

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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United India, After a Fashion

c/o American Consulate
Calcutta, India
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers,

In the State of Assam, the Nagas, who of all things want to be independent of Independent India, are embarrassingly "hostile."

In Bihar, aboriginal tribesmen, proud of their own tradition, campaign constitutionally for a separate State, "Jarkhand."

In Madras, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, opposed to "Northern domination of the South," agitates for a "Dravidistan," a separate nation of the four southernmost States.

In Bombay, Gujerati-speaking people in the North and Marathi-speaking people in the East and South are plainly unhappy together in their bilingual State.

In the Punjab, a "Save Hindi" movement opposes the teaching of Punjabi in schools in the predominantly Hindi-speaking areas of the State.

In Mysore, the Chief Minister complains that the North is getting all the new steel mills, while the South remains discriminated against.

In Madras, members of the anti-Brahmin Dravida Kazhagam society tar the word "Brahmin" on hotel signboards in the "campaign against caste appellations."

These are loud, rather large-scale grievances, based on territorial, cultural and linguistic loyalties, which are heard around India today. Taken together with pervasive but less noisy exclusive loyalties to religion, caste and social class, they represent formidable obstacles to national unity. Prime Minister Nehru inveighs against them all as "fissiparous tendencies."

At a mass rally in New Delhi celebrating the centenary of the "War of Independence" (the erstwhile "Sepoy Munity"), Nehru put the issue quite clearly:

"The biggest question that was before our people in 1857 and which is there today in 1957 and which will ever remain so in the future also is: What is your first and foremost loyalty? Is it loyalty to your family, your ward, your city, your caste, your religion, your province, your language, or is it first and foremost to your country---India?" The other "second-rate" loyalties, he said, must be shoved into the background.

Well, that was a strong, Fourth-of-July type statement, and it may

be misleading. This is no Hitler on the balcony. This is Nehru the democrat-nationalist, knowing the great diversity, the many divisions in India, wanting to infuse the whole land with provable solidarity, and becoming impatient at the slow pace of progress. Nehru will lead the Indian people, but he will not push them around. No goose-step, no "Sieg Heil!"

The diversity of India is an overwhelming fact. Take men's head-gear: In Kashmir, it's mostly the fur Jinnah topi. In the Punjab it's the turban with a sort of cock's comb sticking up and a flaring tail. In Rajasthan the turban gets a tight twist before it's coiled around the head, and in other parts of India it's variously long, short, wide, narrow, twisted and folded. In Bombay, there's the stiff black sailor-type cap of businessmen, and the soft black felt cap of the Parsis. In Kerala a coconut shell makes a rain hat. Elsewhere in India there is a variety of crocheted caps, fezzes, fedoras, sun helmets. In the deep South and in Bengal, they go bare-headed.

The diversity of India begins with the land: there are mountain peaks perpetually bound in snow, and tropical coasts lined with coconut trees, and there are river valleys flooded with water and deserts flooded with sand.

The people range from light-skinned Kashmiris to dark-hued Madrasis, from tall, robust Punjabis to slight, slender Malayalees. There are Cambridge M.A.'s who are octolingual, and tribesmen who know no written language and have none. The women have their variety of saris and ways to wrap them, and a variety of blouses, shirts, skirts and trousers.

Although Hinduism predominates as the religion of 85% of the people, Hindu belief and practice ranges from atheism and animism to polytheism and belief in a personal God. And there are sizable religious minorities: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and the Hindu "Protestants," Buddhists and Jains.

Linguistically, India is a babel of tongues. There are some 179 spoken languages, divided among four or five unrelated language groups, plus 520 or more dialects. It was only in the 19th century that the British provided multilingual India with its first unifying language. English, the language of Empire-style administration, commerce and education, provided Indian nationalists with a medium of communication otherwise unavailable, and English continues today as the official national language pro tem.

The Sanskrit-based Hindi prevalent in North India is scheduled to replace English as the national language, but the way is slow. Meanwhile the Government has selected 13 other languages as official regional languages corresponding roughly to the 14 States. Indian currency, incidentally, says its "One Rupee" and so forth in nine languages, each with a different script.

In hotels the registration book for guests will carry a column for "Nationality." The designation "Indian" is written in often enough, but often there appears the word "Hindu" or "Anglo-Indian" or "Parsi" or "Mysore" or "Punjabi." There has been little practice in thinking in terms of nationality. The map that most Indians carry around in the back of their minds takes the form of the concentric circles of loyalties that

Nehru mentioned, I suppose: family, village, caste, religion, language, province, then nation.

What is it that keeps Indians from feeling "national"? The narrow circle binds. For the millions of villagers, I suspect, there has been a dependence upon and a devotion to what is present in this little place, in this hut, in this village, at this time. There has not been the need to go away, or the resources, or the daring. The Outside? Unknown, except that it too is filled, and the people are different.

These might be called cultural, psychological, economic and linguistic factors, or you could sum them up as "the inability to leave," to leave the circle.

The circle that encloses, if it does not enclose all, excludes. What united imperfectly, divides. Unity makes disunity.

In pre-Independence India, the narrowly-drawn circle of religious loyalty created fanatical antipathy, which, fanned by political ambition and fear, resulted in the bloodshed of Partition.

One circle that binds---and separates---Indians today is language. From the nationalist point of view, "excessive" or "exclusive" loyalty to one's own language, and, in the South especially, resistance to efforts to promote Hindi as the national language are taken as anti-national "linguism." It is no anti-national crime of course to fail to learn the 178 Indian languages beside one's own. The complicating factor, however, is that in many cases, languages represent distinct, living cultural and historical traditions in definable territories, and the surrounding sentiment and loyalty is frequently strong. Again the narrow circle is drawn.

The ideal of bringing all India together in one unit---"under one umbrella, ekchattratipatyam---goes back to the days of the legendary Northern Kings chronicled in the classical Mahabharata. But neither they nor the Chandraguptas nor the Greeks nor the Islamic invaders could unite India. When the British left, India was united in a way, but in the form of three presidencies, six provinces and more than 550 princely states.

The task of bringing the states into the Indian Union fell to the Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and he persuaded, coaxed and straight-armed the princes to line up with the former British-ruled areas to form 28 states in all.

This, however, was recognised as only a temporary solution. The question of a thorough-going **reorganization** of states had been raised at least 30 years before Independence, and it found its answer in the so-called "linguistic principle;" language should determine political boundaries. In 1920 the Indian National Congress, wanting to transform an amorphous populace into a managable pro-Independence force, took up the slogan of "linguistic provinces" and worked through "Pradesh ("Provincial") Congress Committees." The Congress reaffirmed the linguistic principle off and on from 1927 to 1947. Meanwhile the British reorganised several states, nominally "for greater administrative efficiency," but following the rule of language.

When the time came for permanent reorganization of states in Inde-

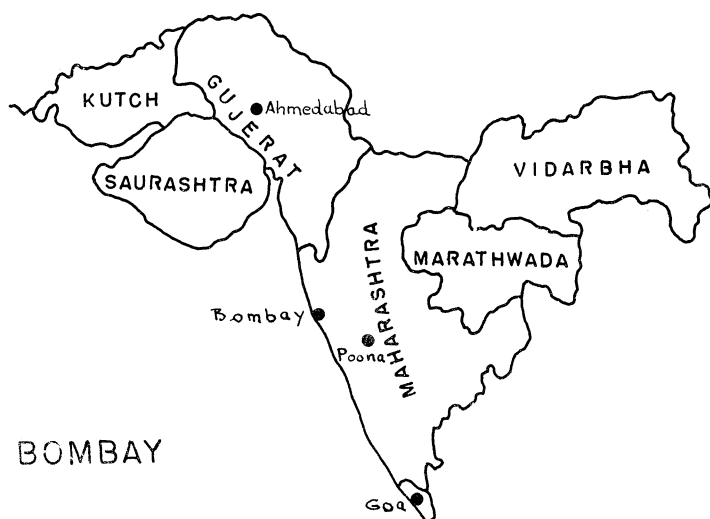
pendent India, the Congress did some backtracking. Two official commissions appointed in 1948 found that reorganization of states on the linguistic principle alone must come second to the first priority of winning security, unity and economic prosperity for the whole nation, unquote.

In 1953, however, agitation for a separate Andhra State for 30 million Telegu-speaking people in multilingual Madras State pulled the whole issue of reorganization back onto the stage. Leading the Andhra movement was an aged Gandhian, Potti Srimalu, who as the last resort undertook a fast. On the 58th day, Srimalu died. A widespread wave of violence broke out. A week later, Andhrans were granted their own State.

Lest the host of other regional linguistic-state organizations should draw an obvious inference, the Government appointed a high-level States Reorganization Commission (SRC) to propose a final solution. After two years of looking around and being tugged at the sleeve, the SRC recommended the formation of 16 States. Nehru said he thought some of the recommendations were "surprising." The reaction from some of the regionalists was "outrageous!" and dissatisfaction in some cases burst into violence. In the end, several "adjustments" were made, and a bill establishing 14 States (plus six Centrally-administered territories) was passed by Parliament and put into effect last November 1. Officially the issue of states reorganization is closed.

This is official wishful thinking, however, for there is a fair-sized maladjustment in the case of Bombay, and if I can whisper a guess, the present "final" reorganization may not be final in fact.

Although the SRC spoke of the guiding principles of "administrative efficiency" and "economic viability" and so forth, they followed the linguistic principle in fact. Boundaries were drawn to form States whose inhabitants for the most part (70% or more) speak the same major language, but there was one exception, Bombay. The SRC report brought trouble enough in States denied expanded borders and those denied further existence, but in Gujerat and Maharashtra, the two areas concerned with the proposed Bombay State, there was not only trouble but tragedy.



The present State of Bombay consists of the areas of Kutch, Saurashtra and Gujerat, all Gujerati-speaking areas and all together called "Mahagujerat" ("Greater Gujerat") and of the larger, more populous, Marathi-speaking areas, Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha, which together are called "Samyukta ("United") Maharashtra."

Gujerat extends from the shallow creeks on the West Pakistan border, along the Saurashtra peninsula, inland to the scrubland of the Rajasthan desert, and around southward to the flat green coastal lands.

Most of the area is dry and barren, and cattle- and goat-breeding are more profitable than tilling the soil. Men have gone into the towns and cities to become traders and artisans and manufacturers, and many of them have gone out farther, to the city of Bombay.

In the chief city of Gujerat, Ahmedabad, the ornate brown stone minarets of 15th-century mosques share the skyline with the brick smokestacks of textile factories. Ahmedabad is proud of both. Ahmedabad is also proud that Gandhi, a Gujerati himself, lived for a dozen years in an ashram across the River Sabarmati and made the city the center of the Indian national movement. The white "Gandhi cap" and homespun cloth, trademarks of nationalism, are worn almost as a uniform by the men of the city (including the secretary of the Ahmedabad Textile Millowners Association).

Maharashtra extends along the coast of the Arabian Sea from Daman, the left-over Portuguese enclave, up over the forest-covered Western Ghats into the plateau where cereals and cotton and tobacco grow, and down south to the poor country north of Goa. Marathwada, to the east, is an underdeveloped area, but Vidarbha, farther east, is good farmland.

Maharashtrians remember Shivaji, the cultivator-become-warrior of the 17th century whose conquests in the center of India created the Mahratta "Empire" with its capital in the city of Poona. Around the remembrance of Shivaji, Indian nationalists in this area organized their Independence movement. Gokhale was for Gandhi "my political guru" ("master" or "mentor"), and Tilak taught others to be aggressive, defiant. Poona, the historical center, the intellectual center of Maharashtra, has a sort of renaissance assurance about it.

Yet the main city of Maharashtra in political and economic terms is Bombay, which for that matter is the chief city of all Western India and indeed, if you take the city motto's word for it, the "Urbs Primis in Indis." To this place men have brought their money and their muscles and have built a great city of docks and factories. Bombay, I take it, regards itself as "ahead," in shipping, in manufacture, in self-government, in up-to-dateness, in all-around urbanity. The city is filled with nearly three million people, five in every ten of them the Maharashtrais, the laborers and coolies and clerks, and two in every ten of them the Gujeratis, the traders, industrialists and financiers. But Bombay is a cosmopolite city, and it belongs to no one.

This is the present State of Bombay after the States Reorganization Act took effect. In its original proposal, the SRC first took the old State and trimmed it of its Hindi- and Kannada-speaking areas, then united all the Gujerati-speaking territory and the two Marathi-speaking areas of Maharashtra and Marathwada, but set apart the third Marathi-speaking area, Vidarbha. The SRC saw the proposed bilingual State as an opportunity for "cooperative venture," argued that a separate Vidarbha was more feasible economically and that Bombay City was "too big" to be included in a smaller, unilingual State.

What the SRC was trying to do, apparently, was to please everybody ---the Maharashtrais by uniting most of them in one State, in which they would have a slight advantage in population, and the Gujeratis too by putting them all in one State, one which incorporated Bombay City. The Maharashtrais were not pleased. In Poona and Bombay there were

noisy demonstrations of protest, and the United Maharashtra organization dispatched a delegation to Delhi.

Now the Congress High Command stepped in to "solve" the problem by proposing a "three-State formula": a separate Mahagujerat, a separate United Maharashtra (Vidarbha added this time), and a Greater Bombay City administered as a federal district. At this, Bombaywalas detesting the thought of being "swallowed by Delhi" and Maharashtrians resenting the idea of being cut off from their "capital city" burst forth with processions and demonstrations and strikes. The police opened fire. Anger brought the burning of buses, the stoning of trains. In two week-long, mad episodes of violence in November 1955 and January 1956, between 79 and 100 persons were killed.

During the next few months the protests and the politicking continued. In August, the tri-State formula was presented to the Parliament. Suddenly, however, it was withdrawn, and a third version appeared: back to the original bilingual-State plan, but this time with the addition of Marathi-speaking Vidarbha. Now the Gujeratis, denied their unilingual State and about to be heavily outnumbered in the proposed State, exploded their own protest. There were ten days of demonstrations and boycotts and curfews and curfew-breaking. Again the police opened fire. Seven persons died.

This final Bombay proposal made it quickly through the Parliament and bilingual Bombay came into being, along with the other States, on November 1.

But both Maharashtrians and Gujeratis were already organizing to demonstrate their dissatisfaction through the upcoming general elections. The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti ("United Maharashtra Committee") composed of dissident Congressmen, Praja Socialists, Communists, other politicians and some distinguished citizens-at-large, agreed on a single slate of candidates. In Gujerat, similar elements formed the Mahagujerat Janata Parishad ("Greater Gujerat People's Association") and worked in a similar way. The "loyalist" Congressmen in the six Pradesh Congress Committees in the new State swallowed hard and stuck by New Delhi's decision sotto voce, while the united opposition opened up on the reorganization and police firings issues.

Congress won the election but it was a victory tinged with humiliation. The Congress won handily in Kutch and Saurashtra and in Marathwada and Vidarbha, as usual. But taking Maharashtra, the Samiti won 100 seats in the State Legislative Assembly to 34 for Congress and outpolled the ruling party 3 million to 2.2 million. In Gujerat the Parishad won 30 MLA seats to 57 for the Congress, and in Bombay City the Samiti got 11 MLA's elected to 12 winners for the Congress. All in all, the Opposition in the Assembly, formerly 41 weak and divided, became 160 strong and more or less united on the issues that brought them together. Later a group of "Protestant" Congressmen won the municipal elections in Ahmedabad, and the Samiti won the Bombay City elections and formed the first non-Congress Government there in 19 years.

In recent sessions of the Parliament and the State Assembly the disgruntled Parishad and Samiti MP's and MLA's have not created the ruckus expected. But the propaganda for separate States continues in the legislative halls and in the press and on the platform, and there are no signs of giving up the fight.

I have visited around and asked about this reorganization issue, and there seems to be a common denominator among those, on both sides, who are riled about the existing arrangement. Both seek justification for their cause and precedent for their actions in Satyagraha.

Satyagraha is a word coined by Gandhi meaning "holding steadfastly to the Truth." For him Satyagraha was at the heart of the non-violent Independence movement. The Satyagrahi was one who suffered abuse, imprisonment and even death, in the confidence that the rightness of what he suffered for would shine through and win the oppressor. India has taken as its motto "Truth Alone Prevails."

Implicit in Satyagraha is the belief that in case of conflict between them Truth outranks the Law. This was the sanction for resistance to oppressive authority, and although Gandhi's rule was passive resistance and a sort of kindly defiance of the British, those who used violence in the name of Independence claimed the sanction of Satyagraha too.

Since Independence, Satyagraha has become the blanket term applied and self-applied to individuals and groups who defy authority or break the law, either sincerely "holding steadfastly to the Truth" as they see it, or simply appropriating ready-to-wear sanctification to clothe their demands for special favor. I suppose there is a mixture of both in all these Satyagrahas, but the Truth, with a capital T, is a big thing to be running around loose. Until the time when Satyagraha can be more clearly re-defined, it will cover a lot of causes. It is the armor of both patriots and opportunists in the case of Bombay.

In Ahmedabad, on a hot office balcony overhanging a honking street, I sipped sugarcane juice-and-water and listened to the energetic secretary of the Greater Gujerat People's Association---the "People" are rebel Congressmen, other politicians, lawyers and students---tell the Gujerati version of the story: The Gujeratis are "all pro-Congress at heart," and despite the desire for a separate State, they accepted the SRC proposal for a bilingual State "without a murmur." "Not even a dog barked against it." And even the High Command's tri-State formula "we gave our heartied welcome. We began thinking where the Secretariat would be. 'Mahagujerat' was written in stone!" Then the last plan came ---the one that took effect---as a "Betrayal!"

The key issue for Gujeratis is Bombay City. "Bombay was built by Gujerati capital and Maharashtra labor. Now they want to give it to the labor. We never claim Bombay as a part of Gujerat, but we want a guarantee to protect the interests of Gujeratis there, and perhaps a share of the Rs 12 crores (US\$25.2 million) surplus revenue a year." "Protection" would be against the Maharashtrais, who are a "wild, communal" sort.

There was a strong, lingering resentment in Ahmedabad over the police firings---the victims were mostly college boys---and the Government's refusal to hold an investigation. Walls were still covered with painted cartoons of Morarji Desai, Chief Minister at the time of the firings, shown taking a stick and beating some nondescript animal labeled "The People." One of the ex-Congressmen explained: "All through our national struggle we always fought and hated the British firings. Now Indians fire on Indians the same way."

In Bombay, in the pamphlet-stacked room of a retired Poona pro-

fessor---"40 years a Congressman, but no more"---I was fed slices of mango and the arguments of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti: "The first point is the unilingual State. If it is a true principle, good enough for Gandhi and good enough for the rest of India, why do they run around it in the case of Bombay?" Well, why? "The Congress dare not offend the Gujerati capitalists." Who was responsible for the last-minute reorganization switch? "Ah! You try to do something without Panditji!" Nehru.

"The Gujeratis cannot claim Bombay for themselves," he continued. "They are not contiguous. Gujerat ends below Surat, a hundred miles north of Bombay. Those Gujeratis talk about the money they have in Bombay. Now, are the British to claim Bombay too? They have money here too! I want to ask everyone of those Gujerati people where their money came from. They made it here. 'Stay here,' we say, 'We are not going to drive you out!'"

In Poona, in his sparse, academic office, a distinguished scholar who stands with the Samiti "as a citizen, not a politician," declares in Cantabrigian tones: "The unilingual State, accepted in principle, must not be denied in practice. It is, after all, a prerequisite not only for convenient administration, but also for the development of bona fide social democracy."

The official Congress position is that "Congress won the election over the unilingual-State opposition, and the issue is closed." Those Congress leaders who talk privately, however, regard the present arrangement as a bitter pill forced down their throats. The High Command's exhortation to "take the all-India viewpoint" did not break through their regional attachments. And they are still holding out: The six Pradesh Congress Committees in the State have been "unable" to amalgamate into a single unit, as has been the case in most other reorganized States. Once they do, it will mean they have stopped working, even in private, for their unilingual States.

What will happen? The present bilingual State may go on for ever and ever, long after Greater Gujerat People's Associations and United Maharashtra Committees have faded from the scene. Or, the Gujeratis and Maharashtrais may agree on a mutually acceptable solution to give them each a State, and present the solution to the Parliament. This, I think, would have to involve concessions to the Gujeratis, who can probably be coaxed out of their dog-in-the-manger position in Bombay City. Perhaps they would be satisfied with a share, for a few years, in the City revenue surplus, or perhaps they could get some assurance that the new port of Kandla, up in their territory, will be favored into prosperity. Again, maybe in a forthcoming election the unilingual Statists could gain control of the State Assembly and petition the Center to "solve" the problem once more.

The Congress Chief Minister of Bombay urges one and all to "give the bilingual State an honest try." But Maharashtrais watch Gujeratis, and Gujeratis watch Maharashtrais, without trying. Bombay---well, all India---remains united, but after a fashion.