

*Core Idea: THINK  
Consider multiple perspectives.*

## **“Will India Turn Communist?”**

July 14, 1953

**Article by Adlai E. Stevenson II published in *Look* magazine, July 14, 1953**

*Excerpt:*

**[I]t seems to me far more important for India to strengthen her fledgling democracy than to proclaim her allegiance to “our side” in foreign affairs. For a healthy democracy, even in a “neutralist” India, will be a stronger bulwark against communism in Asia than a shaky, uncertain state—no matter how loudly pro-American or anti-Communist its leaders speak.**

**And I say again that these proud Asian peoples cannot be browbeaten, bribed or cajoled. And we can win no friends merely by shouting anti-Communist slogans. For skeptics are best won over by the positive aspects of democracy.**

*Background:*

In the spring of 1953, Stevenson embarked on a five-month world tour through thirty-five countries. *Look*, a weekly photo magazine, commissioned the former presidential candidate to write a series of articles about world hot spots. He visited Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Israel, Yugoslavia, West Germany, and made many stops in between.

Stevenson’s traveling party arrived in Calcutta (today called Kolkata), India on April 28 and remained in the country through May 14. This trip occurred at a time when nations and peoples were throwing off the shackles of colonization. India had become the most populous democracy in the world. It won its freedom from Great Britain in a non-violent Revolution lead by Mahatma Gandhi. Because of its success in gaining freedom it played an influential role during this uncertain era. “In India,” Stevenson wrote in this article, “colonialism and racialism are vivid memories, and always associated with the West.”

Stevenson understood better than most American leaders the psychological scars of colonization. Proud nations such as India would not be bullied by America. Instead, he argued, the U.S. should give India’s young democracy a chance to mature, without U.S. interference.

During his stay in India, Stevenson visited Sarnath, a Buddhist holy site, took a boat ride on the Ganges River, and laid a wreath at Mahatma Gandhi’s tomb. He visited the troubled Kashmir region, and talked at length with Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian prime minister and “spiritual successor of Gandhi.”

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**FULL TEXT of Stevenson’s July 14, 1953 *Look* article:**

Whatever the temperature, India is “hot” in every sense of the word. After China, this is the world’s most populous country, the world’s most powerful “neutral” and the greatest influence in free Asia. China, struggling for rebirth, has gone Communist. Which way will India go? The answer to this question may well decide the destiny of Asia and hold the key to peace in our time.

At the broiling airport in Calcutta, the reporters told me I’d picked the hottest time of year to visit India. But it was now or never to satisfy a lifelong ambition to see this ancient land. And somehow we staggered through that shattering heat from Calcutta to the Khyber Pass and from the Himalayas to the southern tip of the great subcontinent. There were brief moments of relief: When we flew over the Banihal Pass from Jammu into the beautiful Vale of Kashmir, the temperature dropped from 115 to 70 in half an hour!

Never have I heard and seen so much in two weeks—including Hindu businessmen prostrate before their deity, Ganesa. He has the head of an elephant, and I thought of home and the GOP!

I came to vast India expecting contrasts, and I found them: sacred cattle lying in the shade of modern office buildings; tribesmen with bows and arrows against a background of belching steel furnaces; women carrying stones on their heads alongside giant Diesel tractors; mud villages and palaces; camel caravans and truck convoys; green fields and blazing deserts; illiteracy and scholarship; hunger and plenty; poverty and pomp.

And I also came to the new India filled with curiosity and questions: *What sort of man is Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru? Is he a shrewd statesman or an incomprehensible mystic? Is he really neutral or indifferent in our struggle against Communist imperialism?*

*Why do Indian leaders sometimes talk as though the United States were as great a threat to peace and freedom as Soviet Russia? Are American aims misunderstood, and why?*

*Can impoverished, crowded, illiterate India build a stable, democratic state—and what can or should we do to help?*

*Why isn’t the bitter Kashmir controversy with Pakistan settled amicably and quickly if India really wants a peaceful world so badly? And, finally—what will happen after Nehru?*

Well, it wasn't long before the troubles and uncertainties I found in the rest of Asia began to shrivel in the churning caldron of India's 360 million people and myriad problems, projects, religious castes, languages and diversities.

Let's begin with Pandit Nehru, "the spiritual successor of Gandhi." For this small, frail, intense aristocrat embodies the moral force, the political cement and the intellectual leadership of the new India. The masses which are India believe in him; the middle classes which make up the government follow him; the West looks to him for understanding; the nations of Asia and Africa whose aspirations are unfulfilled turn to him for support, and even the Communist bloc has not given up hope of persuading him.

The first time I talked to this complicated, cultivated man, he had just returned from a week of grueling travel through a famine area during an India "heat wave"—200 miles a day over bad roads, with ten to twenty stops for speeches and inspections. But that was nothing to his campaign tour last year, when he traveled 26,000 miles in 46 days and made 305 speeches to 30 million people (without benefit of TV!). How does he do it? "The people exhilarate me," he said simply.

I had several talks with this sensitive and heavily burdened man, who is not only the leader and spokesman of the majority Congress party, but also Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defense Minister. He is the mediator of all parliamentary and party controversies, the executive head of a huge governmental structure, the final arbiter of all domestic policies and the author and executor of India's foreign policy.

Perhaps the most perplexing and dangerous question India faces is: Who and what after Nehru? Most of the leaders of India who fought the long battle for independence from the British are aging and weary. And one has the feeling that the Congress party as a whole is losing its revolutionary momentum and zeal. Little new inspirational leadership is emerging. I asked Nehru himself about this, and, with a troubled look, he said, "Yes, we must give more attention to that."

I asked him, too, about India's so-called "neutral" position between communism and democracy. "Our policy," he said, "is non-involvement. In any conflict between freedom and tyranny, India will not be neutral." And then he added emphatically: "Mere anti-Communist talk will attract no one in Asia." By which he meant that the textbook case for communism—social and economic equality, land reform, industrialization, an end to corruption and exploitation—are the very goals of the Asian revolution. Thus the advertised objectives of communism have great appeal to the impoverished Asian masses, who know nothing of its brutal realities.

I also asked Nehru about his statement lauding Stalin as a man of peace at the time of his death, which shocked me and so many Americans. He explained that he meant Stalin had kept peace in Russia and the Communist party. (A better explanation might be that Nehru spoke impetuously without considering the effect of his words.)

As to Korea, Nehru agrees that U.N. intervention was right, but feels that it was a great mistake to cross the 38th parallel and agitate China's fear of invasion or injury. And he thinks that China will never yield to Moscow's yoke and, properly handled, will take a progressively independent position. Because of China's monstrous internal problems (not unlike India's), he discounts the danger of Chinese aggression in Southeast Asia. I think I detected a sort of fraternal sentimentality about China, which adopted Buddhism from India and, like India, was long exploited by Europeans.

We talked of colonialism, of Indochina, North Africa and South Africa and of Russia, too. It is not easy to set down my impressions in a few simple words. Nehru admires Communist accomplishments in developing backward countries with little outside aid—the same problem he faces in India. But he detests intolerance and violence. Means are as important to Nehru as ends; and he and his associates, like the old sage Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras, have dealt firmly and effectively with Communist violence in India.

The more America presses India to join the anti-Communist front, the more I suspect that Nehru and, for that matter, most Indian leaders will balk. What perhaps we have not fully realized is that the proud new nations of Asia may perversely prefer suicide to even a suspicion of the Western domination and dictation which they have been fighting for so long. Like Indonesia and Burma, for example, I suspect India would prefer to go without aid and risk the consequences, rather than accept aid with a political price tag attached. In India, colonialism and racialism are vivid memories, and always associated with the West. (For instance, most Indians regard colonial France as the villain in Indochina, rather than the new Communist imperialism.)

The leading newspaper publisher of south India said to me: "India will save the world from communism because of the deep religious faith of the Hindus, which is the direct antithesis of communism's denial of God." And there are religious depths in Nehru, the man of action who is also Gandhi's heir. He believes in tolerance, nonviolence and individual freedom of action. Peaceful coexistence between men and nations is the Gandhian gospel, and I suspect that Nehru, though a little impatient with the distractions of foreign affairs, rather fancies the role of a noninvolved peacemaker. Besides, Russia and China are India's northern neighbors.

Also, most Indians know little of totalitarian ruthlessness. They have known only one enemy—the civilized British. Passive resistance—such as lying down in front of a British tank—used to land you in jail. They don't realize that a Soviet tank would probably just keep rolling.

I cannot wholly explain the paradoxes and contradictions in Nehru, who so often seems to temper his judgments of India's totalitarian neighbors to the north and criticize his country's real friends in the West. But it is clear that he is essentially a liberal in the best Western sense, that India has a democratic constitution laying great emphasis on individual rights, and that Nehru is going to build the new India by voluntary democratic means or perish in the effort.

Perhaps we can better understand India if we remember our own long tradition of isolation, neutrality and preoccupation with our own affairs. India's internal problems are appalling, and, unless they are solved, speculation about India's and Nehru's attitude toward the external Communist threat is simply a waste of time. There are pockets of communism all over India. I visited one in the far south—the state of Travancore-Cochin, on the tropical Malabar coast. (It was here that St. Thomas and many Christian missionaries are said to have come in the first and second centuries, and the area is sprinkled with Catholic and Protestant missions and colleges.) This state has the highest degree of literacy in all India, the greatest population density (up to 2500 per square mile along the coast)—and the most Christians and Communists. (The latter seemed confused by my visit in the south: One newspaper said I was a stalking horse for Secretary of State John Foster Dulles; another declared I was being gagged by the State Department.)

Why do the advocates of communism flourish in this lush and lovely area? Because they exploit discontent: The coconut-matting industry is depressed, many are out of work, and families of ten or fifteen are trying to scrape a living off a single acre.

The main source of Communist organization here, as elsewhere, is found among the “educated unemployed” —young men who struggled hard for an education and now can't find employment suitable to intellectuals. They find an outlet for their resentment in Communist denunciation of everybody and everything.

Government leaders—especially the renowned philosopher Vice President [Sir] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan—are fully aware that there is too much classical education in the old British tradition. India needs agriculturists, engineers, scientists and technicians, and efforts are being made to change the educational emphasis.

The “untouchables”—low-caste Hindus—are also easy game for the Communists, and I suspect it will take many years, especially in the country, to uproot the ancient caste system, which regards manual labor as degrading.

At least, our journey along the lovely Travancore-Cochin coast ended on a light note. My companions and I all turned up at the airport wearing blue seersucker suits, and an admiring official congratulated us on what he thought was “the summer uniform of the American Democratic party.”

If the root causes of communism have yet to be eradicated in India, Nehru and the Congress party have been more successful in their efforts to create a secular state free of intolerance and religious strife. It has been only six years since the ghastly Hindu-Moslem massacres (when millions were slaughtered), and the scars and bloodstains are not easily erased. But India's 40 million Moslems now live in comparative safety, and it looks as though the secular state is firmly established.

Also encouraging is the progress of the \$4.3 billion five-year plan for economic development, which was launched two years ago. For the building of a strong, viable

democracy depends on the speed and success with which India meets the wants of masses of people who, naturally enough, think more with their stomachs than with their heads. Many were persuaded that independence would usher in Utopia.

This is the revolution of rising expectations that I have found everywhere in Asia. And if the new leaders of free Asia don't make good their promises, the Communists are sure to exploit the resulting disillusionment.

Because India spends \$500 million annually on food imports, the first pressing objective of the five-year plan is to increase food production by improving methods, incentives, roads, health, education, irrigation, reclamation and equipment.

The second is industrialization. Already, the production of cloth, cement, sugar and coal has exceeded the targets. I visited the great Damodar Valley project northwest of Calcutta, modeled on the TVA. Here, huge dams are rising for power and irrigation; a large fertilizer plant has been constructed; steel capacity is being trebled.

And this is but one of several large power, irrigation and industrial developments that are calculated to end India's chronic food deficiency, provide more consumer goods and more jobs for India's 60 to 100 million unemployed or underemployed.

In the villages, improvement has started on a small but rapidly expanding scale. "Village leaders" are being trained, with American help, in 30 centers all over India. Their problems are manifold: A different fodder crop may be better—but what if it is not suitable for thatch? Green manure is good for the soil—but you can't turn it under with a primitive plow. Certainly, the mud huts should have chimneys to remove the smoke—but then the precious fuel, dried dung, will burn too fast.

It takes patience and persistence, and, with 600,000 villages, the task of rural rehabilitation is enormous. Old habits and ways of doing things are tenacious in India. As one village leader said to me, "Our job is psychological. We must help the villagers to want what they should want, and then help them to discover that they can do it for themselves."

I visited villages before and after "the treatment." It works. The people are more responsive to change than I had expected. But what will happen when the trained village leaders are transferred to other communities and the initial enthusiasm dies down? That is still an unanswered and anxious question.

The five-year plan will not work any quick miracles. Even if India gets the remaining half billion dollars she must have from abroad to finance this huge and realistic undertaking, and even if it succeeds in full, it will raise per capita average income only from about \$52 to \$58 a year. India's population is increasing by five million a year, and it will take nearly two decades before living standards can be materially improved. As Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao, director of the Delhi School of Economics, said, "Economic development involves, not only toil and sweat, but also tears and abstinence for many years to come."

Russia accomplished her transformation by ruthless exploitation of the people. Red China is doing the same. But in India, Nehru and his government are trying to carry out their revolution by consent, not coercion. They are banking heavily on the five-year plan, on gradual improvement and on a growing national consciousness and a sense of civic responsibility to replace the anti-British dynamic of the independence struggle.

The great contest in Asia is between the totalitarian and the democratic approach to the development of backward areas. We can be thankful that India has chosen the voluntary way—which is also the hard way. Fortunately, India’s present leaders and top civil servants are British-educated and imbued with the ideals of a free society. The next ten years will tell whether these ideals are a permanent part of the new India, or whether this great nation will turn to stronger, quicker, harsher methods of economic improvement—to the peril of India, Asia and the world.

Thus it seems to me far more important for India to strengthen her fledgling democracy than to proclaim her allegiance to “our side” in foreign affairs. For a healthy democracy, even in a “neutralist” India, will be a stronger bulwark against communism in Asia than a shaky, uncertain state—no matter how loudly pro-American or anti-Communist its leaders speak.

And I say again that these proud Asian peoples cannot be browbeaten, bribed or cajoled. And we can win no friends merely by shouting anti-Communist slogans. For skeptics are best won over by the positive aspects of democracy.

And there is still much skepticism about America. Indians think we are too bellicose and have lost our democratic bearings. They tend to equate the Communist treason trials, for example, with the methods used in some congressional investigations. Recently, I read this in the conservative Times of India: “To Indians, the United States, founded because of the need of man to worship as he desired, to speak as he thought fit, to enjoy liberty, had always seemed the natural home of all civil rights. They hear today that the intellectual atmosphere is often vitiated by persecution and fear, even in academic surroundings, while those responsible for such conditions sit in high places and receive respect.”

Chester Bowles, our former ambassador to India, did pioneer work in personally dispelling Indian misconceptions about America. His able successor, George Allen, I’m confident, will carry on in the same way. There is no more important job for an American in India today.

What are India’s chances? I have listed some of the positive factors—among which are great undeveloped resources. On the negative side, I found other, disturbing elements:

1. India is far from united. Twelve major languages are each spoken by more than 10 million people, and there is strong pressure, abetted by the Communists, further to divide the nation into linguistic states.

2. The Communists, though numbering no more than 50,000 party members, are well organized, energetic and quick to capitalize on popular dissatisfaction.
3. Land reform is a reality on paper, but lagging in practice.
4. Skilled managerial personnel and capital for industrial development are lacking, and slow progress may create impatience with democratic means.

But we should also bear in mind that the totalitarian successes were achieved in countries with no such democratic traditions or leadership as India has.

On balance, I think the prospects for a free India are good. But I wish I had found an answer to the question of what will happen after Nehru. In America, we believe that there is no such thing as an indispensable man. Perhaps that is true in India, too, but the fact remains that there is no younger man in sight with an “all India” appeal to give this vast country the firm, confident direction she so badly needs.

Of one thing I’m sure: Regardless of the strange, petty, unreasonable (indeed, sometimes irresponsible) attitudes and judgments of Indians—including Pandit Nehru himself—this country will never go the authoritarian way and abandon the human values of democracy so long as he is in power.

Besides camels, the first things you see in the capital of Pakistan are the endless acres of mud shacks where thousands of the Moslem refugees from India still dwell six years after bloody partition. Refugees have swelled dry, dusty Karachi’s population from 300,000 to 1,200,000 since 1947, and they constitute but one of the troubles of this Islamic state. For Pakistan is a geographic monstrosity—the handiwork of religious passion, rather than geography, language or economics.

Karachi is on the Arabian Sea at the southern extremity of West Pakistan, which stretches 1500 miles north and includes some 35 million people. A thousand miles eastward, on the other side of India, is East Pakistan, carved out of Bengal, with 40 million people. In the east, the people speak Bengali; in the west, Urdu. There are few natural resources, little industry, and the economy rests on cotton in the dry west and jute in the wet east. Partition separated the jute-producing areas from the mills. And, instead of working things out together, Pakistan has built mills on her side of the heavily guarded border and India has gone in heavily for raising jute. (Concentration on this nonedible crop may have contributed to the great famine of 1951, when the U.S. loaned India \$190 million’s worth of wheat.)

The new Pakistan government is strong at the top—its leaders are young, competent and dedicated. But most of the Hindus, who fared better in the crack British Indian civil service and were also accountants, bankers, traders and technicians in pre-partition Pakistan, have fled to India. So the new state is sorely in need of trained personnel to staff the ranks of government and business.

But Pakistan has far more pressing difficulties. Last year, jute and cotton prices collapsed when the Korean war boom subsided, and the country's foreign exchange earnings dropped 50 per cent. After two years of drought and crop failures, Pakistan had to import 800,000 tons of wheat in 1952—and 1953 looks even worse.

Food shortages have created want and unrest among the impoverished masses. Drastic economy measures and rigid foreign exchange controls mean business stagnation. Extremist mullahs—Moslem religious teachers—have fanned discontent for political ends. This spring, there were riots and violence, partly sectarian, partly in protest against living conditions.

Acting swiftly, Governor General Ghulam Mohammed dismissed Prime Minister AI-Haj Khwaja Nazimuddin and installed forthright and vigorous Mohammed Ali, former ambassador in Washington. A forward-looking, modern-minded administration has taken over. Order has been restored by the army, albeit on an uneasy base of widespread discontent. The new government has asked the United States for a loan or grant of a million tons of wheat to stabilize prices and tide the country over the food crisis.

I trust that we will be generous in Pakistan's present crisis. With normal rainfall and irrigation development, food production will recover. There is an invigorating spirit in Pakistan and no indecision about communism; like her hardy Moslem cousin, Turkey, Pakistan is decisively oriented toward the free world. But I think we should insist that the proceeds of our wheat aid be used for agricultural development and not for some premature industrial project.

Even assuming that Pakistan solves her economic problems, there remain two big question marks—her relations with India and the danger of religious fanaticism in a "Moslem state," which Pakistan proclaims herself to be.

Ever since partition, Pakistan and India have glared at each other over their long twin borders. Visas are required by both countries, passenger trains stop at the frontiers, trade has withered. With all her difficulties, Pakistan, like India, maintains an army—and a very good one—larger than Britain needed for all of undivided India. The air is poisoned with suspicion and mistrust. Pakistanis firmly believe that India's leaders have never accepted the fact of partition, that India is aggravating their refugee problem by driving out more Moslems and trying to starve them by diverting water from the rivers and irrigation canals that flow from India into Pakistan.

To all of these charges, India has answers and countercharges. Actually, just three major issues divide these two inextricably involved neighbors: Kashmir, the canal and river waters and the settlement of refugee claims. The last one can be worked out in time, and experts from the World Bank are studying the water question. With good will on both sides, I believe the two nations can also settle the future of the great mountainous state of Kashmir, which the U.N. has been struggling with since India and Pakistan agreed to cease fighting over it five years ago.

The Kashmir dispute is long and complicated. I heard about it from Sheikh Abdullah, a Moslem and the popular leader of the large portion of Kashmir now occupied by Indian forces. I heard about it from three of the leaders of Azad Kashmir, the territory the Pakistan side of the U.N. cease-fire line. I heard about it from Prime Minister Nehru of India and Prime Minister Ali of Pakistan, from dozens of other leaders in both countries.

I cannot in this brief article relate all the charges of conspiracy and bad faith that have been poured into my ears. The short of it is, in my judgment, that Pakistan is eager to settle the question promptly by a plebiscite. But India seems to be prolonging the present situation with her troops occupying most of the country, partly, I suspect, because time works to her advantage and partly for more worthy reasons. Nehru does not want religious strife to flare up again. For, if trouble should break out between the three million Moslems and the one million Hindus in Kashmir, it could spread to India, with ghastly consequences.

Since most of the Hindus are concentrated in the southern part of Kashmir bordering on India, it would seem to me that a regional plebiscite might be the best solution of a dispute that must be settled fairly and promptly if the relations of these two countries, so important to the peace and security of the world, are to improve. And, personally, it irks me to see the costly armies these countries maintain—in part, at least, against each other—while the American taxpayer contributes to both.

Happily, India-Pakistan relations are improving. Mohammed Ali's first act as Prime Minister was a friendly gesture to India. Nehru responded in the same vein, and, as I write this, they are about to meet face to face. Mohammed Ali's government has also given assuring evidence of its determination that Pakistan is to be a modern state based on Islamic moral principles but not dominated by obsolete Mohammedan orthodoxy.

If these faraway squabbles seem pretty remote to us Americans, we should remember that they involve almost three times as many people as live in the United States. Let us pray that reasonable men, acting in good faith and in a spirit of give and take, can resolve their differences—for the sake of their own countries, Asia and the world.

Before leaving Pakistan for the Near East, I drove up the Khyber Pass to the Afghan border. Beyond rose the white wall of the Hindu Kush mountain range. I thought of the exploits of Alexander's Greeks, of Tamerlane, Genghis Khan and Baber and all the conquerors and martial hosts that had passed through Khyber to the plains of India from time out of mind. The rocky pass was cool, quiet and peaceful now. At least, I thought it was peaceful until a group of bearded tribal chieftains, with cartridge belts and rifles slung over their shoulders, ceremoniously presented me with a fine revolver—homemade!

For nearly three months now, I have been traveling through Asia—this vast area of old civilizations and new nations where totalitarianism and free institutions are freely compared to determine which method can give its miserable millions a better way of life.

China has succumbed by force of arms and Indochina is in peril. The rest of Asia is free, but fluid.

For a long time, the peace and destiny of the world were decided by the balance of power in Europe. Now, a new factor has emerged. What happens in free Asia can upset the balance of power and of principle in the world.

Fortunately, its present leaders hate tyranny and dictation. They fought and suffered for freedom and independence. They believe, passionately for the most part, in representative institutions; and many still look to revolutionary, democratic America for inspiration and encouragement.

But their countries are poor and backward. Their peoples know little of democracy and the blessings of human freedom, but they want to eat every day—and they mean to do it.

The next few years will tell whether these leaders can make democracy work in this great new area of decision—Asia.

— Adlai E. Stevenson II

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### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Does Stevenson believe that Nehru is attracted to communism's economic achievements or its social philosophy? Why?
2. Why did Stevenson believe that the “untouchables” were particularly attracted to communism?
3. How did Stevenson think the Five Year Plan of development would help thwart the appeal of communism?
4. What were the Congressional investigations tinged with the “persecution of fear” that Stevenson referred to?
5. What is the “domino theory” Stevenson referred to? Why was there fear of Indian communism?
6. Why does Stevenson recommend agricultural reforms before industrial reforms in Pakistan?

**Keywords:** India Partition, Korean War, Kokata, Mahatma Gandhi, Kashmir dispute, Jawaharlal Nehru, 1950s India, colonialism, racism, Third World, Indian Congress Party, Josef Stalin, developing countries, Cold War, Hinduism, passive resistance, liberal democracy, Indian communism, anti-communist, neutrality, isolationism, John Foster Dulles, Dalit, untouchables, 1950s Pakistan, Hindu-Moslem massacres, totalitarianism, mullahs, Five Year Plan, domino theory