

India's Influence in Southeast Asia

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INDIA has been a great center of civilization in Asia since the earliest times. The recent excavations in the Indus valley have shown a flourishing civilization as far back as 4000 B. C. At times in her long history, India has been the center of a Southeast Asian empire; as witness the ruins at Cambodia, Java, and elsewhere. However, more important than empire has been India's influence in the arts and religion. The philosophy of Buddha spread from India southward to Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, and northward to Central Asia, Tibet, China, and Japan. While Buddhism still flourishes in these countries, it has almost died out in India itself, having been absorbed back into the original Hinduism.

In the fifteenth century, Europeans began to arrive in India. In time, British interests became paramount. The justice of alien rule in India has long been a subject of controversy—often embittered—between Indians and their European rulers. It is sufficient to say that the more liberal of the great English proconsuls in India envisaged the British rule as a benevolent tutelage in preparation for India's eventual self-government.

In the twentieth century it became evident that the time for Indian autonomy was ripe. However, the problem of transferring power was not an easy one. It was

rendered even more difficult by the misguided zeal of some of India's own political leaders in their attempts to hasten the process.

In 1947, England succeeded in disengaging herself from India by the expedient of partitioning the country into two realms; that of India proper of predominantly Hindu composition, and Pakistan which was predominantly Moslem. Since partition, India and Pakistan have gone their separate ways. Their amity, never great at the best, being marred by the dispute over the territory of Kashmir.

Gandhi's Influence

The moving spirit in the creation of the new India was Gandhi: "He came like a powerful current of fresh air, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness... like a whirlwind," wrote Nehru. Gandhi spoke for the millions of inarticulate India. He was revered as a saint. He entered Congress and gave new life to that organization which was eventually to be entrusted with power in India. Gandhi was the apostle of non-violence, the defender of the worth and dignity of the common man, the proponent of the spinning wheel and village craftsman doctrine of work, and the enemy of centralized industry and exaggerated urbanization.

In the end, Gandhi's humanity cost him

his life. During the wave of disorder and massacre of communal minorities which followed the partition of India, Gandhi devoted himself to the protection of the minority communities. Hindu zealots assassinated him.

The evolution of India in the last few years has been away from the Gandhian ideals. Under force of circumstances, factories and centralization along Western lines are replacing the village crafts. India is moving more and more toward the pattern of a modern European state.

India's Philosopher-Ruler

The architect of the new order in India is the present Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was born in 1889 of a high Brahmin family, and was educated at Harrow and Cambridge. He practiced at the Bar, but in 1920 turned from law to politics. He joined forces with Gandhi, and quickly rose to a commanding position in the All India Congress Committee. In the troubles with the British authorities, he was imprisoned on several occasions. On the attainment of Indian independence in 1947, Pandit Nehru became India's first Prime Minister.

Once the struggle for independence was over, Pandit Nehru showed himself a wise, judicious, and truly liberal ruler of his country. He has kept India in the British Commonwealth of Nations, and has labored mightily to rebuild India along the lines of what he believes to be the best of East and West.

Center of Neutrality

The foundation of Indian foreign policy, as conceived by Pandit Nehru, is the resurrection of Asia. As Nehru sees it, Asia, until the fifteenth century, held an exalted place in the world. It then became submerged under the weight of European domination. The newly independent India, situated at the pivot of Asia, is now leading the revival of Asia. To this end, Nehru

declares, India's policy is one of peace and friendship with all countries, and the avoidance of alignment with power blocs. Accordingly India stands aloof, as far as possible, from both the Soviet and the American spheres of influence.

As corollaries to this basic objective, India is working to end colonialism and imperialism wherever they may be found in Asia, and for the elimination of race prejudice and the color bar the world over.

Nehru wrote:

It has been India's privilege in the past, to be a meeting place for many cultures. It may be her privilege in the present and the future to be a bridge to join warring factions and to help in maintaining that most urgent thing of today and the future—the peace of the world.

India is thus functioning as a bulwark of stability in east Asia. Her prestige is very high. India was the first Asian country to achieve independence and is the great exemplar for the rest of Asia.

Nehru is not dazzled by economics and the apparatus of the technical age. He sees more deeply into Asia than that. While Nehru is in control, we may look to India as a firm center of moderation and neutrality. However, after Nehru—what? In the present high state of tension in the world, the pursuit of India's policy of neutrality is like walking a tightrope. A man of less sure touch than Nehru might succumb to one force or another, or might even attempt to launch out into a Hindu imperialism as a third world force.

Sino-Indian Relations

Under the long British tutelage, India was effectively isolated politically from Asia; India's orientation was predominantly European. On the achievement of autonomy and the division of the peninsula, Pakistan naturally turned toward the Middle East and the lands of Islam. India, however, turned toward the Far East; an orientation which was greatly facilitated by the development of air traffic.

In the Far East, India saw China as her principal partner in the slow re-emergence of Asia. India's fellow-feeling with China was founded on a sense of common Asian nationalism, not on domestic politics. Nehru was friendly to the Government of Chiang Kai-shek; after the Communist revolution he was friendly to the Government of Mao Tse-tung. Accordingly, in world counsels Nehru has been prominent in advocating a general recognition of the new Chinese régime and its admittance to the United Nations.

On the other hand, the militant communism of the new China is embarrassing to India. Nehru has a serious problem on his hands in the growing communism in India itself. Where, as in India, education is often far ahead of the prevailing standards of living and opportunities for self-expression, a disgruntled class of new pseudo-intellectuals is clay in the hands of Communist propagandists. The rise of communism in India has been met by the Government with stern measures of repression and summary imprisonment. The internal Communist threat is pushing India more and more toward a dictatorial mode of government.

In such a situation it will not be easy for India to maintain a friendly liberalism toward a China which has now become the very fountainhead of Asian communism, which gives comfort to the Communist parties abroad, and promotes the southern drive of Communist insurrection in Asia.

Accordingly, in considering India's future in Asia we must appreciate the poignancy of latent conflict with China.

The crucial situation of Burma in Southeast Asian strategy became manifest in the Japanese invasion of China. China's attention was turned from the "front door" through the Treaty Ports to the "back door" via the Burma Road. More recently, Chiang's abortive attempt to reconquer China by this same back door by

infiltrating Kuomintang or Nationalist China troops into eastern Burma, and from this base invading Yunnan, although unsuccessful from lack of adequate support, has kept the attention of strategists directed to Burma.

The official Government of Burma is very feeble, and the country is largely given over to various Communist guerrilla bands. In this condition, Burma can offer little resistance to any determined military designs of the neighboring powers. The future of Burma is fraught with grave possibilities for the security of India. A Communist regime in Burma would be a menace to the whole Indian peninsula. Accordingly, both China and India must have a lively interest in Burma, but their requirements are diametrically opposite.

The Indian Ocean

For the last century and a half the British fleet has been the mistress of the Indian Ocean. Now the old unity has gone. India, at the focus of the Indian Ocean has achieved independence, albeit with British Commonwealth ties. Growing Asian nationalism seems likely, in time, to break up all the old unity of direction in Indian Ocean strategy.

India is the natural geographical center of Indian Ocean politics. Furthermore, India has interests all around the perimeter of the ocean which she must tend. As yet, India is ill prepared to assume these oceanic responsibilities. India's military efforts have for long been directed to the central Asian frontiers. However, India must in time take her proper share of the responsibility for the Indian Ocean as befits her new dignity as an independent member of the British Commonwealth.

The Achilles' heel of the Indian Ocean is its eastern island boundary. The rapid oceanic expansion of Japan in the recent war, almost to the confines of India, demonstrated how vulnerable the Indian Ocean

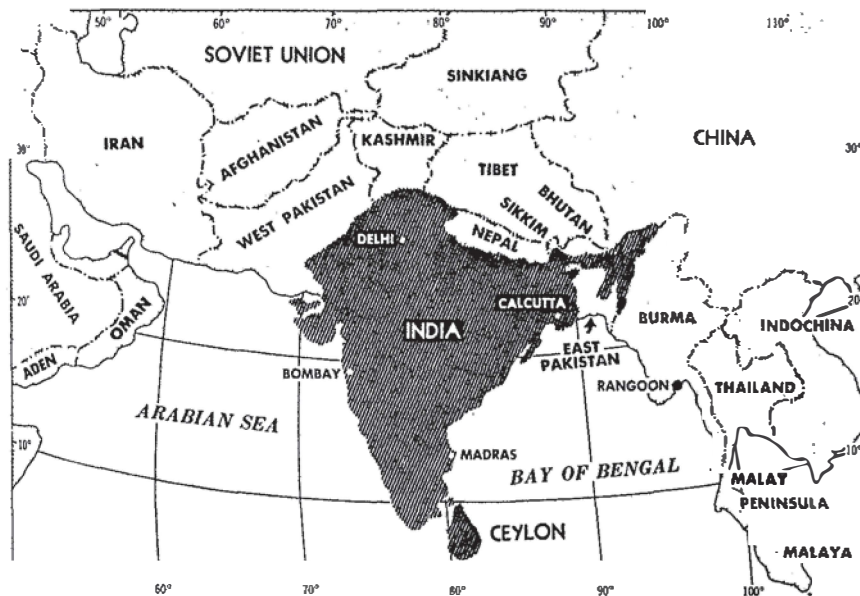
is to penetration from the Pacific. Now China has, potentially, taken the mantle of Japan. If the Communist southward expansion succeeds, then it may be difficult for India and China to avoid a growing tension over the mastery of the Indian Ocean.

The Rice Economy

An appreciation of Asian economics reveals the crucial role of rice. Rice is

vital food supply to India and other eastern countries would be in jeopardy if Indochina, Thailand, and Burma fell into Communist hands.

The present Communist attempts at insurrections in Burma and Indochina take on a more than local strategic significance when the movement of rice is considered. If the supply of rice from these countries was cut off, distress and famine



the staple diet of the inhabitants of the far eastern countries. Most of these peoples are incapable of sustaining life on any other food; they would starve to death if rice were not available. Consequently, any major dislocation of the rice economy of Southeast Asia would have immediate and disastrous effects. Only three Asian countries have any large surpluses of rice: Burma, Thailand, and Indochina. All other Asian countries have to import rice from these three countries to supplement their own supplies. India imports about half a million tons of rice each year. This

would be produced in the Far East and under such conditions communism would be likely to spread rapidly. To meet such a contingency, either the Western powers would have to make good the deficiency—which would place a great strain on those powers—or alternatively, the rice-importing countries would be obliged to enter into trade agreements—with Communist China as the controlling power—and would thus be drawn more and more into the Communist sphere of influence in Asia.

It is evident, then, that by gaining control of rice, Communist China could vir-

tually hold much of Asia for ransom. This would place India in a particularly difficult position. Her avowed neutrality in international affairs would be undermined. India would be forced, by starvation, to capitulate to China's terms, to fight China, or to come as a mendicant to the Western powers. The only solution to the problem is for the Southeast Asian countries to grow more rice, to which end, earnest efforts are now being directed.

The Tibetan Situation

In 1951, the Chinese Communist Government re-asserted China's ancient suzerainty over Tibet. After careful preparation of the situation politically, using the rivalry of the Dalai and Tashi Lamas, a military force was sent to Lhasa to uphold the authority of the Peking Government. Tibet is now, to all intents and purposes, a province of China. So, the last mountain bastion of the ancient order in Asia has capitulated to the new fervid Asia of the mid-twentieth century. Tibet, for a century past, a closed land, is now more closed than ever to the Western world. However, it is wide open to the Communist policy.

Tibet occupies a position strategically critical for India. Situated behind the Himalayas, on the high roof of Asia, Tibet physically dominates the plains of India. In 1903, a British expeditionary force under the direction of Colonel Younghusband was dispatched by the Government of India to penetrate to Lhasa and assert British authority in the country, in an endeavor to safeguard India from the growing Russian influence from the north.

Now the process has been reversed, and Tibet's political orientation has been decisively swung away from India to Peking and Moscow. This must give considerable disquiet to the Government of India. It is not unlikely that any considerable military operations would be launched against India from Tibet; the mountain barrier

and the very long lines of communication would be too great an obstacle. However, Tibet would serve as a very effective base for the Communist political and social indoctrination of India, particularly as Tibetans have always been in the habit of making pilgrimages to the Buddhist shrines in India.

With the alienation of Tibet, attention must be directed immediately to the situation of the Himalayan border states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, which act as a screen between Tibet and India. It is obviously to India's interest to preserve these states as allies of India, and not allow them to be absorbed into the central Asian orbit. These states have long had Chinese as well as Indian affiliations, and their frontiers with Chinese territory are not clearly defined. Now that these lands have become part of the sensitive membrane dividing the two regions of Asia, the destiny of these obscure border countries may contain seeds of Sino-Indian conflict in spite of India's endeavors to maintain close and friendly relations with the new China.

When India was partitioned in 1947, the boundaries between India and Pakistan were drawn by mutual agreement and local preference. The choice in the case of Kashmir was rendered difficult because the Maharajah of Kashmir was a Hindu while the people of Kashmir were overwhelmingly Moslem.

Following a Moslem insurrection in his domain, the ruler of Kashmir summoned Indian help. Pakistan sent troops to safeguard the Moslem interests, and a struggle ensued. The United Nations Security Council arranged a cease fire to take effect from 1 January 1949, and directed that Kashmir should have the option of adhesion to one or the other side by plebiscite. So far it has not been possible to arrange that plebiscite, and the Kashmir situation remains a grave embarrassment to all concerned.

In the meanwhile, Communist propagandists are making the most of the unhappy state of Kashmir to further their policies. There appears to be a possibility of Kashmir becoming an independent Communist-sponsored state.

The dispute over Kashmir is a most unfortunate incident in the establishment of the new order in the Indian peninsula, and is a grave handicap to India in the pursuit of her foreign policy of neutral leadership in the resurgence of Asia.

India and Britain

When, in August 1947, Britain relinquished her power in India, it was a matter for conjecture whether the new India and Pakistan would remain within the British Commonwealth or sever the connection completely. It was widely believed that Pakistan would stay in the Commonwealth, but that India would withdraw. As it has turned out, both these countries, along with Ceylon, have remained in the Commonwealth. Why did this happen? It was certainly not dictated by merely economic motives. Burma, confronted with a similar choice and with much to gain economically by remaining in the Empire, elected to secede.

Fifty years ago, informed Indian opin-

ion favored a dominion status for India on the lines of Home Rule. However, by 1930, Congress' feelings had hardened, and complete independence was the order of the day. Nevertheless, in 1947, when the struggle was over, and Britain had freely handed over India's independence, the old bitterness turned to growing esteem and friendship. Nehru steered India into the Commonwealth as a republic. At the Conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London in April 1949, India, while yet a sovereign independent republic, was declared to be a member of the Commonwealth. By this association, India has not lost her freedom in domestic nor in foreign affairs. However, Nehru's experience has shown him that in international relations the free association of the Commonwealth is preferable to the more inelastic associations and commitments of treaty alliances.

India is thus the premiere Commonwealth representative in Asia. As such, she exerts a considerable sobering and stabilizing effect on Southeast Asia. National aspirations in countries which see in India their forerunner and prototype are likely to be directed in the paths of reason and moderation by the judicious course which India is following.