

# India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity

*A SYMPOSIUM*

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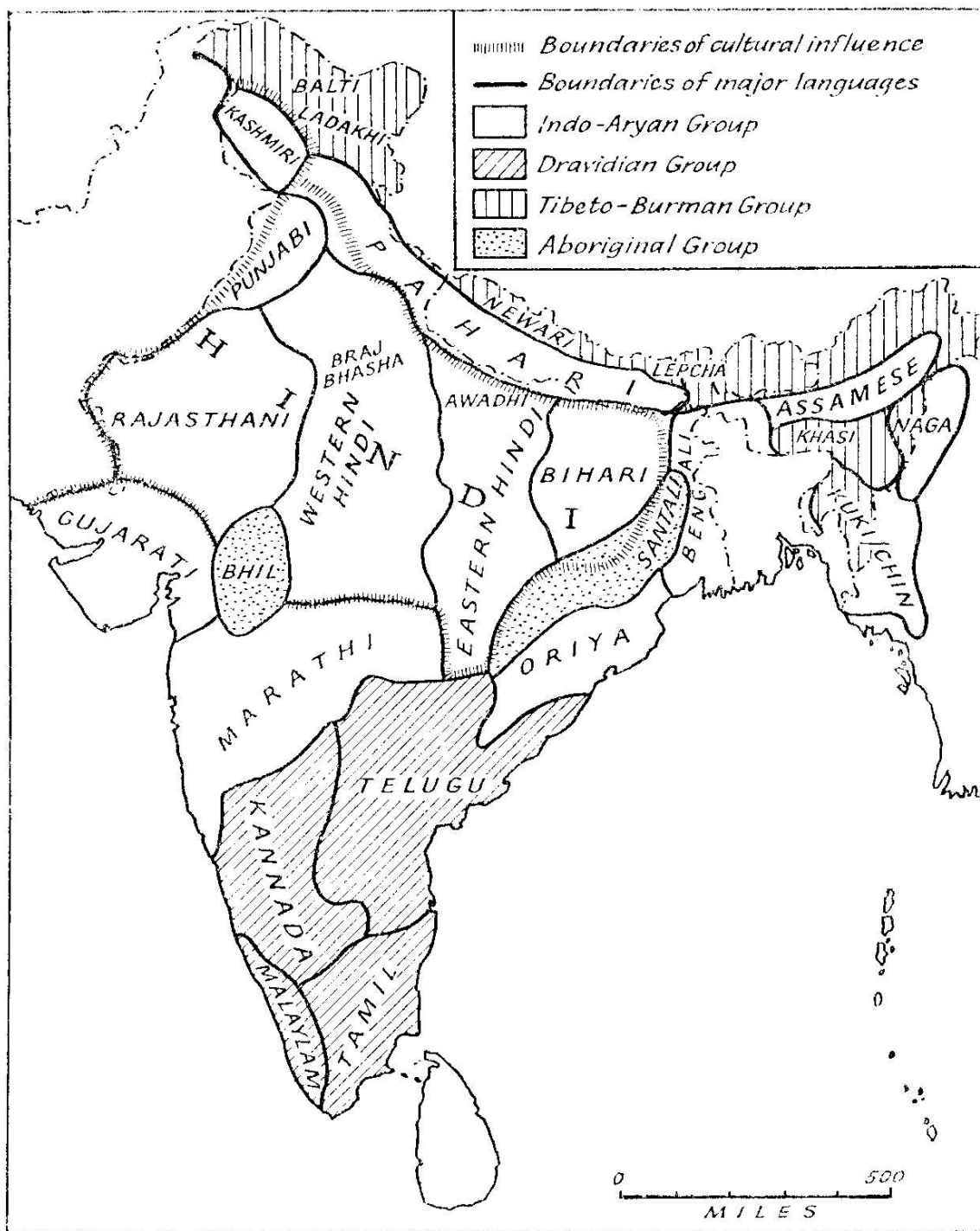
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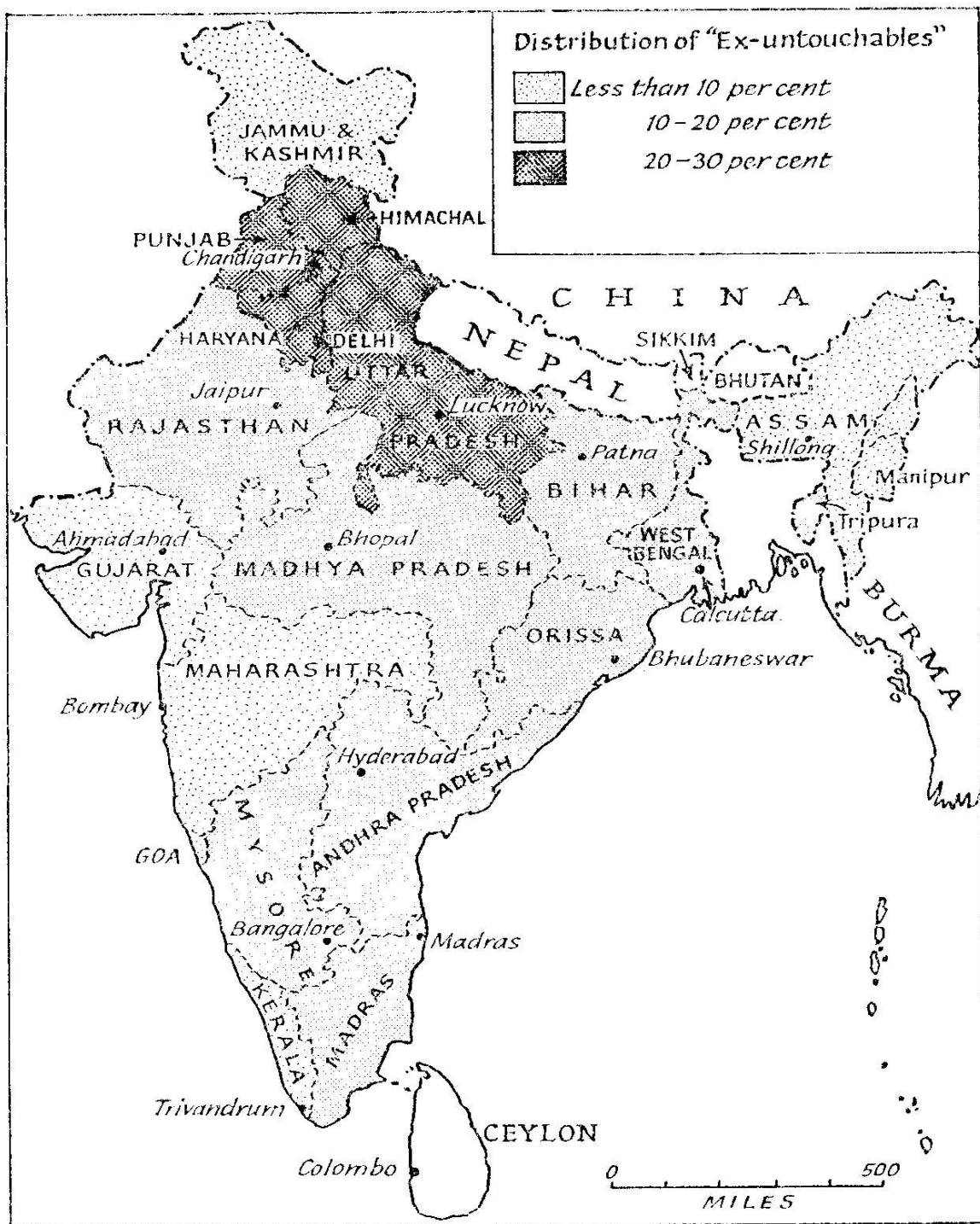
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Map I: India and Ceylon, showing chief linguistic divisions



Map II: India and Ceylon, showing chief political divisions,  
together with density of ex-untouchables

from their ancestral homes is by no means good, and that a real proletarianization of the tribesmen of these areas appears as unavoidable.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, the frank and provocative analyst of the present-day Indian social scene, has expressed a similar assessment of the tribesmen's probable fate under the impact of industrialization in strong and colourful language:

In an industrialized India the destruction of the aboriginal's life is as inevitable as the submergence of the Egyptian temples caused by the dams of the Nile . . . As things are going, there can be no grandeur in the primitive's end. It will not be even simple extinction, which is not the worst of human destinies. It is to be feared that the aboriginal's last act will be squalid, instead of being tragic. What will be seen with most regret will be, not his disappearance, but his enslavement and degradation.<sup>9</sup>

It is to be hoped that this gloomy forecast will prove unduly pessimistic, but unless the detailed recommendations of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission are acted upon, large numbers of displaced aboriginals from the new industrial areas may indeed become homeless vagrants unable to obtain any suitable employment which could compensate them for the land they had to give up as a sacrifice on the altar of India's modernization. The establishment of vast industrial enterprises in tribal zones lends urgency to the extension of protective measures to all tribals whose rights and way of life have been placed in jeopardy. The framers of the Indian Constitution were clear that while the Scheduled Tribes were to be brought out from their age-old isolation, they should be saved from exploitation and from the erosion of their rights to their ancestral land. This aim can be achieved only by special legislation, and the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission ended its long report with the plea to 'secure the advancement of the tribals without disturbing the essential harmony of their life and secure their integration without imposition' (p. 499). The manner of integration of the tribals within the wider Indian society will ultimately depend on political decisions and these will be made on the basis of moral evaluations. Unless the advanced sections of the Indian population develop a spirit of cultural tolerance and an appreciation of tribal values, even the most elaborate schemes for the economic settlement of the tribals are likely to prove abortive. It is for this reason that the late Jawaharlal Nehru formulated the following five principles for the policy to be pursued *vis-à-vis* the tribals:

<sup>9</sup> *The Continent of Circe*, London, 1965, p. 77.

- (1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and the imposition of alien values should be avoided.
- (2) Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.
- (3) Teams of tribals should be trained in the work of administration and development.
- (4) Tribal areas should not be overadministered or overwhelmed with a multiplicity of schemes.
- (5) Results should be judged not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the human character that is evolved.

Except in a few areas, such as N.E.F.A., these principles have seldom been put fully into practice. There are, moreover, indications that Nehru's extremely liberal ideas regarding the rights of the tribals and the preservation of their cultural heritage may not be shared by all of the present leaders of the Congress Party, and it is likely that pressure for a speedier and more complete assimilation of the aboriginals will gradually increase and lead to changes even in tribal areas such as N.E.F.A. The existence of a number of special agencies responsible for the protection of tribal rights, on the other hand, justifies the expectation that despite occasional attacks on these rights the tribals will continue to enjoy at least some of the privileges provided for them by the Indian Constitution.

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