

Preface

What is “incredible India”?

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When you arrive at Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, India's capital, you will see a big colorful poster saying <Incredible India>. This is propaganda by the Tourism Department of the Government of India.

<Incredible> lexicographically of course, means <unbelievable>, but at the same time it implies “something strange or wonderful you could hardly believe” as its Hindi equivalent *adbhut* does so. Here, of course the Indian Government uses this word very positively, suggesting “India is such a wonderful land that you would enjoy unbelievably!” India is proud of its multi-culturism and multi-lingualism which might be negative in other countries. Indian people believe in “unity in diversity” and democracy. It is the biggest democratic country with 8 hundred million voters. India is one of the rare Asian countries which has never allowed military government. Government is altered every time by election. India is the second largest-populated country with 1 billion 250 million people next to China, but it is believed that within the next decade the population will surpass that of China. India's population pyramid shows that the proportion of persons whose age is below 35 is 65 %, which is a big population bonus. It is a very positive guarantee for economic development unless there is any serious unemployment problem, but at the same time the shape of the population pyramid of India shows an unusual distribution of sex. i.e., the female population is fewer than that of the male, which is not the case with developed countries.

India is also known as one of the BRICs, Brazil, Russia, India, China (later South Africa), which was named by the Goldman Sachs Group, an investment banking group of New York, as the most potentially developing countries in the near future. However, now the situation is not as optimistic as it had been in 2001. Except for India, the economic situation of the other four countries is not good.

They are suffering from a stagnant economy. India alone boasts that it has attained 6.8 % growth of GDP in 2016 (12th in the world) and that it is expected to attain 7 % growth rate in 2017. It is already the 7th biggest economic power next to France. It is said that by 2030 it will reach and surpass that of

Japan and become one of the 3 biggest economies along with China and the U.S.A. An economist says that once upon a time (between the 17th and 18th century) the total amount of GDP of the Qing Empire (China) and the Mughal Empire (India) occupied 40 % of the GDP of the whole world, just as the U.S.A. and Japan did so in the 1970-80s. It is true that “history repeats itself”.

However, when it comes to World Ranking of Happiness (2012-2014), to our surprise, India stands at the 117th, lower than its Asian rival, China (84th) and even lower than its neighbors of the same SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), Pakistan (81st) and Bangladesh (109th). Of course it is well-known that Ranking of Happiness is not necessary proportionate with the GDP Ranking. It puts stress on social equality. But even so it is an unbelievable status for India, considering its high economic growth and traditionally-firm democracy. Perhaps there are two kinds of “democracy”—formal or institutional democracy and actual democracy. India's democracy seems to belong to the former. The biggest problem lies in the unequal distribution of income between rural and urban people and between the rich and the poor as well as caste and religious conflict. The caste system once helped the society as its solidarity, but now its conflict weakens the social unity.

India and the EU have some similarity in terms of area. If the EU is a politically- united one nation, there are 28 “states” with 28 official languages. India has 29 states (plus 5 Union Territories) with 22 official languages. But even the total population of the EU, about 5 hundred million, is 1/2.5 of that of the whole of India. Germany, the biggest “state” is equal to only the 4th state in India in terms of population! Seemingly the chaotic linguistic situation of India, especially for a mono- lingual nation like Japanese, could be explained by giving examples of the virtual “united states of the EU”. It may be some clue to understand the situation to some extent. But still it is very difficult to imagine the complexity of Indian languages—there are hundreds of languages or dialects, depending on definition. In fact, it is almost impossible to give an acute definition of

how “language” and “dialect” scientifically differ. Very often political consideration and regional feeling of the speaker have a higher priority than academism.

The eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution was introduced for the purpose of co-existence between Hindi, the only official language of the Union (English is a *subsidiary language*) and other regional languages. However, once those regional languages or dialects are named in the constitution, they are considered to be prestigious hence they began to be called “official languages”. Some of them are very minor, used among limited tribes. There are few people to name all these 22 official names. Political power may increase more official languages. Hindi is the most popular and widely spoken language and the Indian government claims to make it the seventh official language of the United Nations. It may be possible after India becomes a permanent member of the security of council. But there are many problems in India itself rather than outside the country. It is a problem of “prestige”. The constitution says that Hindi is the only official language of the Union and English is the subsidiary language. But the fact is opposite, English is a master and Hindi is its subject. Many intellectuals and elites of various fields usually feel easier with English than Hindi. Many parents, educated or uneducated, rich or poor are crazy to send their children to elite public schools where classes are carried out in English. In this country, if you do not know English you would be treated as a “second class citizen”. English is a must when you want a good job. So political leaders also prefer to speak in English rather than Hindi or Indian languages. However, the present prime minister Narendra Modi, being a nationalist, likes Hindi and performs his public speeches in Hindi, though that is not his mother tongue. When he visited Japan for the first time as prime minister in 2014, I had requested him by a letter to use Hindi for his speeches everywhere in Japan. He did so. I had met him two years before in 2012 when he visited Kobe as a chief minister of the Gujarat State and had talked to him in Hindi only a few seconds, but even after two years from that time, to my surprise, he recognized me in the middle of the 300 person audience at his welcome party held in Tokyo. He expressed his thanks to me for loving Hindi. So he is an “incredible” person for his good memory.

Indian languages vary greatly in typology, —isolating, inflectional or agglutinate, and whatever linguistic family they may belong to. Many of them belong to Indo-Aryan, some to Dravidian and a few to Tibeto-Burman and even fewer to the Austric family. They are like “foreign languages” to each other. Then, what is the “linguistic unity in diversity”? It is something like asking “What is the unity in diversity in Indian culture or society?”, in other words “What makes India in common?” or simply “What is the identity of Indian people?” Though it is a very interesting question, it is very difficult to answer in exact words. Some people say it is Hinduism. Certainly not! Though 80 % of people are Hindus and Hinduism is the most popular and influential religion in India, still 20 % of them are not Hindus, but they are still Indians. Some people answer that

it is the caste system. It may be a closer answer, as most Indian people belong to some kind of caste (= community) including Muslims, but in the tribal society there is no caste system at all. In my opinion “curry” or “masala” would be a more correct identity. The second and third generations of Indian-Americans are already culturally and mentally Americans. Certainly Indian languages are not their identity, for them English is their mother tongue. But interestingly, when their community gathers together, they usually eat Indian food rather than American food. In fact, “identity of India” or “Indianness” cannot be defined clearly in words. It is either body language or something to be felt or smelled. Then, is there any linguistic Indianness or common characters of Indian languages? The answer is “yes” according to most linguists. This is a highly academic matter in which common people are not interested at all. Let me give some examples: Most of the Indian languages show the <SOV> construction as opposed to the European or Chinese <SVO> type. Other Indian norms are the existence of causative verbs, conjunctive participles and explicator compound verbs and the frequent use of dative construction and so on.

Diversity is a natural phenomenon in India, and it is an interesting theme to pursue its unity. India is a reservoir of tourism. It charms most tourists from all over the world because of its diversity. Wherever or whenever you visit India, you would see or feel something new or different. Yes, India is such an incredibly fascinating tourist centre of the world!

About the author

Tomio Mizokami, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Osaka University of Foreign Studies”. At present, President of Kansai Japan-India Cultural Society, Kobe. Awards and honors: *World Hindi Prize* The sixth World Hindi Convention held at London, 1999, *George Grierson Prize* from the President, Dr. Abdul Kalam at Rashtrapati Bhavan, 2002, *Friends of Liberation War Honour*, from the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Ms. Sheikh Hasina, 2013.