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Chronicling a Newly Independent Nation

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## Review Article

Pulin B Nayak

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The *Economic Weekly* (EW) was launched in Bombay (now Mumbai) in January 1949 under the editorship of Sachin Chaudhuri. Chaudhuri was an economist of rare intellectual timbre, who had studied in Dacca University during 1922–26, having been a classmate of A K Dasgupta, the doyen among India's economic theorists. Due to the peculiar rules and conventions governing the institutions of higher learning in our subcontinent, poor result in his master's examination ensured that a career in academics was sadly denied for ever to the young Chaudhuri. But Chaudhuri never lost his lust for ideas, regardless of whether they were from history, economics, sociology or archaeology.

The several twists in his life's chances saw Chaudhuri giving tuitions in Kolkata to make a living, and then shifting, in the 1930s, to Mumbai to stay alternately with his two younger brothers (for a fascinating account, see Mitra 1967, 1977, 2016), and earning his keep by writing political, economic, and even film commentaries for some newspapers. For a brief period, he took up the position of general manager of Bombay Talkies after Himanshu Rai passed away! But his final calling came in 1948 when his younger brother Hiten, working in the corporate sector, was able to prevail upon an initially reluctant Chaudhuri to edit a brand new weekly publication. Hiten's close friends in the Seksaria Group of financiers had been persuaded to provide the entire equity capital. Thus was born the *Economic Weekly*.

India's independence had come about less than a year and a half earlier, after nearly two centuries of colonial rule and a protracted, hard-won, freedom struggle. The long years of colonial subjugation had left the average Indian in utter penury, with little education, poor health, and indigent living conditions. But the extraordinary political and intellectual leadership of M K Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, and innumerable other stellar names, had raised the hopes and aspirations of the masses like never before. Despite the huge disruptions and the terrible loss of lives due to the partition, the dreams and expectations of the nascent nation were seemingly boundless. World

War II was over; India had led the process of drawing the curtains on colonialism in a whole host of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the human mind, at least in this part of the world, was intoxicated with the notions of freedom and development.

It was in this setting that this new weekly made its appearance. The first issue was published on 1 January 1949. Even though economics was the stated focus of the journal, its holistic ambit included politics, sociology, history and culture. In a mixture that had the imprimatur of the editor, the journal was to have, in addition to the usual fare of editorials, commentaries and discussions on current affairs, etc, some learned research papers in economics and other social sciences. It was this last feature that gave the weekly its unique character, which it has managed to preserve for over seven decades now, allowing for a brief disruption during 1965–66, after which the journal was renamed *Economic & Political Weekly* (EPW).

The volume under review consists of 43 pieces, chosen from the special articles published in the first 16 years of the journal. In addition to the two or three special articles published each week, there used to be two large special numbers each year, consisting of about 15 articles in each number. So, there would have been a vast pool of articles to choose from, and the act of choice could not possibly have been easy. The articles are by sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and economists. The authors, from India as well as from foreign countries, read like a who's who of the major names and movers of ideas of those times. The editors, scholars, in their own right, must be commended for providing the reader a flavour of the turmoil of ideas during those heady years of a newly independent nation.

The essays have been divided into nine, somewhat uneven parts with the following titles: (i) early village studies, (ii) rural structures, (iii) identity and politics, (iv) analytical frameworks, (v) development and planning, (vi) policy debates: agriculture, (vii) policy debates: industry, (viii) public finance and distribution, and finally (ix) culture, administration and leadership. Even a simple listing of the titles provides an instant glimpse of the range of themes that captured the imaginations of social scientists, policymakers, politicians, journalists and the lay public alike in the first decade and a half of the country's launch into planned economic development. The editors have also helpfully provided a succinct account of the entire collection of articles in their introduction.

In this brief review, owing to space limitations, it would be impossible to comment on each of the valuable and wonderful pieces included in this volume. I would necessarily have to pick and choose some on which I would like to make a few observations. This should not lead the reader to conclude that I hold the ones unmentioned as being in any way less important.

### **Village Studies**

That said, let me now come to the matter at hand. The first part deals with village studies, with the opening paper being a classic study of a Mysore village by M N Srinivas. It was published in the EW of 1951. Srinivas draws an intricate sketch of the caste hierarchies and mutual interrelationships that define the village of Kodagahalli. Despite the obvious variations in terms of caste status, and economic power captured principally in terms of the size of landholding, Srinivas observes that "the village is a unity in several senses of the term." Interestingly, this is so despite the intense group rivalries and antagonisms that the

author elaborates upon with some illustrations. Attention is drawn to the observation of Charles Metcalfe, made in 1832, that Indian village communities are self-sufficient republics. Yet the idea behind his essay is to show that while the age-old caste courts continue to remain relevant in many ways, the legal system introduced by the British gradually established their primacy over the older social system of adjudication. Perhaps, the best way to describe Srinivas's contribution would be to think of Kodagahalli at the time of India's independence as a village in transition.

The sociology department at the Delhi School of Economics (DSE) was founded in 1959 and M N Srinivas was its first professor. André Béteille, with a master's degree from Kolkata, was recruited as a lecturer the same year. Srinivas was particular to insist on fieldwork as a basic component of the master's training as well as in the doctoral research programme. The first doctorate of the DSE sociology department was André Béteille, who was registered under Srinivas, and did his fieldwork in Tanjore district in Tamil Nadu. Béteille was in due course to emerge as possibly the most prolific Indian sociologist of the past half century who has been a frequent contributor to the *EW* as well as its later avatar, the *EPW*.

### **Kishan Garhi**

Moving on with the first part, there are two more brilliant village studies, published in 1952 and 1953, respectively, by McKim Marriott on the social structure and change in a Uttar Pradesh village and F G Bailey on an Oriya hill village. Marriott, now professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Chicago, had been, in his youth, a resident for 14 months in 1951–52 in the village of Kishan Garhi, in the Brij division of the upper Ganges-Jamuna doab. We learn that 70 years back, the 535 acres of rich alluvial flat plain consisted of 160 mud houses. There was a fortress shared by three one-time landlords, and then there were the people with special skills (45 houses), traders (10 houses), tenant farmers (68 houses) and landless agricultural labourers (34 houses). Most cultivators were dependent on short-term, unwritten leases granted by one of the three families of a single line of landlords. Marriott found out that the landlords in those days always kept about a third of the village lands in their own control, and used to make their personal servants till the land. Most villagers were borrowers of grain and money, and most had then to turn to some wealthier tenants or to the same landlords for credit in their hour of need.

In Kishan Garhi, the Brahmins, comprising 40 households, were all farmers. They were followed by the smaller caste groups of Chamars, Jats, Kumhars and Muslim Faqirs, each of whom numbered more than a dozen families. There are numerous features of kinship that Marriott records, which cannot be gone into in this review. In marriage, for example, the usual norm, prevalent in the rest of the country, was to give a daughter into a "high" relationship, while the family and village from which one took a wife had to occupy a "low" relationship. To secure, a daughter's good treatment, lavish entertainments and gifts had to be made to the husband's family. The broad conclusion of the author is that the existing social structure with its rigid caste boundaries became an inhibiting factor in arriving at decisions on the village-level provisioning of public goods and related welfare measures. This is also the conclusion of the district-level officials who were of the view that for most programmes of technical or economic development, a modicum of classless local cooperation is a prerequisite that was sadly lacking in Kishan Garhi circa 1950.

The author of the third essay, F G Bailey, is the well-known British social anthropologist of long standing. He is most remembered for his fieldwork conducted in the early 1950s in the

village of Bisipara, 100 miles east of Cuttack and 40 miles south of river Mahanadi in Odisha. The village is about 1,750 feet above sea level, surrounded by hills that rise between 500 feet and 1,000 feet higher. The Salki river, about 80 yards wide, runs from south to north through the plain, and there is a small tributary as well, and both of these cut channels about 10 to 20 feet deep. Bailey observes that the “hills around are jungle-covered and infested by tigers and leopards.” He also observes that “bears make the forest paths dangerous.” That was then. Anyone familiar with this area today would aver that it wears a vastly different look in 2020, hammering in our minds the inexorable nature of natural and social change.

### **Bisipara and Hatapadara**

Bailey observes that since times unknown, the hills of Bisipara were occupied by Kui-speaking people. They originally came from Baud in the north, and the ruling caste were given the surname Bisi by the Oriya kings. Genealogies indicated that they had been in Bisipara for 200 years and later fought against the soldiers of the East India Company. The lowland areas were ruled by Oriya rajas. There is a detailed description of Bisipara with its six neighbourhoods, or “sais;” thus, Kumharsai, Sudosai, Panosai, Sundisai, Khodalsai and Hatapadara, with the total population then being about 750. Kumharsai is the area where the potters live, and the houses are built in the Kui fashion, “two lines of houses, not detached, with gardens behind them.” At each end of a Kui street, there was a tall fence to protect the village from wild animals. Bailey surmised that the Kumhars were the true Adivasis and the first occupants of the site. But even at the time Bailey was studying the village, he felt that their assimilation to Hinduism and the prevailing Oriya mores were almost complete.

The author notes that the last neighbourhood, Hatapadara, was distinct from the other sais, or localities. This was the locality of the market, which had been closed by the early 1950s when Bailey was studying the village, and the name derived from that fact. The houses were sited irregularly, in several streets and blocks and the inhabitants were from different castes. The Sundis and Kuis were predominant here, but there also were some from the Keuto (fisherfolk), Brahmin and Gauda (milkman) castes. There were two families of Panas and a family of Ghasis (sweepers) who were Dalits. The Kuis and Sundis were here in search of labouring work.

### **Village as a Self-sufficient Unit**

Bailey contends that before 1850, the village would have been more of a self-sufficient unit. In addition to working on the land, there would have been some people practising traditional occupations like “barbering, oil-pressing,” etc. It would have been an autarkic situation, with all production and consumption activities being carried out within the village precincts. After 1850, part of the village income was paid out as taxes and expended outside the village. A portion of this would have returned as salaries and government expenditure and consumed within the village. There would now have been greater and freer circulation of money, with a new class of salaried workers, such as policemen, postmen, schoolteachers, etc, as part of the village economy.

There is an important section on “village unity” where Bailey draws a sketch of the seemingly disparate caste members coming together for group activities like the daily *thakur* puja or the seasonal hunting outings, which nevertheless follow certain strict

caste-based norms. With the passage of time, some members of the village begin to look for economic opportunities elsewhere, and the relatively strong bonds of unity slowly weaken.

The next two parts of the volume deal with rural structures and the issue of identity and politics. Srinivas and A M Shah have a piece published in 1960 where they bust the myth of self-sufficiency of the Indian village. Charles Metcalfe's thesis of the self-sufficiency of the Indian village had later been endorsed by personages as diverse as Henry Maine, Karl Marx and Mohandas Gandhi. Srinivas and Shah contest the thesis at several levels. First, they argue that in coastal Kerala, Coorg and highland Gujarat, nucleated villages do not exist. Villages in these areas consist of distinct farms, which are geographically dispersed. Second, they argue that in much of India, especially in the North, relatives are not preferred for marriage, and there is the practice of village exogamy and village hypergamy. These refer, respectively, to the following: a man may not marry a girl of his own village, and, he is not permitted to give his sister or daughter in marriage to the village from which he has obtained a wife. This would give rise to a marriage circle that would include at least 200 villages, seriously questioning Metcalfe's hypothesis from the sociological angle. But more fundamentally, pilgrimages and festivals took the villagers, to places beyond their own village. They conclude, quite reasonably, that the Indian village is part of a wider entity, subject to the winds which blew from without.

Irawati Karve was possibly India's first major female anthropologist, who taught at Deccan College, Pune, from 1939 onwards. She obtained her doctorate from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology in Germany. In her EW piece published in 1963, she addresses the issue of individual case study and the statistical method in social investigation, and emphasises the importance of the latter. She suggests that this can be done by studying a large number of samples belonging to different times or different geographical spaces. She addresses these issues in her study of the joint and non-joint family systems in India. A key point to note is that between the two extremes, there are several kinds of semi-joint families, where, for example, a younger brother, working in a metropolitan township, might have left his wife and children in the village under the care of the elder brother and his wife. In a variation of this, the younger brother might have moved to the metropolitan town along with his family, but might still be sending money to his elder brother, residing in the village, to help finance some land improvement activities in the family plot of land.

### **RSS in the Past**

If in the India of 2020, there is a more than nominal presence of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) ideology underlying the various initiatives of the current government, it would be worthwhile exploring the historical antecedents of the entire movement. The earliest published piece in this volume is dated 4 February 1950 and is authored by D V Kelkar. The RSS had been banned precisely two years prior, that is, on 4 February 1948, barely five days after the assassination of Gandhi. A communique by the Government of India stated:

It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of the RSS have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, dacoity and murder, and have collected illicit arms and ammunition.

The author of this piece, Kelkar, had been personally known to Keshav Hedgewar of Nagpur, who founded the RSS on Dussehra day in 1925. Kelkar notes that during 1919–23 at Nagpur, "not a day passed without our meeting." They addressed public meetings together and

Kelkar testifies to Hedgewar, whom he addressed as the doctor, of being a good orator, who “kept his audience spellbound.” Hedgewar was critical of Tilak’s idea of obtaining swaraj “within the British Empire.” Hedgewar wanted freedom without having to be tied to any apron string, and was in favour of Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement which sought to, at least in the initial phase, wrest swaraj within one year.

However, Hedgewar’s appreciation of Gandhi was only short-lived because he was critical of Gandhi’s policy of “appeasing” the Muslims. For a brief period, Hedgewar was supportive of the activities of Vinayak Savarkar, but never allowed his RSS to be subservient to the Hindu Mahasabha. Hedgewar was keen to strengthen the cultural instincts of Hindu society and was openly in favour of the fascist ideology of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. He later became sceptical of Gandhi’s non-violence and doubted that the Congress had the organisational strength to win freedom. He died relatively young at the age of 51 in June 1940. His health had begun to fail towards the latter part of his life and he had begun to delegate his responsibilities to Madhav Golwalkar. Kelkar suggests that in order to understand the full ideology of the RSS, the first edition of the book “We, or Our Nationhood Defined” by Golwalkar is indispensable. Golwalkar talks of the five “unities,” geographical, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic, and argued that any person who had foreign, read Muslim, elements, had to either merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or live at its mercy.

The book had a foreword by the Gandhian social worker Madhav Aney, who disagreed with the author and argued that no person of a minority community ought to be treated as a foreigner in their own country. Aney’s thoughtful foreword was deleted from all subsequent editions. Kelkar seeks to make the point that at an individual level, most of the rank and file of the RSS consists of dedicated workers who are willing to sacrifice their career and wealth for a cause. He hopes and wishes for a successful harnessing of this power to a humane conception of society, which could yield valuable results. The situation today, in 2020, seems like a replay of what Kelkar wrote in 1950. The proverbial “elephant in the room” are the Muslims. It was so then. It is the same today. Nothing seems to have changed. There should be no surprise that any dispensation informed by the RSS ideology will manufacture justifications for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, National Population Register and National Register of Citizens.

### **Essay on Sripuram**

Béteille’s essay “Sripuram: A Village in Tanjore District” formed part of his doctoral dissertation at the DSE and was published in the EW of January 1962. The village is about eight miles to the north of Tanjore. The population of the village was about 1,400, distributed in 349 households, of which the Brahmins constituted 92, non-Brahmins 168, and the balance 89, were Adi Dravida. Thus, the Brahmins were about 26% of the households, but it should come as no surprise that they owned most of the land, and indeed, considerably more than the non-Brahmins. The non-Brahmins, in turn, owned more land than the Adi Dravidas. The Brahmins did not actually till the soil, and absentee landlordism was common. Tilling was actually done by the Adi Dravidas and some non-Brahmins. The Brahmins represented three linguistic groups: Kannada, Telugu and Tamil, and had been far more mobile than the other groups.

Béteille’s article offers a glimpse of the caste and class dynamics at play in the beginning of the 1960s in rural Tamil Nadu. Some Brahmins had their land cultivated by directly engaging

agricultural labourers who were mostly Adi Dravidas, but some non-Brahmins as well. Beteille noticed that the relations between the Brahmin landowners and the Adi Dravida and non-Brahmin labourers had deteriorated rapidly over the previous two decades. There was a sense of political insecurity among the Brahmins, as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was gaining in popularity among the peasants and the working classes.

In a perceptive piece on the class orientation of political factions, Rajni Kothari and Ghanshyam Shah present a study of Modasa, an assembly constituency of Gujarat state, situated very close to the Rajasthan border, and with easy access to business centres in both states. They show that there is no simple correlation between caste and political allegiance. The Baniya community is split into two major castes, the small but largely urban-based "Nima," and the more numerous rural cousins called "Khadaita." However, the Baniyas were no more than 3.5% of the population, and the much larger community, of mostly peasant stock, were the "Patidars" who have come into much prominence in recent years. The largest community, about half of the population, was that of the Kshatriyas, comprising of various castes and sub-castes. There also were a smattering of Dalits, Brahmins and Muslims. This area used to be under the hegemony of the Congress party since independence. Kothari and Shah weave a fascinating interplay of caste and politics that points to the gradual weakening of the Congress and the simultaneous rise of the Swatantra Party in the early 1960s.

In an insightful theoretical discourse, Nirmal Kumar Bose, possibly the foremost sociologist of the pre-independence times, and a long-time associate of Gandhi, raises the fundamental issue of "class and caste" in the Indian context. For Marx, class was an instrument of action and change. Bose seeks to understand if caste may be thought of as a variety of the class system. In this context, he makes a case for historically grounded categories of social boundaries, and seems to favour the Weberian, rather than the Marxian, approach to an understanding of caste.

### **Contributions by Economists**

The next five parts, with 24 papers, consist of contributions by economists on a variety of themes. After presenting three papers by way of defining the analytical framework, there are papers on development and planning, agriculture, industry and public finance and distribution. Altogether, these comprise a rich fare, and we will make no attempt to even briefly describe each paper here, owing to space limitations.

Fairly early on, in the 26 January 1954 special number of the EW, Dasgupta, had published a piece with the title "Keynesian Economics and Underdeveloped Countries." Dasgupta had very convincingly argued that the Indian conditions were vastly different from what Keynes was talking about in relation to the economy of the United Kingdom (UK) in the early 1930s. The problem there was one of lack of aggregate demand along with the presence of excess capacity in industry, and the Keynesian prescription was to introduce a strong dose of public expenditure to revive demand. In India, however, the problem was one of a total absence, or, at least, a lack of capital stock, and the urgent need was to give a fillip to capital formation. This piece essentially presaged the same ground that William Arthur Lewis was to present in his celebrated paper in the Manchester School, where he outlined a process of development with unlimited supply of labour at a subsistence wage. This key paper was to earn the Nobel prize for Lewis in later years, but one must acknowledge that the idea was very much there in Dasgupta's paper at a somewhat earlier point in time. A somewhat

expanded version of Dasgupta's 1954 paper was published with the same title in the EW in August 1965, and is included in this collection.

Joan Robinson must remain one of the great names among the economists of the 20th century. She was a member, in the 1930s and 1940s, of Keynes's "circus" in Cambridge, England, and in later years was a formidable critic of the neoclassical school, of which the two most prominent names were Paul Samuelson and Robert Solow of Cambridge, Massachusetts. For all her conceptual brilliance, she was denied the Nobel prize, possibly for being an "intellectual communist." In her characteristically trenchant piece on "Teaching Economics" she despairs of the tendency among some bright young Indian students in the UK who are focused on abstract theorising, much as their best British counterparts, who pursue the "dreary desert of so-called welfare economics," founded on the notion of individualistic pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. She would rather have preferred these bright young men from India to ask the fundamental question as to whether the problems of deep poverty and unemployment in their country could be solved by private free-enterprise capitalism. Robinson makes a plea for seriously studying the alternative economic systems, and eschewing the simplistic price theory by delving into the serious issues of production, accumulation and distribution.

George Rosen was professor emeritus of Economics at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He died in 2018 at the age of 97. He was one of the early foreign scholars who worked on independent India. He was a good friend of Chaudhury and visited Chaudhuri's Churchill Chambers flat often. He contributed frequently to both the EW as well as the EPW later. His book "Industrial Change in India," first published in 1958, was revised and republished several times. In his 1962 piece published here, he put forward the plausible hypothesis that despite the substantial investment in the railways in the latter half of the 19th century, economic growth in India was aborted because the average income of an Indian was too low, and insufficient to sustain a stable consumer goods industry. The problem was worsened by the refusal of the government to protect domestic industry, at least during its "infancy" period. Further, there was a significant drain of income to the metropolitan country by way of payments for the services of the British personnel.

There follow some brilliant and classic papers by, among others, Ashok Rudra, Lewis, M L Dantwala, Amartya Sen, Raj Krishna, Jan Tinbergen and V K R V Rao. Lack of space prevents us from making any comment on those. These provide a feast to any social scientist trying to understand the social and economic antecedents of India's developmental path.

### **Culture and Administration**

The last part of the volume consists of nine papers on the theme of culture, administration and leadership. At first sight, they may seem like disjointed notions, but every collection of readings must allow the editors their own way of addressing large issues. To an unerring degree, the editors present a coherent choice of holistic pieces written by some of our best home-grown minds. Through the 1950s, there were two major issues that had consumed the attention and energy of the entire country. The first had to do with the language question. There were some genuine fears in the non-Hindi speaking belt of the obvious disadvantages, owing to the hegemony of Hindi, which had been named the national language. More fundamentally, there was the issue of encouraging the natural flowering of regional languages like Bengali, Telugu and Tamil, etc, which, it was feared, would be hampered if Hindi was to be given official sanction from the central government. This was

also linked with the idea of state reorganisation on the basis of language. There were language riots, and several young men martyred themselves in the 1950s.

The second had to do with the role the bureaucracy was to play in nation-building. Did a newly independent country, which had embraced economic planning, need more specialists or more generalists? Would the Indian Administrative Service be able to provide the steel frame the Indian Civil Service had provided to colonial Britain? Not surprisingly, the issue has not become irrelevant even after the lapse of seven decades. During the intervening period, serious questions have come up from time to time regarding the probity and integrity of some of the top occupants of the administrative pyramid who have been known to pursue pelf and power.

D P Mukerji, economist and polymath at Lucknow and Aligarh, has the first essay in this last part, with a piece he had written in 1953 with the title "Man and Plan in India: The Background." Incidentally, it should be pointed out that the very first editorial in the very first number of EW in 1949 was written by Mukerji and had the title "Light without Heat." The present reviewer had known some economists, now deceased, and some other social scientists, who had been students of Mukherjee. I have heard of Mukherjee's intellectual abilities, both in the classroom and outside, only in the highest of superlatives and with the greatest of fondness. Mukherjee offers a magisterial overview of Marx, Tagore and Gandhi and closes his essay with his assessment of Jawaharlal Nehru, and his sense that the future leaders of the country would need to be planners and technocrats.

### **Nehru's Legacy**

Despite all his frailties, Nehru, in Mukherjee's mind, was the tallest person to lead India in its earliest years of growing up as an independent nation. Of Nehru, he says:

But he is also the idol of the middle-class educated man who knows that the world is not exhausted by India, that India must make confident strides towards the future, that willy-nilly, modern forces like nationalism for the colonies, democracy, science and technology, have come to stay, that civilisation belongs to the city, that culture is man made, that history halts unless it is pushed, that there is no marching back like frogs to the well, that the blind forces of nature or of social systems have to be harnessed, and that the universe has to be faced openly and squarely, without fear or favour.

The last two essays in the volume by Kothari and Dantwala are also on the intellectual legacies of Nehru. With all their caveats, both the seasoned political scientist as well as the economist come around to recognising Nehru as the liberal democrat who fundamentally stood for modernity, scientific temper and institution building. This, as well as Mukherjee's assessment of Nehru, the man and the leader, is clearly orthogonal to anything one has been hearing about our first Prime Minister in very recent times. History will judge which of the two views is the appropriate assessment of the man. The present regime too will pass, but the real fear is that it will have altered or subverted the Nehruvian liberal and secular ethos to such a devastating extent that there might possibly be no turning back.

Politically, sociologically, economically and ecologically, India today, in 2020, is at very important crossroads. In order to understand our present predicament with any degree of accuracy, the present-day thinkers, scholars, academics and bureaucrats do require a holistic understanding of where the story began, at the turn of independence. There certainly are many accounts available, in the plethora of books, articles and reminiscences

by people from different walks of life. But it is possible to argue that the first 16 years of Chaudhuri's distilled efforts at the editorial desk of EW offer a most unique vantage point to understand the multitude of forces that shaped our country during the most crucial years. The entire academic world, and social scientists in particular, owe a deep debt of gratitude to Pranab Bardhan, Sudipto Mundle, Rohini Somanathan for having sifted through the huge fat volumes of EW to select these substantial and delectable pieces for us to savour.

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