

There Is An Indian Ideology, But It's Not This

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Simon Gray, the late British playwright, once described his Oxbridge education as follows: "I wrote all my papers with a fraudulent fluency that could only have taken in those who were bound by their own educations to honour a fluent fraud."¹ Perry Anderson is an eminent and worthily acclaimed historian of medieval and modern Europe and a man of prodigious learning. So it is a matter of some astonishment and perhaps regret to those not anointed with an Oxbridge degree to find that Anderson has lost neither the skill nor the temptation he had once acquired at Oxford to write with a fraudulent fluency on subjects about which he knows very little.²

The Indian Ideology is, on the face of it, an indictment of the nationalist myth of a centuries-old Indian identity finding its political fruition in Nehru's democracy, albeit marred by the divisive machinations of the departing colonial power, and then continuing its miraculous journey by successfully riding over all of those impediments that have tripped up most other post-colonial states. A perfectly legitimate, even laudable, project, many would say. The first surprising thing about Anderson's three essays that comprise this book is their magisterial tone intended to create the impression that the unpalatable truth that the ideology was really a sham was being pronounced for the first time. Nowhere is there any acknowledgement that the so-called Indian ideology has been a subject of persistent public criticism in India from the moment of its birth (whenever one chooses to date it). The second surprising—some might say, shocking—thing about the essays is that their critical vantage point is, historiographically, not one that is contemporary with its object, but antecedent to it. Any reader familiar with the contemporary historiography of South Asia cannot but be dumbfounded by the repeated invocations by Anderson of criticisms of Indian nationalist politics that are of indubitable colonial vintage. For a renowned Marxist intellectual and critic of imperialist regimes like Anderson, his historical view of India is, to say the least, bewildering.

His much admired prose is, in these essays, repeatedly dotted by references to the revolt of 1857 as "the Mutiny," the Khilafat Committee as "the Caliphate Committee," and Indian writers as "native scholars." One suspects his lack of familiarity with contemporary historiography is to blame for this. Undergraduates studying Indian history these days routinely learn that what happened in 1857 was far

larger than a mutiny and its suppression. And given the blatantly racist pedigree of the word "native" in colonial India, knowledgeable readers will squirm at its use to describe writers with Indian names. Besides, why does Anderson use proper names when mentioning Western writers but merely gesture (not once but at least half a dozen times) to nameless "native scholars" when citing the latter's views? These are merely stylistic pointers to the much more substantively colonialist positions that Anderson occupies in his criticism of, say, Gandhi's politics, the integration of the princely states into India, or Indian democracy. But more on that later.

Dismantling the Gandhi Myth

Before launching into his first demolition job—the myth of Gandhi—Anderson spends a few paragraphs dismissing the claims of some contemporary Indian eminences whose "patriotic reveries" about the age-old unity of India from the dawn of civilization faithfully follow the rhetoric of the Indian state. "The 'idea of India,'" says Anderson, "was a European not a local invention, as the name itself makes clear. No such term, or equivalent, as 'India' existed in any indigenous language" (11). It is difficult to fathom what exactly he means by this. If he means that Indian languages do not have a name for the country and so have borrowed the Greek coinage, then that is clearly untrue. The Sanskrit name *bharatavarsa*, designating that division of the mythical island continent of *jambudvipa*, which was ruled by the legendary King Bharata, whose legendary history is narrated in several Puranas and the *Mahabharata*, has always been known in every major Indian language. Being a mythical name, its exact geographical boundaries are indeterminate. But precisely for that reason, the name has been available for centuries to describe a country with many shifting political boundaries. Most Indian languages today use that word, or the shorter Bharat, to name the country; the term "India" is reserved for use in English. In fact, the constitution officially names the country "India, that is, Bharat." Besides, various derivatives of the Arabic word *hind* have also been used in Indian languages for centuries. Hence, if the idea of India inheres exclusively in the Greek name, then other names of significant antiquity are available in the Indian languages and can

be (as indeed they constantly are) substituted for it. Or is it Anderson's claim that only Herodotus and Megasthenes, being European, could have given the country a name that is capable of carrying the burden of an idea?

The British conquest of India is summarily described by Anderson as the quick subjugation of a heterogeneous people, politically disunited, with an armed force consisting largely of native troops. Nowhere does he mention the motivations for acquiring a territorial empire in the East—mercantile rivalries with France, the Seven Years War, the need to finance the East India Company's exports from India, the irrepressible urge among its officers to plunder the country. Not only that, he emphasizes that the British only came as the last of a succession of conquerors, thus repeating the first axiom of two centuries of colonialist historiography beginning with Robert Orme: the inhabitants of India, though adept at manufacturing and commerce, were politically incapable of ruling themselves.³ Anderson speaks at some length of the composition of the British Indian army, always consisting of a large majority of Indian soldiers over British, and of the collaborating classes of princes, chiefs, landlords and the new English-educated gentry. "This was the stage on which Gandhi stepped on his arrival in Bombay in 1915," announces Anderson, without so much as mentioning the destruction of traditional Indian manufacturing, especially textiles, the unbearable pressures on the agrarian economy exacerbated by the heavy land tax, the growing indebtedness and dispossession of peasants, the increasingly frequent famines, all of which are now the staples of the historiography of colonial India in the nineteenth century. How else can one understand the impact of Gandhi's politics of self-reliance, spinning and weaving, voluntary poverty, cooperation and the call to take nationalist politics to the villages?

Anderson's blinkered view of popular politics is most apparent in his treatment of Gandhi. He is firmly convinced that Gandhi was the way he was because he was a man of religion, even though his peculiar brand of religion was idiosyncratic. No one, Anderson says, has studied this matter seriously, at least not before Kathryn Tidrick who published in 2006 "the first scrupulous account" of Gandhi's religion and was greeted by "a deafening silence."⁴ Tidrick's book, if one bothers to look at it, actually turns out to contain the bizarre argument that Gandhi was in truth an Esoteric Christian, a follower of the many cranks he befriended as a student living in London's East End. Gandhi apparently came to believe that "he was the pre-ordained and potentially divine world-saviour," a Christ in the making. Yet this "greatest godman of them all" never acknowledged his Esoteric Christianity because it would evoke ridicule and compromise the world role he wanted to play. Given that the source for this hitherto unknown

insight into Gandhi's true religious beliefs comes from a single stray comment by Gandhi's associate and biographer Pyarelal,⁵ a deafening silence was probably the most polite response the scholarly community could have offered the book.

In any case, religion is the dominant motif of Anderson's account of Gandhi's politics as well as popularity. "The original politics of the Congress elite had been studiously secular. Gandhi's takeover of the party not only gave it a popular basis it had never possessed before but injected a massive dose of religion—mythology, symbology, theology—into the national movement" (22). Yet Anderson never seriously examines how exactly Gandhi's religion came to be connected to his popularity. The liberal, constitutionalist and secular politics of the lawyers, landlords and retired civil servants who constituted the older Congress leadership had no support outside their own class and only limited support within. The mould was broken by so-called Extremist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Bombay and Aurobindo Ghose and Bepin Chandra Pal in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. They managed to mobilize a wider middle-class support in cities and small towns but only by explicitly invoking religious doctrines of political activism from the high Hindu tradition. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* while sailing from Britain to South Africa in 1909 with the explicit purpose of countering the Extremist appeal to armed resistance to colonial rule and kept up a lifelong mission of fighting that particular interpretation of the *Gita* in particular. But in his political career in India, as he radically expanded the bases of nationalist mobilization far beyond what the Extremists had achieved, he once again resorted to a religious idiom, except this time it was one of popular piety and devotion.

Anderson does not use the standard Indian name for religious conflict—communalism—preferring a term from Europe's sectarian history—"confessional politics"—once again betraying his dogged belief that the provincial intellectual history of the West must provide universally normative standards of historical evaluation. More troubling is the fact that his account of religion in politics shows no awareness of the nuances that have been uncovered in the last thirty years by historians working on the local material of nationalist mobilization in the 1920s and 1930s. He makes no distinction between Gandhi's personal spiritual experiments ("sleeping nude with his great grand-niece," for example), which were mostly regarded with incomprehension, if not scandalized disapproval, by even his closest followers, and the image of the saintly renouncer with miraculous powers, which was how he was regarded in much of the popular imagination; the social conservatism of many of his views on caste or women and the radical effects of his practical injunctions on

being one's own scavenger or asking women to go to jail by publicly courting arrest; his resolute adherence to his Hindu identity even as he embraced, and was in turn embraced by, village imams preaching in the name of the Khalifah. For Anderson, all of this research represents "the industry of glozing commentary that has grown up around [Gandhi's] ideas, adjusting them for contemporary usage in much the same way as the Pentateuch becomes a blueprint for universalism and the Quran all but a trailer for feminism" (18), conveniently forgetting that the most enlightening research here deals not with ideas but practices. An essay like Shahid Amin's "Gandhi as Mahatma," or his monograph on Chauri Chaura, or even a novel like Satinath Bhaduri's *Dhorai charit manas* or Phaniswarnath Renu's *Maila anchal*, sheds more light on how Gandhi acquired the popular authority that he did than Anderson's vapid observation: "It is no surprise that so magnetic a force would attract such passionate admiration, at the time and since" (17).⁶ There was a world of difference between Gandhi's moral appeal among the literate urban classes and his near-divine status in many parts of rural India, cutting across organized religious and sectarian divisions. The latter image was not wholly of Gandhi's own creation; indeed, he was often thoroughly irritated by the uninformed and frenzied adulation he received in the villages. But the source of that adulation, as the ethnographic research into rural political mobilization has revealed, had little to do with what Gandhi said or wrote. It had to do with the work that a culture of popular rural practices could perform on attempts by urban elites to mobilize peasants for nationalist agitation. Anderson's cursory investigations into Gandhi completely overlook this path-breaking research from the 1980s.

Indeed, Anderson's exclusive focus on Gandhi's personality in order to debunk his myth actually serves to accentuate rather than demystify the central paradox concerning his authority. Despite his many disagreements and conflicts with not only his political antagonists but even his closest lieutenants, how did Gandhi manage so often to get his way? He has been frequently called an autocrat, hiding an authoritarian personality under the cloak of benevolent saintliness: Anderson too calls him "temperamentally in many ways an autocrat" (17). Yet he was clearly no autocratic dictator in the usual sense of the term. Within the Congress organization, he was, until the early 1940s, unquestionably the supreme authority, even though for most of that period he did not hold any official position and indeed from 1934 was not even a member. His decision to suspend the Non-cooperation movement after the violent incidents at Chauri Chaura in 1922 was greeted with shock and disbelief in every rung of the Congress: from senior leaders like Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, Mohammed Ali and C. R. Das to young acolytes such as Jawaharlal

Nehru and Subhas Bose, virtually everyone disagreed and many argued with Gandhi. But he refused to budge; in the end, the others acquiesced. Why? He entered into a ferocious test of wills with Ambedkar in 1932 over the representation of the untouchable castes, putting his life on the line in a fast. It was an utterly unfair contest in which Ambedkar had to finally give in. Why? When Bose challenged Gandhi's chosen candidate for the top position in the party and won, Gandhi managed to throw Bose out of the party in a matter of weeks; an elected Congress president could not resist someone who held no position in the party. Why? It was not because all of those who opposed him and failed were afraid of something in Gandhi's personality—in fact, many, perhaps most, while following him politically did not take his so-called religion seriously at all. However, what they all recognized was the power he had to move the masses. None of them could match it. Putting it down to some inexplicable magical quality, they chose to defer to it or accept banishment from the organization. Even Ambedkar realized the calamity that would descend if he were to be blamed for Gandhi's death; he had no option but to agree to a pact.

That Gandhi had a deep dread of popular rebellion going out of control is beyond doubt. It is an observation that has been made by virtually every critical historian of the Left, from R. P. Dutt, the British communist, writing in 1940 to Ranajit Guha and Sumit Sarkar in recent years, not to speak of the communist leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad.⁷ Anderson makes much of the fact that in the same period in the early 1920s, popular rebellion in Ireland led to Britain having to concede an Irish Free State, suggesting that a similar conclusion might have been on the cards had Gandhi not put on the brakes. In fact, Anderson thinks it was the specter of widespread tax refusals in the countryside leading to the collapse of the entire land revenue system, causing an insurmountable crisis of the colonial state, which scared Gandhi into calling off the growing agitation. The Irish counterfactual is hardly persuasive, not only because of the incomparable difference in the sizes of the two colonies, but also because the colonial government in India had powerful coercive instruments such as seizure of the lands of tax defaulters and their sale by auction—measures that were widely employed in the 1920s. Only the most hardened non-cooperators were willing to accept the permanent loss of their lands; it was never imagined by even the most firebrand Congress agitators that the tax refusal could last for more than a year or two. The more difficult problem was the turning of the agitation by peasants against their local oppressors—landlords and rich farmers. Research on agrarian movements in Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra and other regions have shown that this turn did, in fact, take place. Gandhi, in particular, was resolutely against such

class warfare, and local Congress leaders spoke of postponing that battle until after freedom had been won. But peasants did not necessarily heed the advice and in numerous local areas all over India the forces unleashed by Non-cooperation endured in the form of struggles by tenants and sharecroppers against their overlords, sometimes outside the fold of the Congress but often within it.

On the question of Hindu-Muslim relations too, Anderson thinks that Gandhi's injection of religion into politics was the main reason for the political conflicts that later emerged between the two communities. The alliance over Khilafat was, according to Anderson, little more than opportunistic: predictably, it did not last. But the damage was done by turning the Congress into a mass organization essentially of the Hindus. Anderson overlooks the fact that it was the Khilafat agitation that produced an entire generation of Muslim leaders in those parts of the country such as UP, Bengal and Assam, where Muslims formed large rural peasant communities. Beginning their careers in the Congress, they became mass leaders in other political formations outside the Congress. Once again, the domain of popular politics, once opened up, often acquired a dynamic all of its own that did not owe anything to what Gandhi or anyone else said or did.

Anderson's "great men" view of history blinds him to the possibility that the carefully laid campaigns or plans of Gandhi or Nehru or Jinnah or Mountbatten could have produced, in the form of the response of the popular masses, consequences that were completely unanticipated. Ordinary people in India, whether in towns or villages, even when they enthusiastically joined the campaigns of mobilization launched by the elite leadership of political organizations such as the Congress, did not always dutifully follow the directions of their leaders. They often had their own reasons for joining the movement. Frequently, they refused to join, despite the best efforts of the leaders. Sometimes, having joined the movement, they quit, once again for their own reasons that did not necessarily conform to the reasons proffered by their elite leaders. These are the local realities of nationalist mobilization that have been revealed in rich detail by historical research since the 1980s.⁸ As such, it constitutes a powerful critique of the nationalist historiography which claims this mobilization to be the gift of the political leadership of Gandhi and his team. By entirely ignoring this corpus of research, Anderson, in his demolition of nationalist history, relapses—sadly—into the sneering condescension of a colonialist elitism.

This is shown most clearly in his account of how Indian independence was finally achieved. Gandhi's three great campaigns were failures, Anderson says, and none more so than the Quit India movement of 1942–44, which was crushed by the organized force of a colonial

power already at war. Anderson concludes: "By 1945 [Gandhi] was politically speaking already a back number . . . An assassin's bullet . . . embalm[ed] him in the martyr's death that by then he wanted" (44). That he had become irrelevant for the future plans of the Congress state leadership that was about to assume power can hardly be disputed. That he might have become, had he lived longer, a force of the opposition, perhaps even a thorn in the flesh of his erstwhile underlings, is a possibility that cannot be easily ruled out. One of his last political acts—once again, accomplished by a fast—was to reverse the decision of the new government to withhold Pakistan's share of the huge sterling reserves left behind by the British power as its wartime debt to India. The speculation can go on over how Gandhi might have reacted to the reform of Hindu marriage and inheritance laws: given his firm and repeatedly expressed opposition to state interference in matters of religion, it is reasonable to suggest that he would have opposed the move. Or planning the industrialization of the economy under state auspices: could that have gone through so easily had Gandhi chosen to oppose it? There is little doubt that Gandhi would have had no role within government, but can one be so sure that he would not have tried to influence, even obstruct, its course from the outside?

But that is a matter on which one is free to speculate. The surprise comes with Anderson's stark enunciation of the conditions that brought about Indian independence. Those conditions had nothing to do with nationalist mass mobilizations, he says, because the latter always ended in failure. The first reason for independence was the expanded system of electoral representation put into effect by the British in 1937. The irresistible temptations of governmental office now entered the soul of Indian politicians; after that there was no going back to civil disobedience and jails. Anderson conveniently forgets that the Congress held provincial ministries for a mere two years, quitting as soon as Britain declared war on behalf of India in 1939. "The wine of electoral success had done what the water of non-violence had failed to do: give Congress a political weight and strength that neither rulers nor rivals could henceforth ignore" (46). Reading the last paragraphs of Anderson's chapter on Gandhi, one might get the impression that one was reading a passage out of a book like *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*.⁹ But that would be a mistake because there was a liberal earnestness about Thompson and Garratt's self-congratulatory history that gave it an air of hopeful anticipation of the future. Anderson's cynical assessment of Indian nationalism as culminating in the fight for the loaves and fishes of office makes it little more than a simple restatement of Gallagher, Johnson and Seal's much criticized "Cambridge school" thesis.¹⁰ But his second explanation of India's independence is even more striking: it was "the hammer blow from

outside" in the form of the Japanese assault on South-east Asia which left the British with no alternative but to come to an understanding with the Congress on the future of India. That is what led after the war to Indian independence. Popular movements, mass mobilization, nationalist projects—nothing was of any relevance. The vanity of an empire could only be destroyed by the aggression of another empire. It is an explanation one might have expected from a Tory military historian: that it comes from one of the foremost Marxist historians of our time will remain a matter of lasting shame.

Who was Responsible for Partition?

Anderson's "great men" method of history writing might seem somewhat more appropriate for the history of the partition of India than for other periods or episodes. In 1947, the fate of more than four hundred million people was decided within a few weeks by about a dozen or so individuals. Anderson has a great time prying into the characters, motivations and foibles of Nehru, Jinnah and Mountbatten. "In Nehru, Mountbatten found delightful company, a social equal with a touch of the same temperament. . . . Within weeks, not only was Nehru fast friends with the viceroy, but soon thereafter in bed with his wife, to the satisfaction of all concerned. . . . Affairs of the heart rarely affect affairs of state. But in this case the erotic ties of the triangle were, at the least, unlikely to tilt British policy towards the League" (65).

That policy, according to Anderson, had shifted from a British reliance on Muslim politicians earlier in the century as a counterweight to the growing nationalist challenge of the Congress, bolstered in particular by Jinnah's offer of cooperation with the British war effort when Congress launched the Quit India movement in 1942, to one of open sympathy with the Congress after the Labour victory in the British elections of 1945. The Labour Party's links with the Congress were of long standing, strengthened by personal ties fostered by Nehru and Krishna Menon. "To sentimental affinity was joined national amour-propre:" men like Attlee, "products of an imperial education," could not countenance the possibility that at the moment of its inevitable departure from India, Britain might have to supervise the destruction of the political unity it had created in the course of two centuries of benevolent rule. The Muslim League, "once a tactical expedient for the Raj, was now the principal obstacle to a satisfactory settlement of its affairs." To this line of thinking was added the pretentious self-importance of Mountbatten, "that mendacious, intellectually limited hustler" (64). The result was a process in which the Congress was assured of far more than a fair share of the attention of the departing colonial power.

Then why did that process culminate in the partition of the country, an idea that the Congress had al-

ways attributed to the unmerited ambition of Jinnah and the classic imperial policy of divide and rule? To figure this out, one needs to understand the calculations of the Congress leadership. After the fruitless negotiations with the Cripps mission in 1942, it had become clear that any arrangement of transfer of power that preserved the political unity of India would involve a very weak central authority with considerable autonomy for the provinces and the princely states. This was not the sovereign independence the post-Gandhi leadership of the Congress, fired by the imagination of a strong nation-state marching rapidly towards industrialization, was expecting. The astute Rajagopalachari saw this as early as 1942 when he proposed that Congress accept the Cripps mission proposal of the provincial option and let the Muslim provinces go their own way if they so wanted. But the idea of "the vivisection of India," as Gandhi described the proposal, was anathema to the Congress at this time.¹¹ B. R. Ambedkar, taking a position of neutrality between Hindus and Muslims, set out with clinical clarity the realist case for partition in 1944, arguing that with a carefully organized transfer of populations, it would produce a coherent nation-state in India free of the virus of sectarian politics. Those Muslims who would remain in India would lack the numerical strength to form credible electoral blocs and would thus become free to align with different political parties based on class interests and social ideologies. Without a Muslim challenge, there would be no viable ground for Hindu communalism either. More importantly, the army would not be saddled with a large corps of Muslim soldiers of doubtful loyalty.¹²

But intellectual clarity does not always point to the most expedient path in the domain of mass political sympathies. The realist strategy could be grasped, but not spoken, far less advertised as an article of faith. So while the Congress continued to insist on its commitment to the unity of India, its leaders resisted every proposal for confederation and provincial autonomy. The historical documentation on this matter has been quite irrefutable ever since the publication of Ayesha Jalal's book on Jinnah.¹³ Anderson is right to say that for Nehru, the Cabinet Mission plan would have "deprive[d] his party of the powerful centralized state to which it had always aspired. . . . if the worst came to the worst, it was better to enjoy an unimpeded monopoly of power in the larger part of India than be shackled by having to share it in an undivided one" (67). But the reason for this, Anderson asserts, is that the Congress always wanted a state dominated by Hindus. What they intended to do with this state is not, for him, a question worth taking seriously. Once again, for a Marxist scholar, not to take into account the well advertised Congress promises to abolish landlordism, carry out land reform, promote state-led industrialization through a central planning body

of experts, and undertake reform of marriage and inheritance laws and caste discrimination through social legislation, is a glaring omission. Even more glaring is his failure to mention that virtually the entire class of Indian industrialists was at this time supportive of a strong centralized national state that could provide the lead for precisely such a transformation of the colonial economy into one of relatively independent industrial growth. That the Congress promises would remain only partially and shoddily fulfilled and that the capitalists would, in the 1960s, vent their frustration at being hemmed in by the overwhelming weight of the public sector and the punishing tax regime are, of course, the stuff of Indian politics after independence. The point is that Anderson does not appear to be at all aware of this line of analysis of Indian independence and partition.

Instead, Anderson repeats the old charge that Mountbatten, prodded by Nehru, was in a mad rush to hand over power and leave. Despite warnings about the crisis of authority that might ensue, he gave himself no time to adequately plan the political and administrative transition. Anderson's twist to this story, however, seeks to rework it into a historical morality play. There are only two possible interpretations of the story of the partition, he says. It happened either because the Congress would not accept the other option of an undivided but confederal state, in which case the Congress was primarily responsible for the horrors of the partition killings, or because the populations of the region were so steeped in the supernatural that no modern state could be built except on the foundation of religious majorities, in which case the very culture of the people must be blamed. "Confronted with the outcome of the struggle for independence, Indian intellectuals find themselves in an impasse. If partition could have been avoided, the party that led the national movement to such a disastrous upshot stands condemned. If partition was inevitable, the culture whose dynamics made confessional conflict politically insuperable becomes a *damnsa hereditas*, occasion for collective shame. The party still rules, and the state continues to call itself secular. It is no surprise the question it poses should be so widely repressed in India" (100).

Anderson's insistence on Congress' culpability leads him to accuse it of abandoning its ally, the Khudai Khidmatgar (Anderson, of course, calls it the Red Shirts), in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), of getting Mountbatten to put pressure on Radcliffe to award the Gurdaspur district of Punjab to India in order to provide an access to Kashmir even before that state had decided to join the Union, and of supervising an enormous massacre of Muslims during the armed annexation of Hyderabad. All three charges are tendentious, not because the Congress was blameless, but because Anderson is shockingly parsimonious with his facts.

On NWFP, Anderson neglects to mention that the Khudai Khidmatgar actually got fewer votes in the 1946 elections than the Muslim League and won a majority to form the government only because of its support base in the more numerous rural constituencies with fewer voters and its sweep of the non-Muslim constituencies. Further, as Wiqar Ali Shah has shown, the relations of the Khan Sahib ministry with the tribal populations deteriorated rapidly from late 1946 leading to the rising influence among them of the Muslim League.¹⁴ The governor Olaf Caroe knew that a referendum among the entire electorate (about 14 percent of the population) would result in a Muslim League victory in a province strategically located in the neighborhood of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union and war-torn China, which is why he insisted with Mountbatten that the fate of NWFP should not be decided by its recently elected assembly but by a plebiscite. Basing himself on a remark by Mukulika Banerjee, Anderson attributes Congress' acquiescence to a plebiscite to Nehru's petulance at being subjected to hostile demonstrations during his visit to the province in October 1946. But Anderson neglects to mention that Banerjee also speaks of Abdul Gaffar Khan's "final great act of principle:" "He feared that given the tensions and violence already simmering in the Province, particularly among the would-be *jihadists* in the Tribal Areas, a fiercely fought referendum campaign and narrow majority in favor of India would be tragically divisive and risk unleashing unbridled violence among the Pathans."¹⁵ The Khudai Khidmatgar did not participate in the referendum and NWFP voted overwhelmingly to join Pakistan.

The story of Kashmir's accession to India has been told so often in such tiresome detail that Anderson has nothing to add to it. But his selective narration is revealing. He makes much of the allegedly forged document of accession without mentioning that the reason why the original was not presented before the Indian cabinet was because the Maharaja had not made the commitment that Nehru insisted upon to install Sheikh Abdullah as the prime minister. Nehru was keen to secure a stamp of popular legitimacy on what was a forcible annexation and Abdullah's National Conference, without doubt, represented the most popular force at this time in the Kashmir valley, though not in Muzaffarabad in the West and the tribal areas of Baltistan and Gilgit in the North. Anderson mentions without comment the fact that the National Conference included a significant communist component in its leadership which later, during Abdullah's first ministry, carried out land reforms on a scale and with a thoroughness unmatched anywhere else in India at the time and, arguably, since. Indeed, Anderson seems to chide the National Conference for its eagerness to bring down the hated monarchy. It was his faith in Abdullah's popularity that must have

persuaded Nehru that a plebiscite in Kashmir would democratically settle the matter of its accession once and for all. It is well known that Nehru subsequently prevaricated, leading to the falling out with and imprisonment of Abdullah, the series of sham elections to prop up the puppet regimes of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed and his successors, and the permanent installation in the Kashmir valley of what is effectively an occupation force. This is a story that is by no means untold in India, even though it is not, for obvious reasons, the version that is officially promoted. The writings of Balraj Puri represent the most thoroughly researched criticism of official Indian policy in Kashmir but there are many others who have, over the years, made similar criticisms.¹⁶

On Hyderabad, Anderson's omissions are inexplorable. "When the Indian army took over Hyderabad," he writes, "massive Hindu pogroms against the Muslim population broke out, aided and abetted by its regulars." Some 40,000 Muslims were killed, making it "the largest single massacre in the history of the Indian union, dwarfing the killings by the Pathan raiders en route to Srinagar which India has ever since used as the *casus belli* for its annexation of Kashmir" (90–1). Not once does he mention the massive armed peasant movement led by the Communist Party in Telangana demanding, among other things, the end of the Nizam's rule and the integration of Hyderabad into India. The fact that there was a significant section of Muslim intellectuals and students in Hyderabad city who were part of the communist mobilization escapes his notice.¹⁷ Nor does he mention that prior to the entry of the Indian army, there was a virtual coup d'état in Hyderabad by the Ittehad ul Muslimin, whose leader Qazim Razvi declared his intention to proclaim Islamic rule in the state and merge it with Pakistan, and whose military wing, the Razakars, went on a violent rampage in different parts of the state.¹⁸ Retaliatory killings took place after the Indian army moved in. The report of a fact-finding team consisting of senior Congress leaders Pandit Sundarlal and Kazi Abdul Ghaffar noted that the massacres took place mainly in the districts of Osmanabad and Nanded in the Marathwada region (currently in Maharashtra) and in Gulbarga and Bidar (now in Karnataka), all regions, it said, that "had been the main strongholds of Razakars . . . the people of those four districts had been the worst sufferers at the hands of the Razakars." The report estimated that in the entire state between 27,000 to 40,000 people were killed "during and after the police action." It noted that the soldiers often stood by as the mob looted and killed; at times they even joined in the frenzy. But it also noted that there were many instances where Hindus came to the rescue of Muslims.¹⁹ No one familiar with the scores of reports on communal riots in twentieth-century India

will be surprised by the contents of the Sundarlal report, except for the extremely large number of the victims and the fact that the report was not published at the time. Significantly, P. Sundarayya, the communist leader of the Telangana movement, remarks: ". . . the Union armies rescued the very deshmukhs and Razakar leader Kasim Razvi, who were responsible for setting fire to village after village and the killing of hundreds of people. At the same time, the ordinary Muslim people, who stood against the atrocities of the Nizam, were pounced upon and untold miseries were inflicted on them." There were no large-scale conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in the Telangana region; they took place in districts where there was little democratic mobilization.²⁰ Anderson, busy arranging the sensational nuggets of information that can stack up the tally of Indian misdeeds against Pakistani ones, seems to be entirely uninterested in such historical contextualization.

Anderson's explanation of India's partition is thus quite simple: it was the Congress and its implicit, sometimes explicit, identification with the institutions and sentiments of the Hindu religion that was at the root of it. One of the few persons who saw with complete lucidity that partition was indeed the best solution for all concerned was Ambedkar. "The condition of Ambedkar's sanity was that he had broken with Hinduism. The condition of Nehru's obduracy was that he had not" (90). After such pronouncements, it seems utterly futile to bring up the question of the materialist interpretation of history.

A Democracy of Caste

In his third essay, Anderson presents a lurid recounting of Indian politics since independence in a prose fit for the tabloids. While doing this, he expands on two principal themes: first, Indian democracy as the playground of caste, and second, the cravenness of Indian intellectuals. He is clearly irritated by commentators who wax eloquent on the uniqueness of Indian democracy: "To be impressive . . . is not to be miraculous. . . . There was never anything supernatural about it: terrestrial explanations suffice" (105). He does not have to go far to find that explanation. "The answer lies, and has always lain, in what also sets India apart from any other country in the world, the historic peculiarities of its system of social stratification" (111). Anderson gives short shrift to the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956, describing it as a concession under pressure to regional demands, forgetting entirely that it was the founding principle of the reorganization of the Congress under Gandhi in 1919–20, which, by ignoring the existing colonial administrative divisions into provinces, made the regional languages instead of

English the medium of mass political communication and thus initiated a process of democratization of politics that has continued ever since. “But the truly deep impediments to collective action, even within language communities, let alone across them,” he continues,

lay in the impassable trenches of the caste system. Hereditary, hierarchical, occupational, striated through and through with phobias and taboos, Hindu social organisation fissured the population into some five thousand jatis, few with any uniform status or definition across the country. No other system of inequality, dividing not simply, as in most cases, noble from commoner, rich from poor, trader from farmer, learned from unlettered, but the clean from the unclean, the seeable from the unseeable, the wretched from the abject, has ever been so extreme, and so hard-wired with religious force into human expectation” (111–2).

Such breathless portrayals of the radical strangeness of Indian society have now become extinct in the academic discourse on caste, but Anderson, a neophyte, seems to be unaware how comically his language echoes that of European missionaries and administrators of past centuries. Undaunted, he presses on. Caste is, he declares,

the ultimate secret of Indian democracy. . . . Caste is what preserved Hindu democracy from disintegration. Fixing in hierarchical position and dividing from one another every disadvantaged group, legitimating every misery in this life as a penalty for moral transgression in a previous incarnation, as it became the habitual framework of the nation it struck away any possibility of broad collective action to redress earthly injustice that might otherwise have threatened the stability of the parliamentary order over which Congress serenely presided for two decades after independence (112).

The result is a political system that has “morphed under pressure from below” to become one resembling Ireland and Israel where numerous small political parties jostle to align with one of the two major parties, both of which subscribe to the hegemonic religion of national identity. Anderson’s irrepressible need to make sense of India in terms of Western parallels prevents him from asking even the most elementary question as to whether Irish or Israeli political campaigns are of a scale that might be at all comparable with Indian ones.

Let me mention only a few reasons why Anderson’s archaic view of caste has led him astray. It is now firmly established in the sociological literature that six decades of electoral democracy has extricated caste from its scriptural and religious moorings and turned it into a secular and politically charged category of social identity. The “five thousand *jatis*” are no longer (it is doubtful that they ever were) a massive array of fixed compartments, sanctified by cycles of rebirth, that preclude any possibility of mixture or social mobility. They are

categories that can be politically and socially mobilized for change, alliance, differentiation, enmity—in other words, made adequate for putting together large electoral constituencies.

The size of some of these constituencies based on caste alliances is staggering. Had Anderson not been blinded by his Orientalist blinkers, he might have noticed, for instance, that in Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party led by the Yadavs or the Bahujan Samaj Party led by Dalits often garner the support of some twenty million voters, which is larger than any mobilization ever accomplished by any political party in Europe, whether conservative, social democratic or revolutionary. “But castes are not classes,” Anderson retorts. “Constructed by religion and divided by occupation, they are denizens of a universe of symbolism governed by customary rituals and taboos. State and market have loosened the frontiers between them, but when it came, political activism would all but inevitably acquire a distortingly symbolic twist” (154–5). There we have it! Mobilization by class would have brought material remedies for the oppressed; mobilization by caste only produces symbolic satisfaction: “. . . recognition—the quest for dignity—trumps redistribution, leaders gratifying followers with symbols of esteem rather than the substance of emancipation” (155). It is patently obvious to any observer of Indian politics that the quest for dignity is at the heart of much popular agitation. But it is unclear why Anderson believes that that cannot, or should not, be a valid component of the quest for emancipation.

Besides, it is not true that the struggle always stops with recognition. In the southern states, where the social and political movement against Brahmin domination is a hundred years old, not only have the upper castes been thoroughly ousted from all positions of political power, the struggle for the material amelioration of poverty is arguably more advanced there than in other regions of the country. The Dravida parties of Tamil Nadu, for instance, having completely jettisoned the atheist rationalism of E. V. Ramasamy, the founder of the social movement, and made their peace with popular religiosity, compete to provide some of the best administered social welfare programs in the country to the most disadvantaged castes. Or, take the flexibility of the legal category of the OBC (Other Backward Classes) that operates as a new social identity encompassing many hitherto distinct jatis; it can accommodate even Muslims, alongside backward castes, as claimants to social justice. And as for the rival idiom of class, take the case of West Bengal where nearly five decades of political mobilization by the Left parties has totally delegitimized caste as a language of political identity, only to establish the virtually complete domination of the upper castes in every political party across the entire spectrum from

Right to Left and in every institution of public life. This should not lead one to assert that caste rather than class is the appropriate ground of political mobilization in India, but rather to remind oneself that neither has privileged access to the road to emancipation.

Indeed, what numerous studies of caste since the 1950s have demonstrated with increasingly irrefutable evidence is that, contrary to Anderson's belief, it is not religion or belief in the supernatural that constrains the structures of power in Indian society. On the contrary, it is the dynamics of power that continues to transform the practices of caste. Only an obsolete prejudice about caste as something solidly embedded in an immovable substratum of scripturally sanctioned dogma can prevent someone from seeing this.

Anderson claims to have identified "what is perfectly obvious, but never seen or spoken," namely, that "the three great insurgencies against the Indian state have come in Kashmir, Nagaland-Mizoram and Punjab—regions respectively Muslim, Christian and Sikh" (144). There, he says, "the reach of Hinduism stops," and presumably that of caste-democracy too. Even if one were to discount the political significance of the fact that caste exists even among the Muslims of Kashmir, it is well known that Punjab as a whole, and Sikhs as a religious community, are not only divided by caste, but political affiliations too are frequently determined by caste loyalty. (Punjab, in fact, has the largest proportion of Dalits to the total population among all states in India.) Besides, major insurgency has taken place in the valley of Assam which is thoroughly a part of the domain of "Hinduism" as well as caste. Finally, the armed uprising in "the Naxalite corridor that runs from Jharkhand to Andhra Pradesh" which Anderson describes as having "pre-Aryan tribal populations with their own forest cults" is led—Anderson forgets to mention—by Hindu upper-caste Maoists recruited from Andhra, Bihar, Orissa and Bengal.

The same blindness leads Anderson to identify India's democracy of caste as an "intractable brake . . . on the fullest expansion of capital. The poor outvote the rich, the villages the cities, the slums the suburbs. At once activated and segregated by caste, the deprived have never been able to achieve any real redistribution of national income, their drive for recognition typically contenting itself with symbolic representation in the political firmament, with little reaction at its lack of practical consequence" (164). Anderson's sociological reasoning here seems to be a fairly simple Weberian one. He does not see that capitalist enterprise as well as accumulation has often been enabled in India by caste networks. The early Indian industrialists mostly came out of traditional mercantile caste groups, operating their kin loyalties to raise capital and enforce contracts. More recently, caste networks of rising farmer and artisanal

castes, including a few who were formerly untouchable, have produced major manufacturing capitalists, operating on the borderline between the corporate and informal sectors by forging effective caste-based alliances sometimes straddling the divide between capital and labor. Industrial towns like Sivakasi and Tirupur in Tamil Nadu are perhaps the most striking examples of the operation of caste-based capital, but they abound all over India.

What this form of capital does not produce is the abstract subject of history, as the classical theory of Western capitalism propounds. Of course, that has many significant implications for the form of capitalist development in India. Crucially, under prevailing conditions in countries like India or China, primitive accumulation—that inevitable precondition of capitalist growth—produces a massive surplus population, dissociated from its means of production, but with no possibility of entry into the capitalist growth sector, not even as a reserve army of labor. Lacking the instruments used in Europe in past centuries to manage primitive accumulation—emigration to America and Australia, mass recruitment into the army, Malthusian demographic catastrophes, such as mass deaths in epidemics or famines—large emerging capitalist economies are having to find new political methods mediated by the state to look after huge populations that are entirely redundant for the capitalist growth economy. These instruments may be easier to find in an authoritarian country like China, even though recent accounts of widespread local resistance to land seizure and forced mobility suggest those methods too are straining at their limits. In India, they have been found, first, in the massive expansion of informal units in manufacturing and services that survive by gathering political support for violations of labor, tax, municipal or environmental laws that apply to the corporate sector; and second, under conditions of a vibrant electoral democracy, by responding in bits and pieces, according to political calculations, to a plethora of mobilized demands for resettlement, rehabilitation, the right to a livelihood and a life of dignity. If democracy in India is a drag on capitalist growth, as the corporate sector and the urban middle classes often complain, it is not because of caste per se; it is because democracy is unnecessary for the strictly economic dynamic of capitalist growth and imposes costs on capital that it would rather not pay, especially when growth slows down.

That brings us back to one of the persistent contradictions of modern political life: the historic duty of an enlightened elite to educate the people to become reasonable and productive citizens, on the one hand, and the myth of the sovereignty of the people, on the other. The latter requires the popular will to be periodically verified through universal suffrage in which the

prejudices, fantasies, fears and irrationalities of voters could well dictate the result. Given Anderson's comparison between China and India in the matter of promoting capitalist growth, there is no doubt about which side his sympathies lie. His conclusion, in fact, is no different from those of American modernization theorists of the 1960s who said, "Let the underdeveloped world first modernize their social institutions for capitalist growth; democracy can wait." Anderson's words are an echo of David Apter and Samuel Huntington, half a century later.

Why have Indian intellectuals failed in their historic duty to instill the values of secular rationality in the people? Anderson is convinced it is because they have been spineless in confronting the irrationalities of Hinduism. Their professions of secularism are "spavined," i.e. like a disorder of the knee joint in a horse's hind leg (151). Even non-believers are fearful of demystifying the religion that has been fused with the nation. They shrink from affronting the vast majority of their fellow citizens by belittling the beliefs and practices of popular life permeated by religion. On the political front, while they may criticize this or that economic or administrative policy of the government, they do not protest against the military occupation of Kashmir or the immense apparatus of repression in the Northeastern states and the tribal regions of Chhattisgarh. And on the question of the unity of the nation, "dissent comes close to vanishing altogether." Why? Because "Hindu culture, exceptionally rich in epics and metaphysics, was exceptionally poor in history, a branch of knowledge radically devalued by the doctrines of karma, for which any given temporal existence on earth was no more than a fleeting episode in the moral cycle of the soul" (173–4). No surprise, therefore, that even those Indian intellectuals trained in Western universities fall so easily for the trans-historical metaphysics of the centuries-old unity of India.

Every nation-state produces its own apologetic literature. Nation-states that are relatively stable and have succeeded in eliciting a certain degree of consent from those they rule produce sturdy official ideologies. There does exist today, without a shred of doubt, an official Indian ideology that extols the virtues of the Indian nation, its leaders and their historic achievements. This ideology finds expression even in the academic writing of stalwarts celebrated in the universities as well as in public life. Why should one be surprised by that? What is completely untrue, however, is Anderson's charge that there is no critique of "the Indian ideology" within or outside the academy. On the question of state repression, for instance, it is ridiculous to suggest that governments in India have not been subjected to public criticism, even legal action in the courts, by movements almost entirely led by professionals and intellectuals. In fact, ever since

the Emergency, the civil liberties movement has been one of the most vibrant areas of activism by dissident intellectuals all over India. Anderson does not once mention the women's movement which has radically criticized both the patriarchal foundations of the nationalist ideology and the discrimination against women institutionalized by religion-based personal laws. His only reference to Subaltern Studies merely dismisses it as a neo-nativist defense of popular practices of devotion, ignoring entirely that its historians—Gyanendra Pandey, in particular—carefully constructed an account of how the upper-caste Hindu came to be normalized as the model citizen of the Indian state and "Congress secularism" and "Hindu nationalism" became two rival ruling class strategies for mobilizing consent from the subaltern classes. Those are exactly the critiques Anderson is now offering, but they have already been made in the academic literature with far greater expertise and rigor and without his inept Orientalist chatter.²¹ And although Anderson makes several gestures of approval towards Ambedkar and later Dalit critics of the official national ideology, he completely undercuts the political thrust of that critique by his wholesale rejection of the strategy of caste assertion and the building of electoral caste alliances in the quest for governmental power. His is, he would have us believe, the first prophetic call to Indians to renounce the dubious heritage of their nationalist past.

The claim becomes even more unpersuasive when one realizes that Anderson's view of the Indian ideology is entirely restricted to the world of English-language writings on India. He clearly has no access to any of the massive material that circulates, in print as well as orally, in the Indian languages as the primary source of political information for most people in the country. The Indian ideology "in English medium," as one would say in India, is one thing; the Indian ideology in any of the vernaculars is quite another. This is not to suggest that the dominant nationalist ideology is not purveyed in the Indian languages, or that in the domain of the vernaculars there is enormous resistance to that ideology. But the explosion of research in the last two decades on the print literatures in the Indian languages has shown with remarkable clarity that the modern imagination of the Indian nation and its social and political terrain is differently constituted in each language region, shaped by its own distinctive linguistic tradition and regional political structure. This means that the Indian ideology in its effective role in creating consent is complexly structured, with different inflections and valences in the different linguistic regions of the country. This goes some way in explaining the fact that with the broadening and deepening of democratic desires, there has been a steady decline in the support base of both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party, the two major national parties, just as there has

been the rise of powerful regional parties, each based in one or more states. The Indian ideology will still remain alive and well, but not in the simple constitutive relation to Hinduism and caste that Anderson imagines it to be. It is far more flexible and robust than that, which is why it will not be bothered in the least by critics like him; it has got used to dealing with far more variegated and culturally rooted critics.

But the question that will persist among the numerous admirers of his writings is: where in all this is Perry Anderson the Marxist? Reading this book, one cannot help being reminded that when Marx and Engels wrote *The German Ideology* in 1846, they were, by criticizing Bauer, Stirner and other Young Hegelians, in effect settling scores with their own intellectual heritage. It would have been far more in keeping with that tradition had Anderson attempted an exercise such as *The British Colonial Ideology*. It might have brought him face to face with some of the unexamined premises of his own intellectual upbringing.

NOTES

1. Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "The British Gift to American Letters," *The New York Times*, Sunday Review, August 5, 2012.

2. Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology* (London: Verso, 2013). Page references in the text relate to this edition.

3. Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the year MDCCXLV, 2 vols.* (London: John Nourse, 1778).

4. Kathryn Tidrick, *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

5. Tidrick, 33.

6. Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–22," in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1–61; Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Satinath Bhaduri, *Dhorai charit manas* in Sankha Ghosh and Nirmalya Acharya, eds., *Satinath granthabali*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Signet, 1973), 1–296; Phaniswarnath Renu, *Maila ancal* (Delhi: Rajkamal, 2003).

7. R. Palme Dutt, *India To-day* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940; Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1947); Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959).

8. This literature is now quite large. A few examples: Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar*

Pradesh, 1926–1934 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); Sumit Sarkar, *Popular Movements and Middle-class Leadership in Late Colonial India* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984); Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920–1947: The Land Question* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984, new ed. 2012); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

9. Edward J. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Filament of British Rule in India* (London: Macmillan, 1934; revised ed. Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1958).

10. John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870 to 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

11. Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 79.

12. B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India* (Bombay: Thacker, 1944).

13. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

14. Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159–242.

15. Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North West Frontier* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 189.

16. Balraj Puri, *Kashmir towards Insurgency* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993); *Kashmir: Insurgency and After* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008).

17. Gulam Hyder, "Anti-Nizam Struggle: Participation of Muslims" in Raj Bahadur Gour, Chandragupta Chaudhary, Gulam Hyder and B. S. Paranjpe, *Glorious Telengana Armed Struggle* (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1973), 136–52.

18. Margrit Pernau, *The Passing of Patrimonialism: Politics and Political Culture in Hyderabad 1911–1948* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 322–33.

19. The main text of the report was published in *Frontline* (Chennai), 18, 5 (March 3, 2001).

20. P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons* (Calcutta: Communist Party of India (Marxist), 1972), 188–9.

21. Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Pandey, ed., *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993).

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