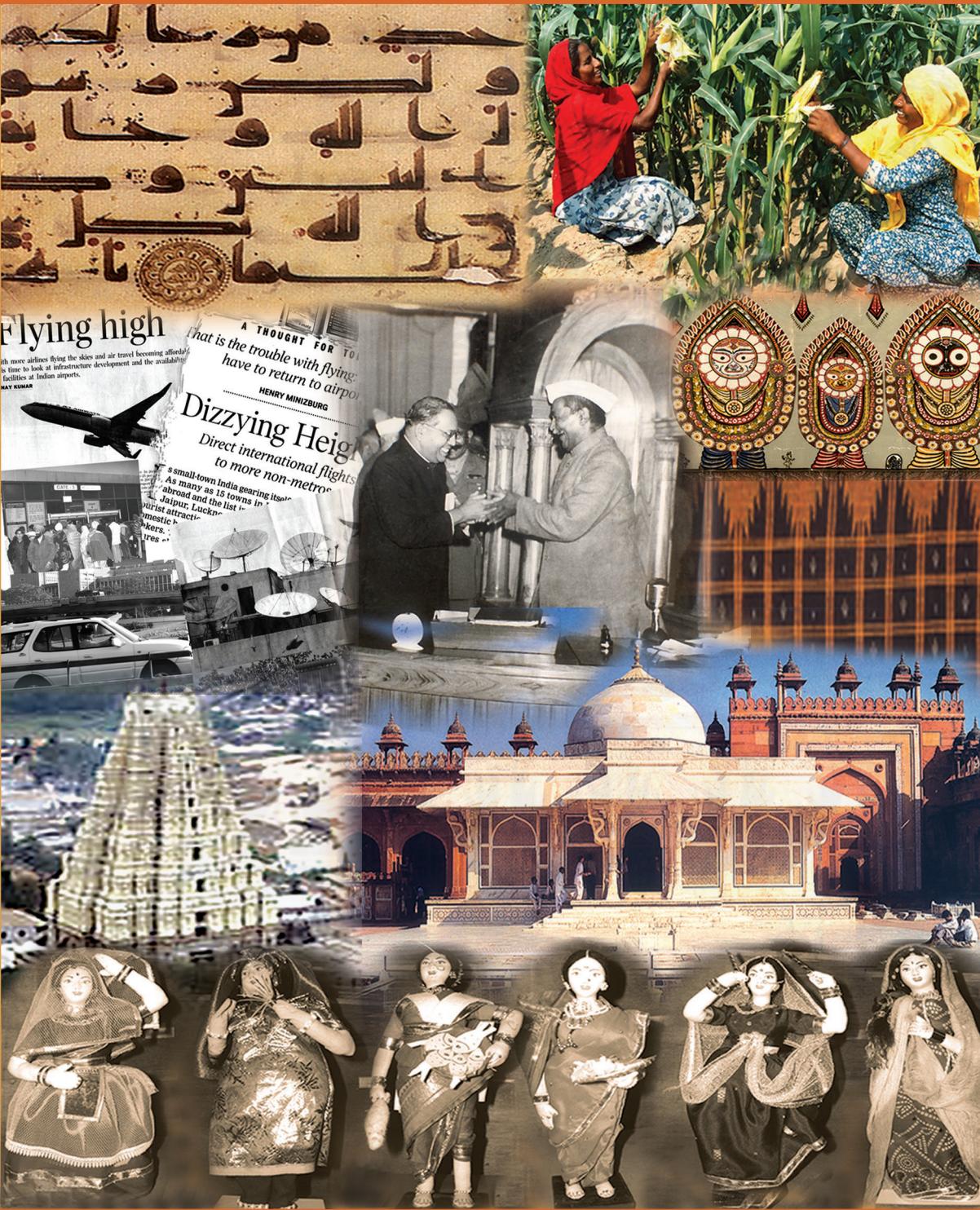


# Our India

BALMIKI PRASAD SINGH



# **THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA**

## **PREAMBLE**

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,** having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

**JUSTICE**, social, economic and political;

**LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

**EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

**FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the **[unity and integrity of the Nation];**

**IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY** this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

# OUR INDIA

BALMIKI PRASAD SINGH



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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## PREFACE

The origins of the book ***Our India*** can be traced to my childhood and, much later, to a piece of advice.

As a student, I found the writings and speeches on India's history and civilisation both fascinating and baffling. The awesome contribution of the Indian genius to religion and philosophy, logic and mathematics, science and astronomy, arts and architecture, sensuality and asceticism was always somewhat difficult to penetrate. Besides, the multiplicity of languages and dialogues, gods and goddesses, values and beliefs, customs and practices used to mystify the students of my generation.

The launch of my book *Bahudha and the Post 9/11 World* in April 2008 was well-received both in India and abroad. My wife, Karuna, and I were greatly pleased. There was a great sense of relief as well as I had worked very hard on this book, and that too for five long years.

After the passage of a few months, in a private conversation in the presence of our son Rajeev, Karuna remarked that my books were for the 'learned' and that, in future, I should write for children. I took it lightly as I thought this was one of the ways wives kept their husbands' feet firmly on the ground. A few weeks later, I asked her whether she had meant her comment seriously. She replied in the affirmative and argued that if children read my book in schools, they would be likely to read *Bahudha* and my other books when they became older.

India is much more than a large market. Its history is not a story of kings and queens and their deeds and misdeeds, achievements and foibles alone. It is also not a mere chronicle of invasions and conquests, annexation of territories and fall of empires. India

was, both in times of its distinction and decline, a lively land of ideas and thoughts. Fortunately, this great tradition continues and is getting deepened.

I have thus written this book primarily for school-going children seeking to portray my appreciation of India's experience as a civilisation and as a nation. And yet I hope that India fans and watchers and other first-time readers will also be enchanted and find it inspirational.

I am beholden to the NCERT, its Director Parvin Sinclair, and to her able colleagues, Professor Saroj Yadav, Professor Anil Sethi, Dr. Seema S. Ojha, Shri Naresh Yadav and Shri Pawan Kumar Barriar for their manifold assistance in the publication of this book.

I shall feel amply rewarded if **Our India** written my way is of assistance to its young readers.

Raj Bhavan  
Gangtok  
*Republic Day, 2012*

BALMIKI PRASAD SINGH

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## Our National Anthem



*Jana-gana-mana adhinayaka, jaya he  
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.  
Punjab-Sindh-Gujarat-Maratha  
Dravida-Utkala-Banga  
Vindhya-Himachala-Yamuna-Ganga  
Uchchhala-jaladhi-taranga.  
Tava shubha name jage,  
Tava shubha asisa mage,  
Gahe tava jaya gatha.  
Jana-gana-mangala-dayaka jaya he  
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.  
Jaya he, jaya he, jaya he,  
Jaya jaya jaya, jaya he!*

Our National Anthem, composed originally in Bangla by Rabindranath Tagore, was adopted in its Hindi version by the Constituent Assembly as the national anthem of India on 24 January 1950.

## SETTING AND ARGUMENT

How should one try to understand one's own country? The country grows on you and you grow with the country. Understanding one's own country becomes more difficult if you are an Indian. India, a civilisation of hoary antiquity, of great achievements and numerous shortcomings, fills one's mind and often causes bewilderment.

India has attracted some of the finest minds from early days. These include travellers and scholars from distant lands as well. Several of them tried to unravel India and in the process wrote perceptively about Indian people, their history and culture, beliefs and economy, polity and ways of living.

Among those who travelled in India in ancient times, Fa Xian (337-422 CE), a Chinese Buddhist monk, came to India on a pilgrimage during the reign of Chandragupta II and penned *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*. His compatriot Xuan Zang (602-664 CE) journeyed across India for seventeen long years and wrote an epic treatise *Journey to the West*. Another person of eminence was the Greek ethnographer Megasthenes (350-290 BC) who is well-regarded for his pioneering work *Indica*.

In the medieval period, Al-Biruni (973-1048 CE), an Iranian Muslim scholar, gave us an incisive description of early 11th century India. In the thirteenth century, Marco Polo (1254-1324 CE) arrived on the Coromandel Coast and was astonished to find that the kings of the Tamil kingdom took pride in not holding themselves above the law of the land, and that this region was the 'richest and most splendid province in the world'. The French physician and traveller, Francois Bernier (1625-1688 CE)

wrote a book in which he provided a photo-image of the Mughal system of governance. Another French scholar Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689 CE) wrote extensively on India.

During the British era, several scholars and civil servants wrote on different aspects of India. The famous German scholar Freidrich Max Muller (1823-1900 CE) delved deep into Indian philosophy and mysticism and brought it to the attention of the world. The Asiatic Society of India was set up in Kolkata on 15 January 1784 by Sir William Jones (1746-1794 CE). It gradually became a reputed centre of learning on Indian history and culture.

*Foreign travellers such as the Frenchman Francois Bernier (in European clothes) and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (in Indian dress) wrote about India. Many other travellers who visited India from time to time also wrote about our country. The Chinese scholars, Fa Xian and Xuan Zang, and Al-Biruni from Uzbekistan readily come to mind.*



## How do we read travellers' accounts?

Was the Tamil kingdom of Marco Polo's times indeed the 'richest and most splendid province in the world'? How can we tell?

How do we decide whether Bernier's statements about Mughal India were accurate?

Who did the various travellers write for? What was the context of each traveller's writings? If you are a historian in the making, you may want to read and think about such questions. In so doing, you may want to refer to Theme 5, 'Through the Eyes of Travellers' of *Themes in Indian History*, Part II, History textbook for Class XII, published by the NCERT.

and attracted scholars from different parts of the world and encouraged Indian scholars as well.

Among the present day scholars of Indian origin mention may be made, among several others, of V.S. Naipaul (b. 1932) and Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) who have written some outstanding books on India.

All these writings and many more have provided rare insights and lessons. And yet, this does not fully help in constructing in the mind a picture gallery of different aspects of India. In the final analysis, one has to undertake one's own journey, howsoever formidable this task may be.

At the outset, it needs to be mentioned that India can be understood in many ways. One credible approach is to look at ideas that have shaped our lives; encounters between values and beliefs that have gone into the making of our civilisation and continue to play a significant role in our day to day lives.

This book in particular looks at five civilisational encounters of our recorded history, namely, the intermingling of Aryans with the earlier inhabitants during the Vedic period; the advent of Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century BCE; the meeting of Hinduism and Islam; the coming of the British and our epic freedom struggle against them; and the present information and communication technology (ICT) revolution. These ideas and related happenings inform the entire text of the book. Chapter 5 entitled 'Civilisational Encounters' makes an effort to interrelate and foreground them. In doing so, it highlights one of the most significant arguments of this book.

## Al-Biruni's objectives

Al-Biruni described his work thus:

'...a help to those who want to discuss religious questions with them (the Hindus), and a repertory of information to those who want to associate with them'.

You might want to read Al-Biruni's *Kitab-ul-Hind* to understand whether his work met these objectives. Is Al-Biruni's use of the word 'Hindu' different from its modern meaning?

# 2

## SOCIAL REFORMS AND NATIONALIST CONSCIOUSNESS, CIRCA 1820-1947



*Rammohun Roy  
(1772-1833), with whom it  
all began, painted by  
Rembrandt Peale, 1833*



*Swami Vivekanand  
(1863-1902)*

Those of us who were born prior to 1947 have grown up in a momentous period of Indian history – a history that has been significant from political, religious and literary angles.

At the global level, the Second World War was at its peak causing bloodbath and inflicting untold miseries on the peoples of Europe and Asia. The war-cries were heard and witnessed in India's north-east too.

But transformations in religion and politics were afoot since the nineteenth century. The Brahmo Samaj set up in 1828 by Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) was active in Bengal and neighbouring areas in eastern India. Building on the enlightened traditions of reform that Roy had initiated, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) redefined religion as service to the poor. He set up the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 named after his famous mentor Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-1886) to work for the provision of education and health care. The schools and hospitals of the Mission are rendering yeomen service. Through his efforts at a cultural resurgence, Swami Vivekananda laid strong foundations for the nationalist movement.

Similar reform movements covered the entire length and breadth of India: the Arya Samaj (1875) of Swami Dayanand Saraswati

(1824-1883) in the Punjab and adjoining provinces; the Prarthana Samaj (1867) in Maharashtra; and the Veda Samaj (1864) in Madras. Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) strove tirelessly and with great imagination to bring social reform among the Muslims despite some bitter opposition. Sree Narayana Guru (1855-1928) worked for upliftment of Izhavas in Kerala. All these personalities became national figures.

The major political battle in India, however, was the struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) which reached its zenith in the Quit India Movement (1942-44).



*Swami Dayanand Saraswati  
(1824-1883)*



*Syed Ahmed Khan  
(1817-1898)*



*Quit India movement, August 1942*

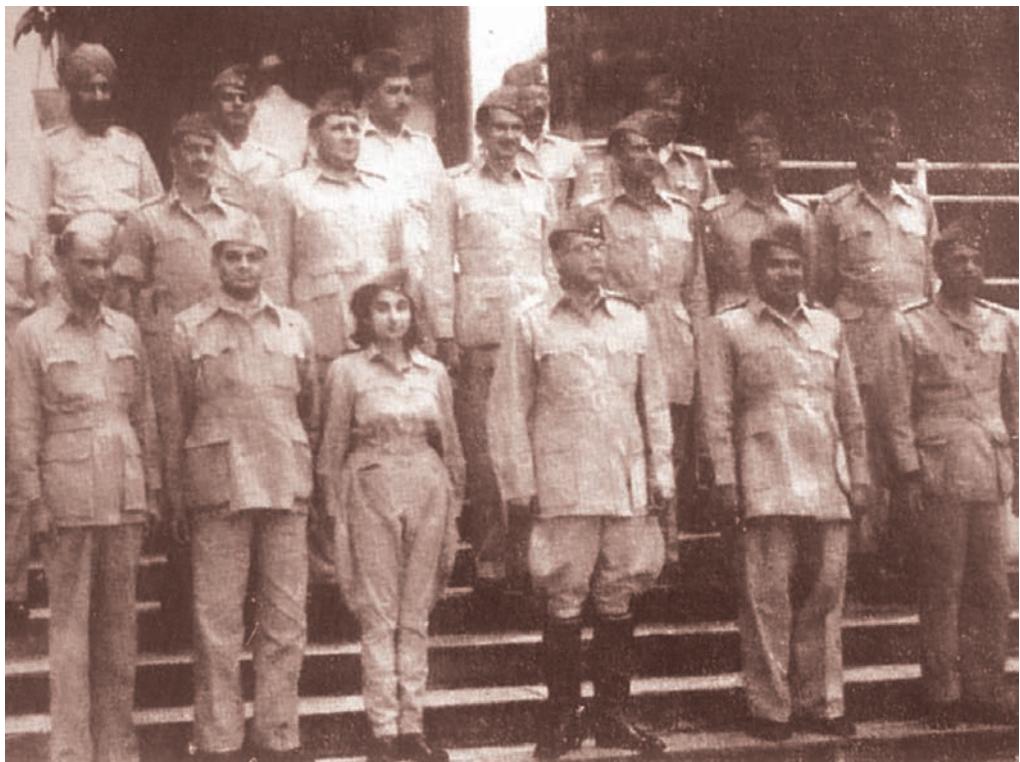
Demonstrators clashed with the police everywhere. Many thousands were arrested, over a thousand killed, many more were injured.



*Mahatma Gandhi lifting natural salt at Dandi, 6 April 1930. In so doing, he defied the irrational salt laws.*

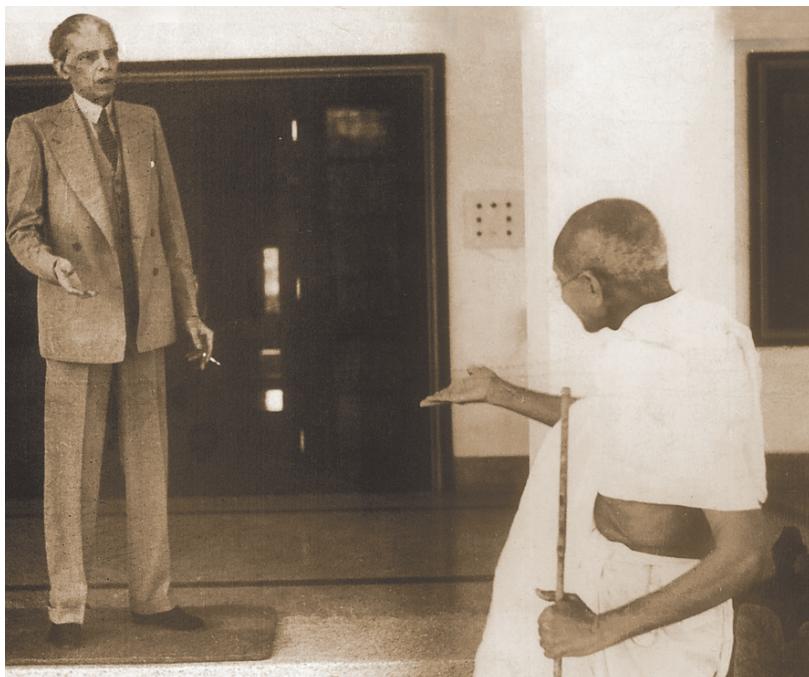
Mahatma Gandhi mobilised the people of India for a non-violent struggle against foreign rule and its scale and depth was unprecedented in history. The repression of such a non-violent struggle by the British only eroded their authority and also of their Indian collaborators, the *zamindars*, the landed gentry and the princely rulers and thus, unintended though, served the cause of struggle for independence. The freedom movement had the distinction of bringing for the first time millions of women into the political realm of civil disobedience and *satyagraha* campaigns.

Another stream of the freedom struggle was led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945) who set up the Indian National Army (INA) that represented the indomitable spirit of the youth of India and worked hard for the overthrow of the colonial order.



*Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose with officers of the Indian National Army*

The 1940s witnessed a hardening of attitudes among the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. The talks between India's top two leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammad Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League, held in 1944, were showing signs of strain. This continued to be the case at the negotiating table when Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad discussed the future of India with Jinnah and the British between 1945 and 1947. The communal divide between the Hindus and the Muslims had stiffened leading to political division of the country.



*Mahatma Gandhi with Mohammad Ali Jinnah.  
Signs of strain and argumentation?*

### **Mahatma Gandhi's mass mobilisation**

Gandhi's non-violent struggle against foreign rule was unprecedented in scale and depth! Have you ever wondered:

- Which social groups and classes participated in the freedom struggle against British rule?
- Why and how did this struggle become an all-India mass movement? And why did this happen for the first time in the years 1919 to 1922, not earlier?
- What are the differences between the non-violence of the Buddha or Christ on the one hand and Gandhi on the other?

On 15 August 1947, India attained freedom but it was an India divided into India and Pakistan. It was accompanied by unprecedented violence with more than one million dead. Many then felt that the partition was temporary while others feared that this will impede India from getting her due position in the comity of nations. The shame of violence was widely shared.

The Partition of India was not merely a political failure. It was also our civilisational failure.



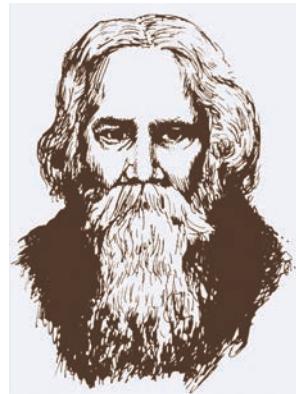
*The civilisational failure that was Partition.*  
Over 10 million people were uprooted from their homelands and forced to migrate.

### Our civilisational failure!

Why does the author emphatically say that the Partition was our 'civilisational failure'? Discuss this with your teachers, parents and friends and reflect on the various ways in which this is true.

During the period of our anti-colonial struggle, there was also a literary movement in the country to which Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Muhammad Iqbal in the north and Subramaniya Bharati in the south provided leadership with imagination and fervor. This movement too had begun with Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal in the early nineteenth century. This new literary movement not only talked of beauty and nationalism but also revealed to its readers India in terms of its spirit, its philosophy, its arts, its poetry, its music and its myriad ways of life. This was a revolution in literature which made a deep impact on the revolution in politics and also got influenced by the latter.

All these brought a new perspective in an Indian's understanding of his or her surroundings, of emerging challenges and, of course, of the country. An age was ending and the 'soul of a nation long suppressed' was finding 'utterance'. India could be understood and re-built in many ways. This is discussed in the next chapter.



Rabindranath Tagore  
(1861-1941)



Subramania Bharati  
(1882-1921)



Jawaharlal Nehru  
speaking in the  
Constituent Assembly  
at midnight on 14  
August 1947

It was in this famous speech that Nehru spoke of the 'long suppressed soul of a nation' finding 'utterance'. He began the speech thus: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom."

# 3

## INDIA BECOMES A REPUBLIC

Once free, we adopted the path of parliamentary democracy. This constituted a most momentous step. Our ancestors, particularly, the *Licchavis* of Vaishali in Bihar had moved towards democracy and had also built some institutions of democratic governance as early as 5th century BCE.

On 26 January 1950, 'WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA' constituted India into a 'Sovereign, Democratic Republic'. The Preamble to our Constitution makes this grand declaration and accordingly, we celebrate 26 January as Republic Day. This declaration was not a product of any violent political uprising. This was the culmination of non-violent revolution that engulfed India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. No wonder we take pride in calling Gandhiji the 'Father of the Nation'.

It is of significance that our Constitution was adopted after wide consultations among the well-known leaders of the people. Many of these were members of the Constituent Assembly whose task was to frame the Indian Constitution. Dr. Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) was the President of the Constituent Assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) played a pioneering role in the Assembly. His contribution went a long way in securing universal adult franchise rising above considerations of

### Ancient republics and modern democracies

Do you think the political institutions of the Licchavis of Vaishali would have been different from that of modern democracies? Point out those features of modern democracies that cannot be found in pre-modern societies. You may want to read about the ancient *ganas* or *sanghas* to think about this matter. See Theme 2 of *Themes in Indian History*, Part I, History textbook for Class XII, published by the NCERT.

religion, ethnicity, caste and gender and in giving content to this fine document which, in turn, has been guiding the Republic in changing times. It is thus only appropriate that his statue adorns the campus of Parliament and several state legislatures.



*'We, the people of India'.*

What connecting threads do you see in these diverse realities of our people?

## The idea of India

On 26 January 1950 India became a Republic. Is India as we know it today a modern development? Have you ever wondered why and how did present-day India come to be single nation?

The establishment of the Republic of India was a unique event in our history. Our ancestors had given India a 'civilisation-state' identity and this phenomenon, even now, provides guidance to us. In the *Rigveda*, we find use of the word *rashtra*. In the Puranas we see repeated references to the expression *Bharatvarsha*. In *Manu Samhita* also, the expression *rashtra* has been mentioned.

India is a civilisation of considerable antiquity. Many independent and sovereign states were formed here, and at times almost the whole country came under one sovereignty. On 26 January 1950 we declared ourselves to be a 'sovereign democratic republic'. This means ours is a government of the people, by the people. For purposes of governance, we have chosen the parliamentary system.

The people of India use their sovereign power at the centre through their representatives in parliament and in the states through their representatives in the legislatures. These representatives are elected on the basis of adult franchise. The Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens (male and female) to choose their representatives. The executive or the Council of Ministers is accountable to these representatives. The President is elected as the Head of the Indian Union and he or she, in turn, appoints Governors as Heads of the federating units. The President and the Governors cannot discharge any executive powers without the advice of the Council of Ministers. The Constitution, however, provides for some special powers to the Governors where they can act in their discretion and for that they are personally responsible.

### Civilisations and 'civilisational identities'

What does the author mean by saying that 'our ancestors had given India a 'civilisational-state' identity and this phenomenon, even now, provides guidance to us'? What is a 'civilisational-state'? How are the civilisations of South Asia different from those of East Asia, the Middle East and Europe? Is there such a thing as 'civilisational identities'? These are big issues and historians have spent whole life-times unravelling them. Think about these questions on the basis of the History you have read in school.

This form of governance is known as Parliamentary Democracy as it is based on (i) representation of the people; (ii) responsible government; and (iii) accountability of the Council of Ministers to the Parliament or the provincial legislature, as the case may be.



Every five years representatives are chosen for the Parliament and the State legislatures on the basis of adult franchise and the underlining principle behind this is 'one-person-one-vote'. It is, therefore, expected that every citizen would experience that this country is his/her country. Over the years, we have as a people proved our abiding faith in parliamentary democracy.

Another important aspect of our Constitution is its federal character although considerable authority was granted to the Union of India. The very first article, Article 1 declares: '**India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States**'. This federal system has been in operation since 1950 and our political economy, thanks to the high rate of growth in recent years, has been able to pay special attention to the states on the periphery as also to poor people.

On 26 January 1950 Dr. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of India. He succeeded, in a manner of speaking, C. Rajagopalachari (1878-1972), the first Indian Governor General. The founding leaders of the Republic created strong structures for the Indian nation-state: a powerful legislature; an accountable executive; an independent judiciary; and a free press. Many other autonomous institutions such as the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, the Election Commission of India, the Union Public Service Commission and the civil services have been established in accordance with the Constitution to give meaning and direction to the functioning of democratic institutions in the country.



*The President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr Rajendra Prasad, and the architect of our Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar*

## EARLY INDIAN CIVILISATION

Viewed in terms of geography, the Indian sub-continent 'is a world of its own, extensive yet enclosed by marked geographical boundaries'.

While geography provides a distinct physical personality to the Indian sub-continent, and more so to the Indian mind, the country was never closed to the world.

A recent survey has indicated that 4,653 communities live in India in a predominantly Hindu society with a sizeable Muslim population. They include people professing all the major faiths of the world, entertaining different notions about the migration of the soul, speaking several languages and dialects. Each group has its own distinct folklore, industry and handicrafts. But India is more than a sum of these. Jawaharlal Nehru once said, 'India is a cultural unity amongst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads'.

In fact, for the past several millennia, Indians have developed common traits, thoughts and feelings. These have given successive generations of Indians a mindset, a value system, and a way of life, which has been retained with remarkable continuity. Despite the passage of time, repeated foreign invasions, and the enormous growth in population, Indians as well as people of Indian origin have developed a unique personality and this will blossom further to unexpected levels in the coming decades in the era of globalisation and democracy.

It is not very clear when the Indian mind started delving into fine arts, poetry, philosophy and science.



*Reservoir at Dholavira, Indus Valley Civilisation.*

Note the masonry work.

The myths and legends, cults and rituals, as well as agricultural practices and handicrafts indicate that civilisational attainments in India commenced 5000 years ago or during a still earlier age.

The Indus Valley civilisation provides the beginnings of Indian historical experience. The archaeological excavations at various sites connected with that civilisation, such as at Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Dholavira, have amply proved that there existed a well-developed city life, irrigation system, and agricultural operations in India during this period.

It may be recalled that the intellectual development of India during the Vedic Age and the subsequent development of Vedic

culture did not mark a complete break from the Harappan culture. Archaeologists are of the opinion that the Vedic and the Dravidian-speaking peoples were in a 'contact situation' for a long period, perhaps of centuries, before the compilation of the Rig Veda. In fact, relics of the Indus Civilisation show the merging of many cultures and concepts, including the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China.

Much later, during the Vedic period divine narratives were pieced together out of subconscious allegory, poetic symbolism, personification of nature, or worship of spirits. It is this feature of the Indian mind which is responsible for the rapid growth of Indian philosophical pursuits and the development of mathematics and astronomy.

The beginnings of Indian literature are found in Vedic hymns in Sanskrit. Early literary forms also include Tamil

verses from the south, Prakrit and Pali tales from the mainland and tribal lore from the hills and uplands. Literature in early days was primarily religious.

The most outstanding works of the Vedic period are the four Vedas – *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. The Vedas comprise of a whole body of literature that arose in the course of centuries and was transmitted from generation to generation through oral communication.

The Vedic view of the individual and his relation to society is determined by four objectives of life: (a) *dharma* (ethical living); (b) *artha* (political economy) (c) *kama* (desire and enjoyment); and (d) *moksha* (spiritual freedom). Through millennia the core of human nature has remained the same. Its aspirations continue to be in the realm of emotions, intellect, material gains, and spiritual progress and thus are well covered under the four objects of life as broadly comprehended by Indian savants.

The Vedas are the world's oldest literature. They are referred to as *shruti* (hearing) which is eternal, self-evident and divinely revealed. The sages had seen and perceived the Vedic *mantras* while in a stage of meditation and contemplation. The entire Vedic literature is *shruti*. On the other hand, we have several human creations in literature which are known as *smriti* (recollection). The Ramayana, the Mahabharata including the Bhagvad Gita, the Upanishads and Dharmashastras represent the finest examples of the *smriti* tradition. Many scholars view the Upanishads also as a part of *shruti*.

Sanskrit became the medium of expression of poets, authors, and storytellers. Treatises on philosophy, economics, politics, astronomy, mathematics, science, town-planning, architecture, music, drama and dance were written in Sanskrit. Alongside, folk literature flourished in popular dialects and in languages like Pali and Prakrit. Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit grew and



A terracotta sculpture depicting a scene from the Mahabharata (West Bengal, c. seventeenth century).



Krishna advises Arjuna on the battlefield, a scene from the Bhagavad Gita. This painting dates to eighteenth century.

developed at the same time. Pali became the sacred language of Buddhism, and Prakrit of Jainism. Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit, have greatly contributed to the growth of modern Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Assamese, and have enormously influenced their script, grammar and literature.

There is enough evidence to indicate that from ancient times India had developed a system of conferences and free discussions to which specialists came from all over the country. The summaries of those conferences were known as *samhitas*, the compilers being editors, not authors.

History encompasses the development of human consciousness, a handing over or easy passage of ideas and beliefs from one generation to the other. As a remarkable feat of the conservation of memory, the Hindus, through the tradition of *shruti* and *smriti* have passed on the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata,

### **Conferences and free discussions!**

Various scholars such as Amartya Sen have written about the argumentative Indian. Do you think Indians are argumentative? Find out about three contemporaneous arguments regarding significant events or developments in Indian history. Do our religious traditions contain fierce disputes?

the Bhagvad Gita and other sacred texts to the present day. This remarkable aspect of historical consciousness of the early Indians was highlighted by Rabindranath Tagore in his paper, 'A Vision of Indian History', where he writes:

I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons.

Where lies the genius of India? Western writers deeply impressed by the metaphysical bent of the Indian mind and by their strong religious instincts and proclivities have viewed the Indian genius as largely concerned with the other world, as dreaming and running away from life. But this is far from correct. As Sri Aurobindo rightly observes:

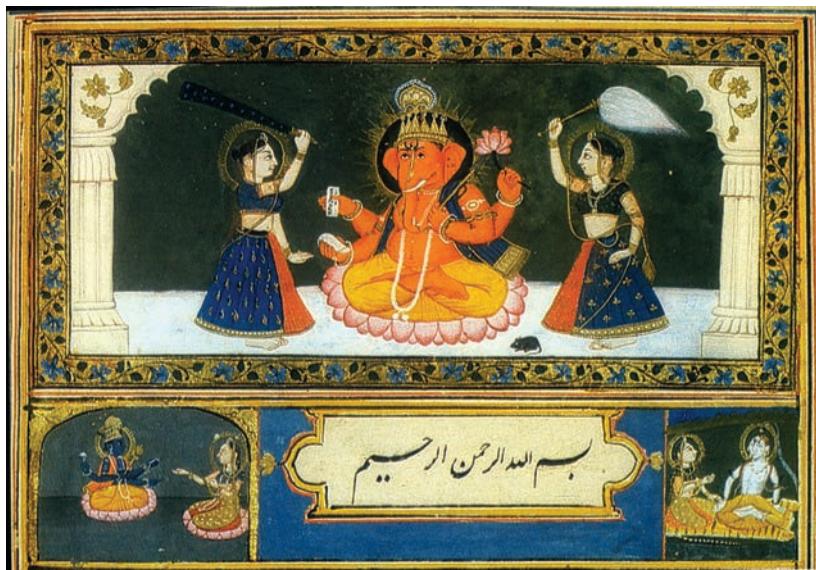
Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the indefinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning, and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight, that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities. She was alive to the greatness of material laws and forces; she had a keen eye for the importance of the physical sciences; she knew how to organize the arts of ordinary life. But she saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical; she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the supra-sensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite.



Sri Aurobindo  
(1872-1950)

It is thus not surprising that during the period of recorded global history of the past 2500 years India was a major power for about 1400 years not only during the ancient period but also in the Mughal era. This became amply clear during the reign of Emperor Akbar (1542-1605).

Our ancestors developed rational traditions in this country. The Indian genius initiated some of the earliest steps in algebra, geometry and astronomy. The decimal system emerged in our land. It was in India where early philosophy, secular as well as religious, achieved exceptional sophistication. People invented games like chess, pioneered sex education, and began the first systematic study of political economy. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita, the finest works of art and sculpture of Ajanta and Ellora and various Buddhist shrines, the best universities of the world of their times at Nalanda and Vikramshila are achievements that should inspire pride in our heritage. These achievements are also of inspirational value to the present as well as to future generations of Indians.



*This painting is from a Persian translation of the Mahabharata, c. 1740-50. It shows Lord Ganesha, the scribe. According to tradition, Vyasa dictated the text to the deity.*

### How should we relate to tradition?

'Our ancestors developed rational traditions in this country', asserts the author. Do you agree with this? Do you feel some of our traditions are not so rational?

## CIVILISATIONAL ENOUNTERS

In its long history, the Indian civilisation has undergone both external and multi-dimensional internal upheavals. In this epic story, five encounters (among thousands) have been particularly significant.

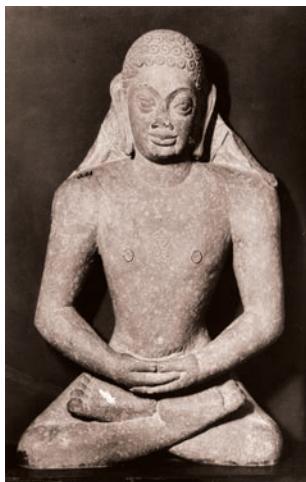
First, the Vedic period (1500 BCE and before) witnessed the intermingling of the Aryans with the earlier inhabitants which made a decisive influence not only on religion and spirituality but also on patterns of agriculture, industry, trade and overall productivity. The Vedas and the Upanishads and our great epics came to guide and determine the way of living and thinking of the elite as well as the common people. Besides, there were notable advances in music and medicine, mathematics and astronomy.

During the Vedic period the society was organised into four *varnas* known as *varnadharmas*, namely, *Brahmin* (the learned classes); *Kshatriya* (the warrior classes), *Vaishya* (the business classes), and *Shudra* (the service classes). Early Hindu philosophy prescribed the four stages of life, that is *brahmachari* (the student), *grihastha* (the householder), *vanaprastha* (the recluse), and *sannyasin* (the free man). It was believed that the law of *karma* governed the cycle of life from birth to death to re-birth and so on.

The *varnadharmas* was an attempt to establish a social law or a systematic functioning of society that would ensure its well-being. A fifth order added later was identified with the untouchables. On the basis of *varna* the elite became a closed group with minimal or no upward mobility. Recruitment to each group was through birth. The elite were drawn from the first three orders – *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, and *Vaishya*.



A Bodhisattva from  
Gandhara.



An image of a tirthankara  
from Mathura, c. third  
century CE

The Vedic social order is predicated on social inequality. Over the centuries it further degenerated. Two features of the Vedic social order, which have harmed Indian society and polity immensely over the centuries, are the creation of a class of 'untouchables' outside the *varna* system and the denial of education to various segments of society including women.

The denial of education to various social groups, including women, in the name of the *varna* system led to the spread of ignorance and illiteracy among the people. This also contributed to India's extreme backwardness and poverty. The lack of education and access to scriptures and books adversely affected the untouchables, the Dalits, people deemed to be 'backward', and the women and also generated a tremendous sense of insecurity among them. All this is contrary to the lofty ideals of peace and brotherhood that characterize the hymns of the Rig Veda.

The second most significant encounter was through the discourses of Lord Mahavira (599-521 BC), the founder of Jainism, and Lord Buddha (566-486 BC), the founder of Buddhism. These enabled people to see things in a new light. Both Mahavira and Buddha questioned the established religious orders and presented a rational way of looking at things, emphasising the role of non-violence in human behaviour and ecology. They strove to build an inclusive social order.

Lord Mahavira put special emphasis on rationality. His theory of *anekatavada*, recognised the multifaceted nature of reality. He also developed a system of philosophy called *syadvada* which strives to incorporate

the truth of all systems. In practical life, such an approach to reality encourages us to keep our minds open, and discourages us from adopting a fundamentalist stand where one considers one's view as superior to those of others. Lord Mahavira was the first among the path-finders to give equality of treatment to women including the right to education and enlisted them in his order.

Lord Buddha advocated the adoption of a rational approach in human affairs and made direct attack on obscurantist beliefs and practices. He prescribed the same yardstick for his teachings as well. Buddha says in a *sutra*:

Monks and scholars should well analyse my words, like gold (to be tested through) melting, cutting and polishing, and then adopt them, but not for the sake of showing me respect.

By this Buddha meant that even if a particular doctrine is set forth in scriptures, one must examine whether or not it meets the test of reasoning. If it conflicts with reasoning, or is at variance with new realities, it is no longer appropriate to assert its primacy or follow its dictates. This also applies to the Buddha's sayings.

I have found in the encounter between the Vedic philosophy and the Buddhist precepts a highly interesting dialogue and one of great value in understanding the Indian mind. It is equally important to know that Buddhism attained its highest expression both in terms of literature as well as in institutions such as monasteries and universities in India. The Buddhist world-view generated introspection among the Hindu elite. As a response, a group of revitalised Hindu scholars, on the one hand decried the increasing role of rituals and rigidity of caste structures and on the other, incorporated the Buddha into its pantheon by treating him as an incarnation of Vishnu.

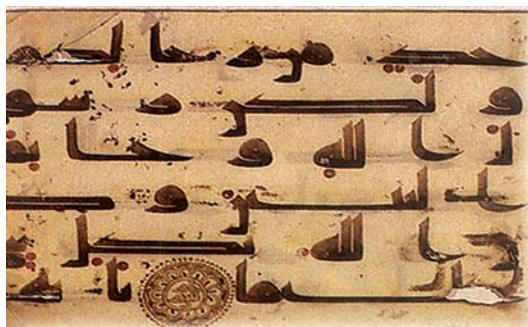
The greatest loss, in my view, on account of the 'banishment' of Buddhism from India was that the method of rationality and scientific enquiry encouraged by Buddhism suffered a setback. In the long run, the

absence of the Buddhist approach facilitated the growth of the forces of regression in Indian society and constrained our capacity to accept varied interpretations of a given idea in arriving at a conclusion concerning religion or nature. It also contributed to widespread illiteracy and ignorance in our society.

The Brahmanical order excluded women and the working classes (consisting of farmers, artisans and *dalits*), from reading and writing. It reasserted its position in the name of religion and tradition and pursued its dogmatic polices with renewed vigour in the absence of the Buddhist challenge. The decline of such a society was inevitable and the Indian society gradually slid into backwardness while maintaining a few pockets of prosperity and some persons of exceptional intellectual talent.

The period of decline that began in the economy and polity after the eighth century CE created space that was filled by Ghaznavid and Turkish invasions and the rise of Delhi Sultanate in the north. Although, Islam had arrived on the Malabar coast earlier, it may be said that the third encounter—that between Islam and Hindu belief systems—effectively commenced in the tenth century.

In a predominantly Hindu society, Islam became the religion of a substantial section of the ruling elite for nearly 600 years. It brought to its believers a single God, a specific code of worship and a way of living. To its believers, Islam provided a distinct facial expression, dietary system, dress, language, music, system of marriage and divorce, architecture and spirituality. Unlike



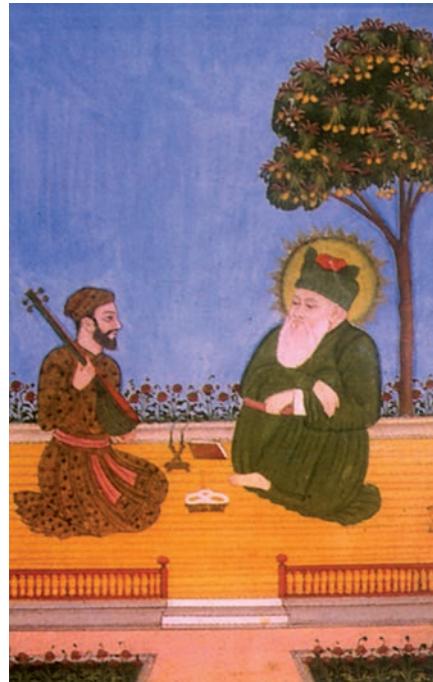
*Page from the Quran Sharif written on vellum in the ninth century.*

the Buddha, the Prophet Muhammad could not be accommodated in the Hindu pantheon.

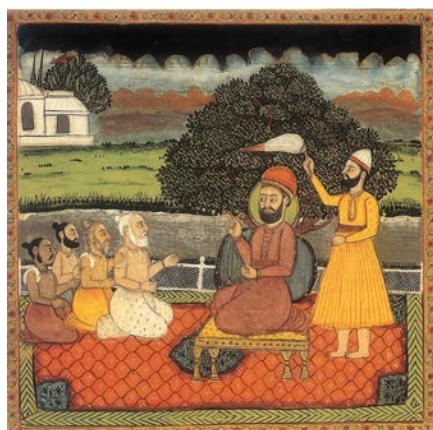
There were, however, significant attempts to find a *modus vivendi* between Islam and Hinduism. It meant that India had to devise ways and means by which Hindus and Muslims could live together in a society based on different spiritual and social conceptions. In fact, Islam gradually lost its Arabic and Persian identity and absorbed many Hindu folk traditions. The influences from Persia and Central Asia gradually began to coexist with indigenous traditions in languages, dress, music and cuisines.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism, and Kabir (1398-1438), the iconoclast poet, strove to bring Hindus and Muslims together. Their appeals were widespread in north India.

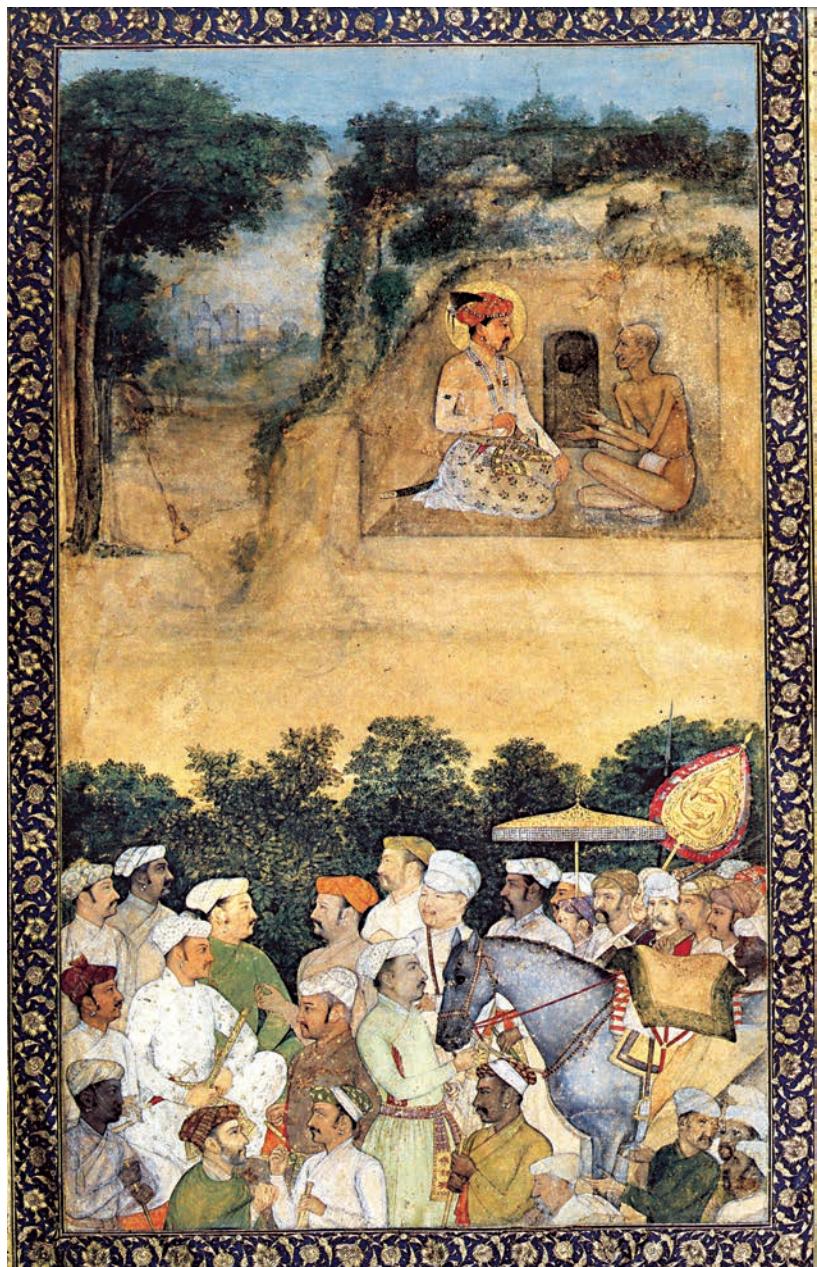
The creative genius of the Indian people – both Hindus and Muslims – found unique expression in Sufism and Bhakti literature, in music and painting, in the birth of the Urdu language and enrichment of the other Indian languages, and in architecture. This is popularly referred to as Ganga-Jamuni *tahzeeb* or etiquette. Indian Islam embraced a diversity of approaches while it had been fairly unitarian in character in the Arab world.



A seventeenth-century painting of the Sufi Saint Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and his disciple Amir Khusrau



Baba Guru Nanak as a young man, in discussion with holy men.



A Mughal painting depicting Emperor Jahangir with a Hindu jogi

Christianity came to India well before it went to several European countries. However, the civilisational encounter began to take root in the seventeenth century with the entry of the Europeans and the establishment of the East India Company in India. With the spread of the English language, the notion of democracy and the rule of law, popularised as much by the leaders of the freedom struggle and the people of India as by the British, the fourth civilisational encounter bore fruit. This led to introspection in Indian society. The religious and social reforms of the Hindus and others in the nineteenth century were attempts to assimilate these new influences. The rights of kings and *maharajas* to rule was slowly yielding place to democratic institutions of governance though these were severely limited to begin with. The first sign of this political awakening was the inauguration of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and this gradually led to a new conception of nationhood and struggle for independence.

Under the imaginative leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress underwent massive transformation in its character and approach. Mahatma Gandhi mobilised the common people including women in the freedom struggle and through a massive non-violent movement, he succeeded in securing independence.

The involvement of common people in the freedom struggle, and the personal lives and beliefs of eminent leaders, led to a unique crystallisation of ideas regarding what to discard and what to retain from our cultural heritage. During the freedom struggle several of the social evils prevailing in India came for close scrutiny. As a result, the practice of gender bias, untouchability, and denial of education to certain classes of people, were sought to be eliminated.

The value of religion was acknowledged, for ideas of tolerance and human brotherhood were integral to popular religious beliefs. What were sought to be denounced were superstitions and irrationalities. It was widely shared that the caste-system is man-made, is

not ordained by divinity, and that religion is meant to promote equality, not stratification. All religions are important, and as Mahatma Gandhi suggested, our prayer should not be 'God give him the light that Thou hast given me', but 'give him all the light and truth that he needs for his highest development'. One of the gains of this is that an overwhelming number of people in India are secular in their political outlook and yet at the same time very religious in their personal lives.

Since the end of the last century, another fifth great civilisational encounter encompassing all aspects of our living is taking place. This is popularly known as the information and communications revolution. This revolution is rapidly transforming our ways of communication—which has become enormously fast-paced. It is integrating markets and trade. This has led not only to a sharing of products, but also of cultural values and in dissemination of information and training. New approaches are on the anvil to raise productivity and tackle poverty.

The information and communication revolution has the momentum and dynamism to catalyze and sustain



*The information and communication revolution: mobile phones and internet connectivity are dramatically rising in the country.*

As late as 1998, mobile phones, for example, were perceived as luxury items. By 2006, however, we became the country with the fourth largest usage of cell phones.

our development efforts. The roots of this renaissance which are still unfolding lie in the freedom movement that strengthened the forces of democracy and the rule of law, of equality and individual liberty.

Internet technology carries the promise of transcending social barriers in providing access to knowledge. In India, for ages, the higher levels of knowledge, popularly known as sacred knowledge, were a prerogative of the Brahminical class—this despite social integration through the network of rituals that regulated birth, marriage and death ceremonies. Any denial of the use of the Internet to the masses would perhaps conform to a similar practice where connectivity through mobile phones would be available to everyone but vital information that is the preserve of the Internet system would be confined to those belonging to a higher economic, social, and educational strata.

Thankfully, the present level of comfort in confining ICT to the middle class is finally being jettisoned. Accessibility to the Internet is increasing, and this has enabled a level playing field among different sections of society. The wealth of information that the Internet promises is no longer the sole preserve of the upper strata. The task before us is to make ICT further available to the public so as to enable them to reap economic, educational and political gains.

In this context, we must remember that equal access to computers can be totally successful only if we are willing to tackle the larger problems of inequality of housing, education, and healthcare through concerted efforts in that direction. Towards this, India also needs to carry forward this new civilisational dialogue at the people's level.

Today, a new kind of knowledge is being produced and circulated, based on India's own traditional knowledge as well as the scientific achievements of the world. In understanding this phenomenon one ought to be also aware of the circumstances governing the kind of knowledge that the new generation of Indians is

producing and circulating. Young Indians are trying to reach across cultural divides and understand languages, scientific methodologies, histories and faiths of others than their own. New perspectives are being added and these are indeed enriching experiences.

The respect that a nation-state would command in the global community in the coming decades would be directly related to its strength in the field of modern knowledge. Fortunately, several Indian universities and science and technology centres are known for their excellence in the world.

The number of renaissance men and women in the country is on the rise. They have courage, intellect and the ability to compete in the world and a significant number of these people have a strong desire to connect with the rest of their community and make a contribution towards building a dynamic and just India.

### **Decisive turning-points!**

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From a history of complex interactions, the author has identified five encounters that changed the course of our history. Do you think there were any other equally significant turning-points in our history? Can you think of historical interactions that may be important to you because of your surroundings or social situation?

## RENEWAL OF INDIA

The renewal of India that commenced during the freedom struggle constitutes one of the most fascinating periods of Indian history. Our leaders had looked beyond attainment of independence and sought to make improvement in all spheres of our society. The process continues. This phenomenon may be examined with regard to society, economy, and polity.

The early leaders of the Republic were clear in their mind that in a land of several faiths and languages, the nation-state has the duty to remain neutral in matters of religion. In fact, the commitment of the leadership to secularism was total. Fortunately, this was in tune with India's heritage.

India has been living through the pluralistic challenge longer than several other nations. In terms of faith, well before the advent of Christianity and Islam in the West and other parts of the world, India was a significant playfield of civilisational encounters between Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Both Judaism and Christianity came to India in the first century itself. Islam too commenced its entry through the coastal towns of the Indian peninsula from the eighth century onwards. In the ninth century, when the Zoroastrians of Persia felt that their religion was in danger from the invading Muslims, they moved to the north-west coast of India. Their descendants still live there and are known as Parsis. The birth of Sikhism since about the beginning of the sixteenth century had the avowed objective of bringing peace to conflicting encounters among Hinduism and Islam. In the last century, when the Tibetans felt a threat to their religion and culture, they

chose India as a refuge and a large number of them live here.

Multi-culturalism is a basic feature of India's civilisational experience. Multicultural practices in India are not atheistic in character but display a combination of religions. No wonder, in the past, India successfully accommodated and assimilated different points of view. In the religious domain in particular, it created images and institutions for 330 million gods and goddesses.

Secularism and multi-culturalism are not in conflict. It is this openness of the Indian experience that provides the basis for devising public policies of harmony. It establishes that disputes shall be settled through dialogue, that no restriction will be placed on the flow of thought processes from different parts of the world to our country.

It is imperative to believe in a unity of spirit between multiple belief systems that have guided individuals of different faiths. The world would be much poorer if one God and one way of worship was prescribed for everyone; if one language and one dialect were to become the mode of human expression; or if one folk tune or set of songs were prescribed to be sung by everyone.

In our long and uninterrupted civilisational history one thing strikes us constantly. It is that the common people of India have always provided support and strength to the values of pluralism and tolerance.

There can be no one way – be it along axes of religions, caste, culture, or languages of being an Indian. Pluralism is the founding principle for building a pan-Indian identity and the latter need not be in conflict with other identities. To accord respect to the identity of others is a part of our constitutional obligation.

The Constituent Assembly debates clearly reveal that the leadership wanted to rapidly move towards augmentation of India's economic capabilities. The primary task was to assist in the transformation of



*The Constituent Assembly in session*

This assembly framed the Constitution, granting franchise to all adult citizens.

Indian society, polity and economy in a manner that would strengthen the cohesion and viability of the nation-state. This took time. India's new economic policy adopted in the last decade of the twentieth century unleashed creative energies of the business and the entrepreneurial class along with elimination of those interventionist policies which gave so much discretion to politicians and civil servants in the past. This put new emphasis on efficiency, productivity and competition.

As a result, both our Gross Domestic Investment (GDI) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose considerably. At the global level India now ranks as the fourth largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, and at current level of growth it could well move higher.

### **GDP and the ordinary Indian**

Has the ordinary Indian benefited from the recent rise of India's GDP?

The face of Indian business too has undergone profound transformation. Several Indian companies are in the list of top companies of the world. Some of them have become multinational. India is a leading nation in software services. The role of Indian nationals at the global level in the fields of science, technology and finance is well-recognised.

The size of the Indian middle class is assessed to be 300 million people. India is self-sufficient in food. It is the largest producer of milk in the world. It has a credible space programme.

Notwithstanding these impressive achievements, we are still facing massive challenges of poverty, illiteracy and disease in the country. Concrete policy action is needed to lift more than 200 million people—concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan—out of poverty.

In order to expeditiously eliminate all forms of poverty, we need to work towards the goal of increasing the size of our economy. All segments of the economy need to work in tandem in order to make sure that competitive economic activities pick up.

We have to move beyond the \$2 trillion economy rapidly. The wealth thus generated would need to be not only preserved but also utilised in a fashion that gives primacy to building of institutions of excellence and such other infrastructure that would enable the youth to contribute fully to the economy.

We have to address some important challenges such as stepping up agricultural growth, physical and social infrastructure development, and fiscal consolidation. It would be absolutely essential for our economy to achieve sustained high rates of economic growth in future as well. Our industries and, in particular, our manufacturing units both in public and private sectors have to be globally competitive. We must look beyond the domestic market and increase our foreign trade. This should be possible with India's demographic

dividend, English speaking workforce and engineering talent.

It is true that economic power in the recent years has gone to a small minority. This growing concentration of economic power in a few hands is a matter of serious concern. We cannot make economic growth inclusive unless people have a say in how that growth is driven. Democracy is the best answer. It is democracy and more democracy which alone can secure shared prosperity and well-being as against the phenomenon of high profit for the few and distress for the masses.

There are several positive aspects. India can reach its potential with the right macroeconomic approach through skillfully calibrating models of employment, capital stock and technical progress given that we have a favourable demographic profile. Our macroeconomic stability, quality of institutions, human resource development and openness are drivers of long-term growth prospects. In addition, entrepreneurship, democracy and a decent legal system provide the underpinnings essential for free enterprise to flourish.

Good governance is essential for ensuring full benefits from our forward looking policies and programmes. There should be free flow of fresh ideas. There should be boldness and a sense of purpose in the implementation of new programmes. Ideas, policies and execution form the trinity of good governance and thus of rapid growth. In other words, the nation needs to generate poverty-reduction growth – that is growth in which the poor participate and from which they benefit.

The Partition of India posed grave challenges for political management. Thanks to the vision and statesmanship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the country could secure integration of the princely states which then comprised a large territory of India. He accomplished this revolutionary act in a record time while continuing

### **Who continues to suffer?**

'It is true that in recent years economic power has gone to a small minority', says the author. With the help of your teacher or any other adult, can you identify social groups still trapped in illiteracy, disease and poverty? Why do they continue to suffer?

to remain on cordial terms with most of the former rulers. Without the integration of princely states it could not have been possible for India to become a cohesive nation or to emerge as the world's largest democracy.

The strengthening of the system of parliamentary democracy was another major challenge. It was Jawaharlal Nehru, who during seventeen years of Prime Ministership, laid strong foundations for institutions of democracy alongside building institutions of excellence in science and technology, space research, atomic energy, higher education and literature.

The passing away of leaders of the freedom struggle ensued decline of the Indian National Congress which had provided effective and transparent leadership to the country and its institutions during the 1947-67 era. Over recent decades, the Indian polity has entered into an era of coalition politics both at the centre and in several states. This requires greater understanding among coalition partners and regular interaction among all stakeholders. We are in urgent need of electoral reforms as well. The biggest challenge is how to encourage people of merit and commitment to join politics. The leadership of each party needs to be alive to it.

An independent and impartial judiciary and a free press are rendering invaluable services in polity management.

Another positive development is that a silent revolution among Indian women is taking place. A vibrant Indian democracy has ensured participation of 1.2 million elected women officials in the polity. The Indian economy is being supported by nearly a million active women micro-credit workers. Nearly half of the workforce in a country of 1 billion people is women.

It is true that much attention is centered on the achievements of women in politics and in the corporate sector. Thanks to better access to education and to micro-finance, the number of working women in villages

### **Equal pay for equal work?**

Women form nearly half of the work-force of our country. Do they get equal pay for equal work? Find out by talking to women workers in the unorganised sector.

and small towns is on the rise. Girls are performing better than boys in several schools and colleges. Women are proving to be good managers as they put their money and skill to more productive uses.

In recent years, it has been possible for us to create a large pool of technical and scientific talent, eradicate famines, and ensure democratic functioning in our society. Our space scientists and computer engineers, musicians and artists, film producers and actors, scholars and authors, social workers and women running self-financing institutions have shown excellence of the highest order.

Currently, we are living in a period of great turbulence. Terrorism, Naxalism and insurgencies, sectarian violence and narrowness, the politicisation of ethnic, caste and religious ties, economic hardships resulting from a lack of opportunities are causing enormous distress in our society. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, we have witnessed an acceleration in terrorist activities in many parts of the country.



*"We the women of India!"*: women's vibrant role in our democracy.

It is true that the government is battling with terrorism, insurgencies, separatism, and corruption. Some people, however, feel that such challenges to the Indian nation-state are much more serious than what is generally assessed through instruments of governance. Some people even think that the democratic system is noisy, messy and dilatory in handling terrorism. It is, however, my faith that in the long run democracy alone, through people's unity and determination, shall prevail over terrorist forces.

There are foreign policy challenges particularly with regard to relations with two of our neighbours: China and Pakistan.

In today's India, democracy supports inclusiveness (notwithstanding polarisation on caste and religious lines) and this would be furthered through education and availability of Internet facilities in the major languages of India. This will also mean better governance, a more informed society and market, and prosperity for our people.

We have to create and sustain an environment that will enable and encourage competition, efficiency and inclusion. Towards this, we need fresh ideas and new policies and programmes. And we need boldness and a sense of purpose to implement those policies and programmes. Dialogue, an essential pre-requisite of democracy, would ensure that.

Today, the renewal of India depends, more than in the past, upon the character, capability and perseverance of our youth—boys and girls—who constitute a sizable portion of our population. The future is what we make as a people. Our youth are indeed actuated by a strong desire to acquire education as well as skills and to build India into a major power in the world.

## Democratic politics

Did you know that democracy has gradually expanded throughout the world in the twentieth century? That is, there were many more countries with democratic governments in 2000 than there were in 1950 and 1900. Do you think democracy is better than other forms of government? If so, why? You might want to read *Democratic Politics I* and *II*, textbooks for Political Science in Classes IX and X while reflecting on these issues.

The fulfillment of this aspiration is closely linked to education. We have several institutions of excellence in science and technology, medicine and arts. But their number is limited and hardly meets either the demands of our students or of our ambition.

Much would also depend on the manner in which the elders would guide the youth to move into meaningful pursuits in order that their creativity gets full expression.

We also have to consciously work for building India as a knowledge society. We Indians have a long tradition of being a knowledge oriented people. This got stifled as we denied education to large sections of our society including women in the past. We also need to remember that valuable knowledge is also possessed by our farmers, and craftspersons, and workers, artists and philosophers, our mothers and grand-parents. At times this is in the form of our folklore and folktales, epics and traditions these too can be a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. In the era of globalisation, our traditional knowledge is required to be given a new orientation and a new language. In the coming decades, a strong knowledge society alone will secure respect for India in the comity of nations.

Despite tumults and turmoil, mutinies and scams, the democratic secular fabric of our country holds considerable promise for the future.

## INDIA OF THE FUTURE

I have been a keen student of India's history. I have found inadequacies in the traditional approach of understanding our country—that is, through a ruler-centric narrative of events. I have thus tried to hear the voices of saints and mystics, poets and sculptors, scientists and engineers, farmers and artisans. I have learnt more from the common people living in our villages than from others. I have also found that folklore and folk-tales are as important in understanding our nation as scientific inventions, economic processes and political events.

It is in this context that I find that respect for another person's view of truth with the hope and belief that he or she may perhaps be right has greatly contributed to the enrichment of Indian life. This has been best expressed in the Rig Veda: '*Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*': 'The truth is one, the sages describe it variously'.

I imagine that this approach of 'one truth, many expressions' was formulated by our *rishis* both in order to understand the complexities of the inter-relationships between natural objects and for harmonious living in society among people of multifarious beliefs and practices.

The *Bahudha* approach underlines equal respect for all points of view. It also calls for—and this is significant—the inculcation of habits of respect for, and consideration of, other people's point of view. Understanding the point of view of those with whom one profoundly disagrees is the first step towards learning to create a society which manages disagreement.

The rise of terrorism and fundamentalism in recent times has brought about phenomenal changes in global

### **Precept and Reality**

*Bahudha* means 'celebration of diversity'. In your opinion can it be observed in day-to-day life and also in International Relations?

politics. These unprecedented challenges call for new, bold, and imaginative statecraft from the world's leaders. The Bahudha approach, a dialogue of harmony and peaceful living, thus becomes imperative in our times. In this context, we have to look at the central role of education afresh and consciously use religious tolerance in the building of a harmonious society. It is also necessary to strengthen the United Nations so that it becomes an effective global mechanism of conflict resolution.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, I wonder about the kind of India my grand-children and generations to come thereafter will inherit. The emergence of India as a global player in the coming years is visible. Also visible is a greater awareness of India's cultural heritage on the part of both Indians and the world at large. In 1915 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy had reflected:

Each race contributes something essential to the world's civilisation in the course of its own self-expression.....the essential contribution of India, is simply her Indianness; her great humiliation would be to substitute or to have substituted for this own character (*svabhava*) a cosmopolitan veneer, for then indeed she must come before the world empty-handed.

The developments in India, particularly since 1947, give me confidence that in the new millennium, we will not face the world empty-handed whether in terms of civilisational attainments or economic strength.

A significant feature of India's cultural attitude is that while absorbing the teachings of its ancestors it has also aligned itself with contemporary global trends. The Indian personality does not take interest only in Buddha, Gandhi and Tagore but also learns from Shakespeare, Beethoven, Bach, Tolstoy and other philosophers and artists. In the past too Indians have learnt from values and traditions of others and also participated in them.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted all of us to 'work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice;

an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony'.

India has all the ingredients of becoming a just society and a dynamic nation-state: economic, military and cultural strength as well as a large body of young people. What is needed is that all of us should try hard and move forward with earnestness through democratic processes.

Democracy is at the heart of governance in India. Election after election, the people are asserting their voice, changing their representatives and governments in the States and also at the Centre. This phenomenon supported by civil society groups, the media and an active judiciary has ushered in demands for accountability of the executive. Democracy has really moved beyond periodic elections towards 'good' governance.

Good governance does not occur by chance. It must be demanded by citizens and nourished explicitly and consciously by the nation-state. It is, therefore, necessary that the citizens are allowed to participate freely, openly and fully in the political process. The citizens must have the right to compete for office, form political parties and enjoy civil liberties including all fundamental rights.

*Good governance  
must be demanded  
by citizens: women  
asking for justice.*



Good governance is accordingly associated with accountable political leadership, enlightened policymaking and a civil service imbued with a professional ethos. The presence of a strong civil society including a free press and independent judiciary are pre-conditions for good governance.

The world looks to India with respect for the manner in which we have permitted and practised a plural society. Our experience, in turn, should make us more concerned about our minorities and the weaker sections of our society. We must realize that only a democratic, secular India will command the trust of our own people, and also of the world.

The health and robustness of a civilisation may be judged by its capacity to challenge and jettison the rituals and practices, opinions and beliefs which stifle progress and create divisions. The Indian civilisation has shown its resilience from time to time.

It is my belief that as long as Indian society and polity encourage creative minds in the literatures and arts, science and technology, and give primacy to democratic institutions, to inclusivity and justice, India's age-old cultural strength would continue to be renewed. In order to achieve this objective, we have to consciously and continuously work to make India a place, as Rabindranath Tagore visualised, 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high'.

I also believe that like individuals, countries too have their destinies. India's emergence as a significant global power is full of promise. Tomorrow's India will be a country free of the scourges of poverty and illiteracy.

## The India of my dreams

In an essay entitled, 'The India of My Dreams', Gandhiji wrote: 'I shall work for an India, in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability... Women will enjoy the same rights as men...!'

What is the India of your dreams? And how can we attain it? Think of writing an essay explaining the new India you wish to create and send it to the author at [rajyapal22@yahoo.in](mailto:rajyapal22@yahoo.in).

I am still learning about India. At times, India's history, its achievements and failings make me happy; at other times I feel angry. But I always feel proud, not in any 'narrow' nationalistic sense, which in itself is significant, but in the wider sense of values that India provides to her children: a simple living, family ties, tolerance for other points of view, spiritual quest and respect for ecology.



### Precept and reality

In your opinion, do Indians lead a simple life, have harmonious families, tolerate other points of view and respect ecology?

## BASIC FACTS ABOUT INDIA

**Country Name** : Republic of India; Bharat Ganrajya

**Nature of State** : Sovereign Socialist Democratic Republic with a Parliamentary system of Government

**Motto** : “Satyameva Jayate” (Sanskrit) “Truth Alone Triumphs”

**National Flag**



**National Emblem**



**National Anthem** : *Jana Gana Mana*

**National Song** : *Vande Mataram*

**Geographic Coordinates** : Between  $8^{\circ} 4'$  and  $37^{\circ} 6'$  N of the Equator, and  $68^{\circ} 7'$  and  $97^{\circ} 25'$  S longitudes east.

**International Borders**

: Afghanistan and Pakistan to the north-west; China, Bhutan and Nepal to the north; Myanmar and Bangladesh to the east; and in the south Sri Lanka is separated from India by a narrow channel of sea, formed by Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar.

**Area**

: 3,287,240 Sq Km

**Capital**

: New Delhi

**Administrative Units**

: 29 States and 7 Union Territories

**Independence Day**

: 15<sup>th</sup> August

**Republic Day**

: 26<sup>th</sup> January

**Population**

: Persons—1,21,01,93,42  
(as per 2011 Census)  
Males : 62,37,24,248  
Females : 58,64,69,174  
Population density :  
382 Persons/Sq Km  
Sex ratio : 940 Females/  
1000 Males

**Literacy rate**

: 74.04 %  
(as per 2011 census)  
Male : 82.14 %  
Female : 65.46 %

**GDP**

: Total \$1.859 Trillion  
(World Bank Report  
2012)

<b>Official Language of the Union</b>	: Hindi (in Devanagri Script). English shall also be used (Art. 343 of the Constitution)
<b>Official languages</b> (under 8 <sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution)	: 22; Assamese (Axomiya), Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri (also Meitei), Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.
<b>Major religions</b>	: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Animism, Judaism Zoroastrianism and many other beliefs.
<b>Major communities</b>	: 4635 communities were identified as per “People of India Project” of Anthropological Survey of India.

## GLOSSARY

(The words are glossed to the context in which they appear in the supplementary reader)

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Augmentation    | - increase, growth, rise   |
| Antiquity       | - long past  |
| Amply           | - fully, sufficiently  |
| Allegory        | - story, tale, fable or a narrative which are interpreted to reveal hidden meaning |
| Afoot           | - happening, going on  |
| Cohesion        | - unity, putting together  |
| Catalyze        | - to bring about a change  |
| Dissemination   | - distribution, spreading  |
| Dialects        | - sub-languages of a language  |
| Expeditious     | - speedy, quick, prompt  |
| Expedition      | - journey, voyage  |
| Execute         | - carry-out, perform   |
| Ethnographer    | - one who writes a scientific description of peoples, their culture, customs       |
| Ethnicity       | - relating to a group of people of common tradition                                |
| Eminence        | - fame, reputation   |
| Formidable      | - redoubtable  |
| Gentry          | - class of people below the rank of nobility                                       |
| Hoary antiquity | - ancient times, the distant past  |
| Irrationalities | - illogical, senseless   |
| Introspection   | - examination of one's own thoughts  |
| Intermingling   | - mixture, combination   |
| Insurgency      | - rebellion, uprising, revolt  |

Indomitable	- strong, resolute, determined
Inadequacies	- shortage, lack of, scanty
Iconoclast	- destroyer of images
Myriad	- many, numerous
Multifarious	- diverse, varied
Multicultural	- comprising of different cultural groups
Millennia	- a thousand years
Macro	- economic entrepreneurship – large scale, private enterprise
Naxalism	- left wing militant movement which believes in armed struggle
Observationist	- scrutinizer, examiner, to inspect
Political realm	- political area/sphere of influence
Polarization	- split into opposing camps
Pioneering	- original, new, ground-breaking
Pilgrimage	- journey to a holy place
Periphery	- border, margin
Perceptively	- understanding, thoughtful
Resurgence	- revival, reappearance, recovery
Repression	- domination, cruelty
Rendering pantheon	- collection of deities/powerful individuals
Stratification	- forming a layer, layered
Stiffened	- rigid, difficult
Secularism	- non-religious
Sovereign	- supreme/independent
Tumultuous	- noisy, confused, chaotic, disorderly
Unravel	- untie, loosen, untangle
Unitarian	- (in Christian theology) unity of gods
Unprecedented	- unique, exceptional, unmatched
Yeomen	- common man

## **NOTES**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **Balmiki Prasad Singh**

(b. 1942)

Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh, currently Governor of Sikkim, is a distinguished scholar, thinker and public servant. He did his MA in Political Science from Patna University and became a lecturer at the age of nineteen at the same University.

Shri Singh has been a member of the Indian Administrative Service and held several positions including that of Union Home Secretary, Union Culture Secretary and Executive Director and Ambassador at the World Bank, Washington DC. He has also been Chancellor of the Central University of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, and a Mahatma Gandhi National Fellow.

His recent publications are *Bahudha and the Post-9/11 World* (OUP, Delhi, 2010) and *India's Culture: the State, the Arts and Beyond* 2nd Edition (OUP, Delhi, 2010).

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