**India: a Dharma based country in 2050**

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**Abstract**

A complex country such as India whose trajectory has been unique in history compared to Europe, China or the USA, poses the possibility of many scenarios that could emerge in the latter half of the 21st Century. This paper looks at a range of issues from governance and education to the environment and culture. The paper considers how the past could shape the country in 2050, together with changes in technology, better governance and environmental awareness. The move towards globalization is relentless and the paper indicates the role India could play in world trade, world food production and governance. Overall, we present a fairly optimistic view of what could be possibly achieved over the next 38 years.

**Keywords**: India, future development, main challenges, Dharmic tradition

**1. Introduction**

Fernandes [1] discusses the emergence of a wider national culture in India which is shifting from the older ideologies of a state-managed economy to a middle-class culture of consumption. After the 1991 reforms, India now boasts a growing middle class with around six million luxury brand consumers within its midst, according to a KPMG report [2]. Hatcher [3] argues that this middle class is now connected in complex ways with the South Asian diaspora, sharing spiritual truths and habits of consumption through a web of global trade, travel and entertainment. This class is essentially freed from the need to labor and, flush with capital, it expresses itself through an active marketplace presence. The impact goes even further as new innovations such as the IPL cricket league touch a range of countries including Britain, Australia, South Africa, to name a few, and go into the heart of other countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia and Holland.

At the same time, Bollywood is now making inroads into Hollywood and the global stage [4], following the initial beginnings when, around 2010, there were crossover stars in films such as Mission Impossible 4: Ghost Protocol and the Life of Pi. The new films are now termed HollyBolly Blockbusters, with many filmed in English, some in Hindi and most in Hinglish. With the growing influence of Bollywood, Hinglish has now become a commonly accepted dialect. Many people around the world understand Hinglish in its more Anglicized format.

The youth of India can be encountered all around the world and have a great spending propensity. They are spreading not only the language but also the sheer exuberance of the HollyBolly films. Thus both economic and cultural changes are being felt well beyond India. Gurcharan Das also considers middle class aspirations and the politics of aspiration as being crucial to the development of India. However, he could not have foreseen the impact this middle class has on world culture [5].

Just as great English writers such as Jane Austen, Shakespeare, Orwell and Huxley had an impact on global culture (and it was important to be British to do this), Indian writers are now dominating the world stage. The beginnings can be traced back to Salman Rushdie winning the Booker of Booker prize [6]. In his company were other well-renowned Indian authors such as Vikram Seth, Arvind Adiga (Booker prize winner), Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy (Booker Prize winner) and Jhumpa Lahiri (Pulitzer Prize winner). India now hosts the biggest iBook launches in the World and the world’s greatest writers are to be seen at the Taj literary Awards Festival in Mumbai. As a growing power, India is also flexing its muscles in science research, agriculture, business, defence, communications and diplomacy.

**2. A Future Scenario 2050 Overview**

India’s population has overtaken China’s population [7] and there is a sense of excitement and trepidation at this announcement within India itself and global forums. The picture across the country is varied with some states boasting a world-class infrastructure and environment, while others languish in deep poverty.

The fastest growing states with good education for all women and an alleviation of poverty are Gujarat, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, and following in their footsteps are Orissa and West Bengal [8]. Many of the other states are still mired in poverty with poor infrastructure, degraded environments and a high male to female ratio. This in turn is leading to instability in some parts of the country with bandits from these poor states venturing into the more prosperous areas. Amongst others states, Maharashtra is growing very unequally with Mumbai and Pune being log jammed with traffic and covered in smog. Many parts of the country are experiencing water shortages and the proposed national water-grid has failed to materialize as yet. The water stress is affecting people, livestock and wildlife not to mention the biodiversity of plants. Well-intentioned people from the more prosperous states have begun mobilizing self-help groups and are beginning to work in the poorer areas volunteering help in education, agriculture and infrastructural projects.

The central government racked with corruption is now showing signs of positive changes with strong, almost benevolent dictatorship from the present Prime Minister, who came into power in 2030. The bureaucrats in government have been replaced by professionals drawn from all parts of the world, including a wide range of nationalities as well Indian diaspora, all of whom have a vested interest in India’s success. India is becoming a crucible for forward thinking on governance as there is talk of how the country with the largest population in the world can influence the world in a positive manner.

Throughout its history, India always had a seam of spirituality that has been expressed in various forms: from Mohenjo Daro to Buddhism and the Vedic tradition. This spiritual foundation was in danger of being overridden by extreme Westernization in the 2020s but the growth of the Dharmic [9, 10] tradition has now reasserted itself and many Indians are no longer satiated with Materialism, turning back to the old traditions. This seems to be hard wired into Indian genes and India is now attempting to emulate the Happiness Index as propounded by Bhutan [11]. This Dharmic resurgence is helping the eradication of poverty in the poorer states as people selflessly give up some of their time for social work and community projects. Many individuals from the Moslem and Christian faiths are also selflessly devoting themselves in this manner. This Dharmic wave is also having a big impact in many countries in the world.

**3. Water**

Over the last twenty years the weather patterns have been very erratic throughout the world and especially in India, with very heavy monsoons and sometimes prolonged droughts. This has exacerbated the problems associated with water for drinking, bathing, cooking and crop growing, not to mention the water needed by industrial plants. Climate change and environmental degradation have a symbiotic and complex relationship that manifests itself in many ways. For instance, modern farming methods contribute to soil degradation, increasing consumption of water leads to dry rivers and low water tables, heavy use of chemicals and oil leads to poor air quality, chemical pollution degrades seawater quality and forest felling not only affects the amount of carbon dioxide in the environment, but also facilitates soil degradation. At the same time, all these factors leading to climate change affect atmospheric temperatures, leading to melting ice caps and the threat of climate change.

It was often argued that water endowment dictates the direction of virtual water flow. However this thesis was found wanting as a study [12] showed that a country’s virtual water surplus or deficit is not determined by how much water it has (see Figure 1). It appears that no correlation exists between the relative water availability in a country and the virtual water trade, the volume of water trade or the volume of water embedded in food and food-related products. Many water-rich countries including Japan, Portugal and Indonesia continue to record high net virtual water imports. Access to arable land actually plays a more important role. For this reason, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat became net exporters of water compared to other states. However their groundwater levels are now so low that do not permit any additional water extraction, which creates a need to balance water resources via a national water grid.

**Take in Figure 1**

In the same way, Egypt is a net exporter of water because of the Nile and has good arable land. Historically, Egypt was literally the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. In a similar way Jarkhand, Kerala and Bihar over the years became net importers of water. Bihar, however, is now working towards improving its agriculture sector.

India now has the difficult position of being a net water importer rather than an exporter, as it was in the past. The differences between various states have been balanced by large water networks straddling the country. However the full water grid has yet to be completed [13], largely owing to delays posed by corrupt bureaucrats. The water stress predictions mentioned by Pachauri in the 2011 report looking at China and India came to pass in 2020 [14, 15]. There were widespread riots, which led to a rethink of policies and a rebalancing of the water resources in India. These large scale changes have also been realized because from 2010 onwards India began purchasing large tracts of land in Africa (especially Ethiopia) and South America, in order to cultivate food for its growing population. These farms in distant places are now producing pulses, vegetables and edible oils on a large scale.

A World Bank report in 2010 [16] found that 45 million hectares of large-scale farmland deals were announced in the two-year period between 2008 and 2009. The majority of the foreign investments in agricultural land have taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa, including such countries as Sudan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, with Mozambique alone covering 23 percent of the global land investment projects during 2002-2009. Since 2008, Indian and Indian-owned companies launched a new global trend of acquiring agricultural land in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia for cultivation. This trend has now led to large-scale plantations supplying the supermarkets in India and the world [17]. In 2013, after the government opened up the retail sector to supermarkets, the supply chains have become quality-based and global.

In its wake, this transformation has driven up unemployment in the agricultural sector, with a few farmers getting richer and land grabs becoming common. India is widely seen as an agricultural colonial power. Large swathes of the population, especially from the poorer states, work as farmhands both in India and on lands in Africa and South America. The countervailing movement is one that was propounded by Ms. Bhatt [18], in which it is important to train women in agriculture and to adhere to the 100 mile principle, where production and consumption should take place within a 100 mile radius, preventing waste and pollution. The SEWA movement started by her (Self Employed Women’s Association) has now taken root in large parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan. These areas are now supplied by self-sufficient cooperatives catering for citizens’ needs.

The large disparity in the male and female ratios means that Indian men are marrying girls from many different nationalities in Africa and South America. The predictions made in the report on population projections [19], where the sex ratio of the total population (females per 1000 males) was expected to decrease (i.e. become less feminine) from 933 in 2001 to 930 during 2026 has come true and there is now a great debate in India about girl infanticide, especially now that the ratio of women active in the government is edging towards fifty per cent. The practice of infanticide is now heavily punished, often with the death penalty. However the idea of ‘baby hatches’ [20] where women can leave baby girls safely is now widespread in India and many of the babies put for adoption in countries in Europe, Japan and the USA are now becoming teenagers in their adopted countries. As prosperity reaches the masses and the shortage of girls is being acutely felt, the middle classes in particular are now embracing the Indian notion of girls as “Laxmis”, bringing good fortune to the family. The girls adopted abroad have formed a movement called “Indian Girl Power” and some are now prominent in HollyBollywood films. Many countries with ageing populations are now relying on young Indians to fill the resource gaps in all areas of services, especially those associated in caring for the elderly.

**4. Education**

The government’s five year plan in 2013 [21] envisaged an opening up of the education sector to foreign universities, similar to opening up the supermarket retail sector and this has helped to make huge inroads into the educational sector as India needed 800 new universities in 2012. The country still needs another 200 universities, but a large number of well-qualified young graduates are now competing in the global marketplace.

The quality of the education has been driven upwards as many private providers could not meet the requisite international standards. The brightest are now attracted by large salaries and good working conditions and many are choosing to stay in India. Higly-educated people are now going to teach in schools as the government has introduced better working conditions and training for teachers, and a nationwide career structure. Mobile and tablet technology is within the reach of every child, transforming them into avid consumers of education. Everyone can be in touch with everyone.

The opening up of the sector has paid huge dividends in producing quality manpower and a very strong middle class, which now exceeds 400 million. Indians constantly debate new ideas, venture into new sciences and lead the world in Ayurvedic medicine. The youth dividend has attracted the interest of the Chinese government, which is facing acute manpower shortages, so bilateral agreements created the opportunity for many young Indians to work in China. Trade between the two countries reached a staggering 1 Trillion dollars [22]. There have also been intermarriages and this segment of the population in China is known as the “Chindian” population.

**5. Technology**

In India, the mobile traffic grew faster than desktop Internet bringing the information age within the grasp of more and more people. This trend continues and now individuals are in touch globally at an instant, either dealing with business matters, just talking or collaborating. Indians like to communicate and keep in touch and are the biggest users of smart technology together with fast travel. New planes can now traverse the world at twice the speed of sound and Indians are avid travellers.

The best locations are used to produce HollyBollywood films. Bollywood and Hollywood are completely enmeshed as a result of cross-holdings between companies as the trend started in 2010 has continued unabated [23]. Countries vie with each other for production rights as the choice of a location brings in many tourists from the sub-continent. Production and IT facilities have been set up in Hollywood and Bangalore. The USA is India’s largest investor in research, technology and business. The two countries enjoy close links and both economies are reaping enormous benefits as India’s growing well-educated population plugs many of the US skills shortages [24]. India is at the forefront of technology breakthroughs in green energy provision ranging from solar panels for electricity generation to electric cars and nanotechnology. The technology leapfrogging discussed by Hubacek [25] has come to fruition.

**6. Governance**

For many years the government was racked by corruption, inefficiency and bureaucracy. However, around 2025 a radical shift in policies took place with the arrival of a benevolent dictatorship taking into account the country’s multi-ethnic diverse population. The move towards professionalism became intense and Inderesan’s [26] vision of the loss of hate dividends amongst politicians took hold as more “Dharmic” movements started to emerge.

The Panchayat system was gradually overhauled as more women became involved in government and better quality education began to filter through to the most remote villages as a result of the opening up of the education system. There is a distinct drop in Honor Killings and a move towards a more open society as old patriarchal control mechanisms began to fade [27]. The knowledge-based society as proposed by Pushpa [28] is now closer to reality. Instead of considering India a country to be exploited for its natural resources with the money being stashed in tax havens, many Indians are now investing in their own country following the spectacular foreign investment success in Gujarat.

An Amnesty clause that was passed in Parliament in 2030 has also helped enormously in bringing illicit funds back into the country. A new world tax governance system, instigated by the USA and Europe has resulted in the break-up of many tax havens, contributing to the flush of money back to India.

**7. Summary**

Hueze’s vision as discussed by David Smith [29] about India becoming more “advanced” than Europe has come to fruition. Its perpetual crises have helped to mold a nation that is now a global power, though some way behind China and the USA in terms of the size and power of the economy [30]. India is now generally moving out of darkness into light with smaller patches of poverty and ignorance than in the past. Following Das’s discussions, India is now growing by both night and day and has finally begun to realize its true calling as a nation shaped by millennia of Vedic culture that helped it to survive various foreign conquests, being ever open to new ideas from abroad. This has happened as a new middle class order is interlinked throughout India and shares similar values.

The revised thinking about the past is now also helping to shape the world’s future towards a greater respect for nature and sustainable living that enhances the quality of life for the global citizen. Doing what is good and leaving smaller footprints through a better understanding of Dharma is creating a better world. India has a bright future and does not have to be the land [29] of rope tricks anymore.

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**Figure 1. The distribution of water resources and their import between Indian states. Source [12]**

**Highlights**

**•** The emergence of a wider national culture in India, which is shifting from the older ideologies of a state-managed economy to a middle-class culture of consumption

• The main challenges for the future development of the Indian nation are poverty reduction, management of water supply, development of education and ethical governance

• The Vedic culture should and can have an important effect for the future development of India