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## India's Survival and Evolution as a Complex Modern Nation-State

### Summary and Analysis – Part I: The Early Stages

Although numerous events have shaped India as a modern nation-state, a few key moments stand out. In 1601, British East India Company first set foot in India and grew in influence over the next two centuries in the name of trade. Slowly, the 'British Raj' spread from present-day Afghanistan to Burma. As the policies of mercantilism and imperialism continued, the first signs of Indian resentment to British rule were evident with the failed Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. As a direct result, the control over India officially transferred to Great Britain and ended the reign of the Mughal Empire, which had ruled over the subcontinent from 1526 to 1857. The next century was defined by India's growing resistance to the British rule and increasing demand for self-government. Several leaders and freedom fighters fought and died for independence, which eventually came on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947. The independence came at a costly loss, though—The Partition of India. The Partition created two sovereign states—India and Pakistan and resulted in approximately 2 million deaths, 15 million displaced people, and a bitter relationship between the neighbors. Coming at a backdrop of civil unrest and with a monumental task of leading a united India ahead of them, critics and scholars did not give India much chance. Ramachandra Guha highlights why India survives seven decades later in his exhilarating and illuminative work, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. In Part I of "India's Survival and Evolution as a Complex Modern Nation-State," significant moments in

India's early democracy will be discussed—the drafting of the Indian Constitution, integrating the princely states, administering the first democratic elections, and stimulating the economy. In Part II, foreign policy, threats to internal democracy and external security, and elements of national unity will be reviewed. Prime Minister Nehru was the face of independent India and under his leadership for sixteen years, universal adult suffrage and regular fair elections became the norm, higher education was established, a socialist economy was created, the debates on linguistic states was settled, and a bold non-alignment stance was taken amidst the Cold War.

The realization of independence was an achievement in itself but a vision needed to be established. Was India going to be a democracy? In Germany and Italy respectively, the contemporaries of India's founding fathers had yielded Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini out of democracies (MJ Akbar's interview). The USSR, China, North Korea, and Vietnam had accepted communism. The western world had already experimented with several forms of governments in the past 150 years with the US, French, British, and Soviet systems. Additionally, the British rule had caused widespread poverty and prolonged decades of economic decline. In order to revive growth, was this nation going to have a free-market private enterprise, socialist, communist, or a mixed economy? India's pride lies with its vast diversity, but competing languages, cultures, castes, religions, ethnicities posed several possible conflicts. Creating the idea of India and drafting a constitution of this complex nation was going to be a tough task. In order to consider these monumental issues, monumental individuals came to the fore. The Constituent Assembly included delegates from all around the country, affiliated with the Indian National Congress, the remnant of the Muslim League (after Partition), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, right wing Hindu fundamentalists), Scheduled Tribes Federation, the Communist Party of India, socialists and represented "low-caste groups," "religious minorities,"

women, “linguistic minorities,” the princely states, and other interests. (Guha 116-117). The delegates “had to adjudicate among thousands of competing claims and demands,” to draft a Constitution at the “backdrop of food shortages, religious riots, refugee resettlement, class war, and feudal intransigence” (117). The chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and the Father of the Indian Constitution was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit (untouchable) lawyer who had studied from London School of Economics and Columbia. Other key figures included Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad (president of the Constituent Assembly), Maulana Azad, K.M. Munshi, A.K. Iyer, B.N. Rau, and S.N. Mukherjee among several others, who brought with them “moral vision, political skill, and legal acumen” (118-119). In terms of the system of governance, ‘village panchayats’ were set aside, the “American presidential system” and the “Swiss method of directly electing cabinet minister” were considered and rejected,” proportional representation was “never taken very seriously,” and ultimately, they settled on a form of the “British model” (119). The Parliament would consist of the lower and upper house, where the lower house would be elected by universal adult franchise, and the upper house by state legislatures. The cabinet was to be headed by the Prime Minister, while the President was to be the head of the state and commander-in-chief (with no real powers). In addition, an independent election commission, impartial judiciary, and a “complex system of fiscal federalism,” were established, along with “Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles” and a system of checks and balances (120). The debate on organizing India on linguistic states was postponed because of the fear of further Balkanization after the creation of Pakistan. After heated debates, it was decided that the ‘official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagri script,’ but for fifteen years, the “English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union” (131). Separate electorates for Muslims and

women were considered and rejected, but constitutional “reservation[s] for untouchables” and adibasis (tribals) were put in place (125-128). After the framework of the Constitution was established, on November 25, 1949, Dr. Ambedkar provided “three warnings about the future” in a marvelous speech (132). He cautioned against the “place of popular protest in a democracy,” violent and non-violent, warned of “unthinking submission to charismatic authority,” and urged citizens to “not be content with what he called ‘mere political democracy’” (132-33). These warnings are still applicable and just as important to the Republic of India, seventy years after its inception. On January 26, 1950, after toiling for three years, the longest constitution in the world was ratified with 395 Articles and twelve schedules (now more than 100 amendments and other changes) establishing “India as an ‘independent sovereign republic’ guaranteeing its citizens ‘justice, social, economic and political; equality of status; of opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality’ – all this while assuring that “adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and depressed and other backward classes”” (117). All in all, as historian Granville Austin states, the “framing of the Indian constitution was ‘perhaps the greatest political venture since that originated in Philadelphia in 1787’” (134).

While the Constitution provided legal basis of nationhood, actually uniting the nation was another problem. In 1947, India was an assortment of territory ruled directly by the British along with 565 princely states that were autonomous and had independent treaties with the British government. When the British left India, the princely states had the choice to sign the Instrument of Accession to India, Pakistan, or, theoretically, remain independent. The task of the integration of princely states was given to India’s astute Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and his secretary, V.P. Menon. In order to gain faith of the princes, delegates from the princely states

were invited in the Constituent Assembly to help form the Constitution. On 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1947, Viceroy Lord Mountbatten gave an important speech to the Chamber of Princes, trying to persuade them to accede to either the Dominions of India or Pakistan. In the speech, he stressed that the “British would no longer protect or patronize them, and that independence for them was a mirage” (57). Furthermore, he emphasized that if they signed the Instrument of Accession before 15<sup>th</sup> August, they would get “decent terms with the Congress;” otherwise, a more “explosive situation” might arise later. In order to persuade the princes, Patel and Menon would go to these princes one by one in a “process of give and take [that] involved much massaging of egos” and “tortuous negotiations with the rulers” (58). Patel negotiated that for the princely states to “merge with the Union of India,” the princes would be “allowed to retain their titles and would be offered an annual allowance in perpetuity” (58). In exchange for this ‘privy purse,’ the government would receive proportionally generated revenue and land. The Privy Purse would continue till 1971 until the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment abolished it under Indira Gandhi’s government. By the end of the tiring negotiations, “in a mere two years, 500 autonomous and sometimes ancient chiefdoms had been dissolved into fourteen new administrative units of India” by “wisdom, foresight, [and] hardwork” of Patel and Menon (59).

Although most of the states had peacefully acceded to the Union, the integration of six princely states was troublesome. Before independence, Travancore, Bhopal, and Jodhpur were reluctant to join the Union, while Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir caused problems (and Kashmir, to this day, still does) after independence. Travancore was strategically located at the extreme southern tip of India, “had the most highly educated populace in India,” “a thriving maritime trade,” and “reserves of monazite” (important for atomic energy) (60). The diwan (or chief minister) of the state was Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, and he insisted on Travancore being

an independent nation, like “Denmark, Switzerland, and Siam” (60). He had already started negotiating with Pakistan and Britain to be recognized as an independent state. On 27 July, though, he was knifed by a member of the Kerala Socialist Party, after which the movement lost its momentum and he succumbed by asking the maharaja to accede to the Indian Union. Next was Bhopal, a princely state located at the center of the country, with a Muslim ruler and a majority Hindu population. He was hesitant to join India and even warned Mountbatten that India will soon be “dominated by Communists” if the Crown did not recognize the princely states (62). Bhopal wished to stay independent and skipped the Chamber of Princes meeting, but because of the growing number of accessions of other princely states, “he capitulated” and signed the document (63). Lastly, there was Jodhpur, a Hindu ruler of a majority Hindu state, but bordering Pakistan. A meeting was arranged between the ruler and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder and governor-general of Pakistan. It is said that Jinnah “handed the maharaja a blank sheet” and said that the maharaja “can fill in all [his] conditions” (63). Patel, after hearing about this meeting, offered the prince similar amenities and the maharaja conceded. If the border state of Jodhpur would have gone to Pakistan, a chaotic situation might have erupted on other border princely states.

After some drama, three princely states had integrated with India but the fate of three other states was undecided till after independence. Junagadh was a Hindu-majority state with a Muslim ruler. The state did not border Pakistan but the ruler signed the document acceding to Pakistan. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, Pakistan accepted Junagadh’s accession although it was 82% Hindu (contrary to the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was based upon). The Hindu chiefs in the region broke away from the ruler and wanted to join the Indian Union. With a small military force sent by India and provincial government set up, the administration of Junagadh

was handed to India. Next was the large state of Hyderabad. It had a Hindu majority with a Muslim Nizam as the head of state. “Of its population, 85% were Hindus, but Muslims dominated the army, police, and civil service,” (66). With three linguistic zones and located at the center of India, it was referred to as the “cancer at the belly of India” (67). The Nizam’s loyalty lied with Pakistan or preferred to remain independent. Had Hyderabad acceded to Pakistan or remained independent, India’s southern and northern portions would be cut off. After civil unrest and militant insurrections, a ‘Standstill Agreement’ was agreed upon between the governments of Hyderabad and India. Yet, tensions grew through 1948 with Hyderabad’s urge for independence and on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1948, “a contingent of Indian troops was sent into Hyderabad” (68). After the death of “forty-two Indian soldiers and some 2,000 (militant) Razakars,” Hyderabad was annexed to the Indian Union. Lastly, the question of Kashmir lingered, which was ruled by a Hindu maharaja. Although Kashmir had sizable Hindu and Buddhist populations, it had a majority-Muslim populace. The state was strategically important as it bordered India, Pakistan, China, and the USSR with the mighty Himalayas as a natural border. Furthermore, India’s first Prime Minister, Nehru, had deep sympathies with the state since it was his birthplace and family home. Maharaja Hari Singh intended to remain independent while maintaining cordial relations with both dominions. Negotiations failed and Kashmir continued to dream for an independent nation. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1947, tribal raiders from North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan crossed the border and invaded Kashmir. Out of desperation, the maharaja asked for defense to India. India granted this request only after Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession to India, which officially integrated Kashmir into the Indian Union. The northwest portion was captured by the raiders with the help of the Pakistan Army, but the Indian Army drove them back from the capital of Srinagar. A ceasefire

was called, and the ceasefire line has now become the Line of Control (LOC) after the 1972 Shimla Agreement. This is now known as the First Kashmir War of 1947-48. India and Pakistan have fought four wars overall, three of them centered on Kashmir with both countries claiming the entire state. In 1948, UN was called to arbitrate the situation but the proposed withdrawal of troops and subsequent plebiscite has not yet taken place. All in all, integrating the separate parts of the country in one united nation was nothing short of an astonishing feat although the unresolved issue of Kashmir persists.

After the initial years of consolidating India into one united nation, the actual practice of democracy still needed to be implemented. Sukumar Sen, a mathematician turned member of the Indian civil service (ICS), was selected as the chief election commissioner. Establishing universal adult suffrage was an enormous challenge both in idea and practice. Western democracies began their early democracies by granting suffrage to a select portion of educated men, who owned property. In the US, women were not given the right to vote till 1919 and France, till about 1945. In India, both the general elections and all of the state elections had to be simultaneously conducted in a country where the adult population (above the age of 21) numbered 176 million, 85% of whom were illiterate. Allowing women, illiterate, and impoverished individuals to vote in a highly populated nation was seen as an experiment that was the 'biggest gamble in human history.' In practice, each eligible voter "had to be identified, named, and registered," "polling stations had to be identified," and most importantly, "honest and efficient polling officers [had to be] recruited" (144). Widespread chaos was expected. Eventually, though, "224,000 polling booths were constructed and equipped with 2 million steel ballot boxes, requiring 8,200 tons of steel," "380,000 reams of paper were used," 16,500 clerks, 56,000 presiding officers, 280,000 staff, and 224,000 policemen were appointed to administer



about “1 million square miles” of land (144). In order to address illiteracy and voter fraud, innovations such as the usage of “pictorial symbols” and “multiple ballot boxes” were created to represent each party, a week-lasting “indelible ink” was developed by Indian scientists, mock elections were held in various places before the actual elections, and the public was educated by the Election Commission on democracy, “the constitution, the purpose of adult franchise, the preparation of electoral rolls, and the process of voting through ‘films and the radio’” (144-45). “Large public meetings, door-to-door canvassing, [and] the use of visual media” was widespread (145). In the Parliament and state assemblies, about 4,500 seats were up for grab. The parties included Nehru’s Indian National Congress (INC), the Kisan Majdoor Praja Party (Farmer/Labor Union), the Socialist Party, Jana Sangh (Hindu organization), Ambedkar’s Scheduled Caste Federation, the Communist Party of India (CPI), and other important regional parties. As a result of wide-scale publicity, “60% of registered voters exercised their franchise,” in a free and fair election (107 million citizens voted--In comparison, about 127 million voted in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election) and at the end, the Indian National Congress secured 2247 out 3280 seats in state assemblies, 364 out of 489 seats in the Parliament, and Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn-in as the first elected Prime Minister of the Republic of India. Since 1951-52, 16 General Elections have been held. State elections in India are usually larger than most country’s national elections, while the General Election is considered the largest election in the world. In the latest 2014 General Elections, about 815 million were eligible to vote, 551.3 million voted (about 66.38%) in nine phases with Bhartiya Janata Party (India’s People Party) emerging as the victor and Narendra Modi as India’s Prime Minister.

Pakistan was the first modern nation with religion as the definitive basis of statehood. Usually, ethnicity, region, or as in Europe’s case, language, determines national borders. Indians

were weary that these factors might further break India up, and it was language that caused the biggest uproar since Partition. India consisted of 122 major languages and 1600 dialects (as of 2001 Census). Since the 1910s, several organizations had been formed fighting for linguistic provinces and Mahatma Gandhi was one of the outspoken proponents of linguistic states. The communal bloodshed that followed the Partition delayed the creation of linguistic states in fear of Balkanization but soon, the call for reorganizing states clamored again. For example, the people who spoke Marathi wanted Maharashtra as a state, and Gujarati-speaking wanted Gujarat. Similarly, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi speaking, and the various other languages wanted their own states. Prime Minister Nehru and other veteran leaders like Rajagopalachari were against this proposal. Several movements had started all over India, but the “most vigorous movement for linguistic autonomy was that of the Telugu-speakers of the Andhra country” since it was “spoken by more people in India than any other language besides Hindi, had a rich literary history, was associated with the Vijayanagara Empire,” and had a strong Andhra Mahasabha fighting for the cause (194). Since 1951, “petitions, representations, street marches, and fasts” were employed to achieve the statehood of ‘Andhra Pradesh’ out of what was then Madras State, but the national government did not budge (194). In early 1952, Swami Sitaram began marching for support and “on 19 October 1952, a man named Potti Sriramulu began a fast unto death in Madras” (195). After 58 days of fasting, in which the movement gathered popular support, he passed away. Subsequently, “all hell broke loose,” “government offices were attacked, and trains were stopped and defaced” (197). Finally, the national government conceded and created a States Reorganization Commission (SRC), where commissioners would travel through 104 towns, interviewing “more than 9,000 people,” and receiving “as many as 152,250 written submissions” in the next couple of years (197). This

culminated in the State Reorganization Act in 1956 and by 1960, with the addition of Maharashtra and Gujarat replacing Bombay State, the map of India had completely changed. Later, due to other statehood movements, newer states were created as well. The creation of linguistic states was a significant moment in India's geographic and social cohesion. Contrary from the initial concern of Balkanization, "in retrospect, linguistic reorganization seems rather to have consolidated the unity of India" because it has "acted as a largely constructive channel for provincial pride" (208). As of 2017, India recognizes 22 official state languages and has 29 states, along with 7 Union Territories. One can say that "if Jawharlal Nehru was the 'maker' of modern India, then perhaps Potti Sriramulu should be called its Mercator" (208).

Apart from socially integrating India, economically developing India was also crucial. In 1947, most of the countrymen were "cultivators and labourers," and "nearly three-fourths of the workforce was in agriculture" (209). Agriculture contributed 60% to the GDP, while the industrial sector represented "12% of the workforce and 25% of the nation's income" (209). Mahatma Gandhi fiercely believed that "the future of India lied in its villages." Agrarian Reform, which included "abolition of land revenue," "expansion of irrigation," and "reform of system of land tenure" was on Congress's agenda after its election victory (211). Nehru also recognized that the future also lay in a fast-industrializing world. The question that was naturally asked was "if India had to be industrialized, which model should it follow? To the leaders of the national movement, 'imperialism' and 'capitalism' were both dirty words" (212). The rising Soviet model was an option, and so was Japan's, given its astonishing development "from agrarian primitivism to industrial civilization in only fifty years" (212). In order to jump start the planning progress, in 1938, "Congress set up a National Planning Committee (NPC)" for economic development. The NPC reported that there were "large areas of the economy where

the private sector could not be trusted, where the aims of planning could be realized only ‘if the matter is handled as a collective Public Enterprise’” (213). Surprisingly, Indian industrialists supported the socialist form of economy. In “A Plan of Economic Development for India”, also known as the “Bombay Plan,” they exclaimed that “ ‘the existing economic organization, based on private enterprise and ownership, has failed to bring about a satisfactory distribution of the national income’” and “only state intervention could help ‘diminish inequalities of income’” (213). The First Five-Year Plan in 1951 focused on food production, transportation, communications, and social services. Apart from food production, most sectors did not grow as much as expected (214). For the second Five-Year Plan, while “power, transportation and communications, and social services retained broadly the same importance,” “the decisive shift was from agriculture to industry” (217). Prasanta Mahalanobis, a physicist and statistician, who had “set up the Indian Statistical Institute” in 1931, the National Sample Survey (NSS) in 1950, and the Central Statistical Organization in 1951, was now appointed in-charge of the second Five-Year Plan (214). His proposed plan implemented “heavy industry [to] be owned by the state” along with “plenty of room for private enterprise,” in a three-class socialist system (217). In addition to agriculture and industrialization, the Mahalanobis model focused India’s growth on power and steel. Impressed by Franklin Roosevelt’s Tennessee Valley Authority, India started several hydroelectric dam projects. In addition, the government-owned steel plants were partnered with foreign countries to promote industrialization. With projects like the Bhakra-Nangal project (second highest dam in the world at the time), India’s power sector was set in place. Finally, in order to accommodate industrial growth, higher education and science was promoted. “Under Nehru’s direction, a chain of new research laboratories were set up,” along with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Atomic Energy Commission, and Indian

Institutes of Technology (IITs) (224). These plans laid the groundwork for India's eventual progress. Despite economic growth, Nehru's economic policies were sometimes met with critical remarks from the point of view of the "free-market critique, the human capital critique, [and] the ecological critique" (231). In addition, although actions attempting to eradicate "inequality in access to land" were implemented, the "diminution in inequality" was "so slight," that in a "democracy committed to 'socialistic pattern of society,'" it was "simply unacceptable" (228). Lastly, even though higher education was promoted, primary education was largely left neglected. Yet, the achievement of launching an impoverished nation forward was remarkable. Back then, most individuals agreed with socialistic style of government. Later, under Indira Gandhi, 'socialism' was strengthened and even officially inserted in the Constitution, along with the word, 'secular.' It was not until 1991, with Finance Minister (and future prime minister), Manmohan Singh, under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, that India's economy was completely liberalized in the face of an economic crisis.

All in all, what the leaders of India achieved in its early years is nothing short of remarkable. After the creation of Pakistan and the bloody communal violence that followed, uncertainty lingered over the Indian subcontinent. Providing an economic backbone, social cohesion, and constitutional safeguards, especially for the concerned minorities, consolidated the idea of India, from which it further built upon. Numerous leaders contributed highly to independent India, but after the deaths of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel in 1948 and 1950 respectively, no individual embodied the Indian cause as passionately as Jawaharlal Nehru. India's vision is directly reflected by Nehru's renowned for India to the Constituent Assembly. At the dawn of independence, he had expressed, "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. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.” By the time Nehru passed away in office in 1964 after winning three terms, he had put India on the map and ensured it would not break up again.