

# India Draws its Strength from an Ancient Tolerant Civilisation- Jawhar Sircar

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On the 14th of August, 1947, Pakistan broke free from the erstwhile united India and that very night, India declared freedom. Amidst the euphoria and waves of support were doubts, doomsayers and opponents. This new India was not one entity but consisted of 14 British provinces and 565 princely states, with a mind boggling multiplicity of cultural identities, languages and ethnicities. Many were reminded of John Strachey's jibe that "there is not and never was an India...no India nation, no people of India." In the same vein, Seeley (1885) had commented: "India is...only a geographical expression, like Europe or Africa. It does not make the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and languages." True, even after 75 years, India does not have a national language, food or dress. Instead, it has 24 major languages, 1600 dialects, 6 active religions and some 6400 so-called caste-groups.

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**BIRTH OF INDIA'S FREEDOM**

**NATION WAKES TO NEW LIFE**

**Mr. Nehru Calls For Big Effort From People**

**"INCESSANT STRIVING TASK OF FUTURE"**

Assembly Members Take Solemn Pledge

**WILD SCENES OF JUBILATION IN PUNJAB**

**STATE VISIT TO KARACHI**

Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Mountbatten speaking to Hindu representatives at the Maharaja's Alms at their arrival

**FRENZIED ENTHUSIASM IN BOMBAY**

**Crowds In Festive Mood**

THE national flag was hoisted over the 74-year-old Bombay Civil Secretariat at midnight when the citizens of Bombay greeted the dawn of independence with solemn invocation and frenzied rejoicing.

"Citizens of free India—yours are now free"—said the Prime Minister, Mr. B. G. Kher, in raising the flag at the midnight ceremony, which was attended by all Ministers and departmental heads and employees of the Bombay Government.

His declaration was greeted with cheer from the thousands who gathered at the approach to the Secretariat.

A strong police guard kept order with the greatest difficulty till the conclusion of the ceremony when they lost control and hundreds

**"MAY BOMBAY PROSPER"**

**Governor's Message**

**GOOD WISHES TO FREE INDIA**

Sir John Colville, Governor of

**NEW CABINET OF INDIA**

Portrait of Jawahar Nehru

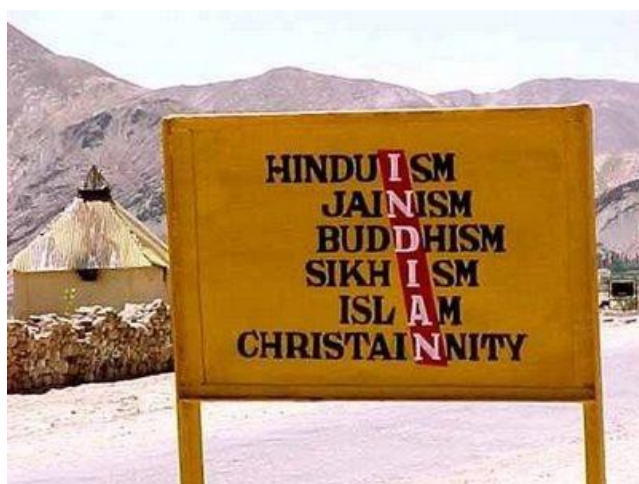
The Times of India on 15th August 1947.

The curse of Partition soon overshadowed the joy of Independence. Rivers of blood flowed through Punjab, on both sides of the new border and though Bengal did not initially react so brutally, anti-socials were backed by politicians to go on the rampage — in installments over the next two decades. One was reminded of a curse attributed to Winston Churchill that said "in a few years, no trace will remain" for "anarchy will lead to internecine warfare". Islamic extremists were overjoyed at having secured their own Muslim State, literally with the sword, that they kept on brandishing — little realising that it is a deadly two-faced weapon that kills more of those who wield it than their foes, real or imagined. The secular Congress had done its best to rein in Hindu retaliation but the Hindu right had also tasted blood, among the swarms of angry refugees who streamed into India, with blood in their eyes. This wing had not participated in India's freedom struggle but was openly critical of the new dispensation and blamed Gandhi for going soft on Muslim communalism and creating Pakistan. The Father of the Nation had to pay with his life. The Hindu rightwing refused to accept the national tricolour and new Indian Constitution. On the other hand, Communists had given a call to arms and there were bloody skirmishes in several pockets. The worst, of course, was that Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs embarked on the bloodiest communal riots India would ever see.

It was the most challenging of times, as not only were both the newly formed nations

bleeding profusely and uncontrollably, but the genes of hatred and violence were embedded into both — in Pakistan at the level the State and the masses, and in India at the level of a society that the official code of secularism tried hard to bottle. The latter did succeed to a large extent for about four decades.

If we fast forward to the present, we come across remarkable developments. India is no more the sum of myriad fragments but one united nation that stands proud before and amidst the world community. Yes, regionalism thrives but more in a form that lends charm and strength to the underlying unity. There have been a few hotspots of outbursts of region-centric and ethnocentric violence but nothing that is not within control. It is the only massive multi-ethnic federation of the four, where cultural heterogeneity flourishes and political power is not monopolised by one small community. In the other three, the hegemony of the majority is rather well established and minority identities are discouraged or sniggered at as in WASP America of the White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or ostracised and dominated over, as in Russia and brutally homogenised as in China. Despite the fantasies of a section of the Hindi-Hindu majority in India, the voices of the non-Hindi regions are as loud, if not louder, and half of India spends its life without speaking a single word of Hindi. Heterogeneity thrives, in spite of recent attempts to the contrary, but it is so warm to hear fluent Hindi from members of the fringe Indo-Mongoloid tribes in far-flung Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.



India is a land of many religions and faiths.

The common popular culture of India is soaked in Bollywood movies and is comfortable with very pedestrian Hindi-Urdu for communication. The phenomenal and everlasting popularity of Urdu-Hindustani songs prove so emphatically that India thinks and lives beyond rigid boundaries set up by the orthodox.

On the economic front, India is no more the wasteland that two centuries of British colonial exploitation had reduced it to. It is ahead of its former colonial master in terms of Gross Domestic Product and if 'purchasing power parity' is extrapolated, it is way above all countries except the USA, China and just a handful of others. Distribution of wealth remains, however, a major problem— as in many other countries and the really poor quarter of the population is comparable only to sub-Saharan Africa— a shame that India's rulers just cannot brush under the carpet.

What is most heartening is that while all third world countries— from Latin America, through Africa and the sweep of Asian continent (except Japan) have struggled to survive, under the jackboots of military juntas and sheikhs, India has continued to hold periodic elections for over seven decades. Its national institutions thrived— till recently, at least— and even though there are charges of moving towards an 'electoral autocracy', wise heads nod the other way. Where there is a challenge, responses will emerge— not to worry. Every nation has to pass through its trying times and though at 75 India is a young nation, it draws its core strength from an ancient tolerant civilisation — that has seen it all.

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