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INDIA: FIFTEEN YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

FOR FIFTEEN YEARS India has made a constructive endeavour to nurture a new-born democracy. For fifteen years it has striven for peace through non-alignment, so that planned development to eradicate poverty and to establish social justice may be fruitful.

The Chinese invasion over the Himalayas shattered several illusions in India—an ill-equipped army with a proud tradition humiliated in NEFA; *Panch Shila* buried under a treacherous avalanche; the wisdom of non-alignment doubted; and the sophisticated moral confusion of pseudo-intellectuals clarified. It had, in fact, touched something deep in the subconscious of India, where the memory of old invasions through the narrow passes in the North-West lives like a spectre. Now the entire 2,500-mile-long frontier in the North was open to wilful aggression by an invader far more powerful and better equipped than the horsemen of old. So while self-righteous men in high places, hypnotized by their theories, and small men, turned away by the insolence of office, rubbed their eyes to watch the incredible, the common people rose with electrified spontaneity, and Hamlets among the leaders were driven to a decision.

Although on November 20, 1962, Mao-Tze-Tung announced, unilaterally, the cessation of hostilities, the ominous shadow of the Chinese dragon will continue to lie across the Indo-Gangetic plain for a long time. A dark curtain has been drawn over the mushy magnanimity of *Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai*, and the sanctimonious posturing by the Indian spokesmen has yielded place to a sobering self-examination. After the night of excessive romanticism, India faces a cold grey dawn. Such a moment compels reflection, and an effort is made here to look at India's problems in an historical perspective, to evaluate its achievements since Independence, to gauge difficulties, and to visualize future trends.

Modern India is a puzzling paradox, for here the old is not discarded and the

new is not refused. Look at the main artery of an Indian city: leisurely ox-carts, overloaded donkeys, rattling *tongas*, dexterous cyclists, brightly painted rickshaws, gleaming *de luxe* cars and a stream of lively pedestrians in a colourful variety of dress—a crowded, noisy, picturesque medley. This is not without some resemblance to India's mind: deep down a strong foundation of most imaginative mythology; sturdy tissues of Vedantic and Buddhist thought; austere strands of Islamic monotheism; a thin layer of Western thought; and everywhere rich deposits of life's experience ready, with its rapture and despair, to give tender sensitivity to art and literature.

This conglomeration has its roots in India's history, for various people who came to the country have left behind their patterns of thought. Alexander the Great may not have left any abiding influence of the Hellenic culture behind him, but the Moghuls brought with them a rigorous monotheism, advocating a society without caste and priestcraft; they spread its message with a fervent, proselytizing zeal, rendered more effective by the sword. Although the efforts to build a synthesis between Islam and the colourful culture and sophisticated philosophy of the Hindus produced a number of eclectic thinkers, including Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, the continued emphasis by the Muslims on the distinctive cohesion and comprehensiveness of their culture ultimately enabled Jinnah and the Muslim League to establish Pakistan.

For over two hundred years the cultures of the East and the West have interacted upon each other in India. The impact of science has been added where religion and philosophy have for long held sway. Here also have met the ideologies of capitalism and communism, their edges very much frayed, but their mutual disdain undiminished.

English education made accessible to the Indian not only the freedom-inspiring works of Milton and Mill, Shelley and Paine, but also the entire treasury of European thought—the delightful exuberance of the Renaissance, the triumph of scientific enquiry against the dogma of the Church, the passionate outburst of the Revolution, the cumbersome majesty of German thought, and the rise of socialism and trade unionism. As the Indian struggle for freedom gathered momentum, it acquired, with increasing force, contents of economic thinking and social reform largely popularized by the Russian Revolution. But the national movement remained rooted in its own cultural past, as it had acquired its inspiration from Vedanta and the Gita. Furthermore, thanks to the Gandhian method of non-violence and the victory of the Allies in the last war, India achieved independence without any serious disruption either of the crazy-quilt pattern of its society or of the thinly-spread but

efficient administrative apparatus established by the British. And no Indian leader of any influence has endeavoured, in the spurt of enthusiasm for the new, to relegate the old to the museum as Mao-Tze-Tung has done with Confucius and much of old China.

The influence of all these forces is obvious in modern India; it is most conspicuous in the Indian Constitution. In the Preamble, for instance, the concepts of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, popularized by the French Revolution, stand out prominently. But pride of place is given to social, economic, and political Justice, concepts which acquired special impetus from the Russian Revolution. But only the principles are borrowed from the West; following Gandhi, India sought their implementation through persuasion and common consent rather than violence. The Preamble, furthermore, envisages a society which provides fullest "liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship"; more than that, it emphasizes the dignity of the individual. The Indian Constitution, therefore, while it reflects the modern shift from the individual to the community, does not ignore the individual. In fact, it endeavours, through a distinctive scheme of fundamental rights, to harmonize the individual interest with the interest of the community, so that the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity may become a living reality.

The paradox of the old and the new jostling each other in India, however, often leads to some incredible anomalies. Here is a scientist leaning over a microscope and right opposite, behind a haze of incense, a statue of Saraswati with floral offerings. A shrewd financier makes a fervent prayer to the goddess Lakshmi before leaving the house for the stock exchange. A distinguished ambassador refuses to take an important decision without consulting his astrologer. And a Tensing, on conquering the proud summit of Mount Everest, does not plant a flag on it; he digs into his pocket for the offerings he has carried for the gods who dwell there. Moral and ethical values in India rest so securely on the lap of the Eternal that no Kant is needed to safeguard them in the *a priori* realm, beyond the prying impertinence of science. The scientific method is eagerly accepted, but its application to social problems is resisted with quiet tenacity.

This jostling of the old and the new often leads to disconcerting social consequences. India has a profound reverence for life, and yet crowds pass by human and animal suffering with amazing indifference. Asceticism is greatly admired, and yet India is a veritable sink for gold and its ingenuity for conspicuous consumption is unrivalled. The producing masses in the country live on the brink of bankruptcy, and yet they must support no less than five million religious vagabonds and parasites.

Millions of useless cattle continue to consume scarce fodder, and yet not even a Nehru, with all his moderism and adoration of science, can venture to suggest that they might be slaughtered for much-needed food. Although a concept of collective social action to solve India's problems has become popular, the Indian mind tends to become world-weary—Aurobindo Ghosh, a militant revolutionary, turned his back on the world to seek peace in an *ashram* at Pondicherry; M. N. Roy, a polit-bureau comrade of Lenin, dissolved his Social Democratic Party to devote himself to individual enlightenment through humanism; and J. P. Narayan, an avowed socialist, refuses to associate himself with any political party and seeks peace with Vinoba Bhave!

No wonder a successful leader in India has to be both a revered Mahatma and a shrewd politician, both a large-hearted philosopher and a calculating *banya*. Gandhi's immense success, in fact, was largely due to the fact that he was a conservative revolutionary, an orthodox rebel. And, a triumphant paradox, he continued to dominate the Indian National Congress long after he ceased to be a dues-paying member of it, and therefore disqualified from holding office.

Although the eclectic and pragmatic approach adopted by modern India towards a solution of economic and social problems often looks muddled, it appears to be most suited to it. The heterogeneous Indian society learned early in its history that accommodation of differences was essential for survival. As to its pragmatic aspect, the British have left it behind as a secret of their success.

India, furthermore, is evolutionary rather than revolutionary in attitude. Hindu philosophy has taught that man can neither break away completely from his past which he carries within himself, nor jump from sin to salvation in a sudden flight. He must evolve, therefore, from a lower to a higher state through intelligent effort.

During the struggle for freedom, for instance, the Congress Party had drawn together divergent elements—feudal landlords, rich industrialists, and well-bred socialists. The immaculate *khadi* gave them all a clean bill of political health, and a short spell in jail could provide the necessary prestige. If it meant all things to all people before Independence, it has managed to maintain the same trend comparatively unimpaired. And without any clear-cut economic and social policy, it has forged ahead with amazing success. Perhaps it is due to its abundant political experience that ideological conflicts have been conspicuously absent during India's three general elections, which returned the Congress Party to power each time with a vast majority. All Congress coins proudly displayed the enshrined image of Gandhi and

Nehru; they stood for national unity, social and economic progress, a secular state, and democracy. Who could oppose such a platform?

This eclectic and evolutionary approach is even more conspicuous in India's economic policy and development planning. Firstly, the socialist pattern which India aims to establish is a society "without caste, class or privilege, which offers to every section of the community the opportunity to grow and to contribute to the national well-being"; this is sufficiently vague to accommodate a variety of views. Secondly, the method employed for its attainment seems to be designed not to alienate excessively any influential group within the country. In fact, the most fascinating feature of the Indian brand of socialism is its delightful vagueness. "We do not define it", assured Pandit Nehru, "nor dogmatize about it. But we do feel strongly that the first objective should be the good of the people of India." Who could disagree? Shades of Jeremy Bentham rather than the messianic assertions of Karl Marx! Under this socialism, however, the poor may not have grown poorer, but the rich have certainly grown richer. The mixed economy, India's method of attaining socialism, nourishes the private sector well enough to enable it to retain its customary sleekness and induces intelligent capitalists to keep at least one foot in the Congress camp. Even foreign investment in India, after a degree of initial disinvestment following Independence, increased from Rs. 2,560 million at the end of June, 1948, to Rs. 6,910 million at the end of December, 1960.¹

Furthermore, it has obviously enabled the country to win the co-operation of a large number of countries with conflicting ideologies towards the implementation of its development plans. Foreign loans for which agreements were signed for the First Plan amounted to a total of Rs. 2,337.7 million, which included Rs. 1,117.4 million from the U.S.A. and Rs. 647.2 million from the U.S.S.R.; corresponding figures for the Second Plan were Rs. 12,958.1 million, Rs. 3,455.7 million and Rs. 3,190.7 million. The grant authorized for the purpose by foreign countries up to July 31, 1962, amounted to a total of Rs. 2,860.4 million, which included Rs. 1,571.4 from the U.S.A. and Rs. 11.5 million from Russia. In addition, other forms of aid from the U.S.A. (commodity assistance and third-country currency assistance) authorized by the same date, amounted to Rs. 12,414.7 million.²

Fifteen years! A fleeting moment in the long history of India and yet a most eventful moment experienced by the people of the country. A democratic republic established where an oppressive tradition of autocratic rule has by no means vanished into a dim past; a secular state made operative in spite of deep-rooted loyalties to caste and community; and the establishment of social justice and equality made a

cardinal principle of government policy. More than that, effective machinery for planned development organized to implement a series of plans woven, with meticulous care, into the complex social and economic pattern of a mixed economy.

In the short span of fifteen years India has achieved much: the country united through a quick integration of over 600 princely states; some eighty million persons, displaced by Partition, absorbed; three nation-wide free elections efficiently organized and fairly conducted; young democracy provided with a root system in the village *panchayats*; untouchability banned and compulsory education extended; economic growth maintained at a rate of 4.5 per cent per year and life expectancy increased from 32 to 47 years; the race between population and food supply not lost to Malthus; and, above all, an open society established where Indians can, and do, indulge in a free expression of their views.

Perhaps the most promising step for the country was the establishment of the Planning Commission in 1950. As a result of its efforts during the decade 1951-61 national income increased 42% and per capita income 16% (from \$60. to \$69.); agricultural production rose 41% and industrial production 94%. The third Plan (1961-66) sets out to achieve as much in five years as has been accomplished during the past ten, its basic aims being a growth rate of over 5%, self-sufficiency in grain production, and the expansion of domestic industrial capacity to make India in a decade or so largely independent of foreign aid for its industrial development.

India has made a bold effort to improve life in rural areas, where poverty is appalling—20% of all households own no land, and another 25% own less than an acre. Its programme for community development, designed not only to improve material conditions but also to imbue villagers with the desire and the will to live a full life, is creating a new awakening. By the end of 1961 the national farm extension and community development service covered 370,000 villages and over 200 million people.³

Although Indian women had made a dramatic entry into public life by joining Mahatma Gandhi's freedom campaigns, and equal rights with men, based on suffering equally borne, could not be denied to them, independent India consolidated their gains by giving them statutory equality with men both politically and, through inheritance rights, socially. The Special Marriage Act of 1954, which provided civil marriage for all Indians, fixed the age of marrying at 21 years for the groom and 18 years for the bride and requires no declaration of religion. A similar act (1956), covering Hindus only, retains the religious marriage ceremony; it has kept the minimum ages at 18 and 15 respectively, and it enforces monogamy and provides for separation and nullity.

In spite of these impressive achievements, however, India is faced with immense difficulties, aggravated by the Chinese aggression. It has advocated peace and yet must be prepared for war. It has promised the people a welfare state and yet must devote an increasing share of its national resources to defence and development investment.

Although production has increased considerably during the last fifteen years, the growth of population, 9 million a year at present, has absorbed over half of this increase. And in the next fifteen years, even with the nation-wide family planning programme adumbrated in the Third Plan, the net addition is expected to be 187 million—the size of the entire population of the U.S.A.!

Apart from these material difficulties, there are mental conflicts. On the one hand, India clings to its picturesque past without feeling its oppressive weight, and, on the other, it plans to establish in a few decades a dynamic, prosperous society. This is a process which it took Europe, under more favourable conditions, some 300 years to achieve.

There is a romantic idealization of the simple village life to which all good men must return. Actually, village life in India is so hedged about by economic want, so torn by factional rivalries, and so bound by stultifying customs that everybody with initiative and ambition tries to escape from it. The reality is closer to Hobbes than to Rousseau, and a Crabbe rather than a Goldsmith could depict it with fidelity.

India adores its heritage of spiritual values: spirituality has been closely allied to poverty, and saints are generally painted with lean, cadaverous bodies and delicate, luminous eyes. But modern progress, so earnestly sought by India, is based on material advancement.

India's eclectic approach towards economic development, furthermore, has its own problems. Can the mixed economy be kept mixed, and for how long? Perhaps the most pressing current problems are how to make the growing public sector responsible economically; how to make the prosperous private sector responsible socially; and how to keep both free from nepotism and corruption. And, in the interest of the future, how to win over the growing cadres of bureaucrats, technicians, economists, and managerial personnel, as well as the emergent lower middle class, to the ideal and purpose of modernization through the democratic process.

National unity in India had been nurtured during its fight for freedom. Soon after Independence, however, a number of corrosive factors, such as communalism, regionalism based on language, and other common local interests, began to undermine it. Of these, the most nefarious, no doubt, is communalism, because, like an

iceberg, only a small fraction of it is seen in the form of active political parties (e.g., Jan Sangh, Akali Dal, and the Muslim League), and the bulk of it remains hidden in the historic consciousness of the community which keeps it afloat. The real danger, however, lies in the fact that the majority community is quick to find communalism reprehensible in minority communities, but is not fully aware of the force with which it is sustained by its own subconscious. This is what makes the eradication of communalism by genuine secularists like Pandit Nehru most difficult.

For the time being, however, the Chinese invasion has given India a new and urgent sense of unity. Whatever the motives behind the invasion—the expansionism of a rising power, the ideological fanaticism of a political party in isolation, the desire to boost prestige or to discredit the democratic method for solving the economic problems in underdeveloped countries—some of its effects are quite clear. Its first casualty was the Communist Party of India. The acidic, blustering Krishna Menon, whose neutralism was more neutral towards the Communist countries than towards Western democracies, had to leave the Ministry of Defence. And the Conservatives, riding on the wave of patriotic fervour, have acquired greater influence.

The invasion falsified India's political calculations. The *Panch Shila* theorists had cherished the belief that Communist China would not commit open aggression against India; in fact, Pakistan was considered the principal enemy. The invasion brought home the realization that in case of a massive attack from the North, an effective defence of the Indo-Gangetic plain would require cooperation between Pakistan and India. And negotiations had to be opened to reconcile the differences between the two.

In addition, the invasion has shattered a number of social and political myths deeply rooted in the country's mind. Indian leaders have sung paeans of praise for the peace which has existed between India and China for thousands of years. But India and Europe also lived at peace so long as the seas remained a barrier between them.

China's attack also exploded the myth of Afro-Asian unity which, in fact, has been fostered largely by the common aspiration to be free of European domination. Independent Afro-Asian countries, faced with stubborn social and economic problems at home, think primarily of their own national interests and behave no differently from their neighbours in the West. In fact, Indians are disliked only a little less than the Chinese in most of Asia and East Africa. Very few countries anywhere are exempt from racialism in some form.

Although peace is the declared aim of every state, including those that seek it through nuclear armaments, India seems to be obsessed with the idea that it is the chosen nation to promote peace. As a result, sanctimonious moral posturing on the subject comes to its leaders with an effortless ease, and sometimes India's best friends find it difficult to control their irritation. It is true that a fortunate combination of the Gandhian philosophy with the political wisdom of the British enabled India to secure independence without going through the moral agony and the material devastation of Algeria, Indo-China, or Indonesia. But can the blind fury of violence generated by the Partition really be dissociated from independence? How was the Nizam of Hyderabad made to see the beauty of integration? Could the Valley of Kashmir be retained by India without effective armed intervention? And can the surgery on Goa be defended merely on the ground that the stroke was smooth and swift?

But the confusion is not only moral; it has led to tragic consequences on the battlefield. Although India's armed forces were ill-prepared to meet the Chinese invader, there was no lack of moral sophistry to reconcile high ideals with the need of the hour. India's philosopher-President assured the nation that "our resistance is to be carried out without ill-will or hatred It is resistance to evil without violence in our minds and hatred in our hearts." Was it necessary to examine the hearts and the minds of Indian *Jawans* reeling under the attack? Alternatively, is it difficult to imagine the fate of a Gandhi brigade facing the juggernaut of Chinese formations with hands folded gracefully and hearts overflowing with love? It seems that neutralism, unless backed by a strong force, cannot lead to peace.

India's policy of non-alignment, to the extent that it means "simply non-adherence to military pacts or alliances with other countries", seems to have been vindicated, largely because of the changed political context. On the one hand, Moscow had developed serious differences with Peking and, on the other, efforts were being made to bring it closer to Washington. It is true that in several Asian countries military alliances had increased tension, endangered political stability, diverted foreign assistance to military activity rather than economic development, and undermined democracy. But can one remain non-aligned in the face of an invasion, when the national sovereignty itself is endangered? And after receiving massive economic and military assistance from powerful benefactors, it takes a very subtle mind and an obdurate will to maintain non-alignment, except in the narrow literal sense of not signing a military pact.

The most severe impact of the invasion must be borne by India's development planning, for peace was the major premise of its social and economic policy. In the

new situation India must continue to devote its energies and resources to the eradication of mass poverty and the establishment of social justice; but it can no longer ignore the third imperative—the safeguarding of national security. It is not surprising, therefore, that 50% of the 1963-64 budget of the Union is devoted to defence. And it is maintained that the Third Plan, which was already in difficulties, is not to be whittled down. This poses serious problems of resources.

The Indian economy has reached the stage at which foreign exchange resources have become crucial. These can be secured either by increasing exports, which is a formidable task, or through foreign aid, which is already substantial.⁴ In any event, the rate of domestic savings (7% in the First Plan, 8.5% in the Second) during the Third Plan is proposed to be 12% of the national income, and is expected to increase to 15% by the end of the Plan. This would require, apart from the cooperation of the population, a number of control measures and regulations. The existing disparities in incomes in India would be difficult to justify in social terms. Would they be maintained, even accentuated, in the name of economic growth and mobilization for defence?

In order to visualize the future, the most important factor is to know what is in the mind of Mao-Tze-Tung. Although China has alienated many Communists as a result of its bitter feud with Russia, in Asia it has taken Tibet, brought part of Korea and Viet-Nam into its orbit, and acquired new influence in Burma, Cambodia, and Pakistan. India, on the other hand, although assured of assistance from Western democracies and, to a certain extent, from Russia, has not been able to reconcile its differences with Pakistan. And, in case of a major attack by the Chinese, the defence of India would be almost impossible without a rapprochement with Pakistan. In the meantime, the impact of the Chinese invasion has accentuated the pinch of economic want; its continued threat is bound to make the people more restive.

Even though India is one of the most conservative and authority-ridden countries in the world, it continues to change rapidly. Although the memory of Gandhi is greatly revered, India is moving away from the Gandhian heritage towards large-scale industry, efficient armed forces, and contraceptives. Nehru, worshipped as a demi-god for over thirty years, has just faced his first non-confidence motion in the *Lokh Sabha*.

As one looks ahead, there is both promise and pessimism. There are numerous imponderables, and uncertainty creates suspense. India's experiment to bring about economic development and social change through peaceful means is as vast

as it is unique. In spite of many setbacks and shortcomings, it is most encouraging to see a society of some 440 million people in a country where modern forces of democracy, individualism, and science from the West have had a creative interplay with the spiritual heritage of an old culture for almost two centuries, proceeding, through trial and error, to provide a minimum of bread and hope to all its people, so that, in time, a full realization of both material and spiritual possibilities may be enjoyed by them.

NOTES

1. H. V. R. Jengar, "The Present Crisis and Import of Private Foreign Capital", *Commerce*, Bombay, 1962 Annual Number, Vol. CV., No. 2697, Dec. 1962, p. 32.
2. R. R. Morarka, "Place of Foreign Aid in India's Economic Development", *Ibid.*, p. 45.
3. Statistics in this section are taken from Government of India: Planning Commission, *Towards a Self-Reliant Economy* (Dec., 1961).
4. Out of a total of \$15,750 million available for the Third Plan, internal resources are estimated to contribute a total of \$11,130 million (30% from taxes, 19% from public loans and small savings, 7% from net capital receipts, 7% from public enterprises, and 7% from deficit financing) and foreign assistance a total of \$4,620 million (29%). *Ibid.*, p. 18.