seat of changemaking, a road to a better playbook for a stronger nation. And this road is unlikely to offer a lonely ride. All politics is tribal. When a few public entrepreneurs succeed in taking this road and reaching the driving seat, many more will come. A new tribe of leaders will emerge on the horizon.

However, missions of social change do not build overnight. It takes time alongside brilliant teams. With every mission outlined here, there are immense opportunities to bring social change and open new roads towards disrupting mainstream politics. We should eventually bequeath an India where politicians relentlessly build such missions with great ambition and open the theatre of politics to a new age with a fresh playbook that will make politics more synonymous to transformational change. India at 75 is just another exciting play for the India of the Future that will be second to no country in the world.

Ghanshyam Tiwari is the Founder and National Coordinator of Parliamentarians with Innovators for India (PIIndia.org). He has advised Chief Ministers and Parliamentarians, served global organisations and is the national spokesperson of the Samajwadi Party (SP).