

India - Change and challenge for a new superpower

India at 60: an emerging economic superpower

India will have a larger economy than the UK within a decade. By 2040 it is expected to be the second largest economy in the world, with China in 1st place and the US in 3rd place. India only gained its independence from the British Empire in 1947 and this year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the nation's creation. Much has been achieved in that time, especially in the most recent two decades which have seen phenomenal rates of economic growth.

After independence, India became an attractive site for **Transnational Corporations (TNCs)** to set up factories and, more recently, offices (call centres). As Indians get richer, the same foreign companies are now starting to also see the country as a mighty new market for their goods and services, and not just a place where things can be made cheaply. US firm Wal-Mart is set to establish new western-style supermarkets there; Disney Asia has quickly moved into the Indian children's market.

Globalisation has brought McDonald's to Mumbai, as well as Japanese Sushi bars. Pizza Hut's only all-vegetarian outlets are found in India – reminding us that globalisation often changes the nature of goods and services sold whenever two cultures are brought together. Sometimes called **glocalisation**, this involves the creation of new **hybrid** ('cross-fertilised') consumer products, specially adapted to meet local tastes.

In addition to the arrival of foreign firms, more and more Indian born entrepreneurs are learning to make **globalisation** work to their advantage (*The Guardian*, 21 October 2006). India's own companies are now establishing bases in other countries, boosting the nation's **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**.

For instance, the Indian firm Tata recently bought Corus, the leading steel manufacturer in the UK. This is a clear sign that the previously **dependent** relationship that India had with the UK is perhaps starting to evolve into an even more mutually-beneficial form of economic partnership. Ratan Tata is the Chairman of Tata. Along with the steel billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, he has come to symbolise the new power and wealth found in India (*The Observer*, 22 October 2006).

India timeline 1947-2007

(Source: *New Statesman*, 06 August 2007)

- 1947 Partition by British into majority Muslim Pakistan and mainly Hindu India
- 1948 Mahatma Gandhi assassinated by Hindu extremist. First war with Pakistan over disputed territory of Kashmir
- 1951-52 First general elections won by Congress Party under leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru
- 1965 Second war over Kashmir
- 1966 Indira Gandhi becomes India's first and only female PM
- 1984 Indira Gandhi assassinated by Sikh bodyguards
- 1996 Hindu nationalist BJP emerges as largest single party
- 1998 India carries out nuclear tests, to international condemnation
- 2003 Kashmir ceasefire

- 2006 US gives India access to civilian nuclear technology while India agrees to greater scrutiny
- 2007 Pratibha Patil becomes first woman elected president.

Social progress in India

Life expectancy in India has risen from 37 to 63 since 1950. At the same time, total population has grown from 340 million to 1.1 billion, meaning many more mouths to feed and people to care for. Viewed in this light, the increased life expectancy has been no mean feat, suggesting that real progress has been made in improving the average quality of life.

The country's death rate has fallen from 26 per 1000 per year to 9 per 1000 per year over the same time period, while India's literacy rate has risen to 61%. However, around one fifth of the population still live in poverty (or perhaps as many as one third, according to some accounts).

Social progress is clearly taking place India, but it is occurring in uneven ways. During the last twelve months, some new and interesting social changes have been reported by Indian and British newspapers.

Banning of child labour

The Indian government recently acted to further restrict the use of child labour. Amending the existing Child Labour Act, the new legislation outlaws the use of children as serving staff in restaurants and for private households (as servants).

As the *Times of India* (04 August 2006) explained, 'India has made rapid strides in changing its economic destiny but it will not be able to sustain its growth if so many children stay out of school and instead start working in menial jobs from a young age.'

Restricted use of children in industry and the introduction of compulsory schooling was a vital step in the modernisation of the UK from the late 1800s onwards. India is now making its own steps in the same direction.

No more 'Delhi Belly'?

In an attempt to clean up the city's image, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, which is responsible for sanitation, is to start closing down illegal food stalls. For years, this part of the city's **informal** economy has provided cheap cooked food to city workers and tourists.

However, it is not regulated and lacks health and safety controls normally associated with cities in richer nations such as the UK. Now this is set to change (*The Times*, 12 April 2007).

In an attempt to modernise more in line with European cities, the city authorities are shutting down 300,000 informal stalls - or else are forcing them to relocate to properly monitored 'food courts', thereby bringing them into the formal sector of the economy. This policy will also ease traffic problems in the city by removing illegally-sited roadside food stalls.

The move precedes the city becoming host to the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Authorities are keen that foreign visitors do not get food poisoning – known as 'Delhi Belly' – which might interfere with attempts to **re-brand** as a modern **world city** and attract further foreign investment. Food poisoning can sometimes be very serious, as impure water used by the

unregulated stalls may carry typhoid and hepatitis B (*The Guardian*, 18 April 2007).

Slum clearances

Dharavi slum in Mumbai is sometimes described as 'the largest slum in Asia' and Indian authorities now want to remove it – a clear sign of social and economic modernisation. 600,000 people are currently crammed into just one square mile of land and a £1.2bn scheme aims to re-house many of them (*The Guardian*, 31 May 2007).

However, critics say that many of these people will not be given new homes. They claim that the state government is more concerned with freeing up valuable inner-city land valued at £5bn for developers, rather than improving poor people's lives.

With **bid-rent** land values soaring in the city, can shanty-town land use sectors survive much longer here and elsewhere? Where else will poor people live if their homes are destroyed? India increasingly faces a crisis of 'slumification' according to some experts. Increasing numbers of poor rural people are still moving to cities for work, yet there is less and less land left available by developers for the 60 million poor who are already living in urban slums!

Unwanted baby girls

One aspect of social change that concerns some Indian policy-makers is the lack of progress being made towards greater gender equality. In India, there is still a bias within families towards the desire for male children. This is because marriage customs dictate that brides marrying into a family must bring wealth with them (known as a dowry), but not vice-versa.

Thanks to a new modern technology, this is now causing a serious problem. Ultrasound scans – which allow pregnant women to discover the gender of their foetus – have resulted in as many as 10 million girls being lost over the past 20 years, following (illegal) abortions.

The male: female birth ratio in one recent Indian census is 100:88, which is far from natural. There are worrying implications of this for future life in India, with many young men set to be unable to find marriage partners in later life (*The Guardian*, 28 July 2007).

What about the environment?

The break-neck speed of growth in modern India – along with the sheer number of people and settlements involved – brings all kinds of threats to the environment.

On a global scale, India's growing market for internal air flights (US-style) is alarming environmentalists who want to see air flights curbed in an attempt to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change.

At a local scale, cities like Mumbai and Delhi, (along with their Chinese counterparts like Shanghai and Chongqing), are now counting the rising environmental costs of unchecked economic growth.

A two-speed society

Celebrations for India's 60th birthday have been marred by claims of growing inequality. A new report by the Asian Development Bank describes the gap between rich and poor as having widened sharply in India in recent years.

In this nation of 1.1 billion people, it is possible that as many as one third live still in absolute poverty. That equates to around 375 million people, living in urban slums or in extremely poor isolated rural regions (*The Daily Telegraph*, 14 August 2007). Many of these will suffer from under-nourishment and energy deficiency.

And yet there is no shortage of billionaires also living in the same society! According to wealth experts Forbes, India is now home to 32 billionaires.

In this two-speed society, the poor of India recently became highly visible during the monsoon season of August 2007. They suffered the worst effects of the torrential rains and, for a while, were put under the global media spotlight.

It is thought that at least 1500 people died, with millions more left homeless, including some of India's very poorest people. The states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were especially badly-hit (*The Guardian*, 11 August 2007).

Caste

The situation is further complicated in India by the Hindu Caste system. Hindu society consists of five social groupings, each with different status. For those born into the lowest group, the *achuta* (which literally mean 'untouchable'), poverty is especially hard to escape. More about this controversial issue can be read in *National Geographic* (June 2003).

Sweat shops

Many people remain concerned about the poor pay and worker exploitation that exists in the slums of India and neighbouring Bangladesh (*The Observer*, 22 April 2007).

Those Indians who own and manage factories (and increasingly hi-tech firms, such as graphic design agencies or medical research facilities) are receiving great financial rewards from globalisation.

However, the poor people who work on the factory floor may receive less than one dollar a day in wages. In this two-speed economy, the benefits of globalisation are far from being evenly spread.

Exploring Anglo-Indian Cultural Geography

Strong cultural links exist between the UK and India. British settlers arrived in India during the 1600s and eventually assumed direct rule. As a result of this long colonising presence, English remains a widely-spoken language in India.

This shared language explains why the UK's National Health Service was so keen to recruit doctors from India in the 1950s, triggering a wave of migration of English-speaking Indian professionals into the UK.

The movement of doctors was accompanied by a movement of far greater numbers of less-skilled Indians. They came in their tens of thousands to work in Britain's then-prospering manufacturing industries.

During the same time period, more and more UK firms were establishing subsidiary businesses in India. This was because they viewed India as a potentially vast market, given the population size found there. For instance, London-based Cadbury-Schweppes established 'Cadbury India' in Mumbai. Executives now regularly move between the two offices.

Indeed, according to a recent report in *The Guardian* (13 June 2007), 'foreign executives are now pouring into India'. This results in many different kinds of cultural exchange, as people from different nations work and spend greater amounts of leisure time together.

Increased social contact helps people from different nations learn to appreciate one another's tastes in music, food and cinema, amongst other pursuits. For instance, Indian executives are widely reported to have a growing fondness for Scotch whisky – no doubt often acquired while on business trips to the UK!

Bollywood comes to Britain

The International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards are the Indian film industry's answer to the Oscars. Worth \$10 billion a year and sometimes dubbed 'Bollywood', Indian films are big business. In 2007, the IIFA Awards were staged in Sheffield. *The Guardian* newspaper (06 June 2007) reported that 'Yorkshire has gone Bollywood mad'.

The choice of Sheffield must surely reflect the strong cultural links that exist between the UK and India. Over one million people of Indian descent live in the UK, many of them in the northern towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, such as Bradford and Leeds. Many Indians originally took up work in the textile industries that used to be found there, during and after the 1950s.

Fast-forward fifty years and the UK is now a popular location for Indian film makers. During 2006, twenty Indian films were shot in the UK. Shilpa Shetty's appearance and eventual success in *Celebrity Big Brother* also underlined the increasingly strong links between the two nations' TV and film cultures.

A classroom discussion could focus on other ways in which cultures connect for the two nations. What Indian words are now in everyday use in the UK? How have Indian influences penetrated and fused with British forms of music, food, fashion and other areas of cultural life?