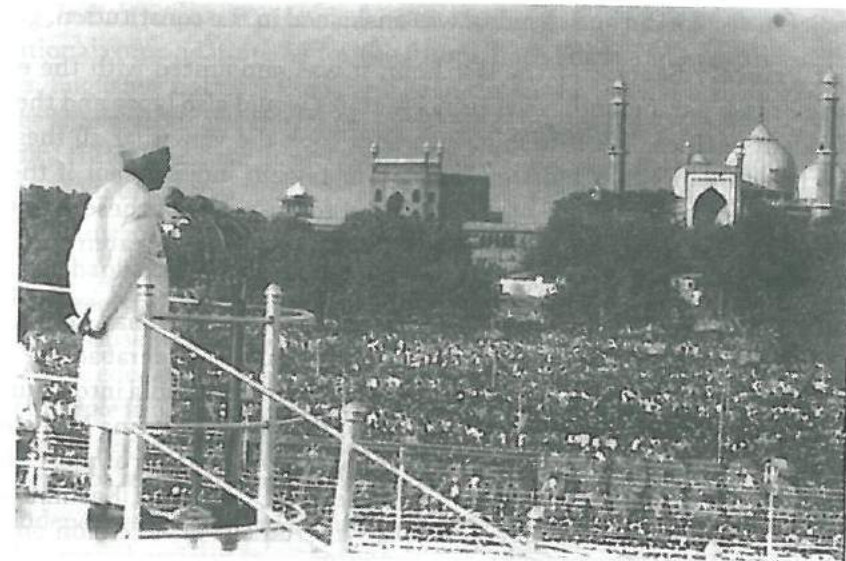


## Post-Independence India: A Primer

The attainment of independence for India was no isolated event but had sparked off a new process of decolonisation all over the world. The leaders of young India now faced the tremendous challenge of establishing a strong nation and setting an example before the rest of the world. Thus, in this part, we shall learn about some of the post-independence challenges that Indian leaders faced, as well as methods adopted to tackle them.

### THE NEHRU ERA (1947–1964)

At the stroke of midnight on 14–15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, India became independent. A special session of the Constituent Assembly was held that night, chaired by the president Rajendra Prasad. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India addressed the assembly and gave his famous 'tryst with destiny' speech. On the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> August, free India woke up to the dual reality of independence and partition. The year 1947 witnessed unprecedented violence associated with partition and trauma of displacement. It was in this backdrop that India embarked upon its post-independence journey.



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1st Prime Minister of India, addresses the nation from the Red Fort on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947



## The Challenges of Nation Building

On the eve of independence, India faced three broad challenges:

- Challenge 1: Consolidating India as a Nation
- Challenge 2: Establishing a Democratic Polity
- Challenge 3: Socio-Economic Development

### Challenge 1: Consolidating India as a Nation

The first and foremost challenge that India faced immediately after independence was to weld India into one nation, yet accommodate the diversity in our society. India is a land of continental size and mind-boggling diversity. The partition of the country appeared to prove everyone's worst fears. Serious questions were raised regarding India's future—Would India even survive as one nation? Would it mean rejecting all sub-national identities? How was the integration of the territory of Indian to be achieved?

In fact, in the wake of partition and communal riots, many observers had predicted growing disunity or even disintegration of India. The need of the hour, thus, was to first respond to the challenge of partition and displacement and then secure the unity of the nation by tackling the major areas of diversity that produced conflicts (which included the diverse Indian States, Indian languages and Indian tribes).

**Rehabilitation of Refugees:** Freedom came with partition which was one of the largest, most abrupt and unplanned transfer of population in human history, resulting in large scale violence and displacement of lakhs of people. Besides administrative and financial concerns, the partition posed another deeper concern—it challenged the very idea of secular India. Even after partition, Muslims accounted for 12 per cent of the total population in 1951. How was the government of India going to treat its Muslims citizens and other religious minorities? Indian leaders remained firm in their belief in secularism and the ideal was enshrined in the constitution.

**Integration of Princely States:** At the last hour, it was announced with the end of British rule in India, the British paramountcy over princely states would also lapse and the states would become independent entities. The British government took the view that all these states, 565 in all, would be free to join either India or Pakistan or remain independent if they wished so. This decision was left not to the people of the states but to the rulers of these states. Clearly, the position of princely states was a matter of grave concern and could threaten the very idea of a united India.

Soon enough, the ruler of Travancore announced that the state had decided to remain independent. A similar announcement was made by the Nizam of Hyderabad the next day. The interim government took a firm view against the possible division of India into a number of small principalities. At this juncture, Sardar Patel, who was India's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, played a historic role and successfully negotiated the accession of most of the princely states to the Indian Union. However, accession of Hyderabad, Junagarh, Kashmir and Manipur was more difficult than the rest. Kashmir signed the Instrument of Accession on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1947, Junagarh and Hyderabad in 1948, Manipur in 1949.

**Challenge Posed by Linguistic Diversity:** Linguistic identity functions as a strong socio-political force everywhere in the world, and so was the case in India. For the first 20 years after independence, the linguistic diversity of India emerged as the most divisive issue. The attitude India has adopted to deal with diversity in general is that of acceptance, tolerance and even celebration of diversity—whether linguistic or religious.

**Issue of National and Official Language:** Thus, the Constitution of India recognises 22 major languages, including English and Sanskrit. The issue of national language was resolved when the constitution makers accepted not one but all major languages of India as India's national languages. However, the question of official language (for all-India communication and for which the chief contenders were Hindi, Hindustani and English) became highly politicised and was closely debated in the Constituent Assembly. Both Gandhi and Nehru supported Hindustani written in Devanagari or Urdu script. But the supporters of Hindi in Devanagari script gained strength once partition was announced as the votaries of Pakistan had claimed Urdu as the language of the Muslims and of Pakistan. In the end, the decision went in favour of Hindi against Hindustani by 78 to 77 votes in the Congress Legislative Party.

Thus, the constitution provided that Hindi (being the language of the largest number, though not of the majority) in Devanagari script with international numerals would be India's official language even as use of English was to continue for official purposes until 1965, when it would be replaced by Hindi. The Parliament could also extend this period beyond 1965 for specified purposes. The decision regarding official language of the states was left to the state legislatures. In 1967, the government of India took another important decision on the language question and declared that Indian languages would ultimately become the medium of instruction at the university level, though the time frame for such a changeover was left upto the convenience of each university.

Since 1967, the language problem has largely disappeared from the Indian political scene, demonstrating India's capability to deal with contentious issues in a democratic manner, promoting national consolidation. As for the future, both Hindi and English are likely to grow as link languages. English is not only the language of the world, but has also emerged as the second language of the Universities and the language of communication among the Indian intelligentsia. Simultaneously, Hindi has also been making rapid progress in non-Hindi speaking regions through the medium of schools, films, television, radio, tourism, etc.

**Issue of Reorganisation of States on Linguistic Basis:** Under the British, the provinces had been formed in a haphazard manner as and when they were conquered. After independence, the need was felt for reorganisation of states and a strong case was presented for linguistic states. Firstly, language is closely associated to culture and customs of people. Secondly, it is the medium of communication, education, administration, judicial activities as well as politics. How could a language play this role in a multilingual province? Clearly, it could not. For this reason, the Congress had reorganised its regional branches along linguistic lines since 1921 and had committed itself towards redrawing of state boundaries on linguistic basis.

However, independence, coming immediately after the Second World War and that too along with partition, created serious socio-economic and administrative challenges and changed the



priorities of the national leadership. While still committed to linguistic reorganisation, the leaders felt that the most important task was the preservation of national unity and other things could wait for some time.

Reorganisation of States—A Quick Timeline:

- **Linguistic Provinces Commission (headed by S. K. Dar, 1948):** Linguistic Provinces Commission was appointed by the Constituent Assembly to enquire into the desirability of linguistic provinces. The Commission advised against the step on the grounds of potential threat to national unity as well as administrative inconvenience. But this could not satisfy public opinion and the demand was repeatedly voiced, especially in the South and led to the appointment of the JVP Committee.
- **JVP Committee (consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, December 1948):** JVP Committee also advised against the step for the time being on the ground that national security and economic development were the need of the hour. However, it also laid down that where the demand was persistent, a new linguistic state could be created. The Committee felt that a strong case existed for the demand of the new state of Andhra for the Telugu speaking people (Vishalandhra movement), yet the demand was not conceded immediately as Andhra was not willing to give up Madras city, which both geographically as well as linguistically belonged to Tamil Nadu.
- **Fast unto death by Potti Sriramulu (1952):** On 19<sup>th</sup> October 1952 Potti Sriramulu, a veteran Gandhian, sat on a fast unto death demanding separate state of Andhra and died after 58 days of fasting. His death sent shock waves all over Andhra and threw the region in a fit of riots and rampage, forcing the government to immediately concede the demand for the formation of Andhra.
- **Formation of Andhra (October 1953):** The new state of Telugu-speaking Andhra formally came into existence in October 1953. Simultaneously, Tamil Nadu was formed as a Tamil-speaking state. The success of Andhra struggle encouraged other groups across the country forcing Nehru to appoint the next commission.
- **States Reorganisation Commission (SRC, August 1953):** Nehru appointed the SRC with Justice Fazal Ali, KM Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru as members to examine the entire question of reorganisation of states afresh. It submitted its report after two years (October 1955) and recommended the redrawing of state boundaries on linguistic basis. But it advised against the splitting of Bombay and Punjab.
- **States Reorganisation Act (November 1956):** On the basis of SRC recommendations, the SRA was passed by the Parliament, providing for 14 states and 6 centrally administered territories.

In this way, the formation of linguistic states did not disintegrate the country as feared earlier. On the contrary, it strengthened national unity and democracy.

**Integration of Tribals:** Tribals are the ancient inhabitants of a region (hence called 'Adivasis'). The tribal population is spread all over the country, with significant concentration in the Northeast (where they are in a majority), Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat

and Rajasthan. The tribals have lived in relative isolation, generally residing in deep forests or hills, practicing habits and traditions which are markedly different from the non-tribals.

The colonial era had witnessed steady intrusion into the tribal areas and disruption of tribal way of life. The simmering tribal discontent had found expression in a series of tribal uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. After independence, the government's approach was based on the nationalist policy towards tribals that had evolved since the 1920s when Gandhi began setting up ashrams in tribal areas and promoted constructive work. Neither isolation nor assimilation was considered desirable and Nehru adopted the policy of making the tribals an integral part of Indian nation, even while maintaining their distinct identity and culture. The two basic premise of Nehruvian approach towards tribal integration were—firstly, 'the tribal areas have to progress and secondly, 'they have to progress in their own way'. In order to achieve the two seemingly contradictory goals, he also laid down some broad guidelines:

- Respect for tribal culture, no imposition or compulsion from outside.
- Preservation of tribal rights over their lands and forests.
- Encouragement to tribal languages.
- Administrators for tribal areas should be recruited from among the tribal ranks.
- Tribal areas should be administered through their own socio-cultural institutions.

In order to give shape to the tribal policy, safeguards were provided in the constitution itself. **Article 46** directed the state to promote the educational and economic interests of the tribal people and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation through special legislation. The constitution also extended full political rights to the tribal people. Along the lines of Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes were also provided reservation of seats in legislatures and in administrative services. However, despite constitutional safeguards and legislative action, the progress among tribals has remained slow and inadequate, particularly in view of poor implementation of even well-intentioned measures.

### Challenge 2: Establishing a Democratic Polity

The establishment of the 385-member Constituent Assembly by the colonial rulers in 1946 marked the culmination of the struggle for democratic government in India. Though, after partition the size of this body was reduced to 298 of which 208 paid allegiance to the Congress party, it is noteworthy that the Congress itself was an umbrella organisation accommodating diverse ideological strands. Thus, the Assembly comprised of members representing various shades of Indian opinion including the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs and gave direction to the establishment of democratic institutions in India. The Constituent Assembly functioned both as the Parliament as well as the Constitution Making Body until January 1950.

The Constitution of independent India came into force on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950. Since then the day is celebrated as **Republic Day**. But prior to 1950, 26<sup>th</sup> January was known as Independence Day as 20 years ago in 1930, this day was celebrated as the First Independence Day or Purna Swaraj Day by the Indian masses. The Constitution of India, the highest law of the land, provided for a democratic and parliamentary form of government, with a socialist bias. At the same time, we must remember that a democratic constitution is necessary but not sufficient for establishing a democracy. A simultaneous challenge, thus, was to develop democratic practices in accordance with the Constitution.



**Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles:** Forming Part III and Part IV of the constitution, the Fundamental Rights (FRs) and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) constituted the conscience of the Constitution. The members of the Constituent Assembly were deeply influenced by the Western values of democracy, human rights and political freedom. They declared the Fundamental Rights of the citizens of India as the most significant part of the constitution and made the individual (and not the family, village, caste or community) as the basic legal unit. This was a great step forward in the direction of justice and equality given the multiplicity of divisions in Indian society along the lines of religion, caste, class and language. Further, the Fundamental Rights were made enforceable by the system of courts with the **Supreme Court** standing at its apex. Independence of judiciary was ensured to defend the rights and property of citizens. The courts were also vested with absolute powers to interpret the constitution.

Though not justifiable, the DPSPs were no less significant and constituted those socio-economic rights which the state could not immediately secure but which the state was directed to apply when making laws. Thus, they were really in the nature of guidelines issued to future legislations.

**Parliamentary System:** Over a period of time, the Indians had become familiar with the British system of governance. Naturally, when they were entrusted with the task of creating a formal institutional framework of state power in India, they opted for the Parliamentary system based on the **Westminster model**. Under this system, the executive, i.e. the Council of Ministers, is collectively responsible to the Legislature. The decision-making authority is vested in the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister. The President of India is merely a nominal head who acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. At the state level also, the real executive power is vested in the Chief Minister while the Governor is supposed to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister. However, the role of the governor has been quite controversial as he also acts as the nominee of the Centre by virtue of his being appointed by him. Thus, there exists an inherent conflict in his roles which becomes far more prominent if the ruling in the state happens to be in opposition to the one at the Centre.

**Electoral System:** The Electoral System introduced after independence was the most significant advance towards the democratisation of Indian polity. Under the new system, representative system of government based on **universal adult franchise** was introduced—a big leap forward for an upper caste and male dominated, elitist and largely illiterate society! The Election Commission was created (Article 324) to supervise the entire procedure for national as well as state elections.

**Federalism:** Decentralisation of decision making power is yet another significant feature of a democratic polity. However, in the wake of partition, the constitution makers made a strong case for a unitary system. Hence, what was established in India was a federal system with a strong Centre. For this purpose, the Indian Civil Service was retained. Various other central services such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) have also added to the centralised political structure in India. Further, the term 'Union of States' was preferred over 'Federation of States' as the federation was not a result of an agreement by States to join in a federation and no State had a right to secede from it. Thus, the federation was really a Union because it was indestructible.

**Secularism in India:** Secularism refers to that character of state and society where there is complete separation of politics, administration and public social life from religion.

India's model of secularism—**Dharma Nirpekshata**: Though both Nehru and Ambedkar were in favour of a legal institutional framework of secularism which could prohibit the use of religion in politics and administration of the nation, several forces compelled them to compromise on their model of radical secularism. Mahatma Gandhi himself was of the view that religion could not be separated from politics. The communalised atmosphere during freedom and partition of the country had further weakened the stand of the secularists. Therefore, the model of secularism that was adopted for free India was a compromise between the two extreme poles of orthodox Hindu communalism and radical secularism. Hence, what was adopted was the 'religious neutrality' (or **Dharma Nirpekshata**) model of secularism, implying distancing from direct religious propaganda and its use in politics and state policy.

Misuse of religion as a political tool: Thus, religion was partially dissociated from state but could not be completely debarred from public and political life. This ensured that the politics of India remained soaked in communal conflicts, the root cause of which was not invocation of religion for any religious gains but for merely political gains. Such a use of religion as a political tool has wreaked havoc on the nation building processes in India. However, it is true that the choice of 'Dharma Nirpekshata' was still a step forward towards true secularism.

**Freedom of Religion—A Fundamental Right:** Under the Indian Constitution, the right to freedom of religion and worship is a fundamental right of every citizen of India. The citizens of India are free to practice their own religion and the state guarantees religious non-discrimination in general and in public employment in particular:

- Article 15 of the Constitution provides that "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any one of them".
- Article 16 states that, "there shall be equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state".
- Article 25(1) guarantees, "the freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion..."

All the same, it is noteworthy that the law in India does not prohibit the use of religion in politics, thereby perpetuating the use of religion as a political tool.

### Challenge 3: Socio-Economic Development

The leaders of the national movement had dreamt not only of a democratic government but also a government that would run for the good of all and not just a section of society. Thus, the goal before India was economic development with equality and justice. This matter could not be left in the hands of businessmen, industrialists and farmers alone but called for an active intervention from the state. In this regard, the welfare goals to be achieved by the state were laid down in the form of DPSPs. The principles of equality and special protection to socially disadvantaged groups and religious and cultural communities were also laid down in the constitution. The remaining challenge for the state now was to develop a design or plan for development and accordingly evolve effective socio-economic policies.



**Planned Development:** By now, the idea of planning as a process of rebuilding economy had already gained currency all over the world. The inter-war reconstruction of Japan and Germany and most of the spectacular economic growth witnessed by Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s was attributed to planned development.

Thus, the **Planning Commission** of India was set up in March 1950 by a simple resolution of the government. It had an advisory role and its recommendations became effective only once they were approved by the Union Cabinet. The Commission was not set up all of a sudden but had an interesting history. Both the political leaders as well as the leading industrialists (who were generally weary of government control) were of the view that planned development was needed to put the Indian economy on track. Both also emphasised on the growth of agricultural incomes and outputs as a way for boosting industrialisation. Thus, in 1944, a section of industrialists and leading businessmen (including JRD Tata, GD Birla and Lala Shriram) got together and drafted a joint proposal for setting up a planned economy in the country. This came to be known as the **Bombay Plan**. The Bombay Plan explicitly saw state intervention and planning as essential for sustained industrialisation.

Thus, from left to right, planning for development was the obvious choice for the country after independence and the Planning Commission opted for Five Year Plans (FYP). The plan was a simple document prepared by the government for all its incomes and expenditures for the next five years. It helped the state to set long term targets, prioritise its goals and spend accordingly. The draft of the First FYP generated a lot of excitement. Though the process and priorities of these plans were widely debated, the first three plans succeeded in laying the foundation for India's economic development.

#### Planning and Industrialisation

**IPR 1948 (Industrial Policy Resolution):** It was in the context of planned industrial development that the first IPR was passed by the Parliament of free India in 1948. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, industrial development was a provincial subject. The IPR 1948 brought about 20 industries under central purview. These included—iron and steel, automobiles and transport vehicles, electrical machinery, heavy machinery, heavy chemicals, fertilisers, drugs and pharmaceuticals, cement, sugar and rubber manufacture. The IPR also laid down certain goals for industrial policy which included prevention of concentration of economic power, prevention of growth of monopolies, balanced regional development, restriction on imports, generation of employment and maintaining price stability. Some industries were reserved exclusively for the **public sector** (e.g. atomic energy and armaments) while others were open to private enterprise. For equitable industrial growth, the need for 'cottage and small scale industries' was also recognised.

The IPR 1948 was implemented through the industries (Development & Regulation) Act of 1951. The most significant instrument that the government now acquired was the power to issue **licenses** (licensing system) for the setting up of medium and large scale industries. The Act also empowered the government to regulate location, technology, production, imports, sales, wages and salaries, etc.

**Mixed Economy and Self-reliant Industrial Economy:** It is clear that the aim of industrial policy in the immediate post-independence period was the establishment of a mixed economy (meaning co-existence of public and private sector). The public sector was to occupy a central role while adequate protection was offered to the private enterprise and foreign capital was kept under strict supervision. Under this protective umbrella, the development of a self-reliant industrial economy was envisaged through the process of **import substitution**.

**Development of Basic and Capital Goods Sectors:** India was abundant in raw materials like metals and minerals and thus it was suggested that Indian should first concentrate on 'Basic' industries like steel coal, heavy machinery, petroleum, cement, etc., which would lay the basis for rapid industrial development. Further, since the investment in this sector would yield low returns, it was also suggested that the public sector should take up this responsibility. Thus, with the support from countries like West Germany and Soviet Union, India laid the foundation for its basic and heavy industry.

The Second FYP laid great stress on heavy industries. It was drafted by a team of planners under the leadership of **PC Mahalanobis**. The Congress had already passed an important resolution declaring 'socialist pattern of society' as its goal (at its Session held at Avadi near Madras) which clearly reflected in the Second plan. For instance, the government imposed substantial tariffs on imports to protect domestic industries.

**Assessment:** Though India has emerged as a major industrial nation, some of the objectives of the industrial policy have not been completely realised. The effectiveness of government intervention has also been a matter of much controversy. The Industrial Licensing Policy Committee (1969) observed that despite government regulation, certain business houses (e.g. the House of the Birlas) had acquired a bulk of the licenses issued and established monopolies. It was also found that Northern and Eastern India continued to remain industrially backward. The inability to bring about radical transformation of agrarian society and the resultant low growth of agricultural incomes has also put a demand restraint on the industry.

#### Planning and Land Reforms

Soon after independence, the Centre and state governments launched a comprehensive programme of land reforms, comprising mainly of the following components—abolition of intermediaries, tenancy reforms, ceiling on land holdings and consolidation of land holdings.

**Abolition of Intermediaries and Tenancy Reforms:** Under this measure, the government abolished the category of intermediaries such as zamindars and taluqdars who exercised control over land cultivated by tenants (e.g. the **UP Zamindari Abolition Act**). The right of the cultivator over the land he tilled was restored and tenants were made directly responsible to pay revenue to the government. Further, the government also abolished the control of such intermediaries over common land of the village (including grassland, forests, ponds and lakes) and vested their control in the elected village panchayats. This was not merely a land reform but an equally significant social reform. A large number of village tenants, artisans, labourers etc were now liberated from the clutches of their exploiters. Politically, it also prepared the ground for the election of village panchayats on the basis of universal adult suffrage.



However, the land reforms suffered from several anomalies. The socio-economic inequalities in the villages could not be altogether eliminated. The landlords were generously compensated and were even allowed tenancy rights over land they traditionally cultivated as khudkasht (self-cultivated). Many landlords resorted to large scale depletion of forest cover, fruit groves and grasslands in order to convert them into khudkasht land. They also undertook massive eviction of tenants from such lands, adding to social inequity.

**Ceiling on Land Holdings:** The legislation dealing with ceiling on land holding came into existence during the 1950s and varied vastly from state to state. Under this measure, the surplus land acquired was to be distributed among the weaker sections of society such as the rural poor, the landless, the scheduled castes, etc. However, these legislations could not be effectively implemented as the landlords transferred surplus land on the name of their relatives and friends (known as 'benami' transfers) to avoid the ceiling laws, posing a major obstacle in agrarian reforms which is yet to be removed.

**Consolidation of Land Holdings:** Another defect ailing Indian agriculture has been the small size of land holdings (called land fragmentation) especially in view of population pressure on land (leading to adverse land-man ratio) as well as inheritance laws under which land could be divided equally among the sons on the death of their father. As the size of land holdings increases, it makes it possible for cultivators to introduce modern technology for farming and increase their yield. Consequently, consolidation of land holdings was taken up in the First Five Year Plan itself. However, pressure on land and our inheritance laws make it a continuous process and efforts in the direction of land consolidation continue even today.

### Food Crisis

The agriculture situation rapidly deteriorated in the 1960s owing to several reasons including population pressure, failure of monsoons, wars (1962 and 1965) and foreign exchange crisis. The government was compelled to seek foreign aid and food imports, mainly from the United States. The entire enthusiasm and sense of pride associated with the planning process suffered a severe setback. Now the first priority of the planners was to immediately achieve self-sufficiency in food.

**Green Revolution:** In order to achieve food sufficiency, the government adopted a new strategy. The government now decided to invest more resources in big farmers and in those areas which were already fertile and well irrigated (as opposed to the previous strategy of giving support to areas and farmers that lagged behind). It was hoped that this would result in increased production in less time. Thus, the government offered high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and better irrigation facilities at subsidised prices. The government also guaranteed the farmers that their produce shall be bought at a pre-fixed price. This marked the beginning of what came to be known as the Green Revolution in India.

True, green revolution raised the availability of food grain in the country, but only moderately so and was mainly limited to wheat production. The rich peasants and big landlords were the main beneficiaries. Regions such as Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh prospered while others remained backward. Such increased polarisation between classes and regions provided opportunity to the left wing organisations to mobilise the poor peasants.

### Development of Science and Technology

The Indian leadership saw development in the field of S&T as a prerequisite to national development.

**Scientific Policy Resolution (SPR, March 1958):** The SPR 1958 was guided by the Nehruvian conviction that 'It was science alone that could solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people.'

### Early Developments in the Field of S&T—A Quick Timeline:

- **National Physical Laboratory (January 1947):** The foundation stone for India's first NPL was laid in 1947. Afterwards, a network of 17 national laboratories specialising in different areas of research, were set up during the Nehruvian era. As chairman of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Nehru himself guided the funding of these national labs and other scientific institutions.
- **Institutes of Technology (1952):** Patterned after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the first Indian institutes of Technology (IIT) was set up at Kharagpur, followed by four others in Delhi, Madras, Bombay and Kanpur with the aim of providing technical personnel for the country.
- **Atomic Energy:** India was early to recognise the importance of nuclear energy and set up the Atomic Energy Commission (August 1948) under the chairmanship of nuclear scientist **Homi Bhabha**. In 1954, a separate Department of Atomic Energy was created under the prime minister with Bhabha as Secretary. India's first nuclear reactor in **Trombay** (Bombay) became critical in August 1956. Though India's nuclear capability could have been easily used to develop nuclear weapons, the national leadership remained committed to peaceful use nuclear energy.
- **Space Research:** India also promptly undertook space research and set up its first Rocket Launching Facility at **Thumba** (TERLS).

### India's Foreign Policy

"What does independence consist of? It consists fundamentally and basically of foreign relations. That is the test of independence. All else is local autonomy. Once foreign relations go out of your hands into the charge of somebody else, to that extent and in that measure you are not independent." - **Jawaharlal Nehru**

The foreign policy of independent India was heavily based on the principles that had evolved during the freedom struggle. Indian leaders had naturally developed an attitude of opposition to colonialism and support to the various enslaved nations worldwide. During the Second World War, India had adopted a strong anti-fascist stand and the violence against Jews was severely condemned. Most remarkably, though India was itself engaged in a life and death struggle against imperialism and racism, its leaders took care never to take recourse to reverse racism and to avoid hatred towards the British at all times. Thus, Indian nationalism never crossed the line and largely succeeded in maintaining a safe distance from chauvinism or jingoism.



The basic principles of India's foreign policy include non-alignment, disarmament, friendship with every country and opposition to colonialism and apartheid.

**Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):** Largely a product of India's efforts, NAM was India's answer to the 'block politics' of the US and the Soviet Union in the Cold War era when the two vied with each other for influence all over the world. India, on the other hand, sought not to join either of the two camps and instead remain non-aligned. The term 'non-alignment' first gained currency in the post **Bandung Conference** (1955) period. The NAM took a concrete shape at the first conference of non-aligned countries held at **Belgrade** (1961). The five pioneering leaders of NAM were: President Tito (Yugoslavia), President Nasser (Egypt), President Nkrumah (Ghana), President Sukarno (Indonesia) and Prime Minister Nehru (India).

**Relations with Pakistan:** The reasons for discord between India and Pakistan lay in the very manner in which Pakistan was created in August 1947. In an effort to establish its own independent identity, Pakistan has continuously competed with India in all fields and at all international forums, triggering an arms race resulting in wars. This has caused a serious strain on their scarce resources and severely disrupted the development process in both countries.

**Kashmir Issue:** Relations with Pakistan deteriorated over the Kashmir issue during 1947–48, i.e. immediately after partition. Refusing to acknowledge Kashmir's accession to India (26<sup>th</sup> October 1947), Pakistan invoked a tribal invasion in India. India resorted to military action, supported by the local population led by Sheikh Abdullah, to drive out the invaders but before the task could be accomplished, a complaint was lodged with the Security Council of the United Nations Organisation leading to a ceasefire (1<sup>st</sup> January 1949). Ever since then, the LOC has emerged as the de-facto border between the two countries with neither side showing any keenness to alter it by force. Earlier, India had also offered to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir, which was however withdrawn in 1955 owing to changed situation. Though diplomatic battles have continued since then, the first hot war between India and Pakistan took place in 1965.

The Kashmir problem continues to defy any solution and remains a military flash point between the two neighbours.

**Indus River Water Dispute:** Another problem created by partition was the issue of equitable sharing of the Indus River and its tributaries. With partition, the headworks of some vital canals in Pakistan fell in India, creating tension between the two nations as India was blamed for any calamity like floods or droughts in Pakistan. Subsequently, an interim agreement (Apr 1959) was signed between the two countries under the auspices of the World Bank which was subsequently followed by a comprehensive agreement. The Canal Waters Treaty was signed in September 1969 in Karachi.

**US Aid to Pakistan:** During the Cold War, while India remained non-aligned, Pakistan allied with the United States. It signed the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement and also became a member of the SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organisation) in 1954. In 1959, a bilateral

agreement was concluded between the two countries as per which Pakistan received massive economic and military aid from the US, thereby creating a security concern for India.

**Relations with China:** China was one of the first countries with which free India established diplomatic relations. In 1949, however, the government led by Chian Kai Shek was overthrown and replaced by the new government led by Mao Tse Tung which India soon recognised in December 1949. Henceforth, India has consistently tried to establish cordial relations with the People's Republic of China, but the results have been frustrating particularly on account of China's aggression in Tibet (1950) and in India (1962) as well as persistent border stalemates.

**China's Aggression in Tibet:** In 1950, China occupied Tibet, much to India's bewilderment. Though India had inherited certain rights and obligations over Tibet from the British rulers, India decided not to confront China on this issue and instead concluded the **Panchsheel Agreement** which formalised the occupation of Tibet and became the guiding principles of Indo-China relations. The five principles laid down by Panchsheel were:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual non-aggression
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful co-existence

In 1959, following a popular uprising and suppression by China, the Dalai Lama fled from Tibet and sought political refuge from India. India agreed to give refuge much to the dislike of China which then occupied 12,000 square miles of Indian territory in Ladakh. The developments in Tibet prompted China to indulge in repeated border violations and extend Chinese claims on large parts of Indian territory.

**China's Aggression in India (India-China War 1962):** In 1962, China launched a full-fledged attack on India and Chinese armies entered deep into Indian territory in Ladakh in the West and in Arunachal in the East. The war ended in a military debacle for India, leaving China in occupation of a large part of Ladakh territory. Doubts were raised on the efficacy of India's foreign policy and despite efforts to resolve all outstanding border disputes, the border stale mate has continued.

### THE SHASTRI YEARS (JUNE 1964–1966)

Nehru had died in May 1964 without naming a successor. Consequently, a group of Congress leaders (that came to be known as '**the Syndicate**') and included Congress President, K Kamraj) managed the succession, preferring Lal Bahadur Shastri over Morarji Desai in the hope that he would be more pliable and not challenge the Syndicate leadership. Shastri was sworn in as the prime minister within a week of Nehru's death. As was expected of him, Shastri did not interfere with the working of the party or of state governments and on the whole kept



Lal Bahadur Shastri  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister of India)



a low profile. He did not make any major changes in Nehru's Cabinet either. However, he did persuade Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi to join the Cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

Shastri supported the **Green Revolution** to boost India's food production and oversaw the establishment of Food Corporation of India. Shastri also supported the **White Revolution** to boost production and supply of milk in India and oversaw the establishment of Amul Milk Cooperative of Anand. He also established the National Dairy Development Board.

### Important Events during Shastri Years

**Setting up of PMO:** Shastri setup his own Prime Minister's Secretariat headed by his principal private secretary LK Jha to inform and advice the PM on policy matters, independent of the ministries. The Secretariat soon came to be known as the PMO and acquired a great deal of influence over policy matters (under Indira Gandhi, it virtually emerged as an independent executive).

**Indo-Pak War (August–September 1965):** The Kashmir issue had been left unsettled in 1948 and had continued to simmer. While Pakistan repeatedly tried to reopen the Kashmir issue, India maintained that the state was an integral part of India and there was no question of any reconsideration. However, in 1965, unrest in Kashmir Valley reached a new peak and Pakistan decided to intervene. Pakistan was particularly prompted to do so in the wake of its newly acquired arms and ammunition from the United States and India's defeat in 1962 war with China.

Subsequently, in August 1965, Pakistan sent trained infiltrators into the Valley with the hope of inciting a pro-Pakistan rebellion. India retaliated with military action and what began was an undeclared war. However, the struggle proved inconclusive as the two countries soon agreed on a ceasefire (23<sup>rd</sup> September) under pressure from the UN Security Council. Though the war had an adverse impact on the economies of the two countries, it helped India regain some of its self-confidence that had been lost after the 1962 war. During the war, Shastri gave the popular slogan of '**Jai Jawan Jai Kisan**'.

**Tashkent Declaration (4<sup>th</sup> January 1966):** Under the auspices of the Soviet Union, the Tashkent Declaration was signed between the General Ayub Khan (President of Pakistan) and Shastri as per which both agreed to mutual restitution of territories and return to pre-war position. Though this meant withdrawal from the strategic **Haji Pir pass** for India, Shastri had agreed as his refusal would have meant resumption of war as well as loss of Soviet support. But even before Shastri could return to India, he died of a sudden heart attack in Tashkent on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1966.

Shastri's sudden and tragic death once again raised the issue of succession. This time the choice of the Syndicate fell upon Indira Gandhi, in the hope that the young woman lacking experience would be pliable and give free hand to the Syndicate leadership.

## THE INDIRA YEARS (1966–77, 1980–84)

### Early Years (1966–69)

Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister at a time when the country was facing grave problems on several fronts. The significant events of Indira Years have been discussed as under:

**Food Imports and Currency Devaluation:** The wars of 1962 and 1965 had left a deep dent on the Indian economy and famine conditions were fast emerging. At this juncture, the Indira's decisions to rely on **food imports** from the US (PL-480 aid programme that started in 1956) and **devalue the rupee** proved to be highly controversial. While devaluation failed in its stated objective of increasing exports and attracting foreign capital, wheat dispatches from the US were irregular and piece-meal. Indira's disappointment with the US found expression in her foreign policy and she began distancing herself from the US. In fact, India was never to try again to come to close to the US on such heavy terms.

**General Elections of 1967:** 1967 was also the year of General Elections in India. Congress, which had been declining since 1964, now suffered a serious setback. Though it still retained hold in the Lok Sabha (with Indira as PM and Morarji Desai as Deputy PM), its majority drastically declined, both in the centre as well as in several states. The Congress monopoly in states was replaced not by any other single party but a multiplicity of parties.

Thus, the **1967 Elections** initiated the era of **coalition governments** as well as the era of **defection politics**. The coalition governments proved to be highly unstable with the net result that during the brief period between 1967 and 1970, Bihar had seen 7 governments; Uttar Pradesh 4; Punjab, Haryana, MP and West Bengal 3 each and a total of eight spells of President's Rule in seven states! A check was placed on the problem of defection only after the passage of the anti-defection law in 1986 under Rajiv Gandhi. **Anti-Congressism** also gained ground which has been described as 'a weariness with Congress and a hankering after almost anything else' in contrast to opposition to the Congress on ideological grounds.

The Elections results set a clear message to the Congress that it could no longer gain people's support on the basis of the role it played in the freedom struggle or the achievements during the Nehru era. The people now expected the party to rejuvenate itself, fulfil its promises and give results.

Before learning about the Congress split of 1969, let us have a quick look at an important development on the Left front.

**Rise and Growth of the Naxalites:** Earlier, in 1964, the CPM (Communist Part Marxist, a pro-revolutionary group) had defected from the CPI due to its pursuance of parliamentary politics. However, postponing armed struggle, the CPM actively participated in the 1967 general elections and formed coalition government in West Bengal with CPM leader Jyoti Basu emerging as the Home Minister. This decision of the CPM leadership was harshly criticised by the younger cadres



Indira Gandhi in 1967 (3<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister of India)



who accused the leadership of falling prey to parliamentary politics and betraying the revolution. They argued that democracy in India was a sham, the agrarian structure was still feudal. Hence, the party should immediately launch armed peasant uprisings leading to formation of liberated kisan areas.

Thus, the rebel CPM members led by Charu Majumdar (a charismatic party worker who later became the ideological father of Naxalism) now initiated an armed peasant uprising in the Naxalbari village of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The peasants attacked the landlord of Naxalbari, lifted his stock, took away his land forcibly and established control over the village (liberated kisan area). Henceforth, a new term was added to the political lexicon, i.e. 'Naxalism' and the CPM rebels came to be known as the Naxalites.

The CPM politburo immediately called a chintan meeting, condemned the violence and threatened Charu and his followers with disciplinary action. Subsequently, the rebels turned away from the CPM and formed a new organization—Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) under the leadership of Charu Majumdar. This development marked the beginning of the Naxalite Political Movement. Even after sustained government repression, the naxal fire has continued to burn in India and has emerged as one of the gravest internal security threats today.

## The Indira Years (1969–77)

**Congress Split of 1969:** The party soon split over its future course of action along the **right-left lines**. Though Congress had always been an umbrella organisation representing a diverse mix of political opinions, it had nurtured a somewhat left-of-centre image. The Congress left (led by Indira) now supported going back to and further developing Nehru's socialist programme to enhance its appeal among the poor and the disadvantaged—specially the Harijans, minorities, tribals and women. On the other hand, the right wing (led by Morarji Desai and the Syndicate except Kamraj) supported greater encouragement to private sector, strengthening ties with the West and enhancing appeal among the big peasants and landlords.

The party finally split, with Indira setting up the **Congress (R)**—R for Requisitionist. The Syndicate-led faction came to be known as congress (O)—O for Organisation. In the final countdown, bulk of the party's Lok Sabha MPs as well as AICC members rallied behind Indira, whose party now emerged as the real Congress while Indira herself emerged as the unchallenged leader of the government as well as the new party.

With the support of her new party, Indira now undertook several bold measures—she went ahead with **nationalisation of banks** and **abolition of privy purses** through presidential ordinances. Her popularity immediately soared and she emerged as the champion of the masses. She also set up a Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission and pressed the states to effectively implement the land reform laws. However, when the Supreme Court ordered against the abolition of privy purses (it had also earlier invalidated bank nationalisation), she dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for general elections a year ahead of time, in the hope of returning to the Lok Sabha with a clear majority this time.

**General Elections of 1971:** As soon as the elections were announced, the non-communist opposition parties including Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Swatantra and others formed an electoral alliance known as the 'Grand Alliance'. It gave the slogan 'Indira Hatao' (Remove Indira) and made it its main plank for the election campaign. Indira responded by raising the slogan of '**Garibi Hatao**' and decided, instead, to fight the elections over national issues. The election results dealt a severe blow to the hopes of the Grand Alliance while Indira's party swept the polls winning 352 of the 518 Lok Sabha seats. Clearly, Indira had received the mandate she had sought and had now emerged as a dominant figure in Indian politics. However, just as she was being sworn in as the Prime Minister, the Bangladesh crisis broke out.

**Bangladesh Crisis (1971):** Though Pakistan was created on the issue of religion, religion soon proved inadequate to hold its eastern and western wings together.

Soon political power got concentrated in West Pakistan and it was widely perceived that East Pakistan was being exploited in many ways. In 1948, Jinnah had declared Urdu as the federal language of Pakistan which was seen as an attempt to suppress the culture of Bengali-speaking East Pakistan. Bengalis were also underrepresented in the Pakistani military and also faced discrimination in budgetary allocation.

The people of East Pakistan soon raised the demand for greater autonomy and launched a powerful pro-democracy movement under the leadership of **Mujibur Rahman** of the Awami Party. Pakistan led by its military dictator General Yahya Khan, reacted violently and decided to suppress the movement which then grew into a full-blown movement for independence.

The Bangladesh Liberation War began after General Yahya Khan, the military dictator of Pakistan, annulled the 1970 Elections and arrested Prime Minister designate—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In protest, the Awami Party started a civil disobedience movement to enforce constitutional provision. However, the war began when, in March 1971, West Pakistan initiated Operation Searchlight in East Pakistan and for the next six months the army carried out large scale slaughter of innocent people, burnt villages and committed heinous crimes of all sorts. Bengali nationalists, students, intelligentsia and armed personnel were specially targeted to deprive the people of any leadership.

Subsequent to the genocide, India witnessed en masse migration from East Pakistan. Some Awami leaders also managed to escape to Calcutta, formed a Government of Bangladesh in exile, organised **Mukti Bahini** (Liberation Army) and launched a fierce war of independence. The refugee-crisis and their stories of brutality unleashed a wave of sympathy in India and a demand arose for quick action against Pakistan.

At this juncture, Indira Gandhi acted with immense courage and caution. She knew that, firstly, any action from the Indian side would further fan the on-going Pakistani propaganda that the independence movement in East Bengal was an Indian conspiracy rather than a popular uprising. Secondly, the international community had to be educated about the condition of refugees and the unbearable burden on Indian resources. The Mukti Bahini had to be strengthened before it could confront the Pakistani forces in regular warfare. And lastly, the military action had to be swift and mission accomplished before the big powers could intervene and force the countries into a ceasefire.



Convinced about the inevitability of war, Indira Gandhi made preparations along the above lines. To further secure India against a possible US-China intervention, she quickly signed a **20-Year Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation**. By November 1971, when the number of refugees from East Pakistan reached ten million, India was fully prepared for war.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1971, the war finally began when the Pakistani air force launched a surprise attack on military air fields in western India. India responded by immediately recognising Bangladesh and launching a strong military action. US tried to intervene, but its proposal of a ceasefire was vetoed by Soviet Union in the Security Council.

On 13<sup>th</sup> December, Indian forces led by **General Manekshaw** (Chief of Army Staff), surrounded Dacca and forced the Pakistani army to surrender on 16<sup>th</sup> December. The next day, India announced a unilateral ceasefire on the western front. Mujibur Rahman was released and he established a democratic government in Bangladesh on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1972.

With the Bangladesh War, Indira's popularity shot up phenomenally and she reached the peak of her power and glory. India now emerged as a pre-eminent power on the world stage. The humiliating memories of the 1962 war had been wiped out; India's pride and self-confidence had been restored. The Bangladesh crisis also strengthened Indian secularism and gave a severe blow to the two-nation theory which had been the basis of India's partition.



Lt. Gen Niazi signing the Instrument of Surrender under the gaze of Lt. Gen Arora

**Simla Declaration (June 1972):** Realising the need for a mutually arrived at Indo-Pak settlement for durable peace, Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto met in Simla and signed an agreement which came to be known as the Simla Declaration. As per the agreement, India returned the Pakistani territory it had occupied except some strategic points in Kashmir; Pakistan agreed to respect the LOC; and both agreed to settle their disputes bilaterally without any outside mediation. India also agreed to release the prisoners of war following a Pakistan-Bangladesh agreement (which occurred the next year after Pakistan recognised Bangladesh in August 1973).

**Indira Gandhi implements left-of centre Agenda:** During 1971–74, Indira Gandhi undertook several measures to implement her left-of centre agenda. General Insurance and coal industry were nationalised. Ceilings were imposed on urban land ownership. In order to check businessmen's influence in politics, ban was imposed on donations by joint-stock companies to political parties.

In 1971, Indira's government also passed the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Acts. The 24<sup>th</sup> amendment restored the Parliament's authority to amend the Fundamental Rights, which the Supreme Court had taken away in 1967 in the Golak Nath Case and later invalidated bank nationalisation (on the ground of inadequate compensation) and abolition of privy purses (on ground of violation of fundamental right to property).

The 25<sup>th</sup> amendment curtailed the right to property and permitted the acquisition of private property by the government for public use, on the payment of compensation which would be determined by the Parliament and not the courts.

**Pokhran Nuclear Test (18<sup>th</sup> May 1974):** India took a major leap ahead in the field of scientific development when the Atomic Energy Agency detonated an underground nuclear device at Pokhran (Rajasthan) in May 1974. The government, however, insisted that India was committed to using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Despite the achievements, 1973 onwards the tide began to turn rapidly against Indira Gandhi owing to several factors, culminating the JP Movement followed by the Emergency of 1975.

**JP Movement (1974):** Indira's popularity suffered a decline owing to a combination of factors including sustained poverty, unemployment and recession. Monsoons had failed for two consecutive years, i.e. 1972 and 1973, giving rise to conditions of drought and shortage of food grains, and fuelling their prices. The government had also been unable to check the tentacles of corruption that had spread far and wide and paralysed the administration.

The dissatisfaction of the people found expression in various forms, including popular movements in Gujarat and Bihar. The Bihar movement was initiated by students in Bihar and led by **Jayaprakash Narayan** or **JP** (the veteran Gandhian socialist, who now came out of his political retirement) to protest against misrule and corruption in the government of Bihar. It soon turned against the Congress and, in particular, Indira Gandhi who was projected as the fountainhead of corruption and a threat to Indian democracy. Criticising Indira for trying to establish a Soviet-backed dictatorship and concentrate all power in her own hands, JP gave a call for '**Total Revolution**' (Sampoorna Kranti).

Meanwhile, on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1975, Indira Gandhi suffered a severe blow when the Allahabad High Court ruling held her guilty of corrupt campaign practices and declared her election invalid. Refusing to resign, Indira challenged the decision in the Supreme Court which was to hear her appeal on 14<sup>th</sup> July. Seizing the opportunity, JP and the opposition parties announced on 25<sup>th</sup> June that, starting 29<sup>th</sup> June, a week-long nation-wide civil disobedience movement would be launched demanding Indira's resignation. The movement would end with the gherao of the prime minister's house by thousands of activists who would prevent her from going out and camp there day and night, forcing her to resign. On 26<sup>th</sup> June, Indira responded by declaring a state of Internal Emergency.

Thus, it is amply clear that neither JP nor Indira Gandhi chose the democratic way out. Instead of demanding dissolution of the Lok Sabha and fresh elections, JP demanded the replacement of democratically elected legislatures through extra-constitutional mass agitations comparable to a coup d'état. Similarly, Indira Gandhi, instead of calling for a fresh mandate, imposed the Emergency.

**The Emergency (26<sup>th</sup> June 1975):** Indira Gandhi proclaimed a state of Internal Emergency under **Article 352**, promising restoration of normalcy as soon as conditions allowed it. During the Emergency, which lasted for 19 months, federal provisions and fundamental rights were suspended. The Press was censored and opposition stifled. On 26<sup>th</sup> June, hundreds of opposition leaders (including JP, Morarji Desai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee) were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). Even within Congress, internal democracy was sniffled, concentrating extra-ordinary powers in the hands of the prime minister.



The emergency evoked a mixed response from the people of India. While it was condemned by a section of intelligentsia, a vast majority of Indians responded to it with passivity, acceptance or even support. Disillusionment with the Emergency came only after a few months i.e. only from the beginning of 1976. A major factor behind peoples' acceptance of the Emergency was its constitutional, legal and temporary character. Apart from the opposition, the repressive measures were almost entirely directed against anti-social elements such as smugglers, hoarders, and black marketers. Most of the detainees were gradually released after a few days or months. Public order was immediately restored and, on 1<sup>st</sup> July, Indira Gandhi announced the Twenty Point Programme directed towards the socio-economic uplift of the vast masses of the rural poor. All these factors prevented any hostile reaction from the people.

However, within six months of the proclamation of the emergency, disillusionment began to creep in owing to varied reasons. Relief to the poor was slow to come by; the workers were unhappy due to restrictions imposed on their wages, bonus and right to strike; while the government servants and teachers grew discontented of special duties imposed upon them particularly with regard to sterilisation work. The bureaucracy and police acquired special powers during the emergency, adversely affecting all sections of people. All avenues of protest as well as grievance redressal were closed. The stifling of the press led to complete ignorance among the people of what was happening in the country. Whatever little was shared by means of radio and television was heavily censored and evoked doubts and distrust and people came to rely heavily upon rumours.

In September 1976, the **42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act**, which was seen as an attempt to tamper with the very basic structure of the constitution and proved to be the most controversial in history, was passed. It attempted to reduce the power of the Supreme Court and High Courts to pronounce upon the constitutional validity of laws. It laid down the Fundamental Duties of Indian citizens to the nation. It brought about the most widespread changes to the Constitution and is sometimes referred to as a '**mini-Constitution**'. In November 1976, Indira got the parliament to postpone elections by one year. The delay in lifting the emergency made people cast doubt on Indira's intentions.

Another significant reason for the growing disenchantment of the people with the Emergency was the rise of **Sanjay Gandhi**, the younger son of Indira, as an extra-constitutional power centre. He held no office in the party or government and yet wielded considerable influence in governance and administration. The most controversial of Sanjay's actions was his insistence on family planning leading to forced sterilisations. Even though these cases were only few, rumour had it that thousands were being forcibly sterilised. Similarly, Sanjay Gandhi also insisted on city beautification programme through slum clearance and demolition of unauthorised structures which was also carried out with equal callousness and cruelty. Such excesses committed under Sanjay Gandhi's direction worsened the situation and escalated a crisis.

**Lifting of Emergency and Elections of 1977:** In January 1977, Indira Gandhi suddenly announced that fresh elections to the Lok Sabha would be held in March. Simultaneously, the repressive government machinery was withdrawn. Free and fair elections were conducted on 16<sup>th</sup> March, the mighty government of Indira Gandhi was voted out and the Janata Party came to power.

The emergency years are aptly regarded as the testing years of Indian democracy. The lifting of emergency in 1977 was a watershed in post-independence history which aptly demonstrated India's commitment to democratic values.

**The Janata Interregnum (1977-79):** The Janata Party, created by the merger of Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) and the Socialist Party, formed the government with 81-year-old Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister. The Janata government brought about the **43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Amendments** in 1977 and 1978 respectively, and restored the pre-1976 position to some extent. It in the field of foreign policy, it advocated '**genuine non-alignment**' aimed at building moderate ties with both the blocks of the Cold War era.



Morarji Desai (4<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of India)

However, by the end of 1977, the Janata government began to decline owing to non-performance on several fronts. It made no efforts to fulfil its promises of land reforms and higher wages to agricultural workers. The period witnessed caste and communal violence, mutinies in police and paramilitary forces. Though '**Food for Work**' programme was implemented to address rural unemployment, it contributed to price rise in food grains. An uneasy coalition that it was, the Janata government was soon paralysed by constant bickering and infighting both in the centre as well as in the states.

On the other hand, Indira Gandhi began to regain popular support mainly on account of two reasons. Firstly, the Janata Government's efforts to punish Indira boomeranged against the government and were seen more as an act of revenge rather than justice. Several enquiry commissions (including the **Shah Commission**) and special courts were set up to enquire into the excesses committed by Indira Gandhi during Emergency. In the eyes of the people, she had already been punished by being voted out and her continued persecution was only seen as an attempt to disgrace and humiliate her. Secondly, the poor and the disadvantaged sections of society still saw Indira as their leader.

Meanwhile, faced by opposition within the party, Indira, had split the party and formed a new party known as Congress (I)—I for Indira in January 1978, while the other wing came to be known as Congress (U)—U for Devraj Urs. In February 1978 elections to the state assemblies of Andhra and Karnataka, Congress (I) emerged victorious and Indira even won a parliamentary seat.

On the government front, the Finance Minister Charan Singh broke up the Janata Party when the Jan Sangh members refused to give up the dual membership of the Janata Party and the RSS. Reduced to a minority, Morarji Desai was now forced to resign on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1979.

**Mid-term Elections (January 1980):** The Elections of 1980 saw Indira Gandhi return to power with a massive mandate (two-thirds majority). In the aftermath of elections, the Janata Party split once again when the old Jan Sangh members walked out, leaving it to emerge as the Bharatiya Janata Party by the end of the year.



**Return of Indira Gandhi (1980–84):** Once again, Congress came to power with Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister. But this time, she was no longer the same person. Deserted by most of her colleagues during 1977–78, she had grown weary of people around her and trusted none other than her son, Sanjay. She seemed to have grown tired and hesitated in taking strong decisions. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1980, Sanjay met with an accident while flying a stunt plane and died, leaving Indira ever more psychologically drained and weakened. Following Sanjay's death, her elder son Rajiv Gandhi, was brought into politics.

Indira once again started the task of economic development. This time, taking note of the changes in world economy, she initiated certain measures in the field of **economic liberalisation**, even as she worked to strengthen the public sector. However, burning issues on Kashmir, Assam and Punjab could not be dealt with firmly with grave consequences leading to her assassination. On the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984, Indira Gandhi met a violent death when she was machine gunned by two of her own Sikh security guards for ordering the storming of the Golden Temple to flush out the Sikh terrorists. Following the assassination, Rajiv Gandhi was immediately sworn in as the new Prime Minister (in the evening the same day). Rajiv and Sonia, his Italian-born wife, reluctantly accepted this decision, little aware of the tragedy that was to occur six and a half years later and sniff out Rajiv's life, equally violently.

### RAJIV GANDHI TO NARASIMHA RAO: A BRIEF SURVEY (1984–91)

Rajiv Gandhi, who had served as a pilot with Indian Airlines for fourteen years, hardly got any time to mourn his mother's death. Even as dignitaries from around the world were arriving at Delhi to pay their condolences, a terrible **massacre of the Sikhs** was taking place in the city to avenge Indira's killing. Within two weeks of Rajiv assuming office, the horrible **Bhopal Gas Tragedy** took place in which more than 2,000 people lost their lives and many more disabled for life due to leakage of poisonous gases from the chemical factory of Union Carbide.

In 1984, General Elections, supported by the sympathy wave, the Congress party won by largest ever majority. Rajiv won his seat from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh (previously Sanjay's constituency) by defeating Sanjay's wife Maneka. His tenure saw the launch of the six **'technology missions'**, assisted by Sam Pitroda, a US-trained Indian telecommunications expert. Rajiv gave a big push to India's **computerisation programme** amidst debate about the utility of computers in a labour-surplus society. He also worked to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions, liberalise the economy and promote international trade.

In mid-1987 the Bofors scandal damaged Rajiv's corruption-free image and resulted in a major defeat for his party in the 1989 election. Two precarious coalition governments followed in quick succession—the first one formed by the National Front with VP Singh as Prime Minister (1989–90) and the second one formed by the Janata Dal socialist faction with Chandrashekhar as Prime Minister. The last coalition disintegrated in March 1991 and fresh elections were announced. It



Rajiv Gandhi (6<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of India)

was while campaigning for 1991 elections that Rajiv Gandhi met his tragic end when he was assassinated by an LTTE suicide bomber at Sriperumbudur, near Madras.

Riding on the sympathy wave following Rajiv's assassination, the Congress once again emerged as the single largest party and formed government with **Narasimha Rao** as Prime Minister (June 1991). Rao emerged as the first person outside Nehru-Gandhi family to serve as Prime Minister for full five-year term.

It was this government that undertook the most radical **economic reforms** to avert the impending 1991 Economic Crisis. Rao energised **India's nuclear security programme** and asked APJ Abdul Kalam to prepare for nuclear tests in 1995, but they were dropped under American pressure when the US intelligence got the whiff of it. His tenure also saw the emergence of **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** as an alternative to the Indian National Congress which had been governing India for most of its post-independence history.



PV Narasimha Rao  
(9<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of India)

### Why Economic Reforms?

Though certain measures towards economic liberalisation had already been initiated by Indira Gandhi in 1980, the economic crisis of 1991 occasioned the most radical changes.

By 1991, India was facing a major economic crisis. There was a huge Trade Deficit; exports were declining and import bills were going up. There was a huge Revenue Deficit; the Public Sector Units were running at huge losses and there was shortage of funds to fuel growth. There were huge Foreign Debts, hyperinflation and the Foreign Exchange Reserves were just 1.2 billion US dollars—which could sustain essential imports for just 3 weeks.

Subsequently, Rao decided to reverse socialist policies and dismantle the License Raj. He appointed Dr. Manmohan Singh, a former RBI Governor, as his Finance Minister to implement the historic reforms at the behest of International Monetary Fund, which was ready to sanction loan only if India opened up the economy. And for this the **LPG model** (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) was suggested, where Liberalisation meant lowering of trade barriers and restrictions for Multi National Companies; Privatisation meant transferring government business or property into private hands and Globalisation meant integration of our economy with the world economy (which was meant to be an outcome of Liberalisation and Privatisation). Thus, in June 1991, the central government introduced the package of reforms at the behest of IMF and the LPG-model was implemented gradually.

- What was the impact of liberalisation on Indian economy and society? Impact on poverty?
- Was liberalisation and participation in the globalisation process the 'final surrender' to imperialism of the IMF-World Bank combine?
- What has changed since the rise of the BJP?

**For answers and more...Read Ahead**

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