

# Indo Canadian Sun

## The Indo-Canadian: Over the Past 40 Years

by Anupam Sharma

### India- 1947, 1991 and 2014: The 3 Big Churns

Nation-states and societies are always churning and responding to the context of the day. Sometimes, it is painfully slow but, underlying there are often currents of energy and motion will at times rise for all to see. This is no different for India. Over the past 68 years – since independence from the British in 1947 - there stand-out three major churnings in India.

#### Churn # 1: 1947- Freedom

India's Independence from the British easily stands amongst the most momentous historical events of the 20th century. To the country and its people, independence gave back the long suppressed spirit and voice. For colonies across Africa and Asia, it influenced similar movements so others could also attain the same for themselves. Its focus on non-violence and peaceful means later on provided a template for civil right movements especially the one in United States led by Martin Luther King.

The outcome was however a mixed bag with independence being attained but at a cost. However, independence came at a high cost - the need to partition India - with India as successor state and Pakistan as the new state. This gave rise to exchange of populations and resulting migration that in turn was cause for much suffering and loss of life. Despite the aftermath, India's independence remains an achievement.

#### Churn #2: 1991-Economic

If 1947 is the year of political independence then 1991 is one of economic independence - this time from the straight-jacket of the state. The rules and regulations governing the economy ultimately had the opposite effect. Well-

meaning to have in place an ordered planning and sense of priorities, it instead stifled the individual person and organization of creativity and entrepreneurship. The latter attributes went underground. There was a huge "disconnect" between the state and society where the latter was more in tune with material desires and wants.

By the 1990s, it was obvious the Indian economy was not only in bad shape but also rather sick. Both internal and external factors working in tandem caused the change. Externally, the international community would only deal with India if it undertook major structural changes that involved opening the economy and dismantling the stifling public sector and requirements. A major undertaking was the retreat of the public sector (relatively speaking) from some sectors of the economy. Internally, the process of globalization helped by technological advances in transportation and telecommunications for the citizens gave them the ability to compare and select. Furthermore, the prevailing ethos of asceticism gave way to creation of wealth and consumption.

#### Churn #3- Public Space

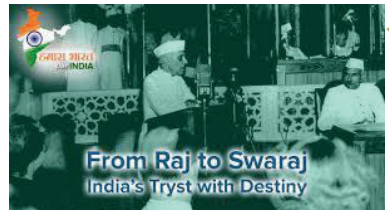
Until recently, most observers – including myself - were largely of the view that coalition politics at the national level in India was here to stay. The nation-state-sub-continental in scope - given its myriad diversities would make it difficult for a clear-cut consensus for a majority political party to govern. In 2014, India went through its 16th general election and state election in Delhi.

The Congress Party – in power as governing party for about 60 years since 1947 - for now stands totally decimated. This political party has for a long time acutely required a major intellectual and political rethinking of its policies and values. It needs to respond to the immediate needs and aspirations of the country that is now changed.

The Bhartiya Janata Party, has on its own, won the majority of the seats in parliament. It has garnered votes from each and every constituency. In the past, this party stood against the perceived appeasement of the minorities. The outcome of the general election is a vote less for the cultural plank that speaks to India as "Hindu Nation" - given that 82% of the population belong to this group. The citizen has voted for this party on its promise to deliver "development and governance" for the country.

Arising out of the results from the elections in Delhi, as the BJP was a contending party in the Delhi elections, the outcome is a total repudiation of the national government –victorious in 2014 - of its agenda of Hindutva (that is more about not appeasing the minorities). This all represents perhaps the reordering of the structure and composition of the political status-quo. The underlying currents of change – though not as clear at the surface level - have been torrential.

The election results of 2014, followed by the elections in Delhi, have thrown up new configurations and new voices. Either way, fasten your seat belts; the next 25 years are bound to be an interesting ride....



Aug. 15, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru (India's First Prime Minister) addresses the nation - "India's Tryst with Destiny".



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