

FOUNDING GENERATIONS

Democracy's Origins and Parallels
in America and India

SIDDHARTH

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To
Babaji
who is no more

EVENTS TIMELINE – AMERICA

Year	Key Event	Benjamin Franklin	George Washington
1754	French and Indian War begins	Publishes " <i>Join, or Die</i> " cartoon and appeals for unity between the colonies	Inadvertently starts the war
1765	British Parliament passes the Stamp Act	Campaigns in London to get the Stamp Act repealed	
1773	Boston Tea Party	Converts to the American cause	Enraged at the turn of events
1775	Second Continental Congress convenes	Fiercely advocates to declare Independence	Named Commander-in-chief of the Continental Army
1776	Congress declares Independence on July 4	Serves on various committees	Leads the American forces on the battlefield
1778	Treaty of Alliance with France	Plays key diplomatic role	
1783	Treaty of Paris acknowledges American Independence	Plays key diplomatic role	
1786	Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom		
1787	Constitutional Convention	Delegate to the Convention	Presides over the Convention
1789	Government under the U.S. Constitution begins		Elected the first president
1796-97	First peaceful transition of power		Publishes the Farewell Address and goes into retirement
1800-01	Second peaceful transition of power, first between rival political parties		
1803	The Louisiana Purchase		

John Adams	Thomas Jefferson	James Madison	Alexander Hamilton
Enraged at the turn of events			
Fiercely advocates to declare Independence			
Serves on various committees	Writes the Declaration of Independence		
Plays key diplomatic role			
	Was drafted by him in 1777	Plays key role in getting it enacted	
Ambassador to Great Britain	Ambassador to France	Central role in making the Convention a success	Collaborates with Madison on <i>The Federalist Papers</i> to gather support for Constitution's ratification
Elected the first vice president	First Secretary of State	A very powerful member of Congress	First Secretary of the Treasury
Elected the second president	Elected the second vice president. Discreetly also the key Opposition leader	Jefferson's key collaborator in the Opposition	Opposes both Adams and Jefferson
Averts a war with France	Elected the third president	Secretary of State to Jefferson	Politically downhill by now
	Uses his authority to see the purchase through	Plays key role	

EVENTS TIMELINE – INDIA

Year	Key Event	Mohandas Gandhi	Vallabhbhai Patel
1915		Returns to India from South Africa	
1920-22	Non-Cooperation Movement	Emerges as the leader of the freedom struggle	Becomes Gandhi's trusted aide
1930	Purna Swaraj/Declaration of Independence	Launches the Civil Disobedience Movement with the Salt March	Emerges as Gandhi's chief lieutenant
1932	Poona Pact	Goes on fast unto death in prison over the issue of separate electorate for the Untouchables	Incarcerated by the British
1937	Provincial Elections held under the British auspices	Focused mostly on social issues rather than active politics during this period	Emerges as a very powerful leader of the Congress Party
1942	Quit India Movement	Incarcerated until 1944 by the British	Incarcerated by the British
1947	India gets Independence on August 15 but is also partitioned		First Home Minister of Independent India. Plays key role in the territorial integration of India
1947-49	Important Debates in the Constituent Assembly	Assassinated in 1948	Plays key role in various debates around Fundamental Rights, Abolition of Zamindaris, Reservation, etc.
1954-56	Hindu Code Bills are passed in the Parliament		
1956	Creation of linguistic states		
1959	Swatantra Party is formed		

C. Rajagopalachari	Jawaharlal Nehru	B. R. Ambedkar	Subhas Bose
Already in awe of Gandhi			
Leads the movement in South India	Emerges as a young leader		
	Hoists the national flag as Congress Party's president		Emerges as a young leader
Plays key role in bringing Gandhi and Ambedkar on the same page	Incarcerated by the British	Opposes Gandhi and emerges as the leader of the Untouchables	Incarcerated by the British
	Emerges as a popular leader with a pan-Indian appeal	Fights the elections against the Congress Party	Elected the president of the Congress the next year to be ousted from the presidency in 1939
Proposes the Rajaji Formula to start discussions with the Muslim League but is rebuffed	Incarcerated by the British		Establishes the Indian National Army and fights against the Allied Forces with support from the Axis powers
First Governor of West Bengal	First Prime Minister of Independent India	First Law Minister of Independent India	
	Plays key role in various debates around National Language, Linguistic Provinces, Hindu Code, etc.	Chief draftsman of the Constitution	
	Plays key role in the passage of the bills	Had earlier drafted the Hindu Code Bills	
	Accedes to the demand		
Chief force behind the Swatantra Party	Pursues centralization and socialist policies		

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PREFACE

2021 started with a bang when the United States Capitol was stormed by a violent mob in the first week of the new year. What unfolded on January 6 in Washington, D.C. shocked the entire world. As armed protestors violently stormed the Capitol to demand the overturning of the presidential election results, legislators had to be evacuated for saving their lives. American democracy thus suffered an irreparable blow to its integrity and esteem. The American democracy had always justly prided itself for its more than two-centuries-old record of the peaceful transition of power. But, the events of January 6, 2021, shook the foundation of this fundamental feature of American democracy.

Two months later, the non-profit organization Freedom House released its annual report which downgraded India's democracy from free to partly free. This happened for the first time in more than thirty years. Otherwise, a glowing exception in Asia for its robust and healthy democratic practices, India's score on the freedom index has steadily and swiftly decreased from 77 in 2018 to 67 in 2021. Similarly, Sweden's V-Dem's Institute also listed India among the top ten nations most quickly sliding toward becoming autocracies. The chief factors leading to this decline have been the unprecedented number of people charged with the colonial-era sedition law by the incumbent government and its treatment of the Muslim minority. Many political observers today believe that the pluralistic spirit of the Indian democracy is under multiple attacks spearheaded by the government's stringent crackdown on the freedom of expression and dissent.

We are thus living in a turbulent era in which the rise of an authoritarian China and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have further accelerated multiple social, economic, and political processes. Nobody knows where all this will lead to. It may well be that this tempestuous period may prove to be the harbinger of a major transition in the world and for the fate of democracy as an institution

of governance. It is thus natural to look back to the past, specifically to the origin of democracy in the world's oldest democratic nation, the United States of America, and the world's largest democratic nation, India, in the hope of gaining a guiding light as we embark toward an uncertain future. This book is a quest in the above direction.



The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun *Nation* as *A community of people of mainly common descent, history, language, etc., forming a state or inhabiting a territory*.¹ The definition appears to be cogent and yet on a closer inspection stands falsified when applied to the world's oldest democratic nation (the United States of America) and to the world's largest democratic nation (India). This is because neither of these nations was founded on the European model of nationalism which is based on affiliation with a particular language, religion, culture, or common descent. Both of these nations are highly diverse along many axes such as geography, ethnicity, religion, language (India, more so), culture, cuisine, and political ideology. In the case of both these nations, the enormous diversity under one nation's dwelling can be attributed to the peculiar circumstances during the birth of the nation as a republic. This is because the institutions of governance of the nation were founded with the creation of a republic. These institutions fashioned by the nation's founding fathers played a major role in sustaining and flourishing the nation's diversity. Furthermore, in addition to diversity, there are four obvious historical parallels that set these two nations apart from most other democracies.

First, in both nations, birth as a republic was a clear break from the past. In America, before the Revolutionary War (American War of Independence), the thirteen colonies were more or less dependent on their mother country Britain for everything from trade to governance. The inhabitants of these colonies were loyal subjects of the British monarch. The swift victory in the Revolutionary War heralded a new beginning for the colonies. The establishment of a republican government by these states (former colonies) was a pivotal moment in human history since the American republic was

unprecedented in scale compared to any other republic in the history of the world. This republican experiment ushered new ideas about self-rule on the world stage. Since this political revolution happened at a time when the world was saturated with monarchies and despotism, the significance of the American Revolution can never be underestimated.

In India too, the rapid culmination of the freedom struggle meant that the political elite procured a clean slate to inscribe their ideas. For centuries, India had been a most unequal society, plagued with inequalities along caste and religion. In the eighteenth century, from the lap of fratricidal Mughal emperors, India had fallen into the arms of equally brutish European colonialists. Across centuries, India had maintained a distinct cultural identity. But, it was the British under whom the whole of the Indian subcontinent became a single administrative unit. However, the British form of governance was, well, British. It was the most extractive form of colonial administration whose primary interest in India was economic. In multiple social and economic aspects, the British left India in much the same condition as they had found her. Thus, after independence, the arrival of the republican government in India with the universal adult franchise (a first for just born nation) was not conducive to the socio-economic conditions of the nation. ‘Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic,’ remarked B. R. Ambedkar, one of the Indian founding fathers, while introducing the draft constitution.² The policy of one-person one-vote was antithetical to the deeply rooted caste and creed prejudices. This meant that the founders played a bet on India’s future by trusting a population that had no experience of self-rule. Hence, in both nations, it was as if history halted for a brief moment around the founding to put a period, before resuming again. Though this can also be said for some other former European colonies, most of them had to undergo iterations of dictatorship, civil war, or monarchy before they transformed into stable democracies—and none were as large and diverse as India or the United States.

Second, both nations were born amidst highly adverse circumstances. Americans fought the war against the most powerful empire of the world. Without the benefit of hindsight, American victory in the war was by no means certain. Thousands of American

revolutionaries died fighting in the war (while even more were claimed by smallpox). The American forces were no match for the battle-hardened British troops and neither could the thirteen colonies, loosely aligned together by the Articles of Confederation (a weak constitution instituted after the war had begun), raise economic and warfare resources commensurate with the British empire. The newly born nation had no professional army or navy and no financial institutions such as banks or a Department of Treasury to establish credit. Thus, when the war ended, the nation found itself not only bankrupt but also under huge foreign debt. After the peace was established, in the absence of a common sense of purpose or history of common governance, the thirteen states started drifting apart and becoming entangled in disputes over trade and territory. There was no executive authority that could govern the whole nation and pay back the war debt. Later, with the creation of a republic, the nation stepped towards an uncharted territory surrounded by the colonies of wily European monarchies. Finally, soon after the French Revolution, Britain and France were again at war. With fraternal and ideological ties to both Britain and France, the newly forged American Republic found itself spiraling towards the European conflict.

The Republic of India was born amidst the tremors of partition which triggered the largest human migration in the history of mankind and unleashed violence in which more than a million perished. The displacement of over 14 million people created a refugee crisis that imposed a heavy burden on the state. The newly established upstart nation was one of the most impoverished and poor countries in the world with a mostly illiterate population. The nation was dependent on foreign aid for basic provisions such as food and security. Its administration contained stains of the abusive colonial police-state and the armed forces bequeathed to the infant nation by the British had a long history of being employed against the population.³ Furthermore, the nation's territory was dotted with more than 560 political units (some as large as European nations—both in size and population) which had their own administrations during the British era. Many of these so-called princely states were now flirting with the notion of their own independence. The nation had no history of republican government. It had tens of linguistic groups (with many languages having their own script) and millions of people belonging

to different ethnicities, divided along caste hierarchy, and following all the major religions of the world. Finally, the newborn nation was under attack from its neighbor Pakistan while it was confronting the anti-democratic forces from the extreme right (Hindu communalism) and the extreme left (communism). Shortly after Independence, the Communist Party of India had declared war against the infant Indian state.⁴

Third, it is striking that the nationalism fostered in both nations under such perilous circumstances averted the most probable outcome—anarchy. Instead of chaos, these tumultuous times gave way to the founding of political institutions that united the nation. American historians widely believe that America was founded twice. Historian Joseph Ellis writes, ‘There were really two founding moments: the first in 1776, which declared American independence, and the second in 1787-88, which declared American nationhood.’⁵ The second founding refers to the ratification of the constitution drafted by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. This constitution united the states under a federal government and thus brought them together. It is a fact of utmost wonder that even after 230 years of the ratification, the basic structure of the American constitution and governance remains the same. However, in 1788, the survival of the new government was far from certain. The Constitutional Convention is a story of multiple compromises between the states and of the expression of opinions about governance which ranged from adopting a British-style monarchy to pursuing no changes in the Articles of Confederation.⁶ The constitution finally drafted through compromises over power-sharing between the federal and state governments became an inspiration for many constitutions around the world. In a first, the constitution directed the separation of state and religion, and clearly defined separation of powers between the three arms of government—executive, legislature, and judiciary. It was the political institutions established by this constitution that paved the way to unite the nation, install financial institutions to bind the colonies together and establish credit, pay the foreign debt, and most importantly, the success of the republican experiment. To scupper the possibility of descent towards monarchy, or even worse—anarchy, the founders later interpreted the constitution in a flexible

manner to bolster the institutions of governance, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Granville Austin, historian of the Indian constitution writes about its framing that it ‘was perhaps the greatest political venture since that originated in Philadelphia in 1787 [referring to the drafting of the American Constitution].’⁷ The constitution of India, after many compromises between the delegates, bound the whole nation to form a Union while making provisions for all minorities—across religion, caste, language, and tribe. In a highly unequal society dependent mostly on agriculture, the constitution made provisions for land redistribution. Furthermore, it made India the first nation to provide universal adult franchise to all its inhabitants right from the republic’s creation. In fact, every adult Indian citizen received the right to vote more than a decade before the civil rights movement forced the American administration to provide the same to African Americans by removing the system of disenfranchisement targeted toward them. Thus, the constitution paved the way for a social revolution simultaneously with a political one. A major achievement of the constitution was that it facilitated for each citizen the flexibility to cultivate multiple identities—based on loyalty to their own linguistic group, religion, and community—while being identified as an Indian. The political integration of India i.e. assimilating the 562 princely states of British India to the Union of India was the other significant step that was successfully executed to forestall the plummet into pandemonium. The process of Indianization of the British Army with definitive civilian control and the commitment of the constitution to secular values were other factors that helped in establishing the legitimacy of the national government in India. Finally, one personality, that of Jawaharlal Nehru, played a major role in holding India together during the crucial years after independence (a role similarly played by George Washington as president of the newly born United States of America).

Fourth, in both nations, amidst such tempestuous circumstances, there came forward a generation of leaders who nurtured their fledgling republic in many ways. In fact, it can be argued persuasively that, but for these leaders, the two nations would not have come into being in their present form. No single leader in either nation can be addressed as the sole founder of the nation. In America, the historical

positioning allowed the founding generation to show unrestrained creativity in establishing the republic. This is because everything from establishing republican traditions to setting up a secular state was a novel venture. In the words of one of the founding fathers John Adams

It has been the will of Heaven that we should be thrown into existence at a period when the greatest philosophers and law-givers of antiquity would have wished to live. A period when a coincidence of circumstances without example, has afforded to thirteen Colonies, at once, an opportunity of beginning government anew from the foundation, and building as they choose.⁸

No founding father could have done everything alone. The founding fathers played crucial roles in all the major events (sometimes alone, sometimes in collaboration with each other, and sometimes in opposition to each other) from the time of the Revolutionary War to the formation of political parties.

In India, the founding generation (especially Mohandas Gandhi) devised methods of non-violent struggle towards achieving Independence from Britain and then utilized its unique position of leadership to create a framework for political and social revolution. It is notable that though both nations have a single founding father positioned above the rest (George Washington in America and Mohandas Gandhi in India), it was only due to the collective effort by the founding generation that history came into being. This was unlike many other nations such as China, Russia, or Turkey where autocracy dominated the modern nation's founding era. Just like the American founding generation, each Indian founding father had his own methods to achieve the shared goals (as we shall see later in the book). The Indian founding fathers often worked in tandem but sometimes positioned themselves against each other, leading to healthy debates between their competing ideas of nationhood. In both nations, as a consequence of the extensive roles played by the two founding generations, we can trace the origin of the current political and social institutions to a specific and short period of time. This is unlike nations such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy where multiple iterations of political and social changes across generations brought about the present institutions of governance.

Taken together the above four parallels in history are scarcely true for any other nation. Furthermore, for both nations, during the founding era, foreigners painted a grim view of the future by predicting the impossibility of the republic's survival. Fortunately, both the United States of America and India successfully emerged as outliers in being able to achieve the confluence of all sorts of diversities with nationhood within a republican establishment.

The founding generation of each nation was composed of astute leaders who were men of letters as well as men of action. They expressed their thoughts and ideas in the form of books, essays, and orations. But, they were not content with the vocal expression only. They worked hard towards realizing their political ideas. Yet, they were thinkers first and politicians second. Politics came to them as a means of attaining their objectives. In both nations, as we shall see in this book, the founders not only gave expression to their thoughts but used all means of politics and compromises to sculpt the republic of their conception.

It is an oft-asked question in America that how a population of less than 3 million (equivalent to that of Chicago today) residing in a political backwater compared to Europe, produced an extraordinary array of leaders who ushered a political revolution that changed the form of governance across the world. This question touches on the debate around the "great man theory," which hypothesizes if history can be largely explained by the impact of great men. With self-reflection on this question in the Indian context, Nehru wrote, 'We are little men serving great causes, but because the cause is great, something of that greatness falls upon us also.'⁹ We may not be able to answer the question but we can surely say that the role played by the founding generation (whether that of India or of America) remains distinct and above that of all succeeding generations because of its positioning as being the first. In both nations, a constant process of debate and dissension underwent between the founding fathers. These debates shaped their views which in turn shaped the two nations. As historian Paul Johnson writes about the American founding fathers, '[W]hat was particularly providential was the way in which their strengths and weaknesses compensated each other, so that the group as a whole was infinitely more formidable than the sum of its parts.'¹⁰

The world's largest and its oldest democracy have never been so intimately connected in every respect as they are now. A decade ago, former American President Barack Obama proclaimed India and the United States as "natural allies" in the 21st century.¹¹ However, as we saw above, in ways more than one, the historical trajectory of these democracies already had many parallels. There is much for both nations to learn from each other's history, especially from the two founding generations.

Both nations have a keen sense of their history which they tend to ruminate, understand, absorb, debate, evaluate, re-evaluate, and re-evaluate through an ever-growing amount of literature. The interest in their own founding fathers has been ever-increasing in both nations. The founding fathers are often eulogized, sometimes denounced, but are never forgotten. They have become heroes in the national pantheon. Every year, in both nations, many works are published about their own founding fathers. The motives of these works vary from venerating these historical figures to debating their political ideas to excoriating their actions to vilifying their personal lives. In addition to the scholarly research, the largest contributing factor which drives this tendency is that every single political debate in each nation still invokes arguments from the founding era. Since the present institutions of government trace their ancestry to the times when their seeds were sowed and watered by the founding generation, the lawmakers in each nation still debate the political actions and intentions of the founding fathers.

In America, the founding generation has been mythologized like in no other nation. The founding fathers have become wise superhumans so much so that no other political elite in the world is thought to come close to them. In a way, this is natural since the founding fathers of America are characters from a very distant past—from the times which we can only imagine and endeavor to comprehend but never fully interpret. Millions of Americans flock to the Washington Monument on the National Mall and the Jefferson Memorial every year to pay homage to these figures. There are television series, movies, and musicals that bring alive the founders for the present generation while books on the founding fathers trend at the top on bestseller lists. Furthermore, based on its policies, the

ruling government adopts and discards the founders as per its need (for example, Alexander Hamilton was adopted by Theodore Roosevelt and discarded for Thomas Jefferson by Franklin Roosevelt). The founding fathers pervade every aspect of American life—from the means of entertainment to banknotes and governance.

In India, the founding fathers are not so chronologically distant as to be so much mythologized as in America. After all, there still exists a generation that has seen them in person. The members of the founding generation have been selectively adopted by different political and social groups for their own agendas. Still, from the debates in the national parliament to the roadside discussions over tea in a village, the founding fathers and their actions are often invoked. Their birthdays are celebrated with pomp by their admirers with governments across the nation honoring them. Unfortunately, since the haze of wonder and mythology has not fully subsumed the founding generation yet, the founding fathers are viewed as individuals and not the noun, *Indian Founding Fathers*. Nevertheless, like America, the Indian founding fathers remain very popular in print, theater, and television. Their actions and thoughts are adduced to and quoted in every general election by prospective candidates. Finally, just like America, every government has its own favorite founding fathers. We may ask then that why do our present leaders seek to obtain the legitimacy for their actions from the founding fathers? Robert Kraynak has succinctly summarized this tendency of looking back at the American founding fathers which can be applied to the Indian founding fathers too. He writes

[A] deeper reason for the perennial fascination with the American Founders is the need to justify our political principles today—to explain why the principles we live by are “legitimate” in the ultimate sense of being right, just, or true. The search for legitimizing principles takes many forms, but one form is to try to prove that “the Founders are on your side”—meaning, your view of government and vision of America are in accordance with the Founding Fathers’ view, or with one of their members.¹²

So, the question arises that what exactly were the achievements of these two founding generations which have made them so relevant in the everyday lives of Americans and Indians respectively? The

British philosopher and essayist Alfred North Whitehead once remarked that ‘there have been only two instances in the history of Western Civilization when the political leaders of an emerging nation behaved as well as anyone could reasonably expect. The first was Rome under Caesar Augustus and the second was America’s revolutionary generation.’¹³ Whitehead so remarked because the American founding generation set up many firsts. It came out with flying colors in the nearly impossible task of winning a war against the world’s most powerful empire, then went on to forge a nation from thirteen states that had no common history of governance, established the world’s first nation-sized republic of the modern era, established a wholly secular state, and (inadvertently) kick-started the process that led to the formation of modern political parties.¹⁴ Had they attained success in only one of the above five undertakings, they would have still merited a prominent mention in world history for themselves. And yet, they were able to achieve all of the above in their own lifetime. They utilized the twin factors of geography (America’s isolation from the Old World with unbounded territory towards the west) and the ideas unleashed during those times in what later came to be known as “the Enlightenment,” to lay the foundation of the modern American nation. The political revolution started by the American founding fathers inaugurated a system of governance that has been adopted the world over in one form or another.

Commenting on India’s success as a democracy, Sunil Khilnani wrote two decades ago

[T]he history of independent India appears as the third moment in the great democratic experiment launched at the end of the eighteenth century by the American and French revolutions...Each of these experiments released immense energies...The Indian experiment is still in its early stages, and its outcome may well turn out to be the most significant of them all, partly because of its sheer human scale...¹⁵

The political elite of India forged common nationalism among its citizens, adopted a constitution that has stood the test of time despite the mindboggling diversity of the nation, made India the first nation in history to provide universal adult franchise while taking birth, politically integrated the 562 princely states into a single administrative unit, and successfully replaced the economically

extractive British police-state colony by an economically flourishing democratic republic. Increasingly, many nations in Asia and Africa plagued with single-party domination and military dictatorships look towards India's success in democratic politics and accommodating diverse groups in the post-colonial era. In addition to the political revolution, the Indian founding fathers also played a key role in instigating and promoting social revolution along multiple axes. These included the abolition of untouchability along with making provisions for the emancipation of depressed classes, abolishing the British-instituted land ownership system to promote economic equality, and reforming ancient Hindu laws through legislation to promote gender equality.

In a way, the Indian founders utilized the shared wisdom from the American creation (epitomized in India's constitution which considerably borrowed from its American counterpart) and applied it to a much diverse and larger population at another time. Khilnani further writes

If one looks beneath the messy confusion and black arts of India's politics, one sees in its democratic experience evidence of something that James Madison and his Federalist colleagues well understood more than two hundred years ago. Large republics with diverse and conflicting interests can be a better home for liberty, a safer haven against tyranny, than homogenous and exclusive ones. Within them, factions can check one another, moderating ideological fervor and softening power.¹⁶

Absorbing Madison's celebrated *Federalist No. 10* essay which detailed the above observation, the Indian founding fathers drafted a constitution that could promote unity in diversity. It is a fact that despite the occasional tensions between the two major religious communities (Hindus and Muslims), India remains the only nation with a very large Muslim population (more than 185 million) where Muslims share common citizenship with the majority community. Historian Ramachandra Guha remarks, 'Thus India provides a test case of the challenges to democracy from its critics on the left and the right; and a test case of the challenge to social harmony posed by a multi-religious citizenry.'¹⁷

The preeminent historian of the American founding era, Joseph Ellis claims that papers of the most prominent founders ‘taken together, constitute the most complete documentation of human endeavor by any political elite in recorded history.’¹⁸ This is not exactly true since the collected works of only two of the Indian founding fathers namely, Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, constitute more documentation than the combined documentation of many of the American founders. Irrespectively, the collected writings of these two founding generations go into hundreds of volumes of printed text. These have been diligently collected, translated, and indexed by generations of editors in both nations. Many of these writings are available free of cost and have been utilized by scholars to write biographies and histories, producing movies, documentaries, theater plays, etc. No other nation can claim to possess such a heritage of written text by leaders who not only expressed their ideas of nation-building but played prominent roles during the nation’s founding era. Additionally, another parallel between the two founding generations is that the founding fathers (in both nations) were in contact with each other. This means that through their own documentation, we can discern their interpersonal relationships and their views about each other’s actions.

The founding fathers in both nations wrote verbosely about their thoughts on various political, social, and economic issues of their times. It is fascinating to trace the evolution of their thoughts across time and events in their lives. They also come alive to us as human beings through their rich personal correspondence with family, friends, and close ones. Unfortunately, these personal letters have also fed an array of “scholars” in both nations who have approached the founding fathers to belittle their achievements by attacking them personally. Many of these writings, when taken out of the historical context, have fabricated controversies in the contemporary world. However, these same writings also illuminate the personal failings of the founding fathers. These writings help us bring them from the pedestal of Mount Olympus (abode of the most important gods in Greek mythology) to our world. The treasure trove of information in the writings of these founding generations has been used to conduct research across multiple domains in historiography, sociology, policy-making, linguistics, among others. With so many similarities,

it is nothing but surprising then that by and large, Americans are wholly unaware of the founding generation of India, and vice versa.

Much more surprising is that among academicians, there is not a single scholarly work that I could find which shows the two founding generations under the same light. It seems like the academicians in both nations have been devotedly possessive about and possessively devoted to their own founding generation.¹⁹ Furthermore, this ignorance has sustained even when the Indian founding fathers wrote predominantly in the English language or otherwise their works have been translated. Furthermore, both sets of founding fathers were educated (formally or informally) in the western ideas of liberty and nationalism, while they made their own contributions towards these ideas in their nation. Yet, much ink has been spilled in both nations to discuss contemporary and future foreign policy perspectives entwining the world's largest democracies while collective research on the two founding generations has been neglected. It is not out of antipathy but apathy for the other nation's history that this has been the case.

To be sure, in addition to the chronology, there are four obvious differences between the two founding generations. First, in America, none of the founding fathers were subservient to each other to the extent that many were subservient to Gandhi in India. American founders collaborated and dissented as friends and colleagues. On the other hand, many of the Indian founders deferred to Gandhi with either almost-parental or tutorial ties. If Washington can be viewed as *primus inter pares* among the American founders, then Gandhi was a central body around which many Indian founders revolved.

Second, as a consequence of the first difference, but also because of differences across culture and time, the expression of dissent among the Indian founders was never as vitriolic in language as that between the American founders. The kind of acrimonious language used by John Adams towards his colleagues and personal vilification through libeling in public newspapers encouraged by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton against each other were wholly absent among the Indian founders. The Indian founding fathers almost never permitted their ideological differences to affect their personal relationships.

Third, the office of the president was held by multiple founding fathers in succession in America, thus shaping the nation from the executive branch of the government. By contrast, in India, Nehru occupied the office of the prime minister until his death almost seventeen years after independence, by when many of the prominent founders had already died. Age played a large role in this discrepancy. In general, compared to the Indian founding fathers when India became independent, American founding fathers were relatively much younger when the Revolutionary War culminated in America's victory.

Fourth, American founders were solely interested in the success of the political revolution while Indian founders aimed at simultaneously realizing a political as well as a social revolution. American founders left open the questions of slavery and Native Americans for succeeding generations whereas Indian founders sought to bring a social revolution as well (such as by the emancipation of the Untouchables and transforming a feudal society into a democratic one as we will read in the following chapters). In this way, the Indian founding fathers brought about not only a political but also a social revolution to vindicate Jefferson's self-evident truths that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These differences notwithstanding, both sets of founding fathers significantly influenced the direction taken by their respective nations.

With so much achieved by the two founding generations, it is interesting to ask that if Whitehead was to come again and look around the world (not just the Western Civilization), will he include the Indian political elite in the same group of political leaders? It is also curious to ask what opinion will Whitehead make of the present generation of leaders in both democracies? Today, with anti-democratic and xenophobic forces gaining influence across the world, as citizens in India and the U.S. debate what it means to be an Indian or an American, the founding fathers are more relevant than ever before. Historian Gordon Wood remarks

The United States was founded on a set of beliefs and not, as were other nations, on a common ethnicity, language or religion. Since we are

not a nation in any traditional sense of the term, in order to establish nationhood, we have to reaffirm and reinforce periodically the values of the men who declared independence from Great Britain and framed the Constitution. As long as the Republic endures, in other words, Americans are destined to look back to the founding.²⁰

The founding fathers were ordinary men who did extraordinary things. Just like us, they had their flaws and failings. Their failings are manifest not just in their documented views but also in their nation's history as well as the present polity. As newer political and social disruptions originate around us, it is an opportune time to go back to the lives and actions of the founding fathers in search of answers to our present dilemmas.

Politics can be defined as 'the process by which a society chooses the rules that will govern it. ...When there is conflict over institutions, what happens depends on which people or group wins out in the game of politics.'²¹ Instinctively then, we search for the causes of our present distresses in the past. After all, it was the founding fathers who won in the game of politics and codified the rules in the constitution which governs our society. As Joseph Ellis writes

the American [true also for India] system of jurisprudence links all landmark constitutional decisions to the language of the Constitution itself and often to the "original intent" of the framers. Once again, this legal tradition gives the American Founders an abiding relevance in current discussions of foreign and domestic policy that would be inconceivable in most European countries.²²

This contemporary relevance of the founding fathers is what makes them ubiquitous in the nation's polity. Historians portray events around the founding of India and the United States of America as republics from various perspectives such as the so-called Whig, Marxist, and Imperialist interpretations of history. These interpretations do not agree with each other, indeed are mutually incompatible. Yet, the role of the founding fathers is prominent in all these perspectives. This is because each interpretation traces the source of our contemporary socio-political dilemmas to the actions of the founding fathers. Thus, the founding fathers continue to cast a long shadow on our present-day politics.

Both nations as democracies face a number of conundrums today. These revolve around the status of minorities, race, social and economic equality, nationalism, independence of the government institutions, highly partisan political parties, among others. Instead of democracy being a vehicle for politicians to promote social and economic inclusion, it is becoming a medium to gain power by fanning fears of “the other” among the citizens. Political rhetoric is loud and rancorous. Social distress is being fueled by populist measures leading to more anguish. However, if anything, social and economic distresses were much worse during the founding of these two democracies. In both nations, the debates around minorities, race, equality, nationalism, etc. raged during the founding era too, and were molded by the founders as they thought would be best for the future of their nation. Furthermore, the founding fathers had no precedents to guide them—they did not have the luxury to scrutinize and imbibe the history of their democracy and learn from it. They had to get things right at the first attempt with a very limited margin for error. If they would have failed, they would perhaps not have encountered another chance since many forces antithetical to democracy were also concurrently at play. Thus, it is natural to ask: what can we learn from the founding era to guide us in our present dilemmas as democracies? This book is a quest to answer the same.

Reading through the writings of the American founding fathers, one quickly gets familiar with two words frequently used by them—*Providence* and *Posterity*. It is manifest from their writings that they interpreted their own times as if bequeathed to them by Providence. They also aspired to be remembered by posterity through their actions. In old age, years after the American Revolution but when the rest of the world was still hostile to the republican ideals, Jefferson addressed posterity in what became the last letter of his life. This letter shows the sheer confidence and grandiosity of the aspirations of the founding generation. Jefferson wrote

may it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the signal of arousing men to burst the chains, under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings & security of self-government.²³

Similarly, John Adams wrote in his old age: ‘The American Revolution was not a common event. Its effects and consequences have already been awful over a great part of the globe. And when and where are they to cease?’²⁴ Clearly, both Jefferson and Adams were implying that the fruits of the American Revolution especially the establishment of a republic will propagate across the world. Yet, the American founding fathers were wise enough to be unwilling to bind the future generations with the tenets set by them. Jefferson had earlier written, ‘We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of its majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country.’²⁵ We get an allusion here that though the American founding fathers were very optimistic about the political institutions created by them, they were willing to let posterity judge for itself the suitability of these institutions. Contrastingly, the Indian founding fathers were not satisfied only with gaining independence from the British. Rather, they wanted to bring about a social revolution in a highly unequal nation ridden with many prejudices and superstitions. Jawaharlal Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” speech on the eve of India’s Independence has been much celebrated. But, this dithyramb delivered in English was actually a follow-up of his oration in Hindustani. In this now forgotten Hindustani speech, Nehru optimistically proclaimed

Generally, countries wrest their freedom after great bloodshed, tears and toil. Much blood has been spilt in our land, and in a way which is very painful. Notwithstanding that, we have achieved freedom by peaceful methods. We have set a new example before the world....Big problems confront us and at their sight sometimes our heart quivers, but, then again, the thought that in the past we have faced many a big problem and we shall do so again, gives us courage. Shall we be cowed down by these?...All Indians shall have equal rights, and each one of them is to partake equally in that freedom. We shall proceed like that, and whosoever tries to be aggressive will be checked by us. If anyone is oppressed, we shall stand by his side.²⁶

These examples show that in both nations, the founding fathers were confident about achieving their aims and were self-aware that they are setting an example for the world. They were conscious that their actions will determine the future of their nation and beyond.

The founding fathers faced many “problems” as faced by the two nations today. It is only from a few decades that America has become a truly multi-racial society guaranteeing equal political and judicial rights for all its citizens. The nation is still far from being able to secure social equality among all its citizens. In recent years, the fear of “the other” has made many Americans view the immigration system with suspicion. America has also seen multiple foreign military engagements in recent times and is still embroiled in them. In addition to all these concurrent happenings, the effects of globalization have led to huge income inequality, leading to a second “Gilded Age.” Some of the debates around these issues today were also conducted by the American founding generation in different forms.

The American founding fathers confronted the question of race in twin forms of slavery and Native Americans. They failed to answer the latter in a peaceful manner and left the former one unresolved which ultimately resulted in a civil war. Fortunately, their record on other such questions was more impressive. They participated in the debates around the freedom of religion and instituted a wholly secular state. When they confronted the dilemma of choosing a side in the Napoleonic wars, they chose neutrality which remained the core of the American foreign policy for more than a century.

Similarly, today India suffers from religious communalism, poverty, income inequality, and caste-based conflicts. These issues were tackled by the Indian founding fathers too—with varying degrees of successes and failures. For example, even after the wounds of the partition, they were able to forge a common nationalism not dependent on religion or language. But, they failed in destroying the seed of religious communalism itself in the process. Similar to the American founding generation, the Indian founding generation chose neutrality as the foreign policy during the Cold War. This tendency towards neutrality still dominates the nation’s foreign policy. While making comparisons with the founding fathers, what must be kept in mind is that taken overall, the conditions were much worse during the founding era than they are now. As discussed above, those times were highly turbulent and there would be neither India nor the United States today in its present form, without the actions—fruitful or futile—of the founding fathers. This is to say that there would be no

“founding” of the nation without the founding fathers. This is what makes in both nations the tendency to learn from the founding fathers an irresistible and incessant process.

At the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama optimistically proclaimed the “End of History.” Fukuyama wrote that ‘liberal democracy may constitute the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and the “final form of human government”....the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be improved on.’²⁷ [emphasis original.] Since then, the ripples originating from the 2008 financial crisis, the further rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the increasing gap in income equality has led to an upsurge in populist forces, identity-based hatred, and anti-democratic movements across the world. This upsurge has been stimulated further by various fast-pacing developments in technology—the effects of which we are still trying to comprehend and catch up with. Across the world, divisive political figures have capitalized on these changes.

On top of all these, we are now witnessing the catastrophic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and Global Warming which are making the world increasingly unstable. The institutions of governance conceived by the American founding generation are once again under threat. However, unlike last time when the threat was posed from the outside by an ideology (Communism), this time the threat originates from within those same institutions. As a consequence, many citizens of America and India are being forced to reassess their democratic ideals—indeed, are being forced to question the aims of the democratic system itself. Thus, it is natural for the present generation to look for answers to the founding era of their nation—to the times when these democratic institutions were established—and to the “original intent” of the founding generation. As India seeks to become a global power in the 21st century and as America plans to prepare for a post-COVID world with its hegemony being challenged by China (an authoritarian nation-state), it may be helpful to look back at their respective founding eras. Such navel-gazing would ensure that these nations do not lose sight of their democratic ideals that have brought them here in the first place.

It is said that all historians write with an eye to the present. However, we must also not delude ourselves with the notion that we can just bring back the democratic ideals from the founding times and