

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GSA - 3

India: One Morning in Delhi

Marina Hotel  
New Delhi  
Room No. 24

19 September 1960

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Dear Dick,

At six thirty the sun, rising over the kitchen-ell across the courtyard of the hotel, comes through the rear door and strikes across the bed like a burning snake. There are only two things to do, get up and stay up, or pull the curtains and go back to bed. The inevitable: bliss until eight when there is a slight rattle as the bearer puts the tea tray beside the bed and then moves silently on bare feet into the bathroom to get the face towel to cover the teapot, aware that between arrival and consumption the brew often gets cold. Beside the tray he has laid a copy of the Delhi "Statesman". The "Statesman" has been running the Congo story in columns two and three, front page, for the last month and the story is so opera bouffe that it is the first thing on which I really focus each day. A quick look is enough before tea.

The tea comes musty and brown from the hot-handled pot and is strong enough to jolt anybody awake, with or without the hot milk that comes with it. The sugar bowl invariably holds four cubes--two per cup, two cups, deduce I. A half cup is enough to get out of bed, across the warm tiles, by the cheval mirror, in which one looms disconcertingly large, into the bathroom toward a splash--a splash the last few days, but during the heat, a bath to wash off the night's stickiness. Dressed, my wallet comes from under the one and a half inch mattress and goes into my left hip pocket. The "Statesman" in hand, I saunter--always saunter, a few paces less a minute means a dry shirt--through the second room toward the front door, in the form of a bamboo screen.

This room has a white ceiling with a mayonnaise colored ceiling fan pendant in the center; a rat colored rug with faded red and blue flowers covers the tile floor. Between this heaven and this earth are two bookcases, caddged by the bearer, a writing desk on which sits a phone book and a capricious telephone and a scratched tin tray for a postoffice pen and a dry inkwell. Add to this two cane bottomed chairs, a standing lamp, with a shade like a Tonkinese peasant's hat, red and with tassels, two small tables, an octagonal table, on which such as this are written, three big chairs and a fuchsia tin ashtray. Oh yes, there are two wall decorations. One, in the Simms Campbell style, of a mammary-lady being embraced by a sharpnosed man, is captioned, "Tell me, Inspector, when did you first suspect me?" The one on the opposite wall, a man being grilled by cops, says, "It's really quite a thrilling confession--couldn't it be televised?" Both have shiny black frames.

Outside the split bamboo screen, and these heat retaining walls, Delhi is still cool from the night, especially so in the shadow of the wall with the breeze blowing freely across the roofless verandah and shaking the top of the neeme tree a few feet away. The neeme and peepul trees are very common in India. The story goes that when recruits, so raw they didn't know the usage of 'left' and 'right', were brought into the army, the sergeants put a peepul leaf into the top of their left sock and a neeme into their right and called cadence "Peepul neeme, peepul neeme".

The street below the cool concrete balustrade, with its flaking yellow paint, is long awake but not yet bustling, as most government offices and shops don't open until 10:00 and most business offices not until 9:30. Across the street the Delhi Branch of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society shares premises with the Ayurvedic (traditional Hindu medicine) dispensary of Pandit Shree Krishan Multani Vaidya. On the dispensary side of the building a lean old Sikh with a graying beard, musters his flock of scooter-rickshaws (two seaters built on the back of Vespas). Off to the right, in front of the main door of the hotel, a group of taxi drivers, mostly Sikhs, in turbans of their fancied color, stand or sprawl chatting around their yellow-topped cabs. Two slim, pretty women are walking down the street, one in a red saree, the other in gray. Their arms swing freely and their legs, thighs and behinds move through the cloth. The white collar worker here is just that, with no tie, white pants, and with shirt tucked in or square bottomed shirt hanging loose--a few of them are already abroad, sharing the freshness with white dhotied men with long shirt tails hanging out. Dress has become much more informal since the departure of the British.

Ribby horses clip-clop by on the trot, pulling two wheeled, four-seater tongas loaded with passengers or freight of any kind. Cars, taxis, scooters, tongas, pullcarts and pushcarts, thousands of bicycles (many of them built by Raleigh in India and styled so that the rider sits upright, not hunched over the handlebars); the traffic moves like threads and shuttles in a loom, a lazy sight from this detached altitude. The philosophy of all drivers is catch as catch can and the result is hectic but genial, as few take seriously their own or other's sins. The creed of non-violence in the form of animal life extends to the verandah. A hawk perches whistling from atop the Hotel Marina sign while three others circle, float, and dip above the street, tipping their tails to either side as rudders. Three hooded crows hop on the balustrade, beaks open, peering with tilted heads, alert for any suspicious movement, while a magpie struts by, a dapper man ignoring three bruisers. The other day I saw a mongoose run along the lower verandah and disappear into a drain. Both pigeons and magpies sit in the bathroom transom and squawk during my bath.

Down to breakfast, through the bar, which regrettably is no longer a bar since partial prohibition--no drinking in public and no liquor for sale on Tuesdays and Fridays--came to Delhi. A friend of mine was once going to write a book, Gin and Empire, but I never guessed the corollary, no empire, no gin. The dining room is a long, dusky rectangle, peopled by silent eaters, except for some visiting Indonesian army officers who sometimes roar with laughter. The waiters wear white pants and a white atchkan or long coat;

shoes are optional. Red trimmed turbans distinguish the two boss waiters from the blue-trimmed herd. One of them, tall and saturnine, is a Muslim, the other is a Christian, who seemed to think that I should like him therefore, but he is happy and a good waiter so I like him anyway. A young sprout, white pants, blue blazer, has arrived to be headwaiter--a Methodist. One night he introduced me to the Rev. H.A. Townsley, district superintendent of the Methodist Church in Southern Asia, an American with nearly 25 years in India. The Reverend was with a group of missionary stamp; he introduced me to one of them, an Indian Bishop; I escaped with smiling invitation to drop in anytime. Most of the waiters are either Christians or Muslims, only two or three are Hindus. New Delhi is cosmopolitan enough to have cast off much of Hindu orthodoxy--though prohibition is part of the reformist orthodoxy of Gandhi and others--but caste relationships and dining habits are something that cannot be wiped out over night, despite the forward step taken in 1950 when the present Constitution came into effect with its abolition of untouchability, and the exemplary, unorthodox behavior of Nehru and other public figures. Brahmins in India fall into two loose groups, those who are priests, seers, wisemen and scholars, following the traditional occupation of the priestly caste, and Brahmins who simply are such by birth but who by occupation are anything, schoolteachers, clerks, cooks. Brahmins and the more orthodox Hindus of the north-central belt across India (the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, South Punjab, Bihar) are vegetarians. Though Indians generally forego beef, many Indians (Hindus) eat mutton, fish (especially in Bengal); in northern Punjab and Kashmir meat eating is quite common. The taboo against eating meat extends with many people to eating foods touched by meat and to touching dishes containing meat. In a hotel such as this, where meat is served at every meal, though vegetarian dishes are available, it is better therefore to have non-Hindu waiters. There might also be guests who would object to being served by low caste Hindus. Strictly speaking, of course, a Hindu would reject food being served him by a non-Hindu. This is dying out in public eating places, though in many homes, particularly in the South--India has its Mason Dixon Line--where orthodoxy is still strong, a Christian visitor or one from outside the clan or caste would eat his meal in his host's house but in a different room from the family. From all the stories I hear, the women tend to be the strictest observers of such taboos and rituals, guarding with other women of the world moral inner sanctums.

After "Statesman" and breakfast (porridge, no cornflakes, with hot milk, some sort of eggs, bacon, toast, marmalade and tea--coffee available) five or six mornings a week (unless I have arranged an interview, many public men begin work at their homes soon after eight) an ample Kashmiri lady of determined mien glides into the room, lowers herself into a chair, wipes the pearls of sweat from her upper lip, and squares her shoulders to the task of giving me a Hindustani lesson. Hindustani is a much misused and frequently misunderstood term. To me it means the language of the street of Northern India, the mixture of Sanskrit-based Hindi and Persian-based Urdu which comes closest to being a Lingua Indica--if one excludes English. Hindi in the Devanagari script is the official language of India, but the same Article in the Constitution that establishes this says that for fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution (1950) English "shall continue to be used for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement". In the past two years Prime Minister Nehru has made it clear

that English may occupy this position as the de facto official language for longer than the specified 15 years. "Hindi" is as hard to define as "English", the King's English (James or George VI?) Edinburgh, Sioux City, Manhattan or Brooklyn English, Carl Sandburg's English or Hart Crane's English. Hindi to the purist, to the Hindu rightist, is a language using many Sanskrit words-- which often have no Twentieth Century meaning. He would purge Hindi of the foreign taint of Urdu, especially, and other Indian languages. 'Give a Sanskrit-wallah a syllable and he'll take a page'. This desire to move toward Sanskrit, the language of the scriptures, a language long out of date, is vaguely akin to the Muslim belief that the Quran is the fount of the purest Arabic. Here it is also a rejection by Hindu religious rightists of Muslim influence. Urdu, one of the major components of Hindustani, is a Persian-based language and is usually written in Persian script. It came to India with the Muslim conquerors and remained the Court language until the mid-19th Century. Though there are probably millions of Hindus who speak Urdu--Nehru comes from an Urdu/Persian speaking home--in addition to English, of course, to some people it is the language of Muslims. If there had not been Partition, if the Muslims under Jinnah had not set themselves apart, Gandhi would almost certainly have achieved his aim, Hindustani as the national language. But the wave of hate that flooded India after Partition gained support for the Hindi enthusiasts. It doesn't appear that they are losing strength with time. This Sanskritized Hindi is even being used in many North Indian newspapers, which seems odd because few people understand it and one would expect circulation to drop. The newspapers of the Arab World, for example, use an Arabic understandable from Baghdad to Rabat, overcoming differences in dialect. It seems a paradox for newspapers to reverse the process and become purveyors of a recherche tongue.

Many persons, of course, don't define Hindi this narrowly. They speak of 'broad Hindi', of a language that can absorb from all other Indian languages and thus become universal, but I suspect that they are talking about Hindustani and simply find it impolitic to use the term. When Mrs. Dar isn't teaching me Hindustani she declaims on some social subject, how she doesn't keep her sweeper out of her house, many sweepers are allowed to clean only bathrooms. or forbid her to touch any object in the house because she is an untouchable, or on the importance of the Kashmiri Brahmin community. Then she will either lean back with a formidable expression on her face or lean forward displaying her generous charms. The lesson is finished; she glides away again, like a safe on rollers.

I had arranged to meet Dr. Hirday Nath Kunzru at 11:00 at his house. The scooter rickshaw, from the flock of the lean Sikh, goes around the hub of Connaught Circus, by the spokes of Lady Hardinge Road, Irwin Road, Parliament Street, Janpath--formerly Queensway--to Curzon Road. There has been a minimum of street renaming since the British departed, Curzon Road is still Curzon Road, though few Viceroy's have been as cordially hated as he who partitioned Bengal in 1905 and whose arrogance even extended to white men. This hasn't been true in another ex-colony, Vietnam. Of all the Frenchmen whose names graced Saigon's streets, most of them as silent tributes to military defeat, only Louis Pasteur survived the purge.

Connaught Circus is a bright street curving between yellow walls and arcades, with shops selling everything one would expect to find in a big city.

Curzon Road is, as are so many of New Delhi's streets, a tree lined avenue which would be a credit to Paris. Life is leisurely in the shade. A wrinkled, dignified lady crouches with her brass and earthenware pots selling water to passers by while a mechanized young man sells 'Cold Refrigerated Water' from a pushcart, pumping full tumblers for his customers. Another woman, in a gray-green saree, squats square-beamed and with quick jerks of her wrist fans a fire to roast ears of corn, while behind her, six foot tall gray bullocks munch on the husks. On the right, underneath two bicycle tires hung from a limb, sits a repairman with a shallow bowl of water between his knees testing a tube for leaks. His tools are arrayed on the ground. Beside him, watching, the owner of the tube in question squats with biceps on knees and hands hanging idly. Just beyond these two is a bus stop where a man squats on the railing, perched like an ungainly bird, his back to a group of young girls waiting to go home from school. Most of them have slender, light brown faces, angular enough, with thin square chins and cheekbones, to have shadows over their jaws. All have sleek heads and precise center parts with the hair gathered into thick, waist-length braids. They wear flowered sheaths over white trousers which are gathered at the ankle above gold embossed sandals. The sheaths are slit from thigh to knee and the fronts and backs billow as the breeze blows and the girls laugh.

H.N. Kunzru is a small slender man of 73 years. He has a narrow face; in profile, a vertical forehead, an aquiline nose and a square chin. He has fine, gray hair. He reminds me of the vertical sheathing on a Vermont barn, weathered and gray on the outside, but solid bright wood underneath. Kunzru has been active in Indian politics since the time of World War I and came early to a role in India's constitutional history--as a Liberal Party delegate to London in 1919 to discuss constitutional reforms. He was a member of the United Provinces Legislature from 1921 to 30 and has been a member of government committees and delegations since the thirties. Always an independent in politics, he has spoken his mind on issues as they arose, following no 'line', though he was close to the Liberals of the early thirties. The Congress majority in the Constituent Assembly disliked non-majority views, Kunzru said, but if you were tough and kept it up, they got used to it, "they got tamer". Kunzru has headed many private organizations, one of the most important being the Servants of India Society, a body with religious roots founded in the 19th Century to work with the Masses on a national scale. He is one of the last of an old school of non-Congress, Indian statesmen and the nation still listens to his voice with respect.

Kunzru talked mostly of the relationship between the Central Government and the State governments as members of the Constituent Assembly envisaged this relationship during the constitutional framing period from 1947 to 1950 and what, in fact, this relationship has been since the Constitution came into effect in January 1950. This relationship between the States and the Centre exists on many levels, probably the most important being the legal cum constitutional level and the psychological level. The diversity of India is news to no one, four hundred million people, speaking at least fourteen major languages, adhering to several major religions and innumerable sects, and believing, consciously or unconsciously, that their first allegiance beyond family and perhaps caste is to the regional culture, based on language and

geography, into which they were born. Nationality is defined in many ways. K.C. Wheare, the high priest of federal systems, calls it "that sense which people have that they are bound together and marked off from others by common sympathies, common sympathies which arise usually from the possession of a common language, common race, or common religion". In Syria and Lebanon, then parts of the Ottoman Empire, during the latter part of the 19th Century, the word 'nation' meant the religious/cultural community to which one belonged, not the larger political organization which exercised administrative authority (or was supposed to) over Turkey and much of Arabia. This usage came to India, perhaps through the British who had experience in both areas, and one began to hear of 'the Muslim Nation' and 'the Hindu Nation'. Talk of the Tamil nation and the less virulent demands for a Naga State, a Marathi-speaking state, or a Gujerati-speaking state are this decade's harvesting of those seeds. The most innocent manifestation of this sentiment is, perhaps, the doctrine that the development of regional cultures will eventually lead to a stronger India, as a people culturally mature and secure will consider political cooperation at a higher level a smaller threat to their 'national' entity.

With the strong tendency of these cultural groups, which may think themselves nations, to ride off in all directions at once, the vital question is what technique to use to hold India, the mother nation, if you will, together. Must there be a Centre with an iron administrative and financial grip on the State governments? (Is a strong Centre necessarily weakened because there are many States instead of a few?) Should India be a loose federation somewhat resembling the pre-constitutional American Confederation? These are the questions at the legal cum constitutional level. But at the psychological level one asks if Units manacled by the Centre will bite at their chains, snarling but obedient, until, for some reason, the chain breaks, or will they learn to always hold their hands properly in front of them even when the cuffs are taken off? If one doubts that restraint breeds docility, and does not believe in loose federation, he may decide to take what seems to be Nehru's course: try to hold the mother nation, India, together administratively, preach constantly of the danger to India of these separatisms, bow when absolutely necessary to separatist forces--as in the case of Maharashtra and Gujerat or Nagaland, but try above all not to arouse resentments, hatreds, try never to drive groups or individual leaders to last ditch commitments that they can never disavow, for these things will make eventual unity harder, if not impossible, to achieve. I do not believe that India is coming apart at the seams; government is generally very effective and I see no reason why it won't continue so. But, in great measure, emotional unity left India soon after the British. Constructive effort must replace anti-imperialism as India's motive force.

Kunzru and his confreres faced all this after Independence. The majority of the Constituent Assembly wanted a strong Centre, said Kunzru, and looked to America for their Federal model. Huge India, he said, "could get no help from the unitary British Constitution"--though the Indians made good use of British export-federalism as expressed in the 1935 Act. (See GSA-2 for thoughts on the Constituent Assembly's majority and the Congress.) Though the majority wanted a strong Centre, few wanted a unitary government with only one legislature, they preferred a grant of power from the Centre that

would make the States viable political organizations. As do many other Indians, Kunzru believes that the demand for autonomous states grew up in India from 1911 and was fathered by Muslim demands for political separation, not so much from the British as from the Hindus.

The need for a strong Center was implicit in the events of the time, Kunzru emphasized again and again. Partition had convulsed North India. There was a serious Communist menace in Hyderabad; "if they had succeeded in Hyderabad, they might have tried in Andhra; there had been like trouble in Bengal". The nation had just absorbed over 500 former Princely States governed by methods ranging from elected legislatures to thumbscrews. There was also danger, Kunzru said, that in the desire for rapid development, "a State might sail too close to the wind to achieve its objectives. Aware of these dangers, the Constituent Assembly wrote Articles into the Constitution sanctioning: preventive detention, operation of a State government by the President and Parliament with or without the consent of the Governor of that State, government by Ordinance if Parliament is not in session, proclamations of emergency by the President where the security of the country is threatened by external aggression or internal disturbance, or if he believes the financial stability of any area in India is in danger, Central power to control certain food supplies normally in the purview of the States (for five years from the commencement of the Constitution), and sanctioning, for an indefinite period, the giving of Executive Directions by the President to the government of any former Princely State. The Emergency Provisions allow the President (which means the Council of Ministers of the Central Government, as here the President is the figure-head he is supposed to be) or the Parliament: to advise the Units on the use of their Executive power, to legislate for the Unit legislature, to bring Unit finances under Central control, to suspend certain Fundamental Rights and the right to move Courts in regard to the enforcement of any Fundamental Right. Generally speaking, Kunzru approved of the powers, "No doubt the Centre needs these powers," he said, "the forms of the Constitution cannot be used to subvert the Constitution itself. The people can be easily misled and these things happen when the electorate is unable to discharge its functions and its representatives are selfish."

In India "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law" (Article 21 of the Constitution). The omission here of the 'due process' phrase of the American Constitution caused a hard fight in the Constituent Assembly and is still a source of contention. Speaking of this issue, only as it related to the very unsettled conditions in India from 1947 to 1950, Kunzru said, "it is difficult to accept the view that all normal legal procedure should exist in an emergency". The other question, he said, was that India had inherited certain laws and powers from the British Government. Should they be given up?

He still believes that Central takeover of Unit governments when "the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution" is a contradiction of the principle of adult suffrage-- which he did not favor in the Constituent Assembly and is skeptical of now. If there is adult suffrage and the electorate is therefore responsible for the government in power, he believes the electorate ought to remedy the situation

and there shouldn't be recourse to Central fiat. I think, though, that Kunzru would apply this rule to bad government alone, not to malicious government out to subvert the principles of the Constitution. He also believes that Central control over State financial matters goes too far, though Central control of certain matters is essential. He said that the majority (the Congress) wrote these provisions into the Constitution fearing Communist State governments or non-Congress governments that might obey neither the Central Government nor the policy direction of the Congress Working Committee. One-party rule in India has not deprived her of reasonably democratic government and it has brought stability.

"Ordinance power is abnormal power", said Kunzru. "When the times were cut down (duration of the Ordinance after Parliament resumed sitting), I agreed to this power, but only because of the disturbed conditions. There have been too many Ordinances promulgated since 1950. I don't impugn their good faith, but the government is inclined to use it too much." Because six months can elapse between sessions of Parliament and because an Ordinance can remain valid for six weeks after Parliament sits, an Ordinance can remain in effect for about seven months. Kunzru thinks that this time lag between the promulgation of the Ordinance and the summoning of a Parliament which may consider it, is too long now that there is reasonably rapid communication and transport established throughout India. The telegraph and the airplane allow Parliament to be summoned in a week or ten days, he says, and this should be done in preference to allowing Ordinances to remain so long in force.

Indians and foreign observers have discussed exhaustingly the amount of control the Centre has over the States, or should have, and how independent the States are, or should be. Kunzru never believed that an extremely strong Centre was a panacea for India's ills, neither was he a myopic Statesrighter. After ten years experience of the present Constitution he thinks that the States "can still profoundly affect the Centre". The States have financial autonomy in so far as they can levy taxes and spend the revenue subject only to the electorate, Kunzru said. He didn't think that the article in the Constitution that says a State must have Central permission to borrow money if it already owes the Centre money nullifies this independence. Some States don't owe the Centre, he said, but I'm under the impression that most do. Nor did he think it crucial that nearly all States fail to meet their normal running expenses by more than 10% of their budgets (1951 figures) and have to count on Central aid just to keep the shop open. Certain people today, notably Minoo Masani, the Swatantra Party leader, claim that the Super Government, the Planning Commission, has wiped out all vestiges of State independence. Those who think this way, argue that the planning is done at the Centre, the direction of the execution of the plan comes from the Centre, and the Centre grants the money to the States to carry out the plans--thereby controlling them. Kunzru believes that "if the States sedulously propagate the idea that the Centre controls the States, they can profoundly affect the Centre. The democratic legislatures in the States are a strong brake on the Centre, as the Centre must impress the national electorate, not only on national matters, but on matters affecting the States. If it does not, the State legislatures can affect the Centre." Professor Morris-Jones makes the same point; the Centre, he said, cannot itself carry out the development programs, the five year plans, the States must do it. If the Centre and the States don't get along, the Central program will suffer. And the States can certainly adversely affect



other matters of Central interest in their areas, if they so wish. Morris-Jones has evidence that contradicts Masani's contentions. Civil servants in State governments have told him that the first communications to the States about a new five year plan from the national Planning Commission are but a bare framework, the total amount of money available for, and the rough priority of the projects to be undertaken in, the next plan. The States themselves do most of the fleshing out of this skeleton and then send their plans to the Centre, where, Morris-Jones said, few changes take place. Morris-Jones questions Kunzru's point about the electorate in the States influencing the Centre. The electorate could not do this directly, he said; a Provincial Congress Committee might influence the Working Committee of the All-India Congress, but the most powerful force could be exerted by a powerful State Chief Minister--such as Roy of Bengal or Kher of Bombay--who would say to the Central Government, 'I can't hold my electorate unless you do thus and so'. These arguments are beginning to temper my belief that the Indian Constitution is Unitary in Federal disguise.

Outside the house, after the interview, I waited on a corner in the sun for an empty scooter. Heat in India doesn't seem to come from overhead but climbs one like a vine till leaves of sweat sprout from the scalp. An instant's breeze will kill the vine and comfort comes with the scooter. The hotel room is a sanctuary with ceiling fan. It is the end of one more morning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Red Austin".

Granville Austin

Received New York September 27, 1960