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## Global Trends

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### India as a Civilizational State

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Received September 5, 2022; revised November 15, 2022; accepted November 21, 2022

**Abstract**—This article is focused on the “civilizational state” phenomenon, using India as a case study. The basic characteristics of the “civilizational state” are outlined, and the reasons behind the interest in societies such as India, China, Iran, etc., are given. Nowadays, the political self-assertion of “civilizational states” is a natural reaction to the “conceptual” crisis of globalism and to emerging trends towards the formation of a new, polycentric world order. The arising of India as a viable “civilizational state” is scrutinized. In this pivotal process, the role of the precolonial, colonial, and independence periods in the formation of modern Indian polity is assessed. The grounds for sustainability of the socio-economic and cultural dualism of Indian society are estimated. In conclusion, the operating of the “Indian political model” combining elements of representative governance and “competitive authoritarianism” is evaluated. The “axial” role of the state, both in domestic development and in the transition to a polycentric world order, is noted.

**Keywords:** India, state, civilization, political model

**DOI:** 10.1134/S1019331622150102

#### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the topic of the “civilizational state” has been increasingly discussed in the global academic space. This issue has not bypassed the Russian social sciences. “For three decades of Russia’s crisis existence at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, the country had attempted to change the economic, political, and social paradigm radically, as well as to join the neoliberal standard,” according to the philosopher V.I. Spiridonova. “As a result, a situation has emerged that has repeatedly taken place in its history—it became necessary to concentrate all efforts on restoring and strengthening its civilizational subjectivity.... Both in previous periods and today, two main factors, external pressure from strong world powers and internal economic disorder, set before the country the task of civilizational conservation with an emphasis on preserving the core of the original system of values” (Spiridonova, 2022, p. 117). It can be said that a keen interest in the problems of the “civilizational state” at a new level of knowledge and political practice in its own way reproduces the academic discussions of the second half of the 1980s. At that point the focus was on ancient civilizations and states such as Iran, India, and China.

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#### THE “CIVILIZATIONAL STATE” AS AN OBJECT OF SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS

The “civilizational state” category has been circulating in the world scientific space since about the late 1980s or early 1990s, when social scientists, perhaps for the first time, began to analyze seriously the motives for the domestic and foreign policy behavior of the ancient societies listed above. It is possible that the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978–1979 prompted their creative search. Initially, the definition of “nation-state” was applied to non-Western societies, which implicitly assumes that the state outside the “North Atlantic civilization” is primary, while society in this region, unlike the West, is secondary.

The next stage in the cognition and description of the “civilizational state” was the papers of the prominent American social scientist S. Huntington, who predicted, among other things, the possible split of mankind along civilizational and cultural lines of demarcation (Huntington, 1996). The papers of this researcher, in turn, took into account the layers of academic efforts already accumulated by world scientific thought, including the papers of O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, L.N. Gumilyov, and other authors.

What is a “civilizational state”? Civilization is commonly understood as a stable and holistic cultural and historical formation, which is distinguished by the commonality of spiritual values, age-old traditions and behavioral motivations, the unification of socio-political and material and production development,

lifestyle features and a certain type of personality, similar ethnic characteristics, and clearly defined geographical habitation boundaries. One of the central characteristics of civilization is long-term cohabitation in a certain territorial space. Accordingly, it can be argued that several guiding principles lie at the basis of the “civilizational state” phenomenon. The following principles should be noted as system-forming:

- unity of historical and territorial space, which forms a kind of geographical framework of a given civilization;

- commonality of historical memory or, more precisely, socio-historical experience (as the Soviet Estonian philosopher E.N. Loone (1980) described this phenomenon) of a given area, which unites and binds into a community representatives of various nationalities that form a superethnos;

- a highly developed literary language, which acts as a cultural and linguistic communicative basis of such a superethnos, its supporting civilizational structure. Such a language is accepted as a means of inter-ethnic communication (*lingua franca*) by the vast majority of the population; it is able to reflect and express adequately the phenomena and the processes of the industrial stage of development of society and the new type of activity that the scientific and technological revolution creates.

“Civilizational states” are included in the developing processes of the modern world, which are reflected in the following phenomena that are important for the future *ecumene*:

- (1) The ongoing ideological, cultural, and political economic decline of the forces of globalism and the groups of world elites associated with this paradigm. Huntington called this socio-political layer “transnationals” (Huntington 2004).

- (2) The possible appearance of new “civilizational states” on the world political map.

- (3) An active attack on globalism and related ideological and political trends by national populism, the growth of which in the West has most likely become irrevocable.

The West popularizes the concept of “universal civilization,” which subordinates the rest of the *ecumene* to the laws of its development. Huntington called universalism the ideology of confronting other countries and controlling their domestic and foreign policies. At present, attempts by the collective West to preserve the liberal world order (which itself has become a product of “North Atlantic” cultural norms and attitudes) are running into resistance from Russia and China, which are recreating themselves as “civilizational states.” This is how the ideas of Huntington have gained a second wind, however, with a significant caveat: this is not a clash of civilizations, as the British political scientist K. Coker notes, but a clash of “civilizational states” (Coker, 2019). However, in his time, Huntington drew attention to the mobility of the bor-

der between the categories of nation and civilization. They are both, the scientist emphasized, “imaginary/ideal-typical communities.” A nation is an active community, while a civilization is a repository of values, worldviews, and behaviors that life itself sets in motion (Huntington, 1996). The significance of S. Huntington’s scientific work lies primarily in the fact that he posed the problem in time, which became relevant after the crisis of the world order as a result of the breaking of a kind of “tightening hoop” of world politics, the Soviet–American bipolarity. Thus, in his papers, the issues of “civilizational wars,” “gray zones” (spaces that are not included in the main civilizations), “cores” of civilizations (economic and cultural), and their “periphery” were discussed.

Strictly speaking, this researcher did not put forward the problem of “gray zones,” “cores,” or the “periphery” of civilizations as an independent paradigm. Nevertheless, it followed logically from Huntington’s thesis about the possible clash of civilizations. It is possible that the current conflict between the “unipolar” world order that has existed for three decades and the polycentric global order that is coming to replace it involuntarily overshadows civilizational issues. However, even under the new international system, the contradictions between civilizations will not disappear, just as the attempts of elites to use such frictions in their own selfish interests will not stop. At the same time, Huntington’s idea about the conflict of cultures and civilizations repeats and enriches the well-known thesis of V.I. Lenin that “the broad masses of the people” are awakening to active political activity with the entire burden of their previous ideas, prejudices, and pre-judgements (the scientist was familiar with the activities of V.I. Lenin to create a modern state in Russia (Huntington, 1968)).

The face of the world is changing very quickly. Russia, China, India, and other countries are already beginning to consider the “North Atlantic civilization” as one of the many civilizations of the modern world. In fact, the denial of the universality of Western civilization is nothing more than a modern reproduction of the logic of the papers of O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, L.N. Gumilyov, and other classics of the “civilizational” genre. It can be formulated as follows: if the West implements its vision of the world with the help of institutions of state power (including military force), why should China, India, Russia, and other “civilizational states” refrain from a similar line while protecting their national interests? Why can “civilizational states” not build their societies according to their own moral principles, if they have millions of people behind their backs?

Today, the “civilizational canvas” of the *ecumene* looks like this: in a world of dense, comprehensive interdependence, the main civilizations have a universalist character, primarily for their own citizens. Civilizational states are fighting to raise their status in the

global geopolitical hierarchy. At the same time, they all belong to the global economic and political system and are part of its common internal landscape. This commonality is also manifested in the fact that almost all states face serious socio-economic and demographic challenges. It is not surprising that, due to the logic of internal needs, modern civilizations are forced to focus on the “development agenda,” i.e., on solving the problems of economic growth, productive employment of the population, and reducing social and property disproportions that are detrimental to society.

The main carrier and driving force behind the development of modern civilization is the human community, which (apparently, not without the influence of L.N. Gumilyov) in the modern world is called a superethnos (Russian superethnos, American superethnos, Indian superethnos, Chinese superethnos, Brazilian superethnos, etc.). The Soviet orientalist–theorist L.I. Reisner considered civilization to be an even more voluminous and fundamental historical and philosophical category than a socio-economic formation (Reisner, 1993). This researcher’s thought becomes especially relevant and productive today, when the tendency of the formation of “civilizational states” overcomes the obstacles created by political elites and artificial borders drawn in previous periods of world history.

Superethnoi exist and evolve in a global political environment filled with all sorts of contradictions. Each of them has problems of growth and development. For the Russian superethnos, it consists in determining the spatial limits of the domestic “neo-Byzantine” civilization and the accelerated development of the Russian integration project, which encountered significant obstacles in both the imperial and Soviet periods of the country’s development. The essence of the problem was that Russia (the “nonclassical” empire) financed the “outskirts” (union republics) at the expense of subventions (i.e., targeted investments).

The American superethnos is not able to define clearly the qualitative characteristics of the productive forces of US society with the conscious regulation of migration flows and the qualitative improvement of education (primarily in primary and secondary schools). The political task of restoring classical education is not only for the United States, but also for other “civilizational states.”

The strategic task of the Indian superethnos remains the formation of the most favorable internal conditions for its evolution, the main political and economic prerequisite for which is the progressive reduction of interregional disproportions and social and property disparities in the development of society. The government of N. Modi seeks to achieve its goals by increasing the rate of economic growth in depressed states. The “trilingual” formula of communication in

the country (Hindi, English, and the national language of the state) seems to be the best possible form for the favorable development of the Indian superethnos.

In the consistent evolution of the *Chinese* superethnos, a special role is given to the factor of the political and economic origin: the energetic leveling of the quality of the socio-economic development of the eastern and southern provinces that have gone ahead, on the one hand, and the rest of the Celestial Empire, on the other.

Finally, the Brazilian superethnos, which has long been talked about in the largest country in Latin America, will receive a new impetus for internal development as a result of the full integration of the Amazon and other northern territories into the common space of economic growth and development of Brazil. It should be noted that Brazil embarked on the path of integration into world politics with a noticeable delay, in the second half of the 1990s. A special role in the “global choice” of the country belongs to the former President of Brazil, the outstanding economist and sociologist F.E. Cardoso.

Huntington, developing the thoughts of his predecessors and enriching them with his observations, emphasized the growing importance of “civilizational consciousness,” that is, the features of mentality structures in various civilizations, the impact of which on the nature of world politics is increasing. The crisis of “truncated” (limited to a narrow circle of countries) globalization (Nayar 2005) has aggravated relations between states on a political economy basis. Objectively, contradictions were growing between the institutional framework of globalization (in which the collective West played the leading role after the end of the Cold War) and the really changing political and economic configuration of the global space in favor of non-Western societies (Travkina and Vasiliev, 2022). In other words, a “post-American world” was emerging (Zakaria, 2008). The author of this concept, the political analyst F. Zakaria, in his own way developed Huntington’s ideas that the West should abandon the “universalism” of the North Atlantic civilization, as well as stop imposing Western ideas and values on the rest of the world. The idea that the United States needs to take into account the interests of other countries in its foreign policy was clearly expressed in the papers of such prominent social scientists as W. Rostow, P. Kennedy, and others. Thus, not only S. Huntington, but also many influential intellectuals of the West spoke for the dialogue of civilizations and a new model of international relations.

It is clear that the main subjects of international relations in the world of the near future will be “civilizational states” and the superethnoi inhabiting them. What are the prospects for the formation of these subjects of world politics by countries and continents?

In the “cradle” of modern industrial civilization, Western Europe, there is currently no Western European superethnos that dominates numerically, intellectually, or culturally. Thus, the United Kingdom will have to work hard to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the island state, given that the Irish and Scottish ethnoi are developing vigorously, eager for political self-expression. An attempt by some of the London elites to divert attention from “domestic” problems by vigorous activity outside the archipelago state only leads to new difficulties that are layered on unresolved former contradictions. In the “locomotive” countries of the development of the European Union, Germany and France, the social structure of society has long been fragmented (which is regularly recorded by the statistics of national elections), so the formation of modern superethnoi on their territory remains a matter of relatively long-term historical perspective. Even more difficult is the internal situation in Italy, where the necessary conditions for a real political and economic integration of the North and the South (which the Italians themselves sometimes call “Mediterranean civilization”) have not yet been formed.

It is obvious that, despite the integration efforts of the European Union, in Western Europe, a leading national–civilizational “trunk” that would organize a center of cultural and political life has not yet formed. The idea of European unity is too abstract to captivate the peoples of this “semi-continent” with its charm. The internal energy of Germany and France is definitely not enough to bring “gray zones” or liminal spaces onto the trajectory of self-sustaining growth, primarily the territories of the former socialist countries. At present, the leaders of European integration have exhausted their potential to support these states. The energy crisis, which is gradually reaching pan-European proportions, is also aggravating the problems of development.

The formation of “civilizational states” in the “global South” also has its own characteristics. In Africa, an Egyptian superethnos is actively being formed, which has absorbed the heritage of ancient Egyptian civilization and Islamic culture and has adapted and transformed French and English influences). The Moroccan superethnos, as well as the superethnoi of other countries of the Maghreb, is acquiring the necessary conditions and characteristics. The Nigerian and other superethnoi of Tropical Africa are continuing to develop. In the Republic of South Africa, a member of the BRICS platform, processes of both the civilizational consolidation and the formation of a new world political identity are taking place. A similar civilizational development is observed in Latin America. It should be noted that, for the formation of the Argentine superethnos, the factor of territorial reunification, i.e., the return of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands to their “native harbor,” is fundamental.

“Civilizational states” live a tense inner life. We can offer a new name for the polycentric world, the “inter-civilizational model of international relations.” This form of interstate communication presupposes a constant and meaningful dialogue between the civilizations themselves participating in the world historical process. In other words, the sustainable development of the future world depends directly on the internal viability/vitality of the world civilizations themselves. Among them, undoubtedly, is India, an ancient civilization and the second most populous country in the world, which, according to demographers, may become the most populous in 2026. The long history of economic growth, rivalry with China, a “great northern neighbor,” promotion of “the world’s largest democracy” to the position of one of the leading global powers—these and other circumstances require increased attention to the internal social processes in India, to its dynamics of development of the “civilizational state.”

#### INDIAN CIVILIZATION AND INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY: MECHANISMS OF INTERACTION

Modern India is often referred to as “the largest democracy in the world.” Political democracy in it functions under conditions of an infinite variety of ecological, physical-geographical, economic, ethno-national, socio-cultural, and other conditions that set the parameters of socio-political development. In the “largest democracy in the world,” the problems of accelerating economic, social, and cultural development are of particular difficulty, as is the development of optimal methods for the political management of social processes. The political process in India is still significantly influenced by factors of pre-industrial origin such as the dualistic social structure of society: a complex symbiosis of modern class/socio-professional communities, on the one hand, and traditional institutional associations (asta, rural community, extended family, etc.), on the other. The content of Indian politics continues to be influenced by the presence of confessions (and ethnoi), the number of which is equal to or exceeds the population of large European countries.

How do Indian authors understand the category of “civilizational state”? With regard to foreign policy, the diplomat K. Sibal described India as *sui generis*, or as an independent entity, unique in its kind. The concept and practice of “strategic autonomy” became the foreign policy projection of an “independent essence,” which acquired its main features during the reign of I. Gandhi (1966–1977, 1980–1984). In the period mentioned, India, due to its strategic alliance with the Soviet Union, achieved the status of an “almost” world power. The geopolitical subject of “strategic autonomy” is the actively emerging Indian superethnos.

A specific, non-Western civil society, which began to develop during the colonial period, became the civilizational—cultural and socio-political personification of modern India. According to the Canadian historian E.T. Embry, the starting point of the trajectory of its development dates back to the early 1880s, when “the interaction of the political, economic, and intellectual efforts of the British authorities, on the one hand, and the traditional Indian society, on the other, formed a new society endowed with some structural characteristics of contemporary Western states and organizationally becoming qualitatively different from pre-colonial India” (Embree, 1980, p. 22). The Russian Indologist A.A. Prazauskas spoke even more definitely on this score: Indian society as a category of sociology, he believes, “began to take shape only after the colonial conquest, and this process was accompanied by both the convergence of various social (including ethno-social) segments and the aggravation of contradictions between them” (Prazauskas, 1990, p. 47).

To understand social processes in modern India, it is necessary to find out how the categories of civilization and civil society relate to each other and interact in the daily political process. By civil society in this article we mean (in accordance with the ideas of A. Gramsci)

[A] social space where the economic and social interests of various communities are formulated and articulated, where massive phenomena such as ideology and politics acquire clear outlines.... [W]e can define civil society as the social infrastructure of politics, i.e., as a set of interests, the dynamics of interaction of which ensures the reproduction and functioning of political relations (Volodin, 2008, p. 33).

It is clear that the civil society in independent India was formed not only under the influence of British (practical, based on indirect control) colonialism. However, during this period, they received an incentive and determined the main trends and intentions of the development of Indian civilization, which turned out to be receptive (more pronounced than the Iranian and Chinese civilizations) to worldview attitudes, which in Western Europe became a kind of breeding ground for the industrial mode of production and the establishment of a rationally thinking and acting personality.

Thus, the presence of a relatively developed philosophical tradition and the skills of abstract-theoretical thinking made it easier for the intellectual elite of the colonial society to access and perceive the ideas developed by Antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment: political freedoms, the rule of law, and civil society. Finally, the spiritual and intellectual environment of Indian civilization did not prevent the emergence of outstanding individuals on the forefront of public life—thinkers, statesmen, and social reformers. This trend had acquired accentuated and massive

forms already in modern times. It is enough to mention the names of R.M. Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, M.K. Gandhi, and J. Nehru.

On the other hand, the religious systems of India of the classical (pre-colonial) period did not contain elements that would activate the *activity* principles of the human personality: they did not orient the Indians to the transformation of the environment or to the expansion of their spiritual and intellectual horizons. In the pre-colonial period, a universal system of values did not develop in Hindustan, capable of linking society and the state with indissoluble bonds into a kind of dialectically unified whole. The lack of such integrity hindered the overcoming of deep socio-cultural differences between regions and groups of society, and prevented the formation of a uniform national—ethnic and state—political community. Religious centers (“sacred cities”), like Puri, Khajuraho, Tanjur, Konarak, and Udaipur, were the cores of regional socio-cultural integration. Nevertheless, these traditional centers, by virtue of their functions, could not (unlike Western European cities) become “poles” of economic growth and territories that would coordinate, stimulate, and direct the economic, industrial, and commercial integration of the entire vast Hindustan space. It is more logical to associate the emergence of industrial-type cities with the colonial period.

The formation of a state system of the universalist type was also actively impeded by the class—caste structure of pre-colonial Indian society. It held back the development of legal relations (the transformation of the individual into a subject of law) and the constitution of social groups (outside the traditional hierarchy) with common economic interests (civil society is primarily a diversified and highly developed system-network of horizontal connections). At the same time, Indian civilization from time immemorial has been distinguished by pluralism, tolerance, and an intuitive understanding of the inferiority of ideological extremes. The displacement of Buddhism by Hinduism and the transformation of the latter into the dominant religious and ethical system significantly expanded the public audience of this ideological teaching. Hinduism deliberately emphasized the principles of tolerance and the absence of ideological dictates. However, according to the fair remark of the historian G.M. Bongard-Levin, “this tolerance was strictly limited to the purely religious sphere: Hinduism from the very beginning was the guardian of class—caste immunity, actively fought against any violations of the varna hierarchy, and perpetuated social inequality” (Bongard-Levin, 1980, p. 307). There was a contradiction between tolerance towards representatives of other religions, on the one hand, and unconditional support for the caste hierarchy, on the other. Subsequently, it took root in Indian politics, where freedom of discussion coexisted with the “untouchability” of the traditional, essentially pre-industrial social hierarchy.

Some new elements in the development of Indian civilization and social relations were introduced by the colonial period (1757–1947). The gradual inclusion of India, which was part of the British Empire, into the world market system required the colonial authorities to rationalize the “development” of the vast subcontinental space and assumed the creation of conditions for India to perceive adequately the most effective forms of economic and financial activity for that time. The special place of India in imperial politics was determined by the fact that, among the countries of the Empire, it was in first place in terms of trade with England. Since 1880, the settlements of the metropolis with European states depended on the state of Anglo-Indian trade.

It is clear that this kind of modernization “from above” was not a qualitative change in the fundamental foundations of Indian civilization. However, a bourgeois state appeared, equipped with the institutions and functions necessary to participate in the division of labor in the world market. By acting in this way, the colonial state created an environment that could potentially assimilate the principles and behaviors of a new, industrial-capitalist way of life. With colonialism in India, the Western prototype of bureaucracy appears as a historical type of organization of power. Its introduction on the subcontinent was the result of the development of the British metropolis, which formed within Indian society categories-institutions of a mature capitalist society such as the state and politics, and indeed the bureaucracy itself. In other words, a kind of inversion took place: modern institutions developed ahead of the economically, politically, and culturally insufficiently mature Indian society-civilization.

The transformation of India into a civilizational state presupposed the formation of a social community that is capable of recognizing itself as a kind of cultural and political integrity with a certain set of interests that are different from the interests of the British metropolis. However, as the intellectual leaders believed, Indian society could acquire new qualitative characteristics only when the main part of the people felt themselves to be a historical subject, i.e., would be able to define themselves in the categories of national interests. It is significant that the creators and executors of imperial policy regarded the Indians not so much as a people or nation, but as the expression of a certain geographical space inhabited by myriads of races, tribes, and castes.

During the colonial period, Indian civilization received additional impulses for development, as the needs of imperial policy stimulated the targeted spread of a unified European education system with a focus on professional training, rationalism, optimization of decisions, and a keen sense of the inherent value of time. It can be argued that the Western education system in a country with a long intellectual tradition has

become one of the catalysts for both economic growth and the development of civil relations.

In parallel, the civilizational state in India acquired its own socio-political space. The emergence of public organizations (1870s–1880s) and the Indian National Congress (INC) party (1885) laid the foundation for the development of modern politics in the form of parties and an all-Indian elite, and also accelerated the development of political culture and political consciousness. However, political integration was dialectically conjugated with the formation of other forms of group solidarity: ethnic, class, confessional, local.

The colonial state also actively influenced social processes. The Dutch sociologist J. Breman emphasizes: “... the colonial state actively interfered in the sphere of economic relations.” The imperial authorities sought to preserve the continuity of the mechanisms of exploitation. Therefore, the colonial economic policy in India was aimed at maintaining traditional (pre-industrial) social ties with the sole purpose of “subordinating the population to the requirements of a new (capitalist) mode of production” (*Rural Transformation in Asia*, 1991, 127).

Imperial policy had contradictory consequences for the development of Indian civilization. During the colonial period, a dualistic socio-economic structure of Indian society developed. The main content characteristic of the society was the disintegration of the social structure. One part of it was the “poles of growth” (enclaves of industrial-capitalist development), which drew internal dynamism from the world system, while the other part, devoid of such direct connections—impulses, acted as a passive resonator in relation to the new industrial centers and a supplier of labor force for them.

In fact, by the introduction of the Law on the Government of India in the second half of the 1930s, a modern rule-of-law state with all the proper attributes appeared on its territory. Of course, to interpret the colonial state as a modern legal institution would be to jump ahead, because, there was no key functional feature to acquire such a quality, the concept of separation of powers. However, this contradiction was overcome after the conquest of sovereignty in 1947. The rule-of-law state created in the colonial period constituted the institutional space of India, indirectly becoming the generator of the modern political process, on the one hand, and assuming the functions of transformative engineering, gradually “pulling up” the social structure to the level of the modern state, on the other. It should be borne in mind that each stage of this process was at the same time approaching the civil state of society and overcoming the deformations that India has left from previous historical eras.

The dualistic structure of society and economy, of course, hindered the development of Indian civilization, supported its closed cycle. This is how the Soviet Indologist V.I. Pavlov described some of the trajec-

ries of the evolution of Asian societies that were common until the 19th century: “The transition from a contemplative to a regular concept of time is an indispensable condition for the organization of capitalist production and circulation, and in a broader sense, the formation of a changing individual in a changing society. The consciousness of man and society remained a closed system of micro- and macrocycles, which formed the individual and social experience, fixed by religion. It had the opposite, retrograde effect on the course of the historical process, often giving it a cyclical isolation. It was impossible to break it without a radical transformation (Reformation) of the traditional religious worldview and the accompanying social norms and hierarchical principles” (Zhukov, Barg, Chernyak, and Pavlov, 1979, p. 263).

Transformations in public life assumed that there is a “hegemonic” force in Indian society that is able to overcome the “stationary” dynamics of its development and bring society onto a trajectory of self-sustaining growth. Finding such a force within the social structure of Indian society was initially difficult due to insufficient self-organization of the mass sections of the population, primarily the Indian peasantry. The role of the accelerator of social development fell on the nation state. The colonial power effectively included India in the world market system, which contributed to the development of the country in the conditions of coexistence with highly developed economic systems of the West and East (Sen, 1982). This feature of the Indian state is of particular importance today, when the international system is moving from a state of “unipole” to a polycentric organization of the global space.

#### REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY OR “PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITARIANISM”? PATHS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT INDIA

A more voluminous and complex topic is logically connected with the problem of the nation-state, which in the system of sciences of transitional societies was called a “development strategy.” It represents the integrity of economic, political, ideological, and socio-cultural factors that simultaneously affect the social environment of developing countries. The goal is to accelerate social transformation and create prerequisites for the adaptation of underdeveloped societies to inclusion in the system of multilateral relations with industrialized countries.

The complex nature of the development strategy presupposes, among other things, the dialectical relationship between the economic and political principles of this process-phenomenon. This kind of connection has constantly accompanied the development of India during the period of independence. Thus, the American economist L. Veit believed that the very

development strategy of India initially contained a contradiction between the economic and political principles of activity, which constantly stimulated crises in the socio-political development of the country during the period of sovereignty. According to L. Veit, India’s economic development strategy was invariably built on directive, mobilization principles (forced industrialization, planning directed from Delhi, etc.), while the principles of compromise coordination of conflicting interests were at the heart of the representative system of government. He describes the constantly emerging contradictions between economic imperatives and political expediency as follows: “The application of legal, reconciliation principles in economic policy often impeded rapid change and, thus, simultaneously combined social stability and economic stagnation.” According to this American author, due to the deepening contradictions between the economic and political aspects of development in the mid-1970s, India’s ruling circles were faced with the problem of the inevitability of a choice between consensual-compromise methods of political governance and directive principles of leadership (i.e., the inevitability of establishing an authoritarian-type regime), which were more in line with the paradigm of accelerated modernization of the national economy (Veit, 1976, p. 20).

A stereoscopic view of India’s development strategy during the period of independence shows that its authorities acted simultaneously in several interconnected directions. Firstly, there was integration of the heterogeneous social and national-ethnic structure of Indian society. The Indian National Congress and the opposition parties for a long time differed in their assessments of the effectiveness of this activity. Secondly, an important stimulator of social transformations was economic growth, which, among other things, was supposed to raise the standard of living of the mass social groups and absorb emerging social class conflicts. Thirdly, India’s development strategy was based on the idea of social justice: the progressive reduction of property disproportions and disparities in a society that suffers from the consequences of the status (caste-class) hierarchy and the concentration of power in the hands of a limited circle of people (“selfish interests”). Fourthly, the development of political democracy was of particular importance, which, through the dissemination of its principles and practices, was supposed to mobilize the lower castes to defend their interests in relations with traditional dominant groups and instill rational stereotypes of behavior in the people, as well as develop secular elements in the political culture of the population (Kothari, 1976). It should be recognized that the strategy of conscious involvement of the masses in politics (as the broadest social phenomenon) expanded the social base of power and increased the plasticity of the Indian political system.

However, the political system of the “civilizational state” did not manage to avoid the contradictions characteristic of representative democracy. These contradictions, determined in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were strengthening of the apparatus of executive power at the expense of representative institutions (discussions in which were often not related to specific problems of the country’s development), as well as new, authoritarian accents in the activities of the leaders of political parties. The very logic of the development of the latter led to a reassessment of the values of the ruling groups. The choice between programs and their executors (candidates) has been replaced by another alternative, a stable or unstable government. At the turn of the 1970s–1980s, in India, there were numerous publications criticizing the chosen course. They noted that the social basis of the political system is narrowing in the country, alienation between the people and the centers of power is increasing, that the latter is not able to control the course of the country’s general strategy, or effectively regulate the activities of other subsystems of society: public administration, science, and education (“development of human resources”).

The institutionalization of the system of political representation could not “reactively” raise the level of political consciousness and political culture of the population in a super-large country. The insufficient intellectual development of the people and the inability of many Indians to correlate their actions and interests is one of the important reasons for the weakness of democratic control over parties, government, and the state, and the main factor in corruption in the ruling circles and the state apparatus. The parliamentary system in India, as Indian author Masani wrote in the mid-1970s, “has always served as a protected area for a small minority, who had qualification and property advantages that allowed the elite to manipulate this system in their interests. In ... an agrarian society, where traditional caste and economic ties still dominate political behavior, universal suffrage never guaranteed real political participation.... Similarly, the INC party during the years of independence never transformed into anything more than a conglomeration of elite groups for the distribution of lucrative government positions” (Masani, 1976, p. 307).

It has long rightly been noted that the real threat to the political system of India came from the unemployed, young people, fringes from the urban petty-bourgeois environment, and lumpen in the large and super-large cities of India. This segment of the population continues to grow at a high rate, which requires prompt and professionally verified actions by the federal center and state authorities. According to local experts, there is only one way to balance the political system of India in the long term: to accelerate the structural transformations necessary for the mass sections of the population, albeit at the expense of limiting the interests of wealthy circles.

The political strategy of the Indian National Congress (INC) was initially focused on the formation of a large middle class in the country, alien to the extremes of both the right and the left. At present, according to various estimates, it has about 300 million people. According to Western estimates, it does not exceed 125 million people (Kochhar, 2021). India differs from industrialized countries in that, in addition to the middle class, in the country there exists (and is eager to satisfy its economic interests) a broad “coalition” of forces with the participation of the intelligentsia, students, various sections of the working class, the rural poor, etc. In the last decade, its social composition has definitely expanded due to the ruined part of the farming stratum and graduates of higher educational institutions looking for work. Replenishment of the middle class with representatives of the “outcasts” has become an important area of activity for the government of Prime Minister N. Modi. In this case, the market nature of the transformations not only does not cancel, but, on the contrary, involves the active use of the state factor to increase the viability of the “Indian model of development.”

Disproportions and disparities in the country’s regional development remain a significant challenge to India and its status as a world power. Thus, the “civilizational state” still exists, as it were, in three dimensions. The first dimension is chronically depressed states, including the most populated ones: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. The second includes states the inhabitants of which have an average income level: Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, and Karnataka. Finally, the states of Punjab, Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu are considered the most prosperous territories. It is indicative that the gaps in economic growth rates between these three groups of states do not yet tend to decrease, and more prosperous states are predictably more effective in fighting poverty (Smith, 2007, pp. 166–167). Social impatience in Indian society is also growing because more than 40% of the country’s population is young people under the age of 20 (Smith, 2007, p. 177). India’s disparities in development are also reflected in the “poverty rate” indicators. Thus, according to the calculations of Western economists, more than 250 million people in the country live below the “poverty line,” which is more than 20% of the population (Bardhan, 2010, p. 91).

The contradictions in the development of modern India are ultimately predetermined by the objective expansion of the social space of the country’s politics. In real time, a multimillion-strong mass of Indians, who, due to historical circumstances, were previously excluded from the decision-making process on the key problems of their life, are joining democracy and the system of political representation. The expansion of the participants in the political process limits the effectiveness of “democratic governance,” which was described by the Indian political philosopher S. Kavi-



raj: “The democratic model of governance functioned relatively clearly in the early years after the conquest of sovereignty in 1947, primarily because the society itself was not yet sufficiently democratized; difficulties with the functioning of representative institutions appeared when feelings of political equality and social justice began to take hold among the people” (cited in Bardhan, 2010, p. 155).

The nature of the political process in independent India is determined by numerous regroupings of social class forces, which is due to the involvement, with all the vestiges of mass consciousness, of new large social groups that have moved from a state of “age-old” passivity to a mode of conscious activity. There were good reasons for such passivity, primarily of a political-economic nature. The “classic” experience of the historical West shows that it was possible to ensure the openness of the political process and political systems in this territorial space due to the mobility of the social structure of society, its ability to free the individual from the burden of ideas of previous historical eras in the course of overcoming the temporary disintegration of the economic organism and the spontaneous transition of society and the economy to a new, higher level of inner balance.

However, in independent India, as noted by A.P. Kolontaev, “preservation of disintegration... goes into the area of the dynamics of the economic system, turns into a problem of interaction of its main links. ...disintegration not only reflects the nature and characteristics of the functioning of individual sectors of the economy, but also expresses ... important features of the modern economic structure as a whole” (*Ekonomika Indii*, 1980, p. 18). Prominent Indologist G.K. Shirokov suggested that disintegration was the cause of low national labor productivity and hindered economic growth and development. In conditions when the industrial-capitalist structures do not have sufficient national transformative power, “the expansion of the economic functions of the state acquired the greatest importance. The latter, through socio-economic transformations, the development of productive forces and changes in the conditions of relations with the world market, should have ensured the integration of the economy at a new, higher level” (*Ekonomika Indii*, 1980, p. 15).

The seventy-five-year experience of India’s independent development shows that the state remains the central element of the entire social system, capable of accelerating the rhythms of its evolution, softening class contradictions and putting them into a safe mode, as well as opening up channels of upward social mobility for low and lower castes that had no influence on political processes in the past. In connection with this feature, the discussions between the socio-political forces of the country do not go around the topic of the state or the market, but touch upon a problem of a more practical nature—the effective use of the

potential of this institution in the interests of society as a whole and the mass social groups in particular.

It should not be forgotten that the political development of the “civilizational state” is more dynamic than the systems of representative democracy in Western Europe and North America. A consequence of the “compression” of historical time in India was the development of a system of political representation, which is sometimes called “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria, 2003). Soviet orientalist in the 1980s characterized systems of this type as “authoritarian parliamentarism” (*Evolutsiya Vostochnykh Obschestv*, 1984, pp. 296–381), which appears more objective and concrete. In addition to India, “authoritarian parliamentarism” was prevalent in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. N.A. Simoniya believed that “the parliamentarism observed in these countries (India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka) is not truly bourgeois-democratic”: “each of these countries managed to develop a special form of political compromise between the main factions of the ruling classes. The parliamentary form here acts as a convenient framework, within which and under the screen of which an essentially authoritarian political compromise of the upper strata of the ruling classes is realized,” the scientist noted (*Evolutsiya Vostochnykh Obschestv*, 1984; pp. 296, 297).

The concept of “authoritarian parliamentarism” was considered debatable by some Indologists. They focused on the multinational and polyconfessional nature of Indian society, which objectively complicated the “authoritarian compromise” within the ruling classes and demanded that the principles of coexistence (consensus) be extended to new spheres of relations (Volodin, 1989, pp. 6–7). However, in the subsequent period, the political process turned out to be so complex and contradictory that the discussion about “authoritarianism” and “democracy” in India had to be returned to in the late 2010s and early 2020s.

In India, political scientists who have spoken from alarmist positions have always had influence. They were afraid of a critical narrowing of the social space of the political system of the “largest democracy in the world,” which would inevitably lead to a major social cataclysm with unpredictable consequences. The alarmists feared that the political thinking of the economically dominant forces and the professional politicians expressing their interests was lagging behind the requirements of the time: they were not able to view Indian society stereoscopically, in the dialectical unity of problems and contradictions, and, accordingly, did not realize the need for timely compromises with the mass social groups. This point of view invariably turned out to be strategically useful, since it set the necessary parameters for the policy of the private-ownership classes. It seems that the main challenge to Indian politics in the early 21st century was energetic growth in the influence of the democratic-minded strata of the population, which is expressed in the

social self-affirmation of the low and lower castes, i.e., the once downtrodden and outcast part of the country's population. Corresponding internal changes also took place in the model of the socio-political development of the country.

However, one factor in the development of India remained unchanged—the role of the nation-state. Its influence is now growing due to the need to regulate the processes of globalization in the interests of the country, as well as to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of a complex society, as well as a balanced relationship between the center and the states. A special function of the Indian state is to accelerate the restructuring of the national economy, which led India to reaching the level of the world's leading countries in economic, scientific, and technical terms in a historically tight time frame. The state also played a decisive role in the regrouping of forces in the international system, in the almost “reactive” movement of India into the cohort of world powers.

The growing role of the state in the socio-political development of India has prompted some political scientists to revisit the concept of authoritarian development in a modified form. In fact, we are talking about a return to the paradigm of “parliamentary authoritarianism,” which in the mid-1980s was stated by the Soviet and Russian political scientist N.A. Simoniya. Thus, the British Indologist J. Manor states: “India is no longer a liberal democracy... BJP leaders are well advanced in creating a new order which differs in kind from liberal democracy. It is an example of ‘competitive authoritarianism.’... Modi's new political order subjugates all public institutions, alternative power centers, and independent voices to create an autocracy. What is ‘competitive authoritarianism’?... It is a system in which power holders do not abolish all formal democratic procedures, but employ informal mechanisms of coercion and control, while maintaining the formal architecture of democracy. The result is a hybrid system that retains the outward appearance of democracy with little actual substance.” (Manor, 2021).

Without entering into controversy, it makes sense to make two fundamental considerations regarding the concept of “competitive authoritarianism.” Firstly, after the 2020 US presidential election, many Indian experts have a healthy skepticism about both the concept of “liberal democracy” and the universal nature of this phenomenon. Secondly, the very filiation of ideas that have gone from “parliamentary authoritarianism” to “competitive authoritarianism” points to the steady repetition of the stages of the political process (with the inevitable features of the subsequent phases of India's historical evolution). At the critical stages of Indian history, when qualitatively new, parametric problems arise before society, the institutions of the state and the executive power are strengthened (which J. Manor convincingly writes about).

The essence of the matter lies in the fact that both I. Gandhi and N. Modi are objectively strong personalities and strong-willed politicians. Their originality leaves a stamp of individuality not only on the activities of politicians, but also on the whole character of political development. The civilizational essence of Indian society directly affects the role of the nation state, which maintains a dominant position in society. This tradition originates in the national liberation movement. Assessing the path traveled by the Indian “civilizational state” over three quarters of a century of independence, we can state that the central institution of the economic and political modernization of Indian society has been and remains the national state, which solves the problem of reducing social and property disparities, as well as strengthening the unity and territorial integrity of the “largest democracy in the world.”

#### FUNDING

This work was supported by a Grant of the Russian Science Foundation “India and China in the Last Half Century: Comparison of the Paths of Socio-Historical Evolution,” project no. 22-28-01829. This grant was implemented at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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*Translated by S. Avodkova*