

OUR INDIA

1

Setting and Argument

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

2. India has attracted some finest minds from early days. These include travelers 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.

3. Among those who travelled in India in ancient times, Fa-hsien (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 Huien Tsang (602-664 CE) journeyed across India for seventeen long years and wrote an epic treatise *Journey to the West*. Another person of eminence was Greek ethnographer Megasthenes (350-290 BC) who is well-regarded for his pioneering work *Indica*.

4. 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) arrived in the Coromandel Coast of India and was astonished to find that the kings of 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) wrote a book in which he provided photo-image of the Mughal system of governance. Another French scholar Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689 CE) wrote extensively on India.

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

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

7. All these studies and many more have provided rare insights and lessons. And yet, it 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 the task may be.

Contemporary Happenings

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. India was undergoing major transformation both in religion and politics. Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) not only laid strong foundations for nationalist movement but redefined religion as service of the poor. He set up Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 named after his famous mentor Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-1886) to work for education and health care services. The schools and hospitals of the Mission are rendering yeomen service.

11. Similar reform movements covered the entire length and breadth of India. The Brahma Samaj set up in 1828 by Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) covered Bengal and neighbouring areas in eastern India; the Arya Samaj (1875) by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) 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 against the bitter opposition from some sections of the *Shariat*. Swami Narayan Guru (1855-1928) worked for upliftment of Izhavas in Kerala. All these personalities became national figures.

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

13. Another stream of freedom struggle was led by Netaji Subhash 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 overthrowal of the colonial order.

14. Mahatma Gandhi mobilized 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.

15. These eventful years also witnessed hardening of attitudes among the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. The talks between India's two top 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.

16. On 15th 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 country of nations. The shame of violence was widely shared.

17. Partition of India was not merely a political failure. It was also our civilizational failure.

18. During the period of our anti-colonial struggle, there was also a literary movement in the country to which Rabindranath Tagore in the north and Subramaniya Bharati in the south provided leadership with imagination and fervor. This had all begun with Raja Rammohun Roy in West Bengal in the eighteenth 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 deep impact on revolution in politics and also got influenced by the latter.

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

3

India becomes a Republic

20. Towards this, the path of Parliamentary Democracy that we adopted constitutes the most important 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 BC.

21. On 26th January, 1950, ‘WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA’ constituted India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic Republic. The Preamble of the Constitution makes this grand declaration and accordingly, we celebrate 26th January as the Republic Day in the entire country. 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 as **“Father of the Nation”**.

22. A significant feature is that our Constitution was adopted only after wide consultations among the well-known leaders of the people. The Constituent Assembly was constituted with these prominent leaders to frame the Indian Constitution with Dr. Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) as its President. The pioneering role played by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) went a long way in securing universal adult franchise rising above consideration of 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.

23. The establishment of the Republic of India was a unique event in our history. Our ancestors had given India a 'civilization-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 idiom of *Rashtra* has been mentioned.

24. India has been an independent and sovereign nation for a very long time in its ageless history. It was 'civilization-state' in its character. But it was declared as **Republic** only on 26th January, 1950. This means, the government of the people and by the people. For purposes of governance, we have chosen Parliamentary democratic system.

25. The people of India use their sovereign power at the centre through their representatives in the Parliament and in 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, in turn, appoints Governors as the Head of the federating units. The President and the Governor 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.

26. 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 States legislature, as the case may be.

27. 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.

28. Another important aspect of our Constitution is its federal character with considerable authority 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 high rate of growth in recent years has been able to pay special attention to the states on the periphery as also to the poor people.

29. On 26th 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. The Constitution also went on to establish autonomous institutions like the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, the Election Commission of India, the Union Public Service Commission and the permanent civil services to give meaning and direction to the functioning of democratic institutions in the country.

4

Origins of Indian Civilization

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

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

32. A recent survey has indicated that 4,653 communities live in India in a predominantly Hindu society with sizeable Muslim population. They include people professing all the major faiths of the world, entertaining different notion about migration of soul, speaking several languages and dialects. Each group has its own distinct folklores, 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 a strong but invisible threads*”.

33. 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 retained a unique personality and this will blossom further to unexpected levels in the coming decades in the era of globalization and democracy.

34. In terms of history, it is not very clear when the Indian mind started delving into fine arts, poetry, philosophy and science. The myths and legends, cults and rituals, as well as agricultural practices and handicrafts indicate that civilizational attainments in India commenced earlier than 5000 years ago or even earlier.

35. The Indus Valley civilization provides the beginnings of Indian historical experience. The archaeological excavations at various sites connected with that civilization, 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.

36. It may be recalled that the intellectual development in India after at the hands of the 'Aryans' and the subsequent development of Vedic culture were not in 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 Civilization show the merging of many cultures and concepts-including the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China.

37. Much later, during the Vedic period divine narratives were pieced together out of subconscious allegory, poetic symbolism, personification of nature, or worship of spirits. But in all these, the human mind played as important a role. 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.

38. The beginnings of Indian literature are found in the Vedic hymns in Sanskrit. Early literary forms also include Tamil verses from the south, Prakrit and Pali tales from the mainland and tribal lores from the hills and uplands. Literature in early days was primarily religious.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. 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 Dharmashastra represent the finest examples of the *smriti* tradition. Many scholars view Upanishads also as a part of *shruti*.

42. 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 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 like Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Assamese, and have enormously influenced their script, grammar and literature.

43. 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.

44. 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, 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.

45. 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.”

46. 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.

47. 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 give us pride in our heritage. These achievements are also of inspirational value to the present as well as to future generations of Indians.

5

Civilizational Encounters

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

49. First, the Vedic period (1500 BC 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.

50. During the Vedic period the society was organized into four *varnas* known as *varnadharma*, namely, Brahmin (the learned class); *Kshatriya* (the warrior class), *Vaishya* (the economic class), and *Shudra* (the service class). It had also prescribed the four stages of life, that is *brahmachari* (the student), *grihastha* (the householder), *vanaprastha* (the recluse), and *sannyasin* (the free man). It is the law of *karma* which governed the cycle of life from birth to death to re-birth and so on.

51. The *varnadharma* 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*.

52. 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.

53. 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, the backwards, and the women and also generated a tremendous sense of insecurity among them, and especially women. All this is contrary to the lofty ideals of peace and brotherhood that characterize the hymns of the Rig Veda.

54. 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, emphasizing the role of non-violence in human behaviour and ecology. They strove to build an inclusive social order.

55. Lord Mahavira put special emphasis on rationality. His theory of *Anekataavada*, recognized 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 right to education and enlisted them in his order.

56. Lord Buddha advocated adoption of 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, and if it conflicts with reasoning, or is at variance with new

realities, it is no longer appropriate to assert its primacy and follow its dictates. This also applies to Buddha's sayings.

57. 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 like monasteries and universities in India. The Buddhist world-view generated introspection among the Hindu elite. As a response, a group of revitalized Hindu scholars, on the one hand decried the increasing role of rituals and rigidity of caste structures and on the other, incorporated Buddha into its pantheon by treating him as an incarnation of Vishnu.

58. The greatest loss in my view, on account of the 'banishment' of Buddhism from India was the method of rationality and scientific enquiry that Buddhism had encouraged. In the long run, the absence of the Buddhist approach facilitated the growth of the forces of regression in the 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.

59. The Brahmanical order excluded women and the working class (of farmers, artisans and dalits), from reading and writing. It reasserted its position in the name of religion and tradition and pursued its dogmatic policies 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.

60. 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.

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

62. 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 Arabia 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.

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

64. 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 Urdu language and enrichment of the other Indian languages, and in architecture. This is popularly referred to as Ganga-Jamuni etiquette or *tahjeeb*. The Indian Islam embraced diversity of approaches while it had been fairly unitarian in character in the Arab world.

65. Christianity came to India well before it went to several European countries. However, the civilizational encounter began 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 and the notion of democracy and rule of law, popularized as much by the leaders of the freedom struggle and the people of India as by the British began the fourth civilizational encounter and that led to introspection in the 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 maharajahs 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.

66. 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.

67. The involvement of common people in the freedom struggle, and personal lives and beliefs of eminent leaders, led to a unique crystallization of ideas as 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.

68. 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 and is no divine order and that religion is meant to strive for equality and not for stratification. All religions are important and as Mahatma Gandhi prescribed 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 that one can see in India is the fact that an overwhelming number of people are secular in their political outlook and yet at the same time very religious in their personal lives.

69. Since the end of the last century, another fifth great civilizational 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 as well as in imparting training. New approaches are on the anvil to raise productivity and tackle poverty.

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

71. 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, was a prerogative of the Brahminical class; this despite the fact that the entire society was integrated through the network of rituals that regulated birth, marriage and death ceremonies. Any denial of 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.

72. 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 the 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, education and political gains.

73. In this context, we must remember that equal access to computers can only be totally successful 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 civilizational dialogue at the people's level.

74. 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.

75. 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.

76. 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 strong and just India.

6

Renewal of India

77. 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 could be viewed in the perspectives of society, economy, and polity.

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

79. India has been living through 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 civilizational 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 the sixteenth century in India 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.

80. Multi-culturalism is a basic feature of India's civilizational 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.

81. 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.

82. 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; or if one language and one dialect were to become the mode of human expression; if one folklore or set of songs were prescribed to be sung by everyone.

83. In our long and uninterrupted civilizational 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.

84. 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 need not be in conflict with other identities. To accord respect to identity of others is a part of our constitutional obligation.

85. 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 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 alongwith 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.

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

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

88. 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 with missile delivery system.

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90. 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.

91. 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 economy need to work in tandem in order to make sure that competitive economic activities pick up.

92. We have to move beyond \$2 trillion economy rapidly. The wealth thus generated would need to be not only preserved but also utilized 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.

93. We have to address some important challenges like 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 domestic market and increase our foreign trade. This should be possible with India's demographic dividend, English speaking workforce and engineering talent.

94. It is true that economic power in the recent years has gone to a small minority. This growing concentration of economic power in 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.

95. 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 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.

96. 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 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.

97. The partition of India posed grave challenges to polity 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 to remain on the 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.

98. The strengthening of Parliamentary democracy system was another major challenge. It was Jawaharlal Nehru, who during nearly seventeen years of Prime Ministership of India, laid strong foundations for institutions of democracy alongside building

institutions of excellence in science and technology, space research and atomic energy, higher education and literature.

99. The passing away of leaders of the freedom struggle ensued decline of the Indian National Congress which had provided effective and transparent leadership to political institutions during 1947-67 era. Over the years, 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 the 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.

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

101. 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.

102. 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 and small towns is on the rise. The girls are performing better

than the boys in several schools and colleges. Women are proving to be good managers as they put their money and skill to more productive use.

103. 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 run self-financing institutions have shown excellence of highest order.

104. 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, and lack of opportunities are causing enormous distress in our society. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, we have witnessed an acceleration in the terrorist activities in many parts of the country.

105. It is true that the government is battling with terrorism, insurgencies, separatism, and corruption. There is a section of people, however, which feels that this challenge to the Indian nation-state is much more serious than what it is generally assessed by instruments of governance. Some people even think that democratic system is noisy, messy and dilatory in handling terrorism. It is, however, our faith that in the long run democracy alone through people's unity and determination shall prevail over terrorist forces.

106. There are foreign policy challenges particularly in regard to relations with our two neighbouring countries: China and Pakistan.

107. In today's India, democracy supports inclusiveness (notwithstanding polarization 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.

108. We have to create and sustain an environment that will enable and encourage competition, efficiency and inclusiveness. 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 programs. Dialogue, an essential pre-requisite of democracy, would ensure that.

109. Today, renewal of India depends upon, more than in the past, on the character, capability and perseverance of our youth- boys and girls- who constitute a sizable portion of our population. 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 a major power in the world.

110. 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 our ambition.

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

112. We also have to consciously work for building India as a knowledge society. India has a long tradition of being a knowledge society. This got stifled as we denied education to large section of our society including women in the past. It also needs to be kept in view that valuable knowledge is also possessed by our farmers and craftsmen, artists and philosophers, our mothers and grand-parents, our folklores and folktales, epics and traditions as these are the storehouses of knowledge and wisdom. In the era of globalization, our traditional knowledge is required to be given a new orientation and a new language. In coming decades, a strong knowledge society alone will secure respect for India in the comity of nations.

113. Despite tumults and turmoils, mutinies and scams, the democratic secular India holds considerable promise for the future.

India of the Future

114. 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 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.

115. It is in this context that I find that respect for another person's view of truth with 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).

116. I imagine 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.

117. The *Bahudha* approach not only underlines equal respect for all points of view, it also calls for – and this is significant- the inculcation of a habit in which a person has developed an attitude of respect for and consideration of the other person's point of view may perhaps be

right. 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.

118. The rise of terrorism and fundamentalism in the recent times has brought about phenomenal changes in global politics. These unprecedented challenges call for a new, bold, and imaginative statecraft from the world's leaders. The *Bahudha* approach, a dialogue of harmony and peaceful living, thus becomes an 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 harmonious society. It is also necessary to strengthen the United Nations so that it becomes an effective global mechanism of conflict resolution.

119. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, I wonder as to what kind of India my grand-children and generations to come thereafter will have. 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 the Indians as well as the world at large. In 1915 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy reflected thus:

Each race contributes something essential to the world's civilization 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.

120. 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 civilizational attainments or economic strength.

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

122. 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*'.

123. India has all the ingredients of becoming a just society and a powerful 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.

124. 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.

125. 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 .

126. 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.

127. The world looks to India with respect for the manner in which we have permitted and practiced 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 not only of our own people, but also of the world.

128. Health and robustness of a civilization could be judged by its capacity to challenge and jettison the rituals and practices, opinions

and beliefs which stifle progress and create divisions. The Indian civilization has shown its resilience from time to time.

129. 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 and 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 visualized '*where the mind is without fear and the head is held high*'.

130. I do 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 scourges of poverty and illiteracy

131. 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.
