

OUR INDIA

BY
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TO
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PREFACE

A little knowledge, it is said, is a dangerous thing. Statistics of Indian life are so scanty and scrappy that reliance on them is bound to endanger one's conclusions. A little book of this nature does not, fortunately, have to pretend to scientific accuracy. Nor can it be burdened with footnotes giving references to works from which facts and figures were derived. That makes it all the more necessary, however, to acknowledge the author's indebtedness to various sources from which he has drawn much of his material. Such a list can hardly be complete, but among the works which he would like to mention are Jathar and Beri's *Indian Economics*,¹ Arnold Lupton's *Happy India*,² Soni's *Indian Industry and its Problems*,³ Gyan Chand's *India's Teeming Millions*,² V. K. R. V. Rao's *India's National Income*,² Wadia's *Geology of India*,⁴ Ram Manohar Lohia's *India in Figures*,⁵ H. G. Wells' *Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*,⁶ Otto Neurath's *Modern Man in the Making*,⁷ and the *Statistical Year Book of the League of Nations*.²

The verses on pages 54, 62 and 67 have been quoted from Shamrao and Elwin's *Songs of the Forest*,² Ilin's *Moscow Has a Plan*,⁸ and Mrs E. M. Milford's translation of Jasimuddin's *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt*.¹

I am indebted to many friends for suggestions, particularly to Professor M. L. Dantwala of the New Commerce College, Ahmedabad, Mr J. C. Kumarappa, Secretary of the All India Village Industries Association, Dr Nazir Ahmed, Director of the Indian Cotton Technological Institute, Professor F. R. Bharucha

¹ Oxford University Press. ² Allen & Unwin. ³ Longmans Green.
⁴ Macmillan. ⁵ U. P. Provincial Congress Committee, Lucknow.
⁶ Heinemann. ⁷ Secker & Warburg. ⁸ Cape.

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M. M.

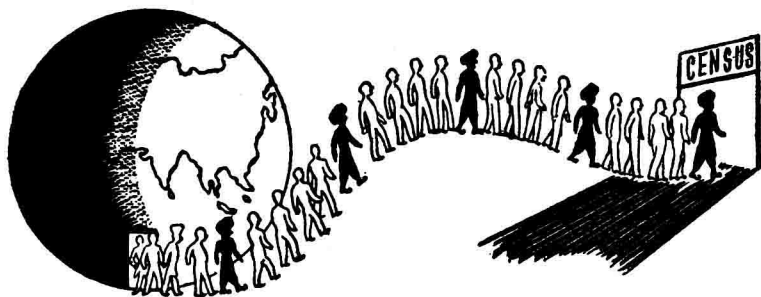
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I

ONE IN FIVE

One man in every five is an Indian. The other four are, let's say, an American, a European, a Negro and a Chinese. Here they are being counted.



Doesn't that make you feel very important? It is rather a staggering thought, isn't it, that we Indians are not much less than a fifth of the human race and that, next to China, our country has the biggest population in the world? And doesn't it make us feel keen to take our proper share in the ordering and settling of the world's affairs?

Besides, what a huge country ours is! Extending 2,000 miles east to west and 2,000 miles north to south and with an area of some 2 million square miles, it is as big as the whole of the continent of

Europe excluding Russia, as you can see from the map opposite.

The size of an ordinary district in India is 4,000 square miles, and some of our districts are as big as entire States in Europe. Thus, both the area and population of Vizagapatam district in Madras are bigger than those of Denmark, Mymensingh district in Bengal contains more people than Switzerland, and there are far more living in the Tirhut division of Bihar than there are in the 'great' Dominion of Canada!

We should remind ourselves of this because many tiny little countries occupy such a lot of room in our history books and in our newspapers and receive such a lot of attention. Even some of the maps of the world in your school atlas—not deliberately, of course!—give this lop-sided view of our place on the globe. Do you know that one of them actually makes India look only *half* as big as it really is compared to England?

Now, size or bigness is not in itself much good. It is what one makes of one's bigness that matters. It has its advantages and its disadvantages. It faces us with big difficulties and big problems. But it makes it possible for us to do things in a big way.

We Indians are like a landlord with a big estate, but we have to ask ourselves where and how it is situated. Is it provided with well-marked boundaries to distinguish it from neighbouring estates or



GREECE

BRITAIN

HOLLAND
BELGIUM

SCANDINAVIA

BALKANS

SPAIN

FRANCE

ITALY

SWITZ

HUNGARY

ROMANIA

GERMANY

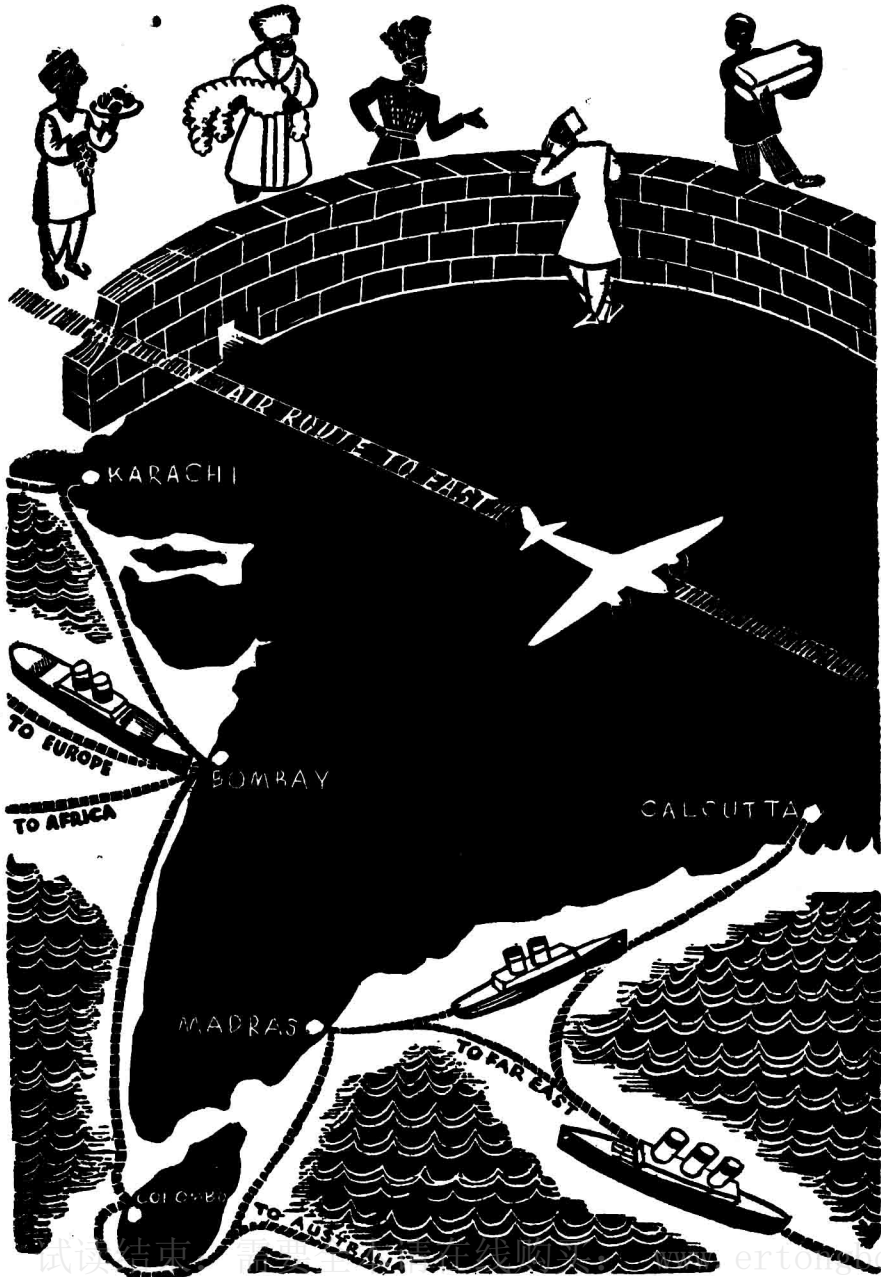
YUGOSLAVIA

not? Is it placed on the main road or is it in some remote corner approachable only through dark and winding lanes?

Nature has provided India with more shelter and protection through natural boundaries than almost any other big country. A broad expanse of deep blue ocean surrounds it on east, south and west. And on the north, could there be a more impregnable Siegfried Line than that provided by the Himalayan range of mountains which runs almost all the way along our land frontiers?

Although we are so well marked out and sheltered, we are by no means cut off from the rest of the world. On the contrary, we are situated right on Nature's highway. India is placed on important shipping and trade routes from Europe and the Near East to the Far East and to Australasia. It can trade with equal ease with China, Japan, Thailand (Siam) and Malay, with Australia and New Zealand, with East and South Africa, with the Levant and Europe and with Russia, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Turning our attention inwards, what lies inside our frontiers, what sort of country is ours? Those who study the structure of the land and what lies under it tell us that India divides itself into three rather distinct parts. There is first in the South the triangular plateau of the Peninsula, which is the oldest part of India and which is rocky. The Vindhya and the Satpura mountain ranges rising



KARACHI

BOMBAY

MADRAS

CALCUTTA

COCHIN

AIR ROUTE TO EAST

TO EUROPE

TO AFRICA

TO FAR EAST

TO AUSTRALIA

east from Kathiawar mark this part from the rest of India. Then in the North there is the mountainous region of the Himalayas, the tallest mountains in the world. Some learned people believe that the Himalayas are still slowly rising! They say the earthquakes we have had in this region, as in Bihar, are due to this movement.

In between is the third unit—the Indo-Gangetic Plain—extending from the valley of the river Indus in the west to that of the Brahmaputra in the east, which is blessed with fertile soil of great agricultural value. This is the newest part of our country.

For a long time it lay under the sea, and the Peninsula was an island. But the great rivers from the North scraped earth from the Himalayas, rushed down the valleys with it and dropped their mud in the calm waters of the inland sea. Slowly, very slowly, the bottom of the sea rose, the rivers had to carry their mud farther before they could find a quiet place to drop it, and so the great plain of the Indus and the Ganges was built up. The Peninsula was no longer an island. The gap was filled. The Peninsula of Southern India was joined to the hills of Asia by the plain of Hindustan, one of the most fertile regions in the world.

The Himalayas influence our country a great deal. For one thing, they affect our climate and our land. By keeping off the dry winds of Central Asia,

they protect India from the desert conditions which prevail there and which would otherwise spread south. Thanks to these friendly mountains, India's climate is so pleasant that an Englishman described it as delightful in *all* parts of the country for *some* months of the year and in *some* parts of the country *all* the year round.

Another thing, where do the great rivers of India spring from? Again, the Himalayas! On their slopes lie the sources of the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, which provide the people of Northern India with water, irrigate the soil and provide a means of transport. Also, they are still dropping mud on the land and making it more fertile.

To keep these big rivers flowing endlessly from mountain to sea, Nature has devised for us something as marvellous as the jinn that could be conjured up by Aladdin's Lamp. This jinn is our familiar friend, the Monsoon. In the middle of each year, he transports, as you can see in the picture on the next page—through the action of the sun, the clouds, the wind and the rain—indescribable quantities of water back from the sea to the mountain tops. He also waters the parched plains of India.

Next to the Monsoon, perhaps the most striking thing about India is the tremendous variety of its climate, its land and its people. No wonder, for Cape Comorin is only 8° north of the Equator and



Gilgit in Kashmir is 34° north. India has every variety of climate from the blazing heat of the plains as hot in places as hottest Africa—Jacobabad in Sind can be in summer as much as 125° in the shade—down to below freezing-point, to the Arctic cold of the Himalayan region. While Cherrapunji in the Assam hills has 460 inches of rain in the year,

Upper Sind has about 3 inches only. In general, we have eight completely dry months followed by four months of a continual downpour of rain. We have the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain in which almost anything will grow, and the rich tropical forests along the coast of the Peninsula, as in Malabar; but we also have the dry, sandy desert regions of Rajputana and Sind and Cutch.

How often we just look at a man and say, 'I don't like his looks!' or 'He must be a nice chap'. Why? Because instinctively we feel that a person with such a face cannot be nice or that another man with a certain expression in his eyes must be exceedingly nice. And indeed, our instinct is often right—though sometimes we make a wrong guess—because what a man is like is generally to be seen from his face and his expression. Now, the land and the mountains and the rivers and the climate of a country are its face, while its men and women are its mind and soul. Only, in this case, because the people arrived so long after the country took its present shape and form, the process is reversed and the face of India is reflected in its mind and soul.



It is only natural therefore that the wide variety in its physical features should be found repeated in the people who live in India. The Indian can be as fair as the blondest of Hitler's Nordics, he can be as

dark as the African negro.

He can be the tallest of men, he can be as short and squat as an Australian bushman. He can be stalwart and strong, he can be frail and rickety. He can be like *this* picture or like *that*. Even in 1940, you can find him living, both in his mode



of existence and in his way of thinking, in every century from the fifth to the twentieth. Perhaps nowhere in the world, except in Soviet Russia, can we find such a variety of human types as in India.

And what tremendous man-power its huge population of nearly 40 crores (or 400 millions) gives to India—next to China, the biggest in the world.

The fact that there are so many of us and such different kinds of us may, and does, produce rather difficult problems for us to solve in the way of living together peacefully and happily. On the other hand, just think what a tremendous source of strength it is and can be!

