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PROLOGUE

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There is a sense of looming calamity here, a sense of danger. One morning, in my parents' house, I am greeted by the news that the cleaning woman has been electrocuted while hanging the wash on a wire clothesline strung between two lampposts, which had been rained on during the night. The same night, a pig rampaged through the garden, and gave birth there to seventeen piglets. The garden is in ruins and the stench unbearable, and no one knows what to do. The pig (and its piglets) may belong to one of the Untouchable sweepers who camp out in the back lanes. The pig may be his only worldly possession, and if anything should happen to it there might be a sweepers' riot. Indeed, I hear rumors all the time of murders and of riots touched off by religious or caste conflicts. I read in the newspapers that the government is going easy on the rioters—especially those from militant minority groups—because it is afraid that it will not be able to stop the riots from spreading. I hear reports of intimidation and corrupt practices in high and low places, of knifing incidents and hooliganism in the streets and on the buses, of servants becoming restive. I've been visiting India every year for many years now. Each year, fear, corruption, and violence have increased, but this year they seem to have become a way of life.

A friend tells me that a while ago her male cook, who had

served her family well for twenty years, suddenly became rude and truculent. She suspected that he was spitting in the food. The family were afraid of what he might do if they dismissed him, but finally, two months ago, they did. Since then, their house has been burglarized twice. They have three Alsatian watchdogs, yet the burglar (or burglars) has been able to get in and out undetected. The family had long since stopped keeping anything valuable in the house—not so much as a silver tray or a gold chain—but the burglar has somehow managed to find whatever money was there, and the family is full of foreboding.

I dine in the flat of a senior government official. He comes downstairs to see me off. No sooner have I reached home than I get a call from his wife saying that he hasn't returned. She fears he's been kidnapped. As it turns out, he has only gone around the corner to buy cigarettes—something he must have done hundreds of times before, when things were more normal.

A few days after undergoing some minor surgery, I drive out to the Holy Family Hospital to have the stitches removed. On the way back, a little boy darts into the road in front of the car. The driver brakes, and we stop a few inches short of the boy. The boy, who is perhaps eight years old, stumbles and falls and starts screaming with fright. A hundred children rush over from a nearby school, climb onto the hood and the trunk, and pound on the windows shouting, "Police! Police! This car has hurt our brother!" Grownups join the children and start threatening the driver, demanding money and revenge. It takes us more than an hour to persuade them that the child was not hurt and to let us drive on. The driver tells me that in Calcutta the police advise drivers not to stop after an accident but to get to the nearest police station as soon as they can. In an incident like the one we were involved in, apparently, a Calcutta crowd would set fire to the car. So things in New Delhi are at least better than things in Calcutta.

New Delhi is in the throes of perhaps the worst outbreak of nationalism and xenophobia it has ever known—directed almost

entirely against the West. Itinerant Western hippies are reviled for choosing to be as dirty as Untouchables. Western missionaries are decried for turning the Indian poor into misfits in their own society by converting them to Christianity. Visiting Western scholars are condemned for using their greater financial and material resources to dominate Indian studies and for displaying "colonial," "exploitative," and "patronizing" attitudes toward their Indian colleagues. Western volunteer workers are viewed either as dupes or as C.I.A. agents. Working conditions here for Westerners have been made so difficult that most of them have gone home, including many valuable agronomists and technical experts. The Rockefeller Foundation, which for fifty years was famous in India for its medical and agricultural work, has cut back its operations and closed down its New Delhi office.

The few remaining Western diplomats, journalists, executives of philanthropic organizations, and volunteer workers—many of them Americans—now live and work mostly in isolation, both from one another and from the Indians they have come to serve. These Westerners have little in common with the old-time India-lovers—European students of Indian history and religion; travellers; gazetteers—who wrote some of the best books ever written on India. The newcomers are often decent people, but they don't know India. They seem always to be taken by surprise by the twists and turns of the Indian mind and by caste prejudices and other religious idiosyncrasies. They seek to counteract their ignorance by cultivating indifference, which can mean ceasing to trust their most ordinary human impulses—for instance, hesitating to offer a glass of water to their driver for fear of offending some caste convention. A recent remark made by a high-ranking American diplomat suggests the extent of these Westerners' ignorance: "If the average Indian had to choose between going hungry and his country's not having nuclear bombs, he would choose nuclear bombs." Western institutions such as the Ford Foundation and the embassies occupy modern, air-conditioned buildings that are equipped with filtered hot and cold running water and

private swimming pools, and are set in well-cared-for, lush green grounds. Once, these buildings and grounds served as examples of modern elegance to which Indians could aspire, but now to the same Indians they have become embarrassing symbols of unattainable affluence. In the nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties, Western journalists in India had a strong emotional involvement with the country, often referring to it as "the great adventure in Western-style democracy." They have been succeeded by detached or disdainful observers, who have been known to call India things like "a permanent basket case." Western diplomats do not seek the company of Indians as they used to. And Indians, in turn, neither covet invitations to Western embassies nor prize the presence of the Western ambassadors at their social and academic functions as they used to. One observer of Indian-American relations has said, "You know that the American ambassador has a dog. But the American dog has not met a single Indian dog in the eighteen months it has been here. That's about the state of Indian-American relations right now." The American diplomats and the executives of philanthropic organizations used to work in concert, but now they are at loggerheads. World Bank people say that the Ford Foundation has a colonial outlook. Ford Foundation people say that the American Embassy has nothing but contempt for India and things Indian. American Embassy people say that the Ford Foundation leads the Indian government to believe that in seeking aid it can bypass the Administration in Washington and appeal directly to a constituency made up of Harvard University, the New York *Times,* and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And those few wrangling Westerners who don't take refuge in defensive cynicism go to the other extreme and become aggressively pro-Indian. They deplore the gloom-and-doom Westerners, and say things like "I'm tired of hearing Westerners say 'India is no God-damned good, the government is no God-damned good, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is no God-damned good.' " They call for "positivistic" thinking—in other words, for dealing with what is, here and now, and letting India's future take care of itself. They are likely to be

invited to the homes of Westernized Indians to eat from "a Mongolian firepot"—the current rage—which is many kinds of food boiled together in a pot at the table.

The talk at such gatherings is apt to be a little glib, a little cosmopolitan, and a little risqué. At one gathering, a Westernized Indian tells me, "I have a wonderful Untouchable sweeper, but I would never let him into my house. I have no objection to sitting and even eating with him at my table—it's just that he has filthy Untouchable habits."

I overhear another Westernized Indian say, "The only possible response to the conditions here is to go around with a Martini in one hand and a grenade in the other."

All the other guests agree with him.

Soon they are all listening to a deaf painter, the brother of a Minister in Mrs. Gandhi's Cabinet, who is renowned for his fund of stories. "The Marquess of Linlithgow, our erstwhile Viceroy, was a great lover of cattle shows," he says. "One day, he and Lady Linlithgow went to the great cattle show in New Delhi. When they got there, they wandered off in different directions. A Punjabi rustic with a huge bull approached Lady Linlithgow and said to her, 'This is the greatest bull in all India.' 'How do you know?' Lady Linlithgow asked. 'He can satisfy a cow two dozen times a day,' the man with the bull said. 'Go and tell my husband that,' she said. When the man found Lord Linlithgow, he repeated his praise of the bull and told him what Lady Linlithgow had said. 'But is it the same cow, my man?' Lord Linlithgow asked."

Indians and Westerners roar with delight.

Westernized Indian society in New Delhi is made up of high-ranking government officials and politicians, members of the professions, and occasional migrants from Calcutta or Bombay society. Its worst term of opprobrium, "new money," or "nouveau riche," is applied to people who have made their money since independence, in 1947, and its highest praise, "old money," is reserved for people who made their money before independence. New Delhi society has been humming with news of the

engagement of Sanjay Gandhi, who is Mrs. Gandhi's son, to Menaka Anand, a professional model, who was recently featured in a story in the English-language *Hindustan Times* headlined "From Towels and Mattresses to Maruti." Maruti is the name of a "people's car" that Sanjay Gandhi has been licensed by the government to manufacture and sell, over the protests of Mrs. Gandhi's political opponents, who accuse her of family favoritism. The newspaper story, after describing how Miss Anand got her start in towel advertising, goes on:

> Menaka joined Lady Sri Ram College to do a Political Science (Honours) course that she dropped later. There at the Miss Fresher [beauty] contest . . . asked to compose an impromptu nursery rhyme, she came up with this cameo:
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> "The man in the moon,
> Looked out of the moon,
> Looked out of the moon and said:
> 'The world's so dizzy,
> Everyone is in a tizzy,
> I'm glad I'm not human,
> I'd rather be dead!' "
>
> Naturally enough Menaka won the crown. (The *Evening News* "discovered" young Menaka in a front-page story on the event, Aug. 23, 1973.) . . .
>
> Soon enough a mattress company signed her on to model for them. (She wears a nightie. . . .) Menaka was famous overnight. . . .
>
> Menaka then decided to migrate to journalism (warms the poor journalists' cockles, no?). She enrolled herself in Sam Castelino's "Dateline School of Journalism." . . .
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> Her tutors at the school wistfully remember how she had got late one evening and they gave her a lift home. On the way she suggested she interview Sanjay Gandhi! Not knowing how well she knew him, the tutor casually remarked, "Yes, but find out if he's willing to be interviewed."
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> "I'm meeting him this evening," Menaka softly replied. She never went to the school again!!

Cultural interchange in the capital seems to be limited at present to talk about the young couple or to lectures on some such fashionable topic as the lure of the occult, India's economic plight, or how much better things are in China than they are in India. A few months back, a dance program or a vocal or sitar recital could always be found and would be well attended. But fewer people can now get to such events in either private cars or taxis, because of the ever-increasing price of gasoline. (New Delhi has a notoriously bad public transportation system.) For the same reason, social gatherings of all kinds have become smaller and rarer. The well-to-do Westernized Indian men go less frequently to their clubs after work for tennis, swimming, or cards. Their wives have curtailed their morning coffee parties in restaurants and also what they call their "kitty" parties—gatherings that usually involve a couple of dozen wives, who take turns entertaining the group at lunch, at which time a little lottery is held. Everyone puts a set sum in a kitty, and then all draw lots for it. Matters are so arranged that sooner or later everyone gets the kitty. Such parties used to be occasions for minor feasts, but the menus are now often restricted to one savory dish and one sweet dish.

During the monsoon season, which generally runs from early July to the middle of September, the sky is streaked with heavy clouds, and there are heavy rains. New Delhi is verdant. The trees have burst into yellow, purple, and orange blossom. Lush, tall flowers, especially snapdragons, are almost everywhere. The fountains are gushing. The accumulated dust of summer has been washed away from the ruins of earlier cities, from the faded Mogul monuments, from the magnificent, stately buildings put up by the British, from the occasional tall, modern buildings, from ancient stones and modern bricks, from every leaf of every tree. No matter how heavy the downpour, people go about without umbrellas or pro-

tection of any kind, as if they were amphibians. They dress in bright-colored clothes, and the air is filled with the hum of insects and the calls of large, brilliant birds. Because of the dampness, all sorts of things must now be kept in tight jars or tins; otherwise biscuits become limp, salt and sugar turn into rocks, matches won't light—the heads simply fall off, even off matches specially treated for the monsoon. Clothes won't dry, and they always smell a little damp, even after they have been ironed. Telephones don't work; cars stall. The network of open drains overflows, flooding the streets.

Lying between the sacred river Jumna and an outcrop of the Aravalli Hills is the Delhi plain, on which New Delhi stands. Legend and history tell us that on various sites on this plain more than ten other cities once stood: Indraprastha, in the tenth century B.C., or maybe it was the fifteenth; Dilli, around the first century B.C.; Lal Kot, in the eleventh century A.D.; Kila Rai Pathora, in the twelfth century; Siri, Tughlakabad, Jahanpannah, and Firuzabad, all in the fourteenth century; Dinepannah, in the sixteenth century; Shahjahanabad, in the seventeenth century; and what is now called Old Delhi, which has something of all of them in it. It has old Muslim tombs and British gardens, old Hindu temples and Protestant churches, old Mogul battlements and British barracks, old mosques and towers, old city walls and gates, old mean streets and bazaars. In alcoves in the ancient walls, on the steps that go down to the Jumna River, Brahmans chant Sanskrit verses, as other Brahmans have done for more than three thousand years. In Chandni Chowk, or Silver Street, in the shadow of the Jama Masjid, one of the world's great mosques, goldsmiths and silversmiths sell bangles and baubles, as their forebears did in the days of the Mogul emperors, and brasher venders offer roast kabobs and Coca-Cola. In the Red Fort, once the residence of Shah Jahan himself, guides tell how he built Shahjahanabad here and the Taj Mahal in Agra. Still living in elegant, if crumbling, quarters are the old high-caste Delhi wallahs, descendants of courtiers proverbially loyal in their service to Hindu, Muslim, or British rulers, always marrying within their own charmed circle. The area in

which many of the original thick, high stone walls and gateways of Shahjahanabad still stand is now a crowded, stinking slum, with all sorts of cottage industries.

New Delhi, which was built three miles south of Shahjahanabad, dates from 1911, when the British transferred their capital here from Calcutta. Because of the strategic position of the Delhi plain, many of the cities here had served other dynasties as their capitals. Christopher Hussey, in his exhaustive biography of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the British architect who, with Sir Herbert Baker, designed the new capital, writes, "From the moment of its foundation the city evoked sectional antagonism, both English and Indian. The English community in Calcutta, seeing their city reduced . . . to provincial status, did not scruple to recall the superstition that Delhi is the graveyard of dynasties. Pointing to the six previous capitals whose ruins litter the plain around that of Shah Jahan, some foretold that the building of an eighth presaged likewise the end of British rule." The main buildings of the Imperial capital—the Viceroy's palace, Parliament House, the two blocks of the Secretariat, all of which are a mixture of Roman and Indian architecture—together with the big government bungalows, and their compounds and servants' quarters, still form the core of New Delhi, which since 1947 has been the capital of independent India. There are many open spaces—wide, tree-lined boulevards and traffic roundabouts planted with flowers—which are reminiscent of the grace and order of the British raj. The grounds of various monuments are well kept up and are free of squatters. Because there is no heavy industry in New Delhi, the city does not have poor laborers like those who camp in the streets of Old Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta. Occasionally, when there is a road to be built, a few hundred laborers will camp at the site or start living in some of the huge sections of pipe that are to be laid down for the water supply. The New Delhi police are fairly strict about chasing away squatters and campers, because they want the capital to make a good impression on the foreigners who come here to work.

Grafted onto the elegant capital are scores of so-called

colonies—little neighborhoods or suburbs with their own bazaars, slums, and distinctive personalities—which sprang up to the south and west at the time of the partition of India, when hundreds of thousands of Punjabi refugees flocked to New Delhi and settled on land made available to them by the government in partial compensation for their losses in Pakistan. Thanks largely to the Punjabis, New Delhi is conspicuously more prosperous than Old Delhi, Bombay, or Calcutta. The Punjabis have, in fact, stamped their character on New Delhi. They are renowned for hard work, an enterprising spirit, proud bearing, primitive, unsophisticated ways, an aggressive, rambunctious manner, hearty appetites, and boastful talk. In the streets, Punjabi men are apt to ogle women and to make their way through crowds with sly, wily, hit-and-run shoves and pushes. At home, they like to sit and stare into space and draw comfort from being with one another. It is said that if a Punjabi gets a good meal three or four times a day and a long nap in the afternoon he is content. The habit of reading is almost unknown among the Punjabis, and they don't have much use for art; their houses are decorated mostly with garish calendars, brightly painted gods and goddesses, and family photographs—of revered or departed elders, of weddings or other family events.

Both New and Old Delhi are breeding grounds for mosquitoes, flies, and vermin. The water-supply system is so erratic and so badly maintained that as much as twenty-five per cent of the water is lost through seepage. In Shahjahanabad and other congested areas, some people rely for water on hand pumps that tap the subsoil, which is contaminated by the rubbish and sewage allowed to accumulate in lanes and by-lanes. As a consequence of all this, according to one estimate, one out of five residents comes down every year with a disease like dysentery, infectious hepatitis, malaria, cholera, or typhoid.

Most educated people here still get their news from three or four English-language dailies of nationwide circulation, which report mainly on conditions in the cities or on the doings of the central

government here in the capital. Weeks often go by without the appearance of a single story from any of the six hundred thousand villages in which most of the people live. These dailies have an inbred character; the people who own them, the people who read them, and the people whose doings are chronicled in them all belong to the tiny middle-class élite who live in the few big cities and have a monopoly on literacy, property, money, and power. But all these papers are now in difficulties: the Delhi edition of the *Statesman* recently had to suspend publication for several months because of a labor dispute; the *Hindustan Times* is said to be feeling the financial pinch; the *Indian Express* is having editorial troubles; the *Times of India,* perhaps the best of the four, is now only eight pages thick, because of a shortage of paper, from which all are suffering. (The newspapers in the Indian vernaculars are weaker and smaller—pale copies of their English counterparts.) The government controls the supply of newsprint, and now the government has come to believe that reports of social unrest only cause more unrest, so the newspapers have to tread warily. Even so, they carry daily reports of food riots, administrative breakdowns, and students' and workers' strikes.

John Kenneth Galbraith once described India as "a functioning anarchy." If that is what it is, it is certainly an anarchy that functioned best after the establishment of the British raj, in 1858; the British are credited even by their critics with having unified India and imposed law and order upon it. The "Indianization" of India that has been going on since independence is becoming a kind of regression to the days before the raj. Old accounts of Indian intrigue, nepotism, and courts and courtiers written by European observers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries bear an unnerving resemblance to what is happening now. Signs of backward-looking political and religious nationalism are everywhere. On All-India Radio, there are daily news broadcasts in Sanskrit. There is constant talk about the glories of ancient India—about how the Hindus in Vedic times travelled around in "flying machines," talked to each other on "skyphones," and constructed "bridges of stones" spanning oceans. The heroic feats

and the anthropomorphic characteristics of the *devas,* or gods, and *asuras,* or demons, in the ancient Hindu epics are being taken literally again. The foreign book most widely discussed among students at Delhi University is Erich von Däniken's "Chariots of the Gods." The students take it as proof that in antiquity not only India but also other parts of the world lived through a technological age more advanced than that of the present day in the West.

Seventy-five per cent of all Indians have no assured employment and earn four hundred rupees (about fifty-three dollars) or less a year. They cannot even count on such rock-bottom necessities for survival as one meal a day and one piece of permanent clothing, and so fall below what the Indian government has defined in its official income profile as "the poverty line." The top five per cent of all Indians have assured employment and earn forty-eight hundred rupees (six hundred and forty dollars) or more a year. This leaves about twenty per cent somewhere in between. A few years ago, I used to hear much fashionable talk about "the bourgeoisie," "the lower middle class," and "the upper middle class," as if the poor did not exist at all and the top five per cent—the only people to whom such class distinctions could conceivably apply—made up the entire country. Now I hear talk only about the well-to-do and the poor. And even the well-to-do talk about their children with uneasiness, as if the children were no longer securely above the poverty line but were in danger of being dragged into the vortex of destitution. Some college students fear for themselves also. Last year, many of them were going to college in buses and eating two *parathas,* or unleavened wheatcakes, at every meal. This year, they are walking to college and eating only one *paratha.*

Until rather recently, only the poor here woke up in the morning and asked themselves, "Will we eat today?" Now the well-to-do, who in a sense have always lived just to eat, are beginning to wonder how long they will go on waking up and asking themselves, "What shall we eat today?" There is a shortage of practically everything. The prices of rice, wheat, and sugar have doubled or quadrupled in the open market in a year, and the

prices of spices, cooking oils, and ghee are going up each month. Milk, bread, and butter have all become scarce, and such daily staples as wheat flour and corn flour are hard to get even at the government-controlled fair-price ration shops. Paper has become so scarce that books are prohibitively expensive. There are hardly any books to be found, even in the rooms of students, and the newspapers are referring to "the textbook famine." Aluminum is now prized almost like silver. Plastics have virtually disappeared. Residential construction has almost come to a halt, because there are grave shortages of cement, steel, wood, and glass. The price of cloth is rising so rapidly that people are buying it up in quantity. Toothpaste, soap, toilet tissue, cough mixtures, eye drops, nose drops, aspirin, antibiotics, and other toiletries and medicines have become scarce or unavailable. "Patients of epilepsy, high blood pressure, dysentery, and diarrhoea are running from chemist to chemist for drugs that are not available at any price," said a grim report in the *Times of India.*

Indians still use the British word "queue," and there are queues for practically everything. There isn't anyone, rich or poor, who is not obliged to queue for something. People have waited as long as two hours in a queue at a branch of the Punjab National Bank, only to be told that the bank had run out of money for that day. Mailing a letter may involve several queues: one for getting the letter weighed, another for buying a stamp, a third for having the stamp cancelled before one's eyes, so that it will not be used by the postal clerk to help buy a meal. Even so, there is no guarantee that the letter will ever reach its destination.

The people in the queues visibly seethe with impatience, anger, and hatred, and many a brawl breaks out, even though police are often posted to keep order. Lord Curzon, perhaps the most brilliant Englishman ever to serve as Viceroy of India, used to say that Indian rage fizzled out like soda water. Now the Indians themselves fear that the hunger, the prices, the scarcities, the endless waits, and the corruption may be turning the soda water into a Molotov cocktail.

For a year, the inflation rate has been thirty per cent. This,

combined with the chronic shortages, means hunger for millions. A representative here of the World Bank, Wolf Ladejinsky (he died in July, 1975), was often quoted in 1973 as saying, "India has twenty minutes to go to famine, and millions will die from starvation." In 1974, he was saying, "I miscalculated. I left out of account the incredible resilience of the Indian people in the face of starvation. I couldn't foresee that any Indian could survive with a meal every two days, as many Indians must have done." Among the millions of Indians who have died since Ladejinsky's original prediction, the government refuses to acknowledge that any died of starvation; it denies the existence of famine. Ever since the days of the British raj, officials here have drawn a distinction between death from starvation and death from any other cause—between faminelike conditions, which exist in some parts of the country all the time, and famine proper, which is said to exist only when deaths can be ascribed to no cause other than starvation. Such hairsplitting may have a legal function—an officially acknowledged famine entitles the disaster area to emergency government relief—but in human terms it only underlines the hopelessness of the situation.

Everyone seems to be discouraged about finding a solution to India's food problem. Large, expensive, centralized irrigation projects were completed in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, but they have turned out to be less well suited to small-farm cultivation, which is the rule in India, than had been hoped. The promise of the so-called green revolution of the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies has not been fulfilled, because the monsoon failed for two years in succession, and because there were severe shortages of electricity for irrigation pumps and of the necessary oil-based fertilizers. The government did not make a large enough investment in fertilizer plants, which are expensive and take at least four years to build, and now it cannot afford the investment, because of the quadrupling of world oil prices. "Nobody has been able to invent a cow which will give milk without being fed," writes D. P. Singh, an agricultural expert. "How can we have bumper crops if rains fail, irrigation doesn't come, electricity

is not available, and fertilizer is scarce?" Hope for any kind of genuine land reform has all but vanished, for the big landowners have become so powerful that it is widely assumed that they will always block any substantial distribution of land among the landless. They pay no income tax, and have managed to circumvent whatever legal limits there are on the size of landholdings. They finance the politicians and provide the political base of the ruling Congress Party.

India's politicians blame India's economists for the nation's economic plight. "We used to think that India had some of the world's best economists," one politican tells me. "In the sixties, they had more influence in determining economic policy here than economists had anywhere else in the world. And what a mess they made of things! We now know they are no wiser than any of the rest of us." The economists, for their part, blame self-serving, corrupt politicians, who, under India's socialist system of government, enjoy the power of licensing private businesses but use it to accumulate vast fortunes, and bungling government officials, who cannot run a single nationalized industry well—not even something as basic as the government-owned steel mills, which now work at only forty per cent of capacity. The economists say that the government has always been short on economic policy and long on socialist rhetoric. Since 1951, the government has been devising five-year plans for India's social and economic development; the draft of the fifth such plan, for the period 1974–79, is a discouraging document. A summing-up paragraph reads:

> The perspective for the next decade or so sketched out above is a modest attempt to have a measure of the task that lies ahead of us and to determine the way that we have to go. No doubt, the task is difficult and the road tortuous. But it is this that makes planning for development a perpetual adventure. It requires both vision and determination and an unshaken faith in the capacity of the country and the people to think and act big. Cynicism, inertia and fear of everything new and bold are alien to it. So are also the unwillingness to

make and demand sacrifices for a better future. Petty thought and action are as incompatible with it as wild flights of fancy and reckless deeds. Our ingrained humility has often led us to underestimate ourselves. We must discover ourselves fully. The nation is surely capable of achieving much more than the modest goals set out above. Just as there can be no movement without resistance, there can be no achievement without setbacks. The temporary difficulties must not be allowed to cloud our vision and shake our will. We have all the opportunity to create an India of our dreams. Let us seize it with both hands. A great socialist future beckons us irresistibly.

Indian economists are a cheerful, convivial lot, who see much of each other, like to talk shop, and amuse themselves by playing what amount to economic war games, constructing and tearing down theoretical models. In this activity, human problems tend to disappear. While the economists have been playing merely verbal games, the well-to-do as a class have been playing much more ominous real ones, with the result that two "parallel economies" have emerged in India: the "white economy," involving taxes, salaries, receipts, which is to say, money on the books; and the "black economy," involving bribes, unrecorded cash transactions, hidden inventories, which is to say, money off the books. There are those here who say that the black economy has outstripped the white. Instead of increasing the money on the books, the nationalization of each new industry, the rationing of each new commodity, the institution of each new control has increased the money off the books. No one here has yet been able to contain the black economy, let alone destroy it. As more and more people chase fewer and fewer necessities, who gets what—water or electricity, a telephone or a ration card—depends on whom one knows, whom one is related to, who owes one a favor, and how much one can pay. Even the democratic system seems to favor the black economy, because it provides leeway for the buying and selling of votes, of influence, and of access to the necessities of life. Arun Shourie, an Indian economist who works for the World

Bank, wrote in a recent article in the *Economic & Political Weekly*, published in Bombay:

> Ostensibly, each member of the Lok Sabha [Parliament] . . . gets elected on the premise that he has not spent more than Rs. 35,000 on his election. Similarly, the law debars each state legislator from spending more than Rs. 10,000 to 13,000. The *cognoscenti*, however, aver that an average Parliamentary election costs a candidate . . . Rs. 200,000 to Rs. 300,000 and that an average election to a state legislature costs about Rs. 100,000. When one adds expenditure on other elections—those to district bodies, co-operatives and so on—I would not be surprised if the [ruling Congress Party] alone has to muster Rs. 60–70 crores every five years. [A crore is ten million rupees, or a little over one million three hundred thousand dollars.] Many observers suggest that even this is a gross underestimate. . . . As contributions to political parties are prohibited by law, all collections are illicit. . . .
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> Governments daily decree exceptions to announced economic policies. . . . Producers and traders are allowed to create artificial scarcities. . . . Governments never get around to strengthening the apparatus for collecting taxes and to enforcing regulations about foreign exchange.

People I meet here still dismiss the possibility of a revolution; they say that since independence the nation has not produced a single revolutionary of any stature or an ideology with any following, and that everything in Hinduism, with its rigid caste structure and its laws of karma and dharma, militates against revolution. They believe that nothing in the country will ever change—that, as always, the Indians will just go on living from crisis to crisis, and things will continue to get worse. These same people, I remember, never believed that India would be partitioned, until they woke up on August 15, 1947, and discovered that a quarter of their country had been carved out to create the state of Pakistan. Such revolutionaries as are still around are talking about a spontaneous outbreak of violence in the villages, a sort of blood-drenched food riot from one end of the country to the other—

a peasants' rebellion, sparked by, say, a major crop failure. They are equally vague about its outcome and about just what kind of government would replace the present one. For the first time, however, there is talk here of military or political dictatorship.

The main industry in New Delhi is still government. The British used to say that they educated Indians so they could have enough clerks, and, in a sense, New Delhi remains a city of clerks. There seems to be no one in authority here who can give the country leadership and direction. As a rule, Indians in positions of power think that once they have articulated a problem they have solved it, that once they have drawn up a plan they have carried it out. They're more interested in theories than in results. There are many who think that capitalism and private enterprise are bad, and therefore that it is better to do without fertilizer plants, for instance, than to have them built by private enterprise, better to forgo offshore oil exploration than to allow private companies to invest in it and profit by it.

A few years ago, people spoke of Mrs. Gandhi admiringly as "a modern mind," but now they speak of her disparagingly as "the Empress," "the Lady," "Madame," or simply "she." In 1974, when there was a threat of disruption and disorder because of a strike of railway workers, the government summarily jailed between thirty and fifty thousand of the workers, reportedly discharging a number of these and confiscating their government-owned homes; it thereby succeeded in breaking the strike and in warning workers in other government-run industries of what was in store for them if they went on strike. In drawing rooms and offices, clubs and colleges, people here have begun to question whether democracy was ever suited to Indian conditions, since the top five per cent of the people are the system's main beneficiaries; since most people must go hungry and can neither participate in the system nor enjoy its fruits; and since the population increases relentlessly every year.

Mahatma Gandhi thought that India's population growth

could be controlled by self-imposed abstinence, but the problem has proved so intractable that some foreign observers here are now questioning whether it could be controlled even by a scientific miracle like a sterilizing vaccine.

I ask an eminent population expert in the government what it is doing about population control.

"The problem is cerebral, not genital," he says. "It's psychological, not physiological. It's a matter of working out a system of rewards and punishments for childbearing couples, of offering them psychological inducements to have smaller families, like life-insurance policies for those who promise to stop at two children. You see, for the poor, children are a form of insurance."

His argument confounds me, and, taking up one of several points that occur to me, I say that we scarcely know whether a system of rewards and punishments succeeds in controlling crime, so how can we be sure that it will succeed in controlling population growth?

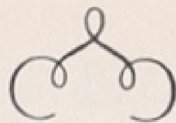
"The poor should not be lumped with criminals," he replies, unperturbed.

The government has been spending less than one rupee per childbearing couple per year for family planning, and it recently reduced the amount even further. I remark that such a cutback is self-defeating—that it can only mean that the government will have to allocate more money to feed more people later on.

"We'll let later on take care of itself," the expert says. "We are just concerned with getting through today. Anyway, the rate of our population growth is lower than that in many Latin-American countries, and Indians consume much less of the earth's resources per person than, say, the Westerners do. Besides, we have now entered the atomic age, and we can look forward to a day when nuclear energy will help us feed our poor. There is no reason to repeat the Western sequence of steps and move tortuously from an agrarian to an industrial to a technological to a nuclear economy. We can accelerate the process and leap all the way from an agrarian economy to a nuclear one."

The tone of all the talk here about population control is theoretical, passionless, unrealistic. It has not changed since independence. Meanwhile, the population has almost doubled.

Indians are wont to say, "It's not the government but God who gives us food. Everything depends on the monsoon." If the monsoon rains are too heavy and extensive, there are floods and devastation in the country; if they are too light and scattered, there is drought and famine. The right amount of rain for a good harvest is rare. In 1974, the monsoon rains were scanty. It had been calculated that at least a hundred and fifteen million tons of food grains would be needed to get India's six hundred million people from that monsoon to the next. The harvest was at least ten million tons short. The world's reserves of food grains are so low that India has been unable to rely on them to help her out, as she did in the past. And she has no reserves of her own.



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