

# India's Long Hot Summer

**Bowed by famine, overpopulation, and linguistic differences, a proud giant staggers;  
a hopeful report on a nation with one-seventh of the world's population.**

By MARSHALL FISHWICK

**I**N SUMMER, 1966, India is not merely dry; it is baked. Heat bounces off the earth's crust like a tennis ball. The dust never settles over Delhi. Driving through the villages, you stir up clouds that obscure people huddled in sapped, starving villages. What, after all, can they do but swallow the dust, accept the hunger, and pray for rain?

And what can *you* do? Bathe and sip cool drinks in hotel rooms from which dust is carefully excluded; talk to well-dusted officials who insist that there really is no famine (though things are a bit hard here and there); try to sleep on sheets made white as snow by the work of many brown hands.

To sleep, to dream—ah, there indeed is the rub. All those people keep coming back. You do not know their names—how could you, having hardly seen them through the swirling dust? They did not speak; you cannot know which were afraid to die, which were afraid to live, which could no longer draw a clear line between life and death. No one told you which of the myriad unmarked mounds were graves, which were accumulations of litter, which ancient earth-warts made for long-dormant deities. After all, you are an American, hurrying through.

But they *looked* at you. That's the root of the problem. You can never again forget their eyes—deep, fearful, questioning, pained, sunk in their black sockets. They could have glanced the other way, or at least closed their eyes when the car drove past, to keep the dust out. But they didn't. They looked at you.

Especially the little children, naked for the most part, or covered with a few bits of soiled cloth that turned them into Raggedy-Ann dolls, wound up to walk

amidst the squalor, bullock carts, placid animals, and dung piles. Close by are the mothers, often carrying the next Raggedy-Anns in their wombs. India's population increases at the rate of a million a month.

The figure is startling enough; the meaning of it staggering. That increase more than wipes out all the recent gains the government has made in production, modernization, mechanization. In the race between people and products, the people, in 50,000 villages, are losing by winning.

"The loop," a cheap, highly effective contraceptive device perfected in America and widely distributed throughout India, may turn the tide. But Indians point out that only the people who can best afford to have children are cutting back; those who are least able to do so continue the explosion. To them the birth problem is moral and religious. Scientific arguments have to break down inner psychic walls. That is never an easy or quick process.

The Indian poet B. S. Mardhekar gives a terrifying picture of ants swarming over a suburban train, then quickly changes the angle of vision:

These are no ants: these are humans:  
Even if their minds are nameless,  
Even if torn minutes veil them,  
eternally;  
Even if they are ashamed of  
themselves.  
So many, intoxicating, sweating,  
Seeped in their pores;  
And the platform drunk  
With the cocktail of their smells.

What goes on under all India's seething and swarming? Peel the skin, Mardhekar suggests, and you will see "a rotting multitude of doubts." God's curse

stays in the temple. Yet to the visitor this untabulated population (thought to be approaching the 500 million mark) is incredibly patient and enduring in the face of problems (economic, military, political, religious, cultural, medical) that crop up everywhere. One feels safer on the streets of Bombay or Calcutta, for example, than he does in New York or London. Courtesy and deference abound. Life moves forward in a stately, steady, symbolic way. Anand Coomaraswamy defined symbolism as the lost art of thinking in images. After thousands of years of civilization symbols are imbedded in India, emerging on occasions with great effective power.

That power would be much more effective, the national life much more cohesive, if the language problem could be solved. If the monsoons come, the drought will end; millions of loops may reverse the birth explosion; careful diplomacy may ease the Pakistan tension. But all the raindrops, loops, and words in the world won't eliminate the Babel that is today's India. Fourteen major languages are spoken, as well as hundreds of dialects. Important contemporary writers and thinkers insist on using the Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Urdu, Tamil, or Punjabi language. The Parichay Trust, founded in 1959 to promulgate Gujarati, has already issued more than 5,000,000 pamphlets in Gujarati. Many Americans have never heard a single word of Telugu—yet more people speak it than all the Scandinavian languages combined.

Isn't English the common bond that holds Indian culture together? Perhaps; but it is weakening every day. There are both practical and theoretical explanations. In the first heady days of independence, after Britain's withdrawal in

1947, India cut back on English training to stress nationalism and the "new freedom." Not in the kindergarten, but in the seventh grade was English teaching begun. Consequently, a whole generation has grown up with English accents and phrasing that range from satisfactory to incomprehensible.

At no time during British control did more than a small percentage of India's total population speak English well. Under a government stressing Hindi as the basic language, lacking hard currency to send many students to the West, the caliber of spoken English continues to go down. "My graduate students are supposed to know English well before coming to my classes," an Indian teacher told me. "Yet I gave an hour's lecture on Milton recently, only to find that one of my students thought I was discussing Lipton and the tea problem."

From a theoretical standpoint, most Indians are convinced that the first language for their country must be a native one. "Can democracy be effective if only the intelligentsia speak the governing language?" they argue. "Our nation can be one only when the élite speaks and thinks in the language of the masses. Why should we be raised to know all about English thrushes and skylarks, rather than our own birds—why should we be what Macaulay called 'black Englishmen'? The impact of our English education is counteracted by the Indian life and religion around us. To be rootless in India is to speak English only, and ape everything Western. Don't you want us to stand on our own feet, and to be ourselves?"

Such thinking lay behind the decision that Hindi would be the language to link India's millions together, giving them

cultural unity and national consciousness. It seemed like a fine choice—for those who spoke Hindi. Noting a reluctance among other language-groups to switch (despite the compulsory teaching of Hindi in all schools), the federal government in Delhi tried to impose a time-schedule for the switchover. Resentment, riots, and rebellion ensued, especially in the South. Recently the government assured non-Hindi speakers that it does not intend to push its case too hard. In her May 25 speech at New Delhi, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi urged the film industry to take a greater interest in developing films in regional languages, since that is the best way to reach the masses. Such films, she said, were not only a source of entertainment but also "a powerful instrument for bringing about national integration." Integration in Babel. No easy task, this.

**S**TILL, the gauntlet has been thrown down. The centuries-old pride of Marathis, Bengalis, and Tamils has been rekindled. "There is only one solution," a South Indian told me last week. "We shall have to secede. The next time you visit India, you will have to get a visa to cross over into our state." Is he merely speaking like one of the "unreconstructed rebels" who continued to plague the American scene for half a century after Appomattox, or will he one day be a regional leader who opted for the Balkanization of a subcontinent?

"Let the winds of all cultures blow into my house," Nehru once said. "But let not the winds blow me off my feet."

Many Indians now admit that the winds blowing out of China did indeed blow Nehru off his feet, contributing to his death and the agonizing reappraisal

of policy that has followed. The winds continue to sweep down upon India's Mrs. Gandhi. Sabers are being rattled. At a time when the government can ill afford to put a single additional man into uniform, India's military strength has been increased five-fold in a few years. Soon jet planes will be coming from the factories of Bangalore. The argument that India must develop nuclear capability to survive is heard with growing insistence. Where does the fight for India's survival begin?

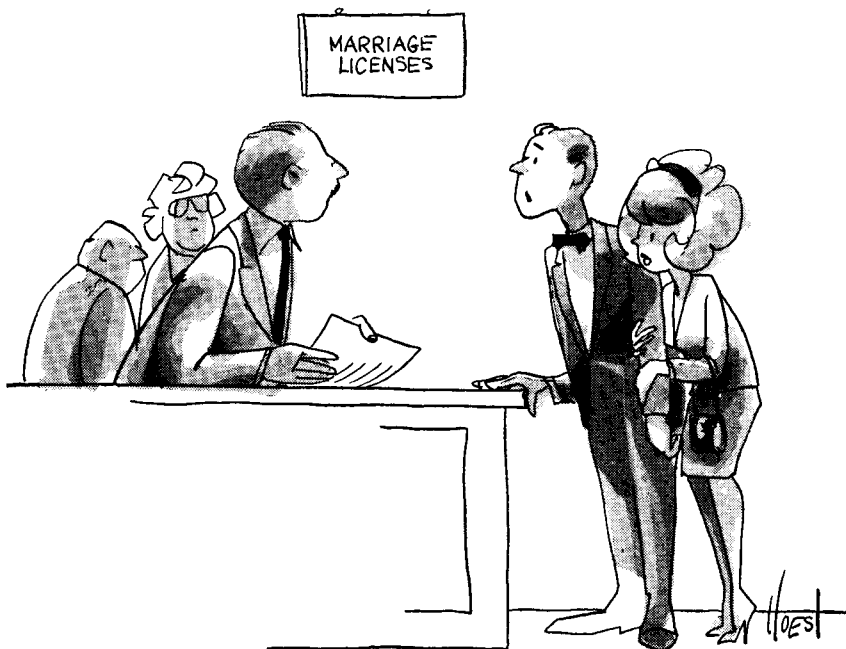
Not, militant Hindu nationalists insist, at the gates of the American White House. The bitter opposition which has met proposals for an Indo-American Educational Foundation indicates how deep is the resentment felt in some quarters. "Even now," Nirad C. Chaudhuri writes in *The Continent of Circe*, "the paraphernalia of American philanthropy in India, consisting of the American Embassy, the technical and financial missions, and even humanitarian ones, constitute in their impressive assemblage an American East India Company." He goes on to make a dark and bloody prediction: "In the fulfilment of their destiny the American people will become the greatest imperial power the world has ever seen, and they will repeat their history by having the blood of the Dark Indian on their head as they have that of the Red."

Against such negative outbursts we can pit the positive acceptance of the Peace Corps. In a dozen places I met this response; all the Peace Corps members that I encountered confirmed reports that they are accomplishing things which no one would have thought possible. Their main accomplishment has been to dispel some of the stereotypes about the America of Hollywood movie stars, ruthless executives, gay divorcees, and juvenile delinquents. The American Ambassador Chester Bowles lamented such stereotypes in 1964 when he opened the new American Studies Research Center in Hyderabad; he pointed out that our stereotypes of India were equally misleading: snake charmers, hideous idols, pampered potentates, and ascetics walking on hot coals. How can we break through thick crusts of prejudice and get to the layer of truth? How can we surmount what B. S. Mardhekar calls:

This vast, gigantic terrible  
Cup and saucer of language?

The answers may come neither from the Old Traditionalists nor the New Imperialists, but from men in the middle: men of synthesis who derive inspiration from the past, but welcome the relevance of modern science and technology—Tilak, Vivekananda, and Ram Mohan Roy. If only enough Indians will follow them, India's future might be bright.

What of the long shadow Mahatma



"Can't we just get a learner's permit?"

Gandhi cast across the century? Isn't he still the main inspiration and guide of his troubled nation? Ostensibly, yes. His picture still stares down from a thousand walls, his words reverberate at dozens of political rallies. Still, one gets the strong impression that the spirit of Gandhi, who won India's freedom by nonviolent action, no longer prevails. *Ahimsa* is the legend; an ever-increasing militancy is the reality.

The sword has been the rule, not the exception, in the long haul of Indian history. During the ten centuries preceding Gandhi there was little about nonviolence in either Hindu theory or practice. Sanskrit literature, from the oldest epics to the most recent poems, glories in battles, wars, and conquests. The business of Hindu kings has traditionally been not only to fight but to *exterminate* all their enemies. By identifying the idea of war with holiness (under a system called *Dharma Yuddha*), Hindu moralists put forth a theory not unlike that of chivalry in the medieval West.

The duty of the warrior, the *Kshatriya*, was to defend and assist the distressed. It still is. When fighting flared up on the Indian border in 1962, headlines proclaimed the *Battle of Dharma*. "Let us not forget that the ultimate force behind our coming victory against the Chinese aggressors would be God," one story began. "Ours is a battle of *dharma* against *adharma*." All hope of Gandhian non-violence was abandoned. In the summer of 1966, the hawks have it over the doves in agitated India.

Nor can the hawks on our side of the world overlook India's critical importance. The largest democracy on earth, it stands eyeball to eyeball with democracy's most dangerous enemy, Communist China. If the preservation of that small area called South Vietnam is vital to our national interests, what about that vast subcontinent which is India? If the Chinese do indeed break through and overrun India, what will our policy be then?

It is not policy but people that one sees everywhere and finds seared into his inner memory; sun-blackened women, building by hand the road near the New Delhi airport in the Sunday morning heat; porters with legs thin as metal tubes, pulling huge piles of baggage; old men with stubby white mustaches, patriarch-proud though starving; women collecting cow dung to dry and use as fuel; young girls passing by in sunbright saris, as though somehow they were gliding on water; beggars too weak or tired to beg.

There is no rain. Yet the American feels inundated with the futility of reform and reluctance to change. Then, when he is ready to give up, he sees children gathering under the peepul



"I'll bet the traffic'll be something this weekend."

tree, bits of chalk and slabs of slate in hand. A teen-ager is trying to teach them to read and write. But this is not all. Come back at night, when the housewife is scrubbing pots with mud and children are curling up to sleep in the dust. The husband sits cross-legged by the flickering kerosene lamp. With him is the young son, teaching the illiterate father what he learned under the peepul tree that morning.

**T**WENTY years after the British left, the Indian nation walks forward on wobbly new legs. Bits of the past are sprinkled like confetti over the cultural landscape. Scottish bagpipes still snarl for marching regiments; Oxford English still speaks the orders in top government offices. Out of the marketplace confusion comes an English idiom to startle the American visitor. A fort looms up on the horizon; someone quotes Rudyard Kipling. The cars are made in India, but they stay to the left side of the road, travel for furlongs or miles, and obey British-inspired road signs. Can or will or should America fill the cultural vacuum left by the British withdrawal?

Here is a question for Queen Victoria's ghost to ponder; for surely her ghost still hovers over this vast land. She must return, from time to time, to the Palace of Salar Jung III, in the center of Hyderabad. Beneath her marble bust, in the Great Hall, a whole division of British toy soldiers march on perpetual parade. Surely the Empress of India recognizes her favorite regiments—Scottish Highlanders, Bengal Lancers, Punjabi, Gurkhas. Her regal eyes must moisten as they fall on the huge silver punch bowl, given

by Prince Albert to the first Salar Jung for his support during the 1857 Indian Mutiny. Perhaps, for her, the Lilliputian bugles still blow, striking fear in the heart of some malicious Mogul.

With all its deathly problems, India is not dying. It waits for rain and renewal. When the time comes, it will cut the cord and enter into a new life of its own.

### India at a Glance

**Population:** 480 million.

**Annual rate of population increase:** 2.5 per cent.

**Population increase since 1951:** 119.9 million (25 per cent).

**National literacy rate:** 24 per cent.

**Principal languages:** Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu. (Also approximately 830 major dialects.)

**Main Religious Groups (1961 census):** Hindus, 366,162,693; Moslems, 49,911,731; Christians, 10,498,077; Sikhs, 7,846,074; Parsees, 100,000; Jews, 30,000.

**Annual per capita income:** (U.S. dollars): \$70.

**Average life expectancy:** men, 41.9 years; women, 40.6 years.

—Indian Information Service.



# Saturday Review

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## Reforming Congress

**I**T IS EASY to criticize Congress. Reflecting the diversities and divisions of our imperfect society, it is certain to produce voices and viewpoints displeasing to some. Viewed in the light of two powerful Presidents, Kennedy and Johnson, the Congress is charged with being obstructionist one year, a rubber stamp the next. No doubt the original constitutional balance between the two branches is gone. But the least logical type of remedy urged seems a restoration of the balance by curbing and weakening the executive branch.

As this country has become more urbanized, industrialized, and internationalized, it has—like all Western democracies—experienced a necessary increase in the role of the executive. The fluidity and complexity of national problems require all the initiative and discretion the White House can properly be given. The answer to the present imbalance lies not in reducing its voice to the level of the legislative branch, but in strengthening the voice of the latter—streamlining its procedures, elevating its debates, permitting its majorities to be felt, making it more representative of grass-roots change, and safeguarding its ethics and honor.

To be sure, despite its talk about economizing elsewhere in government, the Congress's own budget has grown to more than eight times its postwar level. But, with the exception of those sums spent on an excessive number of *ad hoc* investigations, these increases in legislative funds and staffs have been neither surprising nor sufficient. The size and in-

tricacy of the federal agenda, the power and practices of the executive branch, the population and problems of the entire country all have grown even more extensively; and while their growth has been reflected in the Congressional workload (some 20,000 bills and 85,000 nominations presented to a modern Congress), it has not been reflected in Congressional procedures.

**B**OTH Houses of Congress do the bulk of their important work in committees. Indeed, one Congressman has perceptively described the House as "a collection of committees that come together in a chamber periodically to approve one another's actions." Yet most of those committees still do not have: 1) adequate staff assistance for both majority and minority members; 2) expert advice on such complexities as economics or weaponry beyond that provided with some bias by the executive branch or private pressure groups; 3) consistent jurisdictions and procedures; 4) an obligation even to consider major problems, proposals or alternatives; or 5) any assurance that a majority of their members could convene or conduct or conclude a meeting without the presence or consent of their chairman—a man who may have reached that powerful post without any regard to his ability, health, interest, or attitudes.

The House can still be paralyzed by the stubbornness or deliberate absence of one man. The Senate still has no effective rules for keeping discussion or amendments germane or for terminating

extended debate. A bill actually passed by both Houses but in different forms can still die in a conference committee composed of members opposed to the bill. In recent years the time wasted—on constituent errands, local projects, private bills, petty feuds, needless delays, irrelevant debates, duplicate hearings, and neglect of the District of Columbia—has grown greater and greater. Generally, appropriations have been enacted later and later, and Congressional sessions have lasted longer and longer (with intolerable congestion in the closing weeks).

**R**ESPONDING to increased executive leadership and (since 1964) a heavy one-party majority, the Congress has in recent years produced record quantities of reform legislation. But not since passage of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 has it faced up to the problems of its own reform—problems which it must face if it is to be more and continually effective over the long run. No doubt there are those who believe that Congress should serve primarily as a brake—that the more difficult it is for a bill to be passed or a vote to be cast the better it is. But that is a dangerous premise on which to base the governing of a twentieth-century nuclear power.

As in the past, there may be shifts, written and unwritten, from one power faction within the Congress to another—between the rules committee, the leadership, the committee (or subcommittee) chairmen, and the party committees or caucuses. Further reapportionment, improved methods of campaign financing, and increased citizen participation will also help. But only fundamental reforms can produce a net, long-term increase in that body's institutional capacity for positive policy-making contributions.

Fortunately, the Congress, far more than an institution, is a group of men and women. Today, compared with a half-century ago, those men and women are better educated and better informed; better acquainted with more issues but more often likely to specialize; better (but still inadequately) staffed and briefed; less likely to be new members (despite considerable youth); more likely to be reelected (especially in the House); more responsible to the public interest; more responsive to public opinion; more concerned with foreign affairs; and—let us be frank about it—more likely to be Democrats.

Thus, the future strengthening of the Congressional role, in the absence of essential institutional changes, depends upon the ability and willingness of its members to govern affirmatively, to serve not merely as filters for detail and delay but as analysts and catalysts and creators. That in turn depends upon us all.

—THEODORE C. SORESENSEN.