

## Tomorrow's World Power Turns 60

By Mathieu von Rohr

**It's been 60 years since India won its independence and the country of Mahatma Gandhi is now on track to becoming a global power. But the country's new prosperity remains elusive for many, with millions of farmers still leading lives of abject misery. SPIEGEL visits five very different places to see what India's future holds.**



REUTERS

India celebrates 60 years of independence on August 15.

The Republic of India was only four hours old when an untouchable, a girl named Shyama, came into the world in Gurgaon, a village near Delhi. She was born at 4 a.m. on August 15, 1947, in a simple brick house, the third of seven children.

Shyama's mother later told her about the fireworks and the street celebrations that night, and about the historic words of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru: "At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." But one man, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, was not celebrating that night -- because millions of people were still starving and because independence also meant partition of the former British India into two countries, India and Pakistan. Instead, Gandhi stayed at home and fasted.

The family that Shyama was born into that night was not among India's poorest. Her father was a low-ranking civil servant. But they were pariahs, members of the Jatav subcaste. Their ancestors had been leather workers, which made them unclean, placing them at society's lowest rung. Not even their shadows were permitted to touch a Brahmin.

An untouchable, a man named Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, had written much of the new country's constitution. It was designed to create a country in which all citizens would have equal opportunities. "If things go wrong under the new constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad constitution," said Ambedkar, "What we will have to say is that man was vile."

Over the course of the country's history since independence, it periodically seemed that things would indeed go wrong. But now that the Republic of India is turning 60 on Aug. 15, the world no longer mentions the country in the same breath as tales of poverty and hopelessness. Today's stories about India are tales of success.



Shyama was a good student, one of six girls to attend the local college in Gurgaon. She loved to dance and wanted to become a film star. But the other students shunned her. Their families were from the affluent Jat caste of farmers, and they routinely disparaged her as an untouchable and called her even worse names, which she later did her best to forget. Shyama swore to



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The legacy of the 1947 partition can still be felt in India, especially in disputed Kashmir.

herself that she would be a great success in life. When she was 16 she assumed a new last name so that people could no longer tell what her caste was. Because she was born on the same day as India, she called herself Shyama Bharti -- Shyama, the Indian. "I abandoned my name to abandon my caste," she says.

Like the country, Shyama is now almost 60, but she looks younger. She sits in her office in downtown Delhi, wearing a pink sari. She has large, dark eyes and a narrow nose with wide nostrils that makes her look almost aristocratic. She wears her dyed black hair piled up on her head in a hairstyle similar to the one favored by her idol, Indira Gandhi, India's third prime minister.

As a general director of Delhi Transco Limited, the city's electric utility, Bharti is at the highest level she can be promoted to in her career as a civil servant. She has four telephones on her desk, and her business card reveals that she has four university degrees. "As far as education goes, I'm a Brahmin," she says, laughing.

She earns 42,000 rupees, or €760, a month. Her husband receives a government pension. The couple is provided with a driver and a car, a company mobile phone and a large house with servants. The Indian state treats its civil servants well.

Shyama Bharti managed to complete her ascent into the upper middle class long before today's new generation of social climbers, who make their money as call center agents and IT specialists, came on the scene. About 200 million of India's 1.1 billion people are already part of the middle class today, a number that is expected to increase to about 600 million by 2025 -- figures that are enough to make investors delirious.

The West has long realized that India is on its way to becoming a global power. The giant country is expected to be the world's third-largest economy within the next three decades. India and the United States signed a joint nuclear treaty only two weeks ago. India has been de facto accepted as a nuclear power, and its next goal is a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The country's elites are literally bursting with self-confidence.

Indians who read newspapers can marvel at the daily stories of progress in their country, and of its rise to prominence. India launches an Israeli spy satellite into space. Indian automakers plan to acquire Jaguar. Free wireless Internet in all of Bangalore. Domestic flights doubled in the space of two years. Bank accounts opened for each and every resident of the state of Himachal Pradesh.

At the same time, India's infrastructure remains a problem. Its roads, buses and airports are in a woeful state of disrepair, and power outages are common.

A trip through India is a lesson in glaring contrasts. India is a land of the future, and yet parts of it are still a long way from the present. It is a country of the fabulously rich and the desperately poor, of Hindus and Muslims, wooden plows and nuclear power plants.

Shyama Bharti will go into retirement on Aug. 15, her 60th birthday. She and her husband will move to her old village, Gurgaon, which has since been engulfed by Delhi's southwestern suburbs. The land the couple bought there 20 years ago is worth at least 100 times what it cost them to buy.

*SPIEGEL traveled to five different parts of India to get a glimpse of the country's future.*

## A Land of Contrasts

### GURGAON: 'It Will Be Singapore in Five Years'



Ashish Gupta sits in a glass booth on the second floor of a salmon-colored, semi-circular office tower in Sector 39 of Gurgaon, and says: "It will be Singapore out there in five years." Today there are still meadows out there, and cows still routinely stroll across the street, holding up traffic. But Gupta is quite serious.

The India of the future is emerging in Gurgaon. Where there was once nothing but brush, now glass and concrete towers are being built to house



AP

Mahatma Gandhi (r), who led India to independence, laughs with the man who was to become the nation's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, at the All-India Congress committee meeting in Bombay in July 1946.

the offices of Western conglomerates like Siemens, Alcatel and Microsoft. The construction workers live in tents between the buildings. An eight-lane highway cuts through what is still a no man's land, with constant traffic jams lining up in front of half a dozen new shopping malls. A subway is being built to downtown Delhi.

Gupta wears black trousers, a blue shirt and a tie. He attended college in the United States and once worked for corporate consulting giant McKinsey. He is the Chief Operating Officer of a company called Evalueserve. His job is stressful and he is sweating profusely, despite the air-conditioning in his office. The company has 2,100 employees and has only been in business for the past six and a half years. It grew by 100 percent each year in the first

four years, and another 75 percent in the interim. Evalueserve is in the process of expanding into China, Chile and Eastern Europe. Gupta's sentences are sober enough, and yet he sounds almost intoxicated: "The question is not how big we want to become, but how big we can become. Theoretically, there is no limit."

Evalueserve is a showpiece company in the new India. While China is growing through low-cost industrial products, India is growing through cheap services: call centers to serve customers in Ohio, IT specialists handling the programming for European clients and market research companies such as Evalueserve that perform tasks like analyzing the shampoo sales of their clients' competitors.

According to Gupta, there is absolutely no doubt that India is becoming a global power. "We need another 20 years, but they'll fly by."

The Indian economic miracle began in 1991, when Ashish Gupta was still a student. Manmohan Singh, the finance minister at the time and India's prime minister today, jettisoned the "democratic socialism" of the country's founding fathers. Until he came into office, large sectors of Indian industry were still state-owned. Singh began privatizing companies and liberalizing markets. The IT industry has been booming since the late 1990s, and the economy as a whole has grown by an average of 8 percent a year in the last five years.

At Evalueserve more than 100 people, most of them under 30, work in a single room, sitting at long rows of yellow desks and staring at computer screens. One of them is Senior Analyst Andrea Demsic, a 30-year-old blonde with cherubic cheeks and a contented smile, who works in the company's Business Research department. She comes from the southwestern German town of Schwäbisch-Gmünd and speaks the Swabian dialect. After earning a degree in economics from the University of Jena in eastern Germany, she says, it was relatively difficult to find a job in Germany. One day she saw a job posting at her local employment office: Seeking analyst for overseas position. She applied for the position and, a year and a half ago, ended up in Gurgaon.

Demsic's starting salary was 21,000 rupees, or about €380, plus a free apartment. She was promoted after the first year. She says that she could imagine staying in India for a while longer.

She is impressed by the ambition of her Indian coworkers, and by the city being built around her. "There is movement here. Everyone wants to achieve something. There are opportunities to climb up the corporate ladder in India. It's so different from Germany."

Thirty-six foreigners work at Evalueserve, and their numbers are also increasing in other Indian companies. Ashish Gupta, the COO, smiles. He needs people who know Europe and speak its languages perfectly, because his customers come from Europe. But he is also happy with the message he is sending to the world: Instead of hiring exclusively Indians to work for the West, Indian companies are now also creating jobs for Western workers.

### **VIDARBHA: 'They Build Cities and Neglect the Villages'**

His wife and two sons were sound asleep when Punjaram Kubde, a farmer, got up in the night and went into the next room, where he kept sacks of seed, fertilizer and poison. He poured himself a cup of pesticide and drank it. His wife found him dead on the stone floor the next morning.

Now his body lies underneath a pile of wood that the men and women of Chondha have assembled on a green hill in front of the village. They have painted his face purple, brought him flowers, rice and coins for his journey into the next world, and wrapped his body in a white sheet.

About 200 people have come to attend his cremation. Their faces are serious. Kubde's is the first case of a

farmer taking his life in their village. Some say that if it doesn't rain soon his suicide will not have been the last.

Chondha is in Vidarbha, in the middle of India and one of the country's poorest regions. This year alone, 521 farmers have already killed themselves in Vidarbha. Last year there were more than 1,200 suicides. Almost all of the men used pesticides, while a few set themselves on fire.

The wife of the dead farmer sobs quietly, her body trembling. Her name is Lalita and she is wearing the orange sari she reserves for special occasions. She is only 30, young and beautiful, but she will remain a widow for the rest of her life. Village rules forbid widows from remarrying. Sagar, the couple's eldest son, is 10. A man helps him hold a burning bundle of straw, which he must use to ignite the funeral pyre. Then the men and women of Chondha walk around the fire, throwing in sticks.

Punjaram Kubde was an important man. He owned 12 hectares (30 acres) of land, a large house and a motorcycle. He was 45, a powerful man with a mustache and, like most men here, he was a cotton farmer. He grew a strain known as "Bt cotton," developed by US agricultural chemicals giant Monsanto. According to the farmers in the village, conventional seeds are unavailable these days. No one knows why, but the dealers no longer sell it. Monsanto's genetically modified seed is expensive and a new supply has to be purchased every year. The seed makes up half of the farmers' production costs. Even worse, if Bt cotton gets too much or too little water, it reacts far more sensitively than normal cotton.

When last year's heavy rains ruined his harvest, Kubde was unable to repay his bank loans, and the banks refused to lend him more money. He went to private moneylenders, who lent him the money he needed for new seed, but this year brought more heavy rains and Kubde lost his crop once again. In the end he owed half a million rupees and no one was willing to lend him any more money.

Unable to liberate himself from his mountain of debt, he would have been forced to become an indentured servant to his creditors. He chose an easier way out.

The man who counts the region's dead is named Kishor Tiwari. A former engineer, Tiwari founded his own NGO in the small city of Pandharkawada, where he now has his office. He spends his days sending out e-mails filled with accusations and numbers. More than 6,000 farmers have already committed suicide in Vidarbha, he writes, and more than 2 million farmers are in debt. Tiwari reports the news from an India that has nothing to do with the country analysts are touting these days.

About two-thirds of Indians today are still farmers, a number that puts many things in perspective. They live in villages that consist of a handful of tiny mud huts, each containing a sleeping room, a second room for the kitchen and an outdoor latrine. The muddy paths between the huts are littered with cow dung.

More than 300 million Indians live in poverty and 400 million are illiterate. In many parts of India, dependent feudal relationships still exist, women and untouchables are oppressed, there are honor killings and the practice of setting widows on fire is still not entirely abolished.

Kishor Tiwari is a cantankerous man wearing polished shoes, black trousers and a white shirt. He has himself driven through the area in a car with a sign in the front window that reads: "God has sent this man to the poor."

He sits in the back of his car as it bumps across a street filled with potholes, blaming the liberalization of the agricultural market for the farmers' troubles. First, he says, the government almost stopped buying up cotton altogether, and then it permitted the importation of cotton and genetically modified seed. The end result was a plunge in the price of cotton.

He talks about Mahatma Gandhi, who founded his village commune Sevagram Ashram in 1936, not far from here. Tiwari says that Gandhi's successors have betrayed him. "They build cities and neglect the villages. For Gandhi the village, which is self-sufficient, was the pillar on which this country stands. Instead we now have the enslaved village."

According to Tiwari, the same liberalization that is driving India's growth is breaking the farmers' backs.

## **The Scars of Partition**

### **MUMBAI: 'Within Half an Hour I Would Have Enough Muslims Here Ready to Fight'**

The city of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay, is home to some of the poorest of India's poor. More than half of its residents live in poor neighborhoods like Dharavi, Asia's second-largest slum, which investors have targeted to be converted into a modern residential development.

Mumbai is also home to India's wealthiest citizens. Most of the country's billionaires live here, such as the Ambani brothers, whose father, a former merchant, worked his way up the ladder to earn his billions. Another is Anand Mahindra, who dreams of dominating Europe with the SUVs his company makes.

Mumbai is also Bollywood. The city's film industry produces hundreds of movies each year, productions full of saccharine music and starring actors who are paid millions.

The careers of most Bollywood stars are short-lived, with only a handful becoming legends. The most unforgettable star of them all lives in a villa in the Cumballa Hill neighborhood in Bombay's Midtown district: Dilip Kumar, the first and probably greatest star Indian cinema has ever had.

He stands in the foyer of his villa, dressed entirely in white, holding up a palette and a paintbrush. Surrounded by a dozen photographers and jostling cameramen, Kumar remains unperturbed. Saira Banu, his wife, stands next to him and Jatin Das, a well-known artist. The trio is producing a charity painting for Bombay's street children.

Dilip Kumar is 84. Born in Peshawar in what is now Pakistan, he comes from a Pashtun family of 12 children. His real name is Mohammed Yusuf Khan, but it sounded too Muslim for him to become a star. He has trouble remembering the old days. When asked about 1947, the year of independence and partition, the first thing he remembers is playing football with the British. Then he recalls images of horror and death and the massacres that followed independence, and his three cousins who were killed in the unrest. The old man's eyes fill with tears. Then he says: "It was very eventful."

Partition brought horrific massacres. Already in 1946, the year before partition, militant Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were fighting each other, and when the British announced the borders for the future countries of India and Pakistan, 10 million refugees left their homes, attempting to reach the right side. Many never made it. A Muslim mob butchered a train filled with refugees in the Punjab, Hindus destroyed hundreds of mosques and Sikhs murdered Muslims with axes. Millions died. India and Pakistan were born out of a bloodbath.

Dilip Kumar has spent much of his life campaigning for reconciliation between the two countries and has even been decorated for his efforts. But now, in his old age, it is all coming back to him. He says: "If it ever happened again, within half an hour I would have enough Muslims here who would be ready to fight."

Kumar sits in his armchair like some emperor in the waning days of his life, a glittering dome above his head. A painting on the opposite wall depicts him in his role as Bollywood's great romantic star, posing with his hand outstretched. The old man stares into space and says that he misses Peshawar and occasionally goes to the mosque.

### **KASHMIR: 'I Am Afraid of Everything'**

The wound of partition has never properly healed in India. Here, in Kashmir, it is still wide open.

Dal Lake sparkles in the sunlight against a backdrop of the green slopes of the Pir Pinjal Mountains. Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, is a magnificent place -- but is also one of the world's most dangerous.

Two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, are confronting each other up here, both laying claim to predominantly Muslim Kashmir. China also occupies part of the region. Kashmir is probably the world's most heavily militarized zone. There are 500,000 troops stationed on the Indian side, along with paramilitary forces, police and intelligence agents.

And all this is just because the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, flirting with independence, hesitated to choose a side in the year of partition. Pakistan sent guerilla troops, the Maharaja called for help from India, and a cease-fire line has separated the armies of the two countries ever since.

Despite frictions, Kashmir was long a dream destination for tourists, until a guerilla war of independence, supported by Pakistan, erupted in 1990. Today the region is a war zone, devastated and lacking an economy or infrastructure. But things have quieted down in recent years, as the militants have scaled back their attacks. Is there reason for hope in Kashmir?

The Mirwaiz of Kashmir, Omar Farooq, is the religious leader of Kashmir's Muslims and one of the province's best-known politicians. He lives in a dusty pink house in downtown Srinagar, where a dozen bearded men with guns sit in the entranceway. Farooq, who is only 34, wears a beard and designer glasses, and is currently doing a PhD on Sufism at the University of Srinagar.

What is he afraid of? Farooq's answer can be summed up in one word: Everything. On the one hand, there are the militant groups that murdered his father 17 years ago, so that he was only a teenager when he became his successor. On the other hand, there are the Indians, who also cannot be trusted.

Farooq is a young, intelligent man, but he has already internalized this conflict so much that it seems as if he has been dealing with it for the past 60 years. He is considered a moderate, one of those who want to negotiate with the Indian government. The Indian prime minister recently proposed that the line of control be turned into a "line of peace" between the two countries. There is a proposition for some kind of joint administration of Kashmir by India and Pakistan.

The Mirwaiz is in favor of these efforts, but he is frustrated because there is, in fact, little progress. He believes that it is high time that Delhi do something to back up its declared intentions. Indian newspapers write that Kashmir is faring better than ever, and that its economy is booming. The Mirwaiz smiles sadly. Kashmir is a place that makes people melancholy.

### DELHI: 'We Aren't the Only Ones Doing Well'



DPA

Former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, seen here with her daughter-in-law Sonia, is Shyama Bharti's idol.

Shyama Bharti, who was born on Aug. 15, 1947, is sometimes astonished over how much her country has changed. "When I was a little girl India was dominated by the rural population, and the farmers couldn't read and were superstitious," she says, "but now even their standard of living is rising. People are educated and they know their rights and duties."

In those days, says Bharti, her family's house was furnished with only one bed, three blankets, a few chairs and a transistor radio. "Nowadays we have air-conditioning everywhere and everything is fully furnished, and we aren't the only ones who are doing well." Every morning and every evening, Bharti goes to the small altar room behind her kitchen to give thanks to Ganesha, the elephant god.

On weekends Bharti visits her poor relatives, where she is treated like a guest of honor. She tells them that women should fight for their rights and their careers. Sometimes she gives them money. She is thinking about going into politics after she retires. She says that the country gave her a lot, and that it's now her turn to give something back.

She is immensely proud of her sons. The older one has also chosen a career in the civil service, and was accepted into the prestigious Indian Administrative Service, which accepts no more than 300 applicants each year. When his appointment was announced in the newspaper, Bharti and her husband were inundated -- to her delight -- with offers of brides for him. But what about love? "Indians aren't fond of love marriages," says Bharti, "They prefer arranged marriages. It's safer." Her marriage was also arranged.

India's traditions are not disappearing with its economic boom. Indeed, newspapers are reporting a new trend: Middle class families going into financial ruin to come up with dowries for their daughters.

Did the family of her son's bride pay her a dowry? "We did not take one," she says. "Only greedy people do that."

Bharti and her husband selected a pretty girl for their son. She is a senior civil servant, an intelligent woman.

Is she from the same caste? "Of course!" says Shyama Bharti.

*Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan*

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