



*Vibrant India*  
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## *The Interminable March of the Indian Juggernaut*

*The stroke of midnight, 1947 heralded the beginning of a momentous journey for India. Well to some, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ”*

*Paradoxical though this comparison may seem, between the opening lines of Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* and the moment at which India won her independence, it poetically encapsulates the undercurrents which engulfed the nation-state at the moment of her birth. The best of times awaited her at the dawn of freedom, the erudite civilisational wisdom steadied her step as she marched into unchartered territory, the darkness of enslavement and colonisation had been left behind, and the spring of hope, with the potential to unravel magnificent possibilities, awaited her. But to say that clouds of despair had completely cleared would be a fallacious exaggeration. The political, social, economic, human and emotional costs of securing this independence were high. The Indian subcontinent had been partitioned, causing one of the largest mass migrations in recent human history. Ill-fated policies manoeuvred by the colonial administration had reduced the once mighty ‘golden bird’ into a feeder ancillary economy for industrialised Britain. Historical and social compulsions wisely dictated India’s choice of the model of political governance democracy was the best suited alternative. The political elite were faced with onerous task of consolidating institutions and systems of governance, while balancing on the foreign policy tightrope in the*



*new international order which emerged post the end of World War II. With India shaking off the shackles of colonial rule, predictions abounded on how long would the fledgling democracy survive. Those for whom India was nothing more than a “geographical term”, “no more a united nation than the Equator”, imagining the country as an equal, sovereign, democratic nation was truly incredulous. The world waited with bated breath for the day when (in their belief) this apparently artificial creation would collapse under its own weight giving rise to another cycle of, perhaps, neo-colonialism.*

*Yet, seven decades and 16 general elections later, the Indian model continues to thrive and flourish. Having traversed a rather arduous journey, India has come a long way from being a sum of its contradictions, to contradicting all doubts, tooth for nail, which were cast upon its birth and survival. It is a nation which unifies the diverse streams of thought and living as much a nation of snake charmers and elephants (and proudly so), as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and which only recently announced its rather royal entry in the ‘elite space club’ (the New York Times and The Times of India cartoon, as cases in point). Challenges and pitfalls notwithstanding, if one were to list all her achievements, probably a new number system would have to be created, but given our affection for all things numerical, this shouldn’t be bothersome.*

*Well, what makes India tick What is the cause for this relative calm in the midst of chaos Or are things ‘calm’ at all Better still, should this sense of ‘peace and calm’ be an aspirational goal for India. A mosaic of multiplicities is what India has always prided itself as being, as against the background of its immediate neighbourhood which, to say the least, may have descended into the abyss of dysfunctionality. India has stood mighty in the face of all challenges, internal and external, and her indomitability has taught many a lesson to the world. It would be interesting to attempt finding our way around this delightful labyrinth, probably unveil the secrets which define the heart and propel the soul of this unstoppable phenomenon. In veneration of the poetic essence of the spirit of India, I have attempted to weave this narrative around the following characteristics which shall be taken in detail subsequently Diversity Democracy and Development.*



## *Diversity*

*Diversity in India thrives with a sense of unguarded affection. The country has often been described as an 'ethnological museum', an 'epitome of the world' by those in awe of its civilisational manuscript. India is home to a multiplicity of religious and cultural traditions, ethnic groups, linguistic identities, each revelling in the distinctiveness of their being a characteristic which sets this nation apart from those who seek the brutal enforcement of monolithic identities on their populations, treating distinctiveness as an aberration to be cured. The remarkably diverse, composite and representative Constituent Assembly gave to this country an unparalleled document the Indian Constitution on which rests the authority of safeguarding the rights and responsibilities of the country's citizens. Appropriately, it is often commented that while the year 1947 heralded a landmark in India's history, the year 1950 was a milestone in India's future. It reflected decisively to the world, the future India sought to carve for itself, a unique identity which respected and preserved the beauty in its own diversity, in line with its vision for a peaceful, wholly tolerant international order. Over the course of its majestic existence, the nation has welcomed within its fold a plethora of identities that have sweetened its social fabric, and strengthened its moral ground of representing a microcosm of multiplicities bound in reverence to the spirit of national identity.*

## *Democracy*

*A natural consequence of the end of the colonial era was the necessity of putting in place schematics of self-governance in the political entity hence created. And progression towards a democratic model of governance was deemed the most suitable given India's recent history. Power was thus placed in the hands of the people and a tacit pledge was undertaken under the principles of constitutionality to ensure the establishment of democracy, in all its manifestations political, economic, and social - in the country. India thus set the ball rolling for one of the largest and arguably, the most exhilarating experiments in modern democratic governance. Apart from the baggage of an exploitative colonial history which weighed heavily on the minds of the country's leaders post independence, the sheer diversity of individualities and opinions in the country meant that a democratic polity with a parliamentary system of governance was instinctively trusted to lead*



*the nation into the future. Remarkably, not only has the experiment handsomely survived all challenges and aspersions, but has also emerged as an example for the world to emulate in lessons of tolerance, accommodation, free will and power of the common (wo)man.*

*Electoral mandates in India, over the years, have been increasingly reflective 'moments of realisation' indicating the will of the masses to emphasise what they deem supreme in social debates. Their outlook and alignment have toppled fortunes of political masters and strengthened the soul and spirit of the nation's democracy. The relationship between the masses and democracy has always been a crucial factor in defining India's growth story and its development profile. Democracy in India has constantly endeavoured to discover and express the will of its people, thereby expanding the notions of popular sovereignty beyond the periodic expression of a political right, to manifestations of daily practice.*

*Despite efforts at indicating otherwise, the dominant principle of international politics in contemporary times continues to be the state centric, power aggrandising theory of realism. Consequently, democratic norms, with their emphasis on softer virtues of equality, inclusivity and common welfare may not sit too comfortably with the essence of self-seeking, Darwinian politics of statism. In an anarchist international order, democracy has been an aberration than a norm, and considerable amount of efforts have gone into ensuring that structures do not dissolve into chaos. Given these challenges, the fragility of democracies is sometimes taken for granted.*

*India's tryst with democracy, however, continues unabated. In addition to actualising a mode of political power which is 'of, for and by the people', the Indian model of democratic governance has also endeavoured to push for mutual trust and shared responsibility 'between' the people. All may not be perfect, but privileged with constitutional foundations which make India's democratic experience a work in progress, bettering its efficiency with each passing day, the Indian example gives enough reasons to look beyond the rhetoric of pessimism towards the possibility of building an encompassing, all-embracing society.*



## *Development*

*Almost seven decades ago, at the dawn of her independence, India became the first country in the non-western world to choose a 'resolutely democratic constitution'. This decision has paid us for the better. Development in India today is much more than a mere buzzword – it is the lifeblood which sustains and energises the multifarious processes of existence and progress which define the Indian experience.*

*It would be safe to say that 'development' may also be an 'essentially contested' term. While there is broad agreement on its criticality to a nation's growth agenda, disagreement continues to exist on its parameters of judgement. Also what is essential is that the fruits of development must trickle down to the last standing individual in the hierarchy (of things). Development must extend beyond its usage as a vote-magnet – translating statistics into social impact is crucial. And in these past seven decades, India has successfully managed to do just that (to the best of its capabilities given the circumstances). To independent India was bequeathed the legacy of a shattered economy, widespread illiteracy, and abysmal levels of poverty. The processes of building a robust (primary, secondary and tertiary) economy, standing at par with global standards, impressive military-defense structures, satisfactory social welfare schemes, and an infrastructure which can support the ever-expanding ambit of development are feats few others can claim to match, and require due acknowledgement. While it may be tempting to adopt the approach of cynical naysayers, and be engaged in a constant mode of criticism, what cannot be denied is that for a country seven decades young, to progress on a path of welfare-centric development while successfully addressing its domestic and global commitments is a task not easy to balance, let alone excel in. But India may just as well have found the magic elixir.*

## *The India of Our Dreams*

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*



*This verse taken from one of the most-loved poems of Robert Frost aptly describes the Indian experience which has dared to venture into the unknown, beyond the ordinary. What endears this nation to the world is the almost esoteric quality of the story of its success, and that of its people. The land of saints and sages, emperors and warriors, daintily and deftly unites divergent streams of thought and existence into the whole of its being, presenting a one-of-its-kind marvel for the world to behold.*

*The challenges confronting the Indian state are daunting, but in abundance are also the opportunities. Translating these opportunities into rewards shall require the collective commitment and will of its citizens towards building the 'India of their dreams'. With each individual endeavouring to be the change they wish to see in the world, it would be safe to say that the future of this nation is assuredly luminous.*



## About VIF

*Vivekananda International Foundation is a non-partisan institute for dialogue and conflict resolution from a nationalist perspective. Some of India's leading experts in the fields of security, military, diplomacy, governance, etc have got together under the institute's aegis to generate ideas and stimulate action for greater national security and prosperity, independently funded.*

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