



# FROM TRYST TO TENDULKAR



*The History of Independent India*

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# **From Tryst to Tendulkar: The History of Independent India**

**Balaji Viswanathan**









# Prelude

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**November 14, 2013**  
**Mumbai, India**

At about 4pm, India stopped working. A trillion dollar economy and a billion Indians were waiting. It was the last they would see of one of the greatest legends in Indian sporting history. It was the last of the trademark Cricketing cover drives and hooks you can get a glimpse of.

Sachin Tendulkar could not contain his tears as he walked past the test pitch for the last time. India could not contain its tears either.

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## India in Crisis Mode

Cricket is an English sport played in whites by whites, trying to kill their idle time while ruling the vast empire. However, this sleepy sport has become a quasi-religion in the subcontinent.

I was about six when Sachin Tendulkar first played for India. It was a different time back then. You had to pay a bribe for everything: scooter, telephone or even foreign exchange. The Indian economy was firmly shut from outsiders and India was fast imploding in every sense.

India was in a state of deep unrest at that time. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi squandered one of his most thumping electoral victories in 1984 to end up being in the opposition party when Sachin Tendulkar took guard for the first time on November 16, 1989 in Karachi, Pakistan.

The nation was deeply hurt by the adventures of the Indian Peacekeeping force in Sri Lanka and the popular scams of the time - buying Bofors guns from Sweden.

The landmark Shah Bano case which denied a Muslim woman of her rights in a messy divorce, and the government's tweaking of laws to placate the communal interests, kept India in a state of unrest. A strange coalition of orthodox Hindus and feminists were aghast at the government for its handling of the issue. To placate the orthodox Hindus, Rajiv opened up the gates of the controversial Babri Masjid.

While internally it was chaotic, there were massive changes in the world around India: the Berlin wall collapsed, students were shot in Tiananmen Square, and the USSR pulled out of Afghanistan in the same year of Sachin Tendulkar's debut. The fall of Communism and India's allies along with that, hurt the Indian economy.

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## The Start of a New Era

Sachin didn't seem perturbed by any of this. In his first series in International Cricket - played against India's arch rival Pakistan - Sachin Tendulkar showed signs of becoming a future icon of India. He stood bold against some of the best fast bowlers of all time. By 1991, he was a rising star for India fresh out of a great tour of India's former colonial masters - England.

While Sachin was growing from strength to strength, India was growing from weakness to weakness. The hodgepodge of right and left parties that took over the power from Rajiv in 1989 were no better handling either the economy or the polity. The protests following the recommendation for more affirmative action programs by the Mandal Commission, kept the nation on edge.

Another war in the Middle East (a major oil exporter and a major source of dollar remittances to India) started when Saddam Hussein's misadventure in Kuwait skyrocketed prices. In parallel, India's most important trading partner - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - was no longer a union, nor soviet, nor a socialist. It had crumbled into a network of 15 new nations.

By the summer of 1991 - India was practically bankrupt. The anti-Congress alliance failed and India was back to the polling booths. The new elections brought a slim majority to Congress. A sullen new Prime Minister and his turbaned Finance Minister were taking charge of India. One of the first jobs for the new Finance Minister was to take India's gold reserves to London and get some precious dollars to pay for the now unaffordable oil.

With nowhere to go, India finally opened up its economy, dramatically reducing taxes and partially dismantling the "License Raj" - an era of excessive government intrusion into the Indian economy. This freed up India's corporates and started a new era.

As Sachin Tendulkar started piling up runs and ratcheting centuries, India began one of its fastest growth phases.

## **India Entering the IT World**

While India was handing England its worst defeat on a cricket field in February 1993, a quiet Indian software company attempted to enter the hallowed floors of the Bombay Stock Exchange. It was selling its shares for Rs.98/share (in the next few years this would multiply 2000x). However, the IPO failed and Infosys had to enter the markets through a side route. Even though the IPO failed, things looked quite rosy for many fledgling Indian software companies. In the next decade, these small players would become global players making India a top destination for the global software and services trade.

The year of 1994 was especially great for Sachin as he proved his abilities in the shorter form of Cricket. Incidentally, 1994 was also the year of a huge bull run in Indian stock markets (although now we know that it was quite manipulated). My dad was investing in a bunch of IPOs (mostly bank/insurance IPOs) and it was quite exciting to see the gains.

In short, everyone at home was happy - some for Sachin and some for the stocks. We watched almost every one of his centuries. We cheered every one of his boundaries. We got angry every time he was unjustly given out. We were in tears every time his dismissal brought the end of India's chances of victory. In short, Cricket in India was just a synonym for Sachin's game. Some of the happiest times of my childhood were correlated with Sachin's form.

## **Siamese Twins**

At the time India exploded its landmark nuclear test in the summer of 1998, Sachin was at his peak fighting one of the greatest matches in Sharjah. In the spring of 1999, when India fought the last of its

major wars in the hills of Kargil in Kashmir, Sachin went through a chronic back pain phase - scaring his supporters all over India.

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India smiled when Sachin smiled. India winced when Sachin winced.

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**September 28, 2014**  
**New York City, NY USA**

The crowd of engineers, scientists, oncologists, professors, billionaires, graduate researchers, postdocs, artists, and executives could not contain the hope-laden tears as Prime Minister Narendra Modi finished his speech. There was an exuberance and joy that was uncharacteristic of this hardened crowd. Sitting in the historic Madison Square Garden, I could see the same passion with which people watched Sachin's batting. The same way Sachin led his one man Cricket army, Modi showed a glimpse of a one man political army with a lot of potential.

A truly explosive 70 minutes of speech left the crowd stunned. It infused a new sense of hope and passion among a populace that were growing disenchanted with politics. It reminded this new generation of the challenges that Nehru and his team faced on August 15, 1947. It was as though we were transported back in time to the midnight hours of August 14, 1947.

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## **What this book is about**

This book is not just about sports or politics; but about the story of independent India. It is not just the story of politicians, but also of the people who really made India. From Homi Bhabha to Abdul Kalam, from Padukone to Tendulkar, and from Nehru and Patel to Modi. This is a story of hundreds of people who really made India what we know today.

This is a book of not just events written in a laundry list, but about the insights into the events. From the integration of Hyderabad to the Shah Bano case - this is a train journey that will take you through Indian history and halting at all important events that shaped the nation.

Welcome to the story of independent India!

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# Tryst with Destiny

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*Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, then an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance...*

*At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries which are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of misfortunes and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future? The past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.*

*The appointed day has come - the day appointed by destiny - and India stands forth again, after long slumber and struggle, awake, vital, free and independent. The past clings on to us still in some measure and we have to do much before we redeem the pledges we have so often taken*

*Yet the turning point is past, and history begins anew for us, the history which we shall live and act and others will write about. It is a fateful moment for us in India, for all Asia and for the world. A new star rises, the star of freedom in the east, a new hope comes into being, a vision long cherished materialises. May the star never set and that hope never be betrayed! We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be.*

-- Jawaharlal Nehru addressing the Parliament on the first hour of freedom

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# Chapter 0: The Road to Freedom

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*India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grand mother of tradition. Our most valuable and most astricti materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only!*

-- Mark Twa

*If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.*

-- Romain Rollan

At the stroke of midnight on August 14, Britain finally left India. It was a momentous occasion for India that was long awaited. It was a time to live up to Romain Rolland's words above. Nehru gave his landmark speech in front of a packed audience at the Central Assembly, soon to become the Parliament of India.

It was also a confusing period as the nation was partitioned to create the new nation of Pakistan. There was blood all around the nation as people were forced to move between the two nations, depending on the religion they professed.

India didn't achieve freedom in one shot in the darkness of August 15, 1947. Rather, it was a long road of many small victories and big disappointments.

# Colonization of India

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In 1453 AD, Ottoman Turks captured the city of Constantinople and controlled a major trade route between Europe and Asia. To avoid paying taxes to the Muslims, a number of Europeans started exploring alternate routes to reach India. In this process of exploration, Columbus and others discovered large portions of the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa. Eventually, in 1498, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama discovered the route to India through the Cape of Good Hope.

In 1510, Portugal captured the major port of Goa in the western coast of India. It was a key trading point that was strongly contested by the Hindu kings of Vijayanagar and the Muslim kings of Bijapur Sultanate. The conquest of Goa enabled Portugal to monopolize Indian trade routes. 16 years later, Afghan king Babur captured Delhi and established the Mughal Empire. Under the Mughals, India reached both its economic heights as well as saw tensions between Hindus and Muslims towards the later stages of the empire.

In 1588, England defeated the formidable Spanish Armada and established itself as the biggest power over the seas. In 1612, the newly established English East India Company defeated Portugal in the Battle of Swally, near the city of Surat. In the same year, Sir Thomas Roe led a mission to Mughal Emperor Jahangir's court. In return for European rarities, Emperor Jahangir promised protection for English factories in the city of Surat. In 1661, England got the key western port of Bombay as dowry for the marriage of King Charles II of England and Princess Catherine of Portugal. The establishment of trading posts in the southern city of Madras (1639) and eastern city of Calcutta (1690) made England as a dominant player in India.

In March 1707, the sixth Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (grandson of Jahangir) died at the age of 89. During the long reign, he ruled with an iron-fist causing a lot of angst among the Hindu population. It is alleged that over 60,000 temples were destroyed during the Mughal rule. The 1679 imposition of Jizya tax on the Hindus and other non-Muslims caused further pain and anger.

Thus, as soon as Aurangzeb died, a number of Hindu kings tried to reestablish themselves. Throughout most of the 18th century, there was a power struggle among various Indian rulers who were all vying to be the successors of the Mughals. The East India Company saw the opportunity to become a major power, both to protect its trading assets from the new kings as well as the potential to expand trade.

In the mid-18th century, the company was presented with two major mistakes by Indian monarchs. In 1757, in the Battle of Plassey, the Bengal Nawab didn't cover his gunpowder during a brief afternoon shower. This tactical mistake made his guns wet & misfire - scaring his elephants - leading to the victory of the opponent. In 1761, the biggest claimants to the Mughal throne - the Marathas overextended themselves and were defeated in the third Battle of Panipat by the Afghan emperor, Tipu Sultan. Their defeat combined with the defeat of France in the European wars, eliminated the biggest challenge to the East India Company. By the end of the 18th century, the company consolidated much of India.

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# Struggle for Freedom in the pre-Gandhi period

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The takeover of the company provoked a lot of tensions, but the response from the locals were very uncoordinated. This helped the company put out the rebel movements in various parts of the country quite easily.

However, in 1857, almost a century after it won the Battle of Plassey, the company was posed its biggest existential challenge. A number of monarchs joined hands after a mutiny broke among the soldiers in the northern city of Meerut. While the rebellion was among the most coordinated attacks on the Empire, the Company eventually won over using the soldiers from various martial clans in India. However, the British Crown under Queen Victoria realized that the company might not be able to withstand further attacks and took direct control of India. The vindictive actions by the Crown following the rebellion silenced India for a few decades.

In 1885, a number of influential Indians came for a meeting in Bombay under the leadership of the Scottish civil servant Allan Octavian Hume. This created the Indian National Congress and consolidated various small regional political outfits created by English educated Indians. Within a few years, the movement grew more radical with some members asking for independence from England. However, a sizable chunk of the party was not ready for a full-fledged freedom movement.

In 1907, Indian Congress split into a Garam Dal (Hot faction) under Bal Ganghadar Tilak and a Narayana Dal (Moderate faction) under Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The partition of Bengal in 1905, to reduce the influence of Bengali Hindus in national affairs, formed the lightning rod for the hot faction.

The entry of UK in the First World War in 1914 however changed the dynamics of the equation. UK leaders promised India of self-rule after the end of the war, in return for greater cooperation from Indian leaders. Thus, leaders such as Tilak and the new entrant Mahatma Gandhi (who just returned from a reform movement in South Africa) helped in toning down the anti-colonial activities. The draconian Defence of India Act 1915 made it hard to free espouse anti-colonial sentiments. This brought a period of silence. Another big factor was the massive Influenza epidemic of 1918 that infected nearly 500 million people and killed as many as 100 million people all over the world - a sizable chunk of them in India.

During this period of lull, in 1916 various factions of the Congress and the newly formed Muslim League agreed to put down their differences and form a unified response to the British. They hoped that the end of war would bring out the promised reforms.

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# Government of India Act 1919

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One of the first changes came at the end of the First World War, when the Government of India Act 1919 provided a more direct role for Indians to participate in the government. Although the legislative councils created before that provided some role for India, the 1919 act truly expanded that.

It created a bicameral legislature - with a Central Assembly directly elected by the people and a Council of State elected by members of provincial assemblies and also nominated by the Governor General. This is a precursor to the present Indian parliament consisting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The Central Assembly would legislate laws that would then be approved by the Council of State and eventually get the approval of the Governor General, appointed by the British Parliament.

At the provincial level, there was a system of dyarchy - where the provinces got the power to legislate on items like agriculture, health, education, etc., while the Viceroy/Governor General still had all power over Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Communications.

A lot of control was still with the Governor General, who was a non-Indian. Indians got some representation and some powers to legislate. The voting rights were not universal, but restricted to those with property or educational qualifications. Only 2% of India could vote. The first elections were to be held in the winter of 1920.

# **Non-Cooperation Movement**

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However, Indians were promised much more autonomy and could not digest an overbearing Government General at the top. This disappointment led Congress to intensify its struggle. Mahatma Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement in 1920 and boycotted the elections.

The non-cooperation movement brought mixed successes as it ended in violence. Mahatma Gandhi and others were sent to jail for sedition. After his release, Gandhi spent most of the 1920s building the base of the Indian freedom movement in the society by emphasizing on boycotting British textiles, fighting the menace of alcoholism in rural India, and getting temple entry rights for India's lower castes - Dalits.

# Civil Disobedience Movement

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As India's social base got strengthened, Mahatma Gandhi pushed for the second major political movement. On December 31, 1929, on the banks of River Ravi in northwest India, Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the tricolor Indian flag. On January 26, 1930, he declared Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

To achieve this goal, Gandhi primarily looked to cut the British tax base in India. Mahatma knew well that power needs money. By cutting the money source, it was easy to cut the power. For years, he worked to cut the British imports of textiles into India - a major source of government's income. But he wanted to take it further.

On March 12, 1930 Mahatma started the salt satyagraha - openly flouting rules to make salt on the beaches of Dandi in western India. Salt is essential to human existence and the exorbitant tax proved to be a good folly for Mahatma to show how the British taxation was evil. A full-fledged civil disobedience movement continued the process of cutting off taxes to the British government.

Already reeling from the effects of the Great Depression, the British government was practically bankrupt in the early 1930s and forced to concede more autonomy to the Indians.

# Government of India Act 1935

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This is one of the longest bills ever to pass the British Parliament with 321 sections and 10 schedules. In some ways, it was a step ahead of the 1919 Act and in some ways it was a step backward. In any case, it had a huge impact on the Indian Constitution. Among many things, it created a Federal Court at the top that eventually became the Supreme Court of India. The Act also sought to build a federation among 11 provinces of British India and six big princely states. A national level railway authority was created. It also significantly changed the map of India - by separating Burma from India and also created new provinces: Sindh and Orissa.

Most importantly, the act provided for an expanded role for the provincial legislature. This time, the voting rights were extended to a significant portion of the population (about 14%) and millions of Indians excitedly voted. It was the first big election in modern India.

Elections were held in 1937 and Congress won all the provinces. However, the Muslim League had already showed that it was capable of winning 10% of the total seats and became the second biggest political force in India.

This act formed the reference when India wrote its constitution. However, the act still didn't please Congress enough. The freedom struggle continued.

# Cripps Mission, 1942

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In 1939, Britain declared India as a belligerent in the Second World War. India was once again forcibly drawn to a war that it had nothing to do with. All the Congress ministers resigned.

The resignation of Congress leaders in 1939 created the political space for the Muslim League that was completely routed in the 1937 elections. Britain sought for native support in India now that Congress was opposed to a war. Jinnah saw a great opportunity in this and in March 1940, at the Lahore resolution, he declared that the Muslim League would push for a separate nation of Pakistan torn from the western and eastern sides of India.

Congress was baffled by this move, but didn't take this too seriously as they believed they had control over all provinces of India.

In March 1942, Britain sent Sir Stafford Cripps to negotiate a deal with the Indian leaders. Although privately he was prepared to accept a dominion status for India with autonomy, publicly he didn't offer any such solution. Instead, he offered a solution that promised autonomy after the end of the war.



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