



Introduction

Plural dreams: India in the 21st century

1. Anarchy and utopia

India is like a microcosm of the whole world. Its complexity cannot be understood easily, its future even more so. India is over one billion people – a sixth of humanity – and the future is likely to see this percentage rise. In no other nation-state is there so much of ethno-cultural diversity – in terms of religion, language¹, region, caste, class, ethnicity and ideology. Besides, individual Indians may also be part of various interest groups, associations, factions and political parties, interacting in ways involving both cooperation and conflict. The Indian democracy permits great freedom of activity and association, and the pursuit of different ideas and interests. But rules and laws in this democracy are violated, or manipulated, perhaps as often as they are obeyed. It will not be incorrect to say that democratic, free India is a functioning, even thriving, anarchy – characterised by a clamour of contesting voices and assertions, engagements and pursuits, debates and discourses, movements and manipulations, campaigns and conflicts and, no doubt, diverse dreams and visions of the future. In these circumstances, it is simply not possible to speak of *an* Indian future². Envisioning the Indian future is, consequently, almost as difficult and contentious a task as envisioning the global future, in all its complexities, challenges and varied possibilities. Even the attempt to present many Indian dreams of the future is not easy.

Visions of the future are always influenced by the conditioning of the past – which stretches back almost 6000 years in the Indian case – and by interpretations of the present. As Ashis Nandy states, ‘All visions of the future are interventions in and re-conceptualisation of the present’ [1]. This could not be truer than it is in the Indian context. The Indian future is heavily burdened/conditioned by the past, and severely entangled in the present, and the immediate or short-term future, to the point of indifference to the long-term future. Most Indians are not willing to place their bets on anything beyond the next five years. Most often, the future is discussed implicitly,

¹ A dozen major languages each spoken by well over ten million people, another few spoken by over a million each and about 2000 dialects! The states (provinces) in which these languages are spoken are often larger than most of the European nations.

² The vastness and diversity makes it impossible task to generalise and speak about India as a whole. To every rule there are exceptions, to every generalisation, a counter-example, to every analysis a counter-argument.

through a critique of the present or a commentary on the past. ‘Future Studies’ is a term that usually evokes bewilderment. The Indian Government’s report on India Vision 2020, for instance, points to the deep-roots of the civilisation and emphasises that the vision of the Indian future will be built on a rediscovery of the (glorious) past.³

There are also a number of attitudes relating to the Indian way of thinking that make an explicit focus on the future problematic. Notions of time, destiny, non-action, non-attachment, the ambiguity and illusory nature of reality (*maya*)⁴. Under the influence of these notions rooted in many millennia-old culture, besides the involvement in the activities, anxieties and pressing concerns of the present and the immediate future, most Indians are often indifferent to consciously thinking about the longer term future. Even an exploration into the future, when it is attempted, is done usually through the traditional knowledge of astrology! The underlying mindset of the ordinary Indian is of ambiguity, uncertainty and seeking godly benevolence – who knows what is going to happen in the future? – even the astrologers do not have anything certain to assert.

Nevertheless, India has its share of leaders, thinkers and visionaries who have, in the last century or two, articulated their visions of the future. The colonial encounter with the West led, in a period of political-intellectual ferment, Indian thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore to look inwards, introspect and articulate their visions of the future⁵. These discourses presage some of the crises and concerns today on the direction that the country is taking and the choices before it. In a recent essay, *Re-imagining India*, political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh has outlined three different images of India that arose during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the Hindu civilisational image; the synthetic or plural image; and the modernist image of India [6].

In independent India in the 1950s and 60s, under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, planning was chosen as the chief instrument of state-led development and social engineering, to build a democratic, socialist future of the republic. The socialist project could not achieve the goal of redistributing the means of production and doing away with age-old inequalities based on caste and class. Instead, socialism

³ ‘Although the present Republic of India is a young developing nation, our people have a rich and illustrious history as one of the longest living civilisations in the world. In 1835, even Lord Macaulay, the British historian politician had to admit before the British Parliament: “I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre... the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage...” Thus, it would be wrong to state that in 1947 India started to construct a modern nation from scratch. Rather, it began the process of rediscovering its rich cultural and spiritual values that had formed the foundation of India in the past. It is on this foundation that we seek to formulate our vision of India 2020’ [emphasis in the original] [2].

⁴ For an excellent discussion on the ways of thinking of traditional Indians see Nakamura [3]. For a discussion on Indian notions of time in the context of the new millennium see Romila Thapar [4].

⁵ The spectrum of the Indian response to the West in the twentieth century has been captured by a collection of statements of prominent twentieth century Indians, edited by Fred Dallmayr and G N Devy [5].

soon deteriorated into a politics of patronage (and populism) that has been described as the ‘licence-permit raj’. The Nehruvian thrust on science and technology, however, continued uninterrupted.⁶ For well over two decades this was the scenario, and there were no other competing visions, till a set of factors that included the Cold War, the oil shocks of the 1970s and the global realisation of the limits to growth spawned a worldwide interest in the longer-term future. This interest was reflected in the book *Footsteps into the future* [8] written by Rajni Kothari (published in 1974) with inputs from his colleagues at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. This was not a book on the Indian future, but a book suggesting a redesign of the global order, from an Indian perspective, influenced primarily by the ideas of Nehru and Gandhi. Subsequently, in the next two to three decades there have been many visions and books dealing consciously with the future, although there have been few in the nature of grand, over-arching visions. It is noteworthy, too, that most of these discourses and visions of India, however, have remained restricted to a narrow intellectual class and have hardly been able to capture the imagination of the wider public! Writing in 1993, two decades after *Footsteps...* Kothari noted that the ‘alternatives’ and ‘alternative futures’ movement ‘remained largely academic and did not make it even to the mass media, leave alone to the masses’ [9].

One alternative vision was J C Kapur’s *India: an uncommitted society*, highlighting the fact that countries such as India not committed to the consumerist value system stand a better chance of creating a new and sustainable human order in the future [10]. In the nineties, Gadgil and Guha’s *Ecology and equity: the use and abuse of nature in contemporary India* [11] contrasted a profligate India of consuming ‘carnivore’ Indians with a prudent India of ‘ecosystem people’ living in harmony with nature. The authors suggested that we need to reconcile and synthesise strands from different ideological perspectives into a consensual vision for the future of India, that they called Conservative-Liberal-Socialism. More recently, Sunil Khilnani in *The idea of India* has tried to envision India by excavating the recent past to remind us of the intellectual and practical underpinnings of modern, democratic, tolerant, India, although he realises that ‘no single idea can possibly hope to capture the many energies, angers and hopes of one billion Indians’ [12, p.xv]. A year later, focussing on visions and work inspired by Gandhi, Rajni Bakshi’s *Bapu kuti* described the projects of young neo-Gandhians attempting to make another future [13]. Responding to the growing and tangible environmental crisis along with a burgeoning population, a number of writers and organisations have come up with visions that analyse and focus on the precariousness of environmental sustainability as a major theme.⁷

⁶ Nehru’s remark about dams being the temples of new India is oft quoted and well known. Randhir Singh argues that in a subtle shift in Nehru’s thinking, science and technology replaced socialism as the key to solving India’s problems. Thus Nehru ‘increasingly opted for what I would describe as ‘fetishism of science’, that is, investing science in powers it does not itself have, expecting it to do the job of social revolution, which it simply cannot.’ [7].

⁷ Some of these futuristic texts are B B Vohra’s *Land and water: towards a policy for life-support systems* [14], K R Datye’s *Banking on Biomass* [15], S A Dabholkar’s *Plenty for All* [16]; and *GREEN India 2047* by the Tata Energy Research Institute [17]. Amulya Reddy’s work on the Demand-focussed,

Another set of alternative visions for India, best represented by Nandy [19,20], Alvares [21] and Sardar [22] argue for the need to decolonise the Indian mind as a prerequisite to build an authentic Indian future, based on the knowledge, experience and categories of thought derived from Indian civilisation. In complete opposition to the Nehruvian vision, these critiques consider mass institutionalised violence and oppression as inherent in the western notions of modern science, majority-based nationalism and ‘development’ that plunders nature and uproots communities living in harmony with nature, supposedly for the benefit of the ‘nation’.⁸ These critiques do not suggest specific elements of another vision for India, but they oppose utopias based on modern science and development as mass-violence justifying reasons of nation-states (which was not the historical character of the nations/cultures of the civilisation of India/South Asia).

Another influential strand of the futuristic discourse in recent times, however, is less willing to go along with this critique, and argues instead that India’s persisting poverty and other problems will only be tackled by more development, based on liberalisation inside and trade with the world outside. This discourse is concerned chiefly with the need to liberalise India, to unleash the entrepreneurial and innovative energies of its people bound by the corrupt bureaucratic socialism of over four decades after independence. This is the thrust of Gurcharan Das’s two books [25,26], celebrating the liberalising nineties as a silent revolution in India’s economy, polity and society.⁹ In the same category is the technology-based development vision of Abdul Kalam and Y S Rajan (based on the work of the government’s Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council – TIFAC), *India 2020: A vision for the new millennium* [27]. This vision has inspired a wider public in recent times, especially so after Kalam’s ascendancy to the position of president of India. His charismatic style and behaviour as president too has much to do with the popularity of his developmental vision for India. This development vision is particularly popular with India’s political-bureaucratic elite and the business class, and many educated and patriotic Indians, many of whom feel that India rightfully deserves to be a super-power and can make the grade with rapid economic development in the next two decades.¹⁰

end use oriented (DEFENDUS) energy-planning paradigm, although done only in the context of Karnataka, was pioneering and visionary [18].

⁸ For instance, between 1950 and 1991 itself 21.3 million have been displaced by ‘development’ – dams, mines, wildlife sanctuaries, industries. Most have been thrown out with paltry compensation, many have been displaced even two or three times and three-fourths of these people have not been rehabilitated [23]. A more recent critique places the number at 50 million – or 5 per cent of the population! [24]. And there is still no central government policy for the resettlement and rehabilitation of those displaced by development. Reportedly, policies such as these would discourage foreign investment in the country.

⁹ Das notes, however, in *The Elephant paradigm*, that ‘India is not a tiger but and elephant—hence our reform process is frustratingly slow’. The title alludes to the huge, slow-moving but wise Indian elephant [26, p.203].

¹⁰ An influential analysis by an outsider that seeks to carry out a ‘net assessment’ of the major factors critical to India as an emerging great power and to understand the mindset of India’s strategic community and elites is Stephen Cohen’s *India: emerging power* [28].

In the anarchy that is India, thus, there are many confident aspirations of grandeur, many visions of utopia that may be. Although in 1993 Rajni Kothari was lamenting the decline of engagement with utopias, the last decade has not been completely disappointing. Yes, the communist dream has collapsed and the developing world has not come up with any real ‘third alternative’. But there are numerous Indians working in their own ways towards a hopeful if not a utopian vision of the Indian future. These initiatives may be for human development, the articulation of people’s struggles for justice, the rediscovery of traditional knowledge systems or innovation and creativity at the grassroots. These initiatives are not always reported by the mainstream media, but are documented by a number of ‘alternative’ journals, websites and books (for instance [29], [30], [31], [32]).

This is a crucial point about India-in-the-making. In the free-for-all ‘anarchy’ that prevails today, there are many elements of concern. The challenges and threats that the papers in this issue bring out are very real and constitute the warnings that the country may indeed descend from a thriving anarchy into one of real instability, chaos, sectarian conflict and ecological disaster. But equally, the sources of resilience and resurgence are many. Borrowing Kothari’s evocative phrase, with careful ‘footsteps into the future’, India may indeed be able to build upon its unique strengths to seek a utopian future. What are these footsteps? The papers in this issue, will, it is hoped, throw some light on this.

2. India and Bharat¹¹: exclusive and inclusive visions

Decolonising the Future: Two previous special issues of Futures, in 1992 [33] and 1997 [34], have dealt with South Asia. Both issues emphasised the need to decolonise the Indian/South Asian future, to liberate it from the clutches of Western notions and ideas, which continue to rule South Asia despite the departure of the colonial British rulers. Sankaran Krishna [35] argued, taking the instances of Partition and the formation of Bangladesh, that in South Asia the attempt to form nation-states based on religious nationalism, homogeneity and majoritarian over-centralisation and concentration of power cannot work. Sohail Inayatullah, the editor of the special issue on South Asia in 1992, observed that the intellectual climate of the sub-continent was dominated so much by mistrust, hate and fear, that creating alternative futures beyond the partition discourse would be the ultimate challenge for South Asian scholars.

Five years later, Zia Sardar emphasised once again the need for the Indian/South Asian civilisation to ‘come home’ through a return to cultural authenticity and self-assured identity. “The vision of Indian civilisation, what should now appropriately be called the civilisation of South Asia, was always a vision of spiritual plurality...

¹¹ The division between westernised, urban, educated, English-speaking, middle-class or elitist India and the non-westernised, rural, labouring, vernacular, poor masses has been described as the division between India and *Bharat*.

Thus, India is a pluralistic civilisation par excellence where Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and Christianity, countless ethnic cultures and numerous languages fuse together to produce a thriving, dynamic entity that is perhaps unique in world history... The future of South Asia, I argue, lies not in fragmenting, strife-torn, nation states, but in coming together of its cultural and ethnic constituents” [34, pp 887-888].

In the present issue the explicit focus is on India, but the notion of a plural Indian/South Asian civilisation is always there in the background. It is too early to say if India has started earnestly on the journey to ‘come home’. But pluralism and the exclusive/inclusive nature of visions for the future of India is one of the most important and central issues.

The contributors to this issue were asked to address the following four questions:

- The biggest challenges and hurdles that India faces.
- The direction and the “footsteps into the future” that India needs to take to move towards the good society.
- The innovations and initiatives that represent the signs of hope for building a humane future. What will be the sources and who will be the effective agents of change?
- What will be India’s role and unique or significant contribution in the globalised world?

Some of the fifteen papers¹² in this issue deal with these questions explicitly, some do not. But together, the papers give us enough insights to crystallise, from the many hazy dreams, some of the important elements that will give shape to the possible futures of India.¹³

One of these common elements, a thread that runs through all the papers, although dealing with different sectors, aspects and issues, is: the dreams envision a future for whom? For which constituents of India? For ‘India’ alone or for *Bharat* too?¹⁴ Another division that has come to the fore in recent times is the division between the majority religious community and the religious minorities. The central question, perhaps, in exploring and making the possible futures of India is this: will it be a future for all, including the masses who constitute *Bharat*, or will it be a future for a few - the well-educated, westernised, globally-connected, consumerist elites and

¹² There should have been more, and the gender imbalance among the contributors is unfortunate, although not due to a gender bias! Some of the women contributors who had confirmed dropped out at a late stage.

¹³ One of the characteristics of the Indian discourse on the future is that the concern with the *post-human* future – an important part of the futures discourse in developed countries – is either absent from or not taken seriously, even though the question of information technology is central to visions of India in the 21st century. The concerns of the futures discourse in India are unequivocally *human* concerns – human development, human rights, human values, human welfare, human morality, and so on.

¹⁴ One recent study hypothesises that disparities in India have given rise to three different economies – the business class economy constituting 2 per cent of the population; the [motor]bike economy comprising 15 per cent of the population and the poor bullock cart economy of 83 per cent of the population [36].

‘middle class’ of *India*? Analogously, will it be a future for every Indian, irrespective of religion, or will it be a future in which the religious and ethnic minorities will feel threatened and unwelcome?

3. Colonial dreams and post-colonial alternatives

We begin, appropriately, with analysing a dream of the future originating in the colonial period. Ranabir Samaddar shows, through a reading of Tagore’s last testament, that colonial subjects can only dream – as Tagore did of the advent of a new man and saviour of human civilisation - of an utopian future. Dreams inspire and become the basis of hope and resistance, Samaddar argues. ‘There has been hardly any other way in the colonial world to counter the reality of power than by becoming utopian in political thinking’. Based on this, Samaddar makes the broader point that visioning the future is a historical activity grounded in the politics of power. Since space and time, self and activity interact in this process of dreaming the future, the process of envisioning the future is born out of what Samaddar calls chrono-politics or the politics of time.

The dream of colonial subjects is expectedly utopian. But what of the dreams of people in a free country? Surely political freedom enables at least the first steps in the journey to ‘come home’. One would expect, therefore, not only a wider variety of dreams, more rooted in one’s being, but also dreams – less utopian - built on a more realistic assessment of possibilities. A number of the papers in this issue explore such ‘viable’ dreams, and examine what factors keep alive the chasm between visions and reality.

Kishen Pattnayak notes that the radical visions of development of the early twentieth century, eminently those of Gandhi and Mao, were soon eclipsed by the rise of the technological vision of development. Pattnayak emphasises the hegemony of the capitalist-technological vision of development, and its hold over elites worldwide. This technological vision fails to recognise the linkages of the capitalist, technology-driven path with colonial exploitation and war. This model of development requires non-capitalist or pre-capitalist territories to exploit, to provide the markets required for capitalist growth. Thus the capitalist technological vision can only be a vision for selected nations, or for a selected few within nations. It can never be a vision for the whole world. Put differently, it can be a vision for elitist ‘India’, but it cannot be a vision for the masses – the farmers, workers and *dalits* [downtrodden and crushed – the preferred term for self-description by India’s scheduled castes, at the bottom-most of the traditional caste hierarchy] who constitute Bharat. Alternative visions are, therefore, inevitable.

What alternative future does Pattnayak envision for India? His alternative path has three elements or prerequisites. The very first requirement, he feels, is to educate the elite and the intelligentsia that a non-capitalist-technological alternative is possible. The second requirement is that the political leadership will have to be courageous enough to pursue a path independent of the developed nations. The third step, to be taken by the intelligentsia and the scientists, is the refinement of alternative

technologies. Pattnayak rightly recognises, however, that the elite is unwilling to shift its allegiance from the technology-dominant path of development. What is it, however, that makes the elites – and others too – a prisoner of the techno-dream? This is a question that Pattnayak and all other critics of the techno-vision, and champions of alternative models of development, need to ask. In the Indian instance, what explains the turning away from the Gandhian *swadeshi* (literally, of one's own country, referring broadly to economic self-reliance) path? And why were India's inward looking policies not able to help much in the alleviation of poverty for many decades? The answers to these questions may be crucial in shaping the trajectory of alternative pathways of development in the future.

4. The roadmap to reform and human development

While Pattnayak's vision rejects capitalist globalisation and technology-led development outright, P V Indiresan presents a vision that has a place for both *swadeshi* (economic self-reliance) and globalisation. 'Logically, there is space for both: Globalisation for improving competitiveness of tradeables, and *swadeshi* for maximising employment through non-tradeables.'

Indiresan's human development vision for India proposes shifting investment from congested cities to rural areas by linking loops of villages by four types of connectivity – physical, electronic, economic and knowledge – thus promising to hasten India's growth, and improve the environment too. He also makes some important proposals for the reform of administrative governance and to counter the hate vote. Indiresan's vision and proposals can be seen as designing technology-based systems, electoral reforms and administrative reforms so that not only elitist India but the Bharat of rural masses too benefits from the fulfilment of basic needs and beyond.

Interestingly, in terms of technological choices and ecological architecture this vision is not very different from the Gandhian alternative visions, except for the thrust on the use of modern electronic technologies. Where it differs is in its more accommodative approach towards globalisation, capitalism, the market and in its greater faith in the elite in carrying through the technology-based social transformation. Somehow, the Gandhian approach tends to be identified with a sharing of widespread poverty¹⁵, or at least austerity. The Indiresan-Kalam approach, on the other hand, tends to present technology (along with entrepreneurship) as a driver for a society in which prosperity can be shared. Is it this that accounts for its much greater and wider appeal?

Continuing with the design for economic reform, Bibek Debroy notes the pluses and minuses of our achievements in economic and human development. Since independence, we have made significant improvements in a number of variables – such

¹⁵ This could perhaps be due to a sub-conscious influence of deeply ingrained ways of thinking. Nakamura notes, for instance, 'With reference to economic morality, Indian people lay stress on the fairness of sharing rather than on that of production ...' [3, p. 84]. In modern times, however, there is a much greater focus on production and growth.

as per capita income, foodgrain output, life expectancy, literacy rate, poverty ratio. These are not good enough, but he is firm in his optimism that we are on the path to progress. 'India certainly won't be a developed economy by 2020. But by 2040, it will be close to what we mean by a developed economy today' (roughly where Malaysia is today). Domestic economic reforms, and, particularly, rural sector reforms are going to be central to the processes of development. These include investments in rural infrastructure, the curbing of wasteful subsidies, the provision of social infrastructure, legal and tax reforms and so on. The groups that will benefit most from liberalisation and reforms are efficient trade and industry, small farmers, unorganised labour and consumers, while the vested interests who benefit from the status quo and oppose reforms are inefficient trade and industry, the bureaucracy, organised labour and large farmers. This insight into the gainers and losers from the reform processes is extremely valuable, for it points to the role of different agencies/constituencies in the un/making of the Indian future. If Debroy's analysis is correct, and if reforms succeed, rural Bharat will benefit much more than the elites and organised workers of urban India.

5. Technology for Bharat

Bharat may also benefit much from emerging technologies. These technologies – hybrid telemedicine systems, a digital rural exchange and a wireless access system, the simputer (low-cost, hand-held computing device), etc. - have much to offer for the welfare of the rural Indian masses, who have hitherto benefited little from technological developments. Dinesh Sharma describes some of the promising experiences with these technologies. E-governance is another promising area, for instance the computerisation of land records, thus reducing frequent land-related litigation and conflicts. The use of satellite-based disaster warning systems can help save the lives of thousands of fishermen and others threatened in disaster situations. Thus a whole range of technologies, which can make another future possible for Bharat, are available today. 'But mass application of these technologies will need changes in policies, coordination among various wings of the government, a clear preference towards locally developed technologies, recognition and promotion of innovative ideas, and above all, a change in the mindset of politicians and the bureaucracy'.

6. The environmental threat and the challenge of governance for sustainability

One of the blind spots that characterises economists in general and Indian planners in particular is what has been called '[natural] resource illiteracy' of India's city-bred elites [14, p.15]. Among the most important factors that may puncture the optimism of Debroy – and many others – about India's economic growth and development is the question of energy and natural resources to support over a billion people. The challenge to an Indian sustainable future arises from a combination of three

factors: the numbers and density of human and animal population in India, moderate to high levels of economic growth (thereby higher per capita consumption of resources and generation of waste and pollutants), and the culture of consumerism that feeds on the technology of obsolescence, by design! Pachauri reminds us in this context that ‘Blindly aping the consumerist approach of the developed world, particularly in negligence of the ecological footprint of lifestyles, could prove disastrous for a country that already has population in excess of one billion people’.

Pachauri notes that ‘as of now Indian society has not internalised in its growth agenda the externalities and distortion that take place on account of environmental and natural resource damage that we see around us.’ Illustrating the relationship between economic policies, development and environmental damage with the Environmental Kuznets curve, Pachauri highlights the potential threat to the environment in India. While in the developed countries environmental protection policies were introduced after reaching significantly high income as well as pollution levels, but still well before the threshold of irreversible environmental damage was crossed, ‘A developing country like India cannot pursue the same path, and would need to set up a governance structure and policy regime that allow the turning point to take place at substantially lower levels of income’. This is a challenge that many Indian economists and planners have failed to realise. And often, due to the absence of this realisation, when environmental groups have lobbied against development projects destructive of the environment, they have been branded anti-development and even anti-national!

7. Globalisation and the challenge of food, livelihoods and ecological security

Vandana Shiva’s observations about hunger and starvation deaths and her caution about the re-colonisation of Indian agriculture are the other counterpoint to the development optimists. Read in the context that nearly half the adult population gets less to eat everyday than required in terms of calorie intake and that nearly 50 per cent of the children suffer from malnutrition and underweight,¹⁶ her concern is not unwarranted. What kind of future does such malnutrition and hunger imply for Bharat—the poorer, two-thirds of India? What kind of statement about the future is it when thousands of farmers, and sometimes whole farmer families, are committing suicide? Ironically, these suicides are taking place not only in the poorer states but also in affluent states like Punjab and in states like Andhra Pradesh with a strong reforms programme and a dynamic, futuristic chief minister. ‘The very viability of a national agriculture and food security system is being ruptured as high cost, capital intensive, corporate farming displaces small farmer centred agriculture, and trade replaces food rights of the poor as a policy priority’.

Shiva argues that three core areas of policy shift - changes in property rights to natural resources; changes in technology, especially new genetically engineered crops

¹⁶ For detailed figures see India development report 2002 [37, p.11].

and seeds; and changes in trade regimes - are destroying the fragile fabric of ecological security, livelihood security and food security, creating ecological devastation and deepening hunger and poverty.

8. Plural visions of society: exclusion and inclusion

With competing nationalistic and ethnic claims and conflicts, diverse religious and linguistic identities, multiple hierarchies, ancient influences on social organisation as well as ways of thinking... and yet a modern framework of a democratic nation-state, India is complex and tends to confuse, at the least. How do we go about building a conceptual framework for understanding this complex entity? T K Oommen seeks to do this by conceptually clarifying the terms society, nation-state and civilisation and situating 'India' in terms of these notions. He suggests that India's future as a society and as a civilisation is durable.

The future of the nation-state, however, is a matter of contestation among competing values. Oommen identifies four competing value-orientations vis-à-vis the 'nation state'--cultural monism, cultural pluralism, cultural federalism and cultural subalternism. The *cultural monists* are Hindu nationalists who believe in one nation, one people and one culture. In their majoritarian view of democracy the identity of religious minorities stands erased. The *cultural pluralists* conceive Indian society as a product of gradual and continuous accretion of cultural elements drawn from Aryan, Dravidian, Mughal and British-European sources. They believe in secularism – the dignified coexistence of all groups and communities - and in the necessity of a strong centralised state system. In contrast to these two orientations, *cultural federalists* conceive Indian 'society' as a conglomeration of nations, basically linguistic and tribal entities, a multi-national state. Each of the constituting nationalities (such as Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi) has its own cultural specificity that needs to be recognised and nurtured; thus political federalism is a pre-requisite. Lastly, *cultural subalternism* is the perspective of the *dalit-bahujans* comprising the dalits or Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled tribes and the Other Backward Classes (50 per cent), the peasantry and artisan groups falling between the Scheduled Castes and Upper Caste Hindus. They believe that the specificity of their needs and contributions are totally ignored in the discourses among the elites in India. India's future as a nation-state, Oommen asserts, will depend upon the legitimacy these value orientations achieve in future.

Not satisfied with the elitist discourse in India, what is the vision that the dalits have of their own future as part of the Indian future? This question is not easy to answer, of course, because the dalits have a double burden. They not only have to imagine ways in which they may be able to overcome the discrimination rooted in a social hierarchy that dates back many millennia but also how this may be done in a poor, developing country in a fiercely competitive, even hostile, world. Gopal Guru takes up this challenge to identify the elements of the dalit vision of the future. The overarching challenge, of course, is to transform a culture built on the principle of *bahishkaar* (ostracisation and exclusion) to one built on the principle of inclusion. This means getting rid of the mental notions of ritual purity and pollution (which

are entrenched in the members of the wider society) and, additionally, ensuring that even the operation of modern technology is not subsumed under the influence of these notions. The author observes that the market and the forces of globalisation have not helped the dalits. These forces only tend to reinforce the divides along the poverty and pollution lines. Thus the intervention of the state, as well as a secular and authentic nationalism, rooted in moral strength is crucial in any future social vision for the dalits. The state will have to play a proactive role in ensuring that dalits get enough education and economic opportunities to abandon the tasks of sanitation traditionally associated with them. The authentic nationalistic assertion will help them to assert their identity as an integral part of the Indian nation, and thus overcome their outcaste status.

In Oommen's framework, while Guru represents the cultural subaltern view of the nation state, Asghar Ali Engineer represents the cultural pluralist view of the Indian nation-state. Engineer argues that Indian democracy, which is here to stay, is in itself a guaranty for the future of secularism. 'A pluralist country like India needs secularism like its life-blood. India has been pluralist not since post-modern times but for centuries and no one can wish away its bewildering pluralism, which can be sustained only with a religiously neutral polity'¹⁷. Based on this long history of pluralism, combined with the hope that economic progress will blunt communal tendencies, Engineer feels strongly that the present communal turmoil will pass and would certainly yield to a more stable secular polity.

Continuing with the focus on identity-based conflicts, Sanjoy Hazarika presents the complexity of the situation in India's North-East and the sources of conflict and alienation. In this instance, as in many other conflict situations worldwide, the conflicts arise from a combination of competing nationalistic or sub-nationalistic claims, ethnic identities and the play of demographic and economic forces. Rigid attitudes and unbending views of history and geography only make these conflicts more difficult to resolve. The exodus of the young from the region is a comment on how the young see their future in this troubled area. The author suggests that the solution to conflicts has to arise out of peaceful negotiations and has to build on the region's natural strengths and traditions of governance. 'Despite the seeming lack of answers for the future, it is evident that the region has to build on its natural advantage in terms of abundant natural resources. Greater degrees of autonomy with extensive powers to village "republics", based on tradition, but with a definite change towards gender sensitivity and representation, can show the way forward'.

9. Strengths and weaknesses: governance, corruption and leadership

It is not just globalisation that is responsible for all the Indian ills. Many of the weaknesses of Indian society are of a structural and cultural nature, as both Vittal and Jhunjhunwala assert.

¹⁷ Bhikhu Parekh concurs with this view. 'As the rest of the world turns increasingly multicultural and agonises about how to live with its plural identity, India has much to teach it' [6].

Vittal notes the structural and attitudinal problems that characterise Indian society and Indians. These include lack of national pride, politics based on caste and other identities, a hierarchic and corruption-ridden feudal society and the tendency to reward failure and weakness rather than success and achievement. These and other hurdles prevent India from achieving its true potential. On the other hand, India's strengths in democratically managing a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country and its capacity to master technology are also notable. India must build on its strengths and achieve its potential to become an economic superpower with a good and just society.

Jhunjhunwala too focuses on the structural-cultural aspects of Indian society, although he relates these to a broader theory of human psychology and its expression in social structure and governance. The key to good governance in future will lie in invigorating such individuals to 'speak' who have transcended their desires of money and power and are able to take a dispassionate view of the problems in the larger social good. Referring to India's past, Jhunjhunwala suggests that Indian civilisation was able to survive for five millennia because it had created a space for intellectuals disinterested in money and power who could provide a check on governance. In the future, 'An effective check on bad governance can be established only with thousands of intellectuals independently speaking out their views in society. These individuals have to build multiple loose networks among themselves so that they are in touch with each other and can draw inspiration and emotional sustenance from each other while retaining their independence in livelihood and thought.'

10. Popular culture, consumerism and globalisation

Ashok Raj looks at the India's popular culture, as reflected in cinema, and argues that the authentic, spiritual and creative cinema for Bharat has given way to a vacuous and glamorous cinema for India, in the wake of globalisation. Many observers have noted that the globalisation of the economy is bringing in its wake notions of materialism and consumerism that do not match with Indian traditions of austerity, simplicity and spirituality. Raj argues that the decline in the quality of Indian cinema in recent years is part and outcome of the wider globalisation processes. Tracing the history of Indian cinema he argues that in its classic phase Indian cinema's creativity and rooted-ness was reflected in its concern with spiritual-social themes. This cinema was both beautiful and emotionally satisfying. During the last decades of the twentieth century, Indian cinema moved in turn to anti-establishment themes to vacuous 'heroism' to empty affluence. In recent times there has also been the portrayal of pop patriotism to boost falling film markets.

In the future, cinema (and television) will be dominated even more by technological sophistication but will be devoid more and more of genuine socio-cultural context. 'Modern technology will overpower the language, intimacy and the emotional content of the "basic Indian film"'. This cinema – in its pursuit of global attractiveness and profits - will work with globalised values, technology and material, although outwardly using a national cultural setting. 'It will thus cease to represent national cinema *per se*. This cinema, in fact, will get increasingly homogenised within the

globally unifying cultural monolith and thus lose its identity'. Raj suggests a set of future options to resurrect cinema from its present decline and to help the medium reinvent its past glory and social relevance.

11. Conflict and cooperation: the South Asian future

The papers discussed above have focussed on the visions, ideas, forces and factors at work within the country, which are shaping the Indian future. What about India's relationship with its neighbours? Due to the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan South Asia is often described as one of the most dangerous places on earth. Peace in South Asia will direct developments in a number of other areas, from trade and energy security to education.

Sundeep Waslekar and Semu Bhatt outline four scenarios based on the geopolitical developments in India's neighbouring countries and India's response to them. Though major geopolitical events in its neighbourhood will impact the immediate future of India, India's response and internal strengths and weaknesses will determine its long-term future. The authors suggest that the driving forces of developments in the region can be analysed using the five-G framework, developed by their group: Growth, Governance, God, Geopolitics and Globalisation. The list of driving forces influencing the nature of conflicts in the region include American ambitions, the Chinese resurgence, destabilisation of Pakistan, the primacy of economics in world policy, global terrorism and so on.

Each scenario explores a set of possible events and the consequences triggered by it. While *Storms and Fires* is based on the rise of a sharp nationalist Indian sentiment in the face of heightened security tensions in the region, *Across Space* outlines the future of India's worldview shaped by the present government's policy of US primacy. *Light and Shadows* is based on differential policy towards neighbours – conflict with Pakistan and cooperation with other neighbours. This scenario is predicated on the supremacy of economic objectives whereas *Rainbow in the Sky* is based on the regional cooperation as the primary guiding force of the Indian foreign policy. Like a number of challenges and choices within, India clearly faces critical choices in dealing with its neighbours, and the wisdom of its leadership in making those choices will strongly influence the future of the whole of South Asia.

12. Conclusion: keeping alive the utopian quest

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, India envelopes the possibilities of many different futures. This is a period when a new global order is emerging, the forces of economic globalisation and technological innovation are at a peak, long-term global environmental disruption due to climate change is certain and there is a global emergence of religious fundamentalism. The significance of this period in the making the Indian future in the twenty-first century is, thus, not merely symbolic.

At this defining moment, India may appear to be engaged, almost single-mindedly,

with the task of economic reform and development. A central question for the future of India is whether this concern will pay off for Bharat, and, therefore, for India as a whole. Whether the Indian leadership will have the integrity and the wisdom to ensure that economic growth is accompanied by social justice, at least by health, education and welfare measures for the poor and marginalised Indian masses. This is a persistent weakness, and the question is how long into the future it will persist. Writing in 1983, Amartya Sen noted that

‘The elections, the newspapers, and the political liberties work powerfully against dramatic deprivations and new sufferings, but easily allow the quiet continuation of an astonishing set of persistent injustices. This dichotomy seems to me to be the central point in judging how India is doing. It is doing well in many specific respects... But this record had to be assessed in the light of the persistent inequities, and the basic weakness of modern India that sustains them. It is a weakness that is not being conquered [38].

The concern with development and liberalisation and the impacts of globalisation have led to some to interpret that India is becoming more materialistic, individualistic and consumerist in its orientation, which indeed appears to be the case at present. If the Indian leadership gradually internalises these values, what does it mean for the future? In the long run, therefore, the question for India and Indians in this regard is: will India retain a spiritual-compassionate orientation despite the onslaught of globalisation with its vulgar consumerism, ostentatious affluence and the increasing aura and allure of technology?

A second major concern is the future of cultural pluralism and inter-religious harmony. The forces of religious intolerance and violence are cause for deep concern, even agony, to many Indians today. But, influenced by the Hindu idea of the unity of all things, and by the syncretic nature of Indian culture and history, many of us are able to nurture the hope that we can break down the walls between, and realise the oneness of, self and other.¹⁸ A number of observers – both Indians and others – have noted the tolerance, pluralism and the space for multiple truths and perspectives in India¹⁹. Stressing the immense diversity of India’s social universe, The French anthropologist Gerard Heuze claims that ‘India has become more “advanced” than Europe. The perpetual nature of its crises proves it... The India of today appears indeed one of the most explicit metaphors of the world of tomorrow’ (quoted in Smith [40]).

There are a number of other challenges that India faces, and a number of possible responses to those challenges, that the contributors to this issue discuss. The dreams

¹⁸ See, for instance, for one interpretation of this view, Ramchandra Gandhi, ‘The swaraj of India’, in [5].

¹⁹ Referring to the next wave of India’s impact on the West, French academic and journalist Guy Sorman writes, ‘Westerners look romantically to India for the mysticism that has run dry in a disenchanted West. But if the fourth wave comes, I believe it will bring neither divinity nor spirituality but toleration, that is the acceptance of the other and the recognition that there is a truth other than one’s own’ [39].

and visions of the future discussed in this issue acknowledge the worries, challenges, complexities, confusions, conflicts and constraints of the Indian situation. Yet, the self-awareness and reflectivity, the recognition of weaknesses (and strengths), the dynamism of efforts despite deterrents and apathy, the innovations and attempts to revitalise deep-seated and diverse traditions of knowledge, the spirit of struggle, the plurality of perspectives, the design of different alternatives and the diversity of dreams are signs of a continuing quest by many in this country to seek alternative futures and utopias.

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