



Editorial

HM Queen Elizabeth II 1926-2022



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The Second Elizabethan Age 1952-2022

Queen Elizabeth II died peacefully at the Balmoral Castle on 8 September 2022. With her passing, the Elizabethan age came to an end. The passing of any monarch, a leader or someone with profound influence among their fellow humans does evoke much grief, emotion and action. Such is the programming of our psyche that even though we know the inevitability of death in the life of everyone born, it still leaves us with much emotional turmoil. Francis Bacon wrote, *"It is natural to die as to be born"*. Yet we are moved by the finality of the event. Queen Elizabeth II recognised this when she wrote, *"Grief is the price we pay for love"*.

For the love of Monarchism

For a monarch who influences not only the UK, the 16 countries of the Commonwealth and much of the modern world, having visited over 120 countries during her reign, the emotional turmoil is bound to reach across the globe. There has been an outpouring of love from people of all walks of life and words describing her decades of service to the nation and the commonwealth's people as exemplary. There is no doubt that, unlike many other monarchs, QE II has held sway across much of the world, if not in political power or material wealth but certainly by her statesmanship and the role she played with dignity.

One question that has sent many radio and TV presenters into a mild frenzy is whether this 'sway over much of the world is due to her royal inheritance or some divine and magnetic personality. There is consensus that she was indeed inspirational.

There were monarchists and then anti-monarchists. The achievements of the New Monarchs in the 15th century included limiting the power of the feudal aristocracy, creating centralised systems of taxation, maintaining a standing loyal army, encouraging some sense of national identity, fostering trade and enforcing religious unity. This is seen by historians as instrumental in the rising power of European kingdoms and their sway over distant lands, enriching their coffers by any means.

India and Monarchism

Outside of Europe, monarchs wield absolute power, with examples in the Ottomans, the middle-east and China. India was no stranger to absolute monarchism, with multiple kingdoms ruled by rulers within families. Indian monarchs (before Ashoka) were revered and feared but hardly loved. Ashoka (304-232 BCE) was one of India's greatest emperors, ruling the Maurya dynasty with an empire that spread almost across the entire subcontinent. He started as a cruel and aggressive King, gaining the nickname "Ashoka the Fierce" due to his ownership of an ornately decorated torture chamber. The Emperor waged a bitter war against Kalinga (modern-day Odisha), a feudal republic on the east coast, beginning around 261 BCE. This bloodiest of conflicts cost the lives of around 150,000 Kalinga warriors and 100,000 Mauryan men and is said to have caused the Daya River to run red. The aftermath, in which Kalinga was ransacked and thousands of people were deported, caused Ashoka to reappraise his attitude towards war. On his subsequent conversion to Buddhism, he vowed never to take another human life. Such was his adherence to the faith, and he had around 84,000 stupas (burial mounds) built and gave millions of pieces of gold to the monastic order.[1]

Samudragupta (315-380) had to defeat many smaller kingdoms, exterminating the opposing monarchs. He annexed more than 20 kingdoms, and due to his military might, neighbouring states in Iran and Afghanistan became tax-paying tributaries. Samudragupta's legacy was an empire stretching from the Himalayas to central India that would last until the year 500. A keen patron of the arts, his reign was also responsible for fostering music, science, literature and religious freedom and is often referred to as "the Golden Age of India".

It was, however, the Mughals who tried to emulate the new monarchism by uniting their lands with taxation and religion enforced by a large, standing army. If we consider monarchism in Mughal India based on the understanding that the Mughal reign coincides with the early modern period in Indian history, the first problem that should be addressed is the absolute authority wielded by monarchs. In this early modern society, small-scale farming in rural areas developed more than in the preceding periods. In addition, commerce and industry flourished, particularly commercial trade between remote areas. This era likewise saw tremendous growth in the area of foreign trade. The monarch stood at the head of and exerted control over a vast military and a well-developed bureaucratic machine to rule over this financially prosperous great empire. As a sovereign, his authority was felt in the political arena and the religious world. [2]

Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) and his progressive thinking helped to integrate conquered territories by diplomatic means and changed the state to become more liberal, introducing far-reaching social reforms, thus ensuring that the Mughal empire would prevail until the mid-19th Century.

India was already under crown control after 1858, and before this, under the dominion of the East India Company, which took control in 1757. In 1877, Benjamin Disraeli, Conservative Prime

Minister, had Queen Victoria proclaimed as Empress of India. Still, this title was a gesture to link the monarchy with the empire further and bind India closer to Britain. The Royal Titles Bill was brought before Parliament in 1876. It faced opposition from Liberals who feared that the title was synonymous with an absolutism. Celebrations were held in the Delhi Durbar on 1 January 1877, led by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton.[3] India under the English Crown till its independence and establishment as a republic was a chequered period. During her Golden Jubilee in 1887, Queen Victoria made every effort to showcase her 'jewel in the crown. She hosted lavish banquets and parties for Indian princes and European nobility and rode in elaborate processions accompanied by the Colonial Indian cavalry. Indian attendants were also brought to the royal household to help with the festivities. The Queen frequently wrote to influence matters in India. One such letter to Viceroy Lord Dufferin requested that he take 'some extra measure to prevent this painful quarrelling' so that the Muslims could carry out their ceremonies 'quietly and without molestation' and 'give strict orders and prevent the Mahomedans and the Hindus from interfering with one another so that perfect justice is shown to both.' India in Victoria's time was rife with such unrest, in addition to sweeping famine and widespread change.[4]

The Anti-Monarchists and Republicans

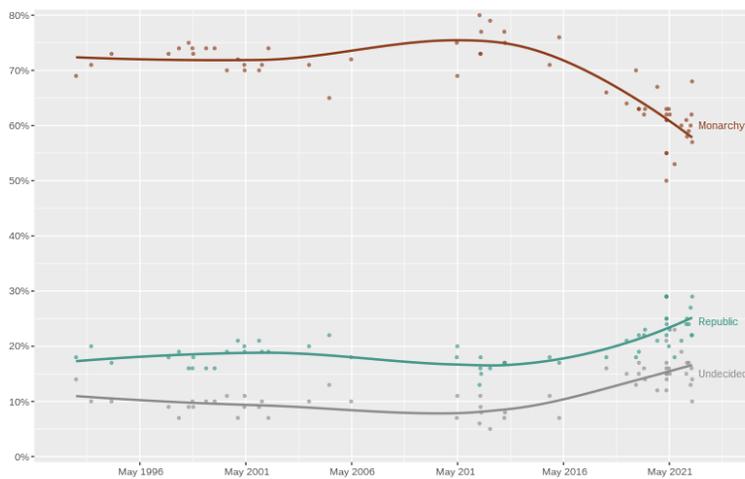
Then there are the anti-monarchists or republicans who do not accept the royal inheritance and line of accession. In England, this abolition was sealed in 1649, with the trial of King Charles I for treason by Oliver Cromwell. The English Parliament assumed independence from the Crown, and only in 1660 a limited monarchy was restored, further cemented by the 1689 Bill of Rights and in 1701 by the Act of Settlement. The

Commonwealth Parliament (1649-1659) represented itself as a republic in the classical model. Cromwell's Protectorate was less ideologically republican and was seen as restoring the mixed constitution of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy found in classical literature and English common law discourse. Charles II (29 May 1630 – 6 February 1685) was King of Scotland from 1649 until 1651 and King of England, Scotland and Ireland from the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy until he died in 1685.

Queen Victoria did her best to engage with her subjects through frequent public appearances,

sending telegrams to her subjects and starting the tradition of opening parliamentary sessions with her speech. She also had an affinity for India, although never had the privilege of visiting. She learnt Urdu, ensured that her favourite curry was served every day by the royal kitchen and employed people from India in her household staff. However, she accepted the advice of Disraeli and approved of his imperialist policies, which established Britain as the most powerful nation in the world. Her popularity in Britain soared as she became a symbol of the empire towards the end of her reign. [5]

The popularity of the monarchy and the rise of support for the republicans in England has remained steady, with only a recent trend away from the monarchy. [6]





SUSHRUTA

HEALTH POLICY & OPINIONS

With the passing of QE II, everyone but the hardened republicans have been silenced by the outpouring of grief from thousands across the country and abroad. Like many of her newer subjects, often grapples with the vexing questions of, 'where are you from?' or the follow-up of, 'Where are you really from?' It felt strange to be sitting in silence, unaware of the darkness settling around me as I watched the unfolding of the grim announcement from Buckingham palace of her passing. A lone tear drop glistened on the dark brown cheek, falling silently, unnoticed in the wrong kind of light.

Colonialism & the Monarchy

With her accession to the throne in 1953, Queen Elizabeth II became the Head of the Commonwealth, allowing sovereign republics to exist within the Commonwealth. "The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past," she insisted in her Christmas Day message of 1953. Initially imagined as a consortium of the "white" settler colonies (championed by the South African prime minister Jan Smuts), the Commonwealth had its origins in a racist and paternalistic conception of British rule as a form of tutelage, educating colonies in the mature responsibilities of self-government. Reconfigured in 1949 to accommodate newly independent Asian republics, the Commonwealth was the empire's sequel and a vehicle for preserving Britain's international influence.[7]

Queen Elizabeth has presided nominally over many post-colonial atrocities and managed to skirt clear personally controversies related to reparations and demand for recognition or apology for the activities of the Colonial masters in countries around the world. During her trip to India in 1961, millions of people lined the streets to view her procession. Among them in Esplanade, Calcutta were my father and his

siblings. They remember the spine-tingling excitement of being in the royal presence, on the front line and becoming part of a historical event.

During her 70 years on the throne, QE II had done nothing to acknowledge, redress and atone for the legacy of the suffering of her overseas subjects during her reign and/or during the entire period of trafficking, enslavement, indentureship and colonisation. In 2020, Barbados formally rescinded the Queen as the constitutional head and adopted a republic. Unfortunately, Queen Elizabeth II is a reminder of a tragic period in the colonial past of countries around the world.

True that Queen Elizabeth II maintained her stoic position as a stable constitutional monarch, underlining a stolid traditionalist front over decades of violent oppression. Yet, she steered clear of any controversy, but this is not what her former subjects from the Commonwealth expected. [8]

Inequality, Diversity & Controversy

Towards the end of her reign, the world, as Queen Elizabeth II knew it in 1953, had changed. She presided over Britain, where the society had become more diverse. In 2011, one in seven Britons were identified as non-white. There was a rising awareness of the historical legacy of inequality, the deep divisions in society were likely to inflame, and institutions were often put on the back foot following evidence of inherent racism, bias and discrimination.

In her book 'The Palace Papers,' Tina Brown wrote a chronicle of the unhappy House of Windsor, [9]-

'The Queen decides. She elevates. She exiles.'

Her household was mired in controversy. Her reactions during the public cry of grief that followed the untimely death of Diana (the

People's Princess)[10,11], the allegations against Prince Andrew[12], the treatment of Harry and Megan Markle [13,14] and their much-publicised move away from royal household duties. However, Queen Elizabeth II managed to keep her head high and maintain the sanctity of the family and her utmost allegiance to her divine duty.

The Second Carolean Age

Charles III was proclaimed the King on 10 September 2022, and the second Carolean age commenced with his ascension. The Carolean age under Charles II (1660-1685) was a time which followed a period when there was no King in England. King Charles III takes over at a time that offers a unique challenge of accepting that the world has changed; a post-Brexit Britain is much smaller, weaker financially and politically, and without many European allies. The war in Ukraine is at its doorstep. While there is likely to be a rebirth of the NATO alliance, many European countries are nervous about continuing the military commitment. China's neo-imperialistic influence and the tensions between the right and left of socio-political thought. Against this backdrop, there is an uprising of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, among many others, designed to rid society of the legacy of slavery, violent oppression, and the historical destruction of economies in Asia, Africa around the world in the guise of civilising the natives or colonialism.

If the Carolean age is to see the restoration of the influence of the monarchy and the aspiration of making a Britain, independent of Europe, an island with an iota of its previous glory- this will have to be earned not by arms, stealth or manipulation but by love, respect and fairness. The first step in repairing the image of Britain both to its diverse citizens and to the Commonwealth will have to begin with an open, honest acknowledgement of the atrocities of the

past, a promise of reparation and welcoming of equal partners. Will King Charles III and his new Prime Minister Lizz Truss rise to the challenge? We will have to wait and see.

As my favourite Rabindranath Tagore poet wrote,

'Death is not extinguishing the light, it is only putting out the light as dawn has come.'

(Cover sketch by Sharmila)

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