

# The Curious Persistence of Colonial Ideology

Sudipta Kaviraj

Perry Anderson's book, *The Indian Ideology* comes out of a high tradition of European thinking that runs from great modern thinkers like Hegel, James and J.S. Mill—only from its wrong side.

In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel had remarked about the Indian 'spirit': "India is a phenomenon antique as well as modern; and one which has remained stationary and fixed. . . . It is marked by an idealism—but only as an Idealism of the Imagination, without distinct conceptions . . . which changes everything into the merely Imaginative. . . . We may say the Absolute being is presented here as in the ecstatic state of the dreaming condition." He thought "The character of Spirit in a state of Dream, as the generic principle of the Hindoo Nature, must be further defined" (141–142). Two features of Hegel's observations about Indian history are remarkable. The first is the establishment of a linear frame upon the gathering evidence, collected by European intellectuals of the high colonial period, of the immense diversity of social forms in the world. The enterprise named 'universal history' sought to make sense of this increasing evidence of diversity. While earlier European thinkers, like Voltaire or Montesquieu, arranged this evidence on a lateral range of diversity, a powerful new strand of thinking, represented by both Hegel and the Scottish enlightenment, placed them on a hierarchical scale of 'civilization.' For this new discourse of progress, Europe, China, India did not represent different 'civilizations' with divergent internal principles, but a straight linear scale of civilization in which other cultures were rude, and the modern European civilized. Universal history—the name for reflection on the history of different societies—involved thinking about these histories through a grid of comparison. But it was an odd sort of comparison marked by a striking asymmetry. European thinkers could draw on a vast amount of accumulated knowledge about their own past, compared to scanty material about other societies; but that did not deter them from pronouncing judgments about their comparative value in human evolution. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* was a classic text of this genre. On the basis of available knowledge of European and non-European history, he proceeded to evaluate the great civilizations of the world, and soon produced a powerful narrative that showed the civilizations of China, India and Persia as stages passed by human history, coming eventually to Europe and following its triumphant rise to self-consciousness and modern free-

dom. Hegel's reflection gave rise to two strongly connected strands of historical reflection. His reflections on Western societies began the tradition of philosophical history or historical sociology that formed the originary bases of modern social science thinking about Europe. But it is important to note that at the same time, he inaugurated a tradition of thinking about non-European societies, which was a combination of little information and grand generalizations—inaugurating a cognitively deleterious tradition of 'theorizing.' Strictly speaking, European writings about the non-West in this form were an exercise in not comparative, but contrastive history: because its treatment of the two kinds of societies was asymmetric. They set up a contrast in which attention to some large, supposedly essential features of Asian societies set the stage for closer and detailed exploration of the history of Europe. Hegel's work is paradoxical, precisely because it announces historicity as a universal principle and suspends its application for the larger part of the world. At the very foundation of the modern theory of historicity we find a 'truncated universal.'<sup>1</sup>

Anderson's book follows Hegel, at least in this case, not in the first trajectory, but the second. A remarkable feature that travels from Hegel directly into Anderson is the supposition explicit in Hegel, slightly less so in his successor, that European societies were hot, historical societies: by contrast, Indian and other societies were cold, unchanging. They could be dealt with in a small chapter of exalted prose simply because they had no history: they had an essential character, captured in Hegel's piercing vision, and presented in a short, simple and strikingly ahistorical analysis. The methods of study of Western and non-Western societies were necessarily asymmetrical: the West needed historicization, a fine sensitivity about constant social change, the East required essentialization, an intuitive grasp of the essence of their character which had formed presumably in ancient times and stopped, crusted in the immobile "village communities."<sup>2</sup> The Hindoo mind was given to febrile imagination, lived in a world of its own fanciful constructs, unconnected to reality. Evidently, the qualities of the Hindu mind—the collective mind of most Indians, except a few who received Western education—had not changed, as evidenced by the cases of Gandhi and Nehru.<sup>3</sup> Nehru's case is particularly instructive: he was entirely "Hindoo" in his thinking; his secularism was either a pretense or a delusion. Nineteenth century British observers had already noted that Hindus

were peculiarly deceitful. Indians are unchangingly religious or communal: in fact, these two categories were interchangeable. Gandhi and Jinnah were explicitly religious; Nehru was inexplicitly so: and Ambedkar, whom Anderson treats with less derision, after all, fought for the rights of his community, and though Anderson does not emphasize this, collapsed at the end of his life into the consolations of Buddhism. The history of India, as this powerful philosophical argument suggests, is therefore always a history of its religious life. The argument is remarkable because of its time. In colonial times, this kind of argument was common. It is interesting to see that the tradition of this part of Hegelian thought still runs powerfully through European culture, including its Marxist strand. Ideology, as Anderson suggests, is indeed a formidable force: it prevents even great minds from seeing what is involved in their own thinking.

Perry Anderson's slight book would not deserve close analysis, had it not been for the surprises it contains. It shows the paradoxical nature of European post-coloniality: it is a time after colonialism, but in which some of its intellectuals still feel a warm affection for the colonial past. In one sense, the book is very Hegelian:<sup>4</sup> it is a series of grand generalizations on the basis of an economical reading list comparable to an undergraduate syllabus—which shows what can be accomplished by a great mind even on the basis of rather meagre facts. The structural similarity of the analysis with Hegel is striking: Anderson does not seem to think that much Marxism is required in an analysis of modern Indian politics;<sup>5</sup> all that is required is a good grasp of how the Hindu mind [Hegel's "The Hindoo Spirit"] works. What is striking about the book is not so much its contents, but its attendant claims. Anderson is not the first to attack Gandhi or Nehru from the left. He is not the first, as he admits, to suggest that Jinnah never wanted to create the state of Pakistan; and he comes after a long line of Western observers who predicted every time a general elections was held, that that was to be the last. In the light of these antecedent criticisms, it is startling to encounter the claim that Anderson is the first to organize these facts coherently into a critique of Indian ideology; for Indians lack the courage to utter these truths, or the honesty to face them. The book is all about truth. It could be called Anderson's experiments with truth: its successive chapters unveil the truth about Gandhi, about Partition and about Indian democracy. We shall discuss these truths in sequence; but as these judgments about the three themes have been made before, it is more instructive to examine the methods of analysis which produce these remarkable conclusions.<sup>6</sup>

### The Truth about Gandhi

Before the analysis of Gandhi's politics, Anderson makes a really startling prior claim, not made by even

conventional colonial ideologists. The 'idea of India,' Anderson is convinced, was a British invention—certainly an argument of some originality. Nationalists, whom Anderson derides as gushy irrationalists, of course thought that the idea was theirs—the phrase at least was Tagore's. Colonial writers derided this idea as impractical and utopian. The diverse parts of the sub-continent, which had never had a united political history, could not remain united through the power of any internal animating idea, but only by the 'steel frame' of the colonial state. Others claimed that the idea of a *political* India did not pre-exist British rule, but the historical circumstances of British unification of India created conditions for an historically unprecedented nationalist imagination. Anderson's position is different from all the above: the idea of India, the nationalist imagination of a single people who could demand freedom from British rule, was, for him, in the face of all evidence, 'a British invention.' If that means simply the fact of colonial conquest, he is not referring to an *idea*, but a brute administrative force. The suggestion that the idea was British is curious because it must mean that a colonial state incongruously created and placed an anti-imperialist emotion in the minds of natives—a strange act of altruism by imperialist rulers. How that is possible Anderson does not condescend to explain. What are the great texts of this British created Indian nationalism? Anderson does not offer much evidence from intellectual history. Remarkably like Hegel, he expects us to surrender to this remarkable claim by the simple power of speculative 'theory.' After the British gifted this idea to Indians, they began to put this to political use. The principal figure who is put 'centre stage' in this story of independence, illegitimately as it turns out, is Gandhi.

Anderson's critique is marked by a notable singleness of purpose—to debunk the myth of a successful national popular movement leading to the establishment of a successful democracy; and that is equaled by the singleness of his categorical repertoire. Before Gandhi, Indian politics had unfolded in expected ways—through a slow education of the Indians in the complexities of modern liberalism. Two general historical theses stand in the background of this analysis. British imperialism was a generally benign enterprise that had, following its Millian heritage,<sup>7</sup> long decided to grant democracy to its subjects—in small bearable installments. Second, the prior history of India was one of incessant conflict between its two religious communities (note their singleness and solidity). The understandably slow evolution of Indians towards a democratic future was suddenly thrust aside by Gandhi—who introduced *religion* (note the thunderous singleness of the category again) into political life. Through his long critique of Gandhi and Indian nationalists, Anderson never wavers from this high-toned singularity of the category. Anderson's thesis—remarkable for both its force and

simplicity—is that Gandhi introduced religion into Indian politics, mobilizing the Indian peasantry for his initial popular movements by infusing the political appeal of nationalist defiance of colonialism with a deeply Hindu religious language. This made “Indian” nationalism an entirely Hindu idea and political enterprise. Given the centuries of ceaseless conflict between two religious communities—which was restrained only by the benign secular power of British rule,<sup>8</sup> it is hardly surprising that Muslims (note the emphatic singular) were scandalized by this appeal, and were forced to launch their own religious counter-offensive through the Muslim League. Actually, this reading is not entirely new: Indian communists had long pursued a similar line on Gandhi. Thus, at least some Indians had anticipated Anderson’s critique—though he forgets to include them in awarding certificates of secular probity. Admittedly, their analyses lacked the grace of Anderson’s superior prose.<sup>9</sup>

Anderson rescues us from the common error of believing Gandhi’s attempts at mass mobilization were successful and these played a major part in ending imperial rule. He replaces that ideological belief by a more critical perspective. British power was ended in India by two historical forces—by the orderly introduction of democracy by the colonial rulers themselves, though this democracy was not yet quite complete. At the time of their departure, the British had been able to enfranchise only 13 percent of the people in the onward march towards democracy. A second, sudden, unexpected force that hastened the end of colonial rule was the Japanese military threat during the war. Although the war ended with British victory, the British were sufficiently unnerved by the Japanese invasion to decide to leave India in 1947. These two factors were jointly sufficient for an explanation of the end of empire. Gandhi was thus a failure, who initiated popular movements only to lose his nerve when popular masses threatened to act on their own, and he always withdrew the mobilization when real revolution threatened.<sup>10</sup> Gandhi’s irrelevance to India’s freedom has passed unnoticed due to the power of the ideological narrative. He was in fact saved from oblivion by the assassin’s bullet. A devious obscurantist politician, Gandhi misled the Indian peasantry into fruitless confrontations with British power. In this story too Anderson was anticipated by an Indian Marxist. Except for the last one, the rest of the truths about Gandhi were clearly grasped by M.N. Roy, who does not figure in Anderson’s list of perceptive Indians.<sup>11</sup> Gandhi and Nehru come out the worst in Anderson’s history. Despite their well-known differences regarding the place of religion in political life, or the centrality of the state in modern societies, they are both shown, without much obvious evidence, to collaborate in the creation of a predominantly Hindu national-

ist movement in the Congress. And not surprisingly, the state that emerges from it is a Hindu confessional state, only barely hidden by the appurtenances of a secular constitution.

Some dissenting figures emerge with greater honor from this story of travestying political rationalism and secularity: these figures are Jinnah, Ambedkar and Subhas Chandra Bose. An interesting underlying feature of Anderson’s worldview is his belief in the power of an Oxbridge education to haul Indians out of their religious blindness into the light of political rationalism, so that they learnt to see politics as an instrumental activity and gathered the courage to state what they really wanted politically. Bose and Ambedkar were fortunate recipients of this illumination through their cognitive pilgrimage to Cambridge and the LSE.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi, we are categorically informed, was a lawyer, not a thinker.<sup>13</sup> Passing a Cambridge examination is the true test of a philosopher, which establishes Bose’s credentials incontrovertibly as a subtle philosophical mind. Anderson passes over the fact that Bose’s attraction to socialism was so wide that he did not mind collaborating with a form of socialism with a strong nationalist bias. Or, perhaps his great philosophical subtleties were temporarily in suspension when he sought support for India’s freedom from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Historical analysis with a society forces us to do two types of tasks: first, to acquire factual knowledge. Even Hegel’s speculative genius could not rescue his thinking from the effects of his narrow factual base. Secondly, if we wish to advance an explanatory argument based on some specific causal factor, we must focus on increasing conceptual differentiation of that analytical category. If Marxists wish to explain the rise of modernity through the central category of capital, they have to conceptually concentrate on that particular category—trying to figure out, as Marx did, how many types of capital exist, and how each produces effects peculiar to it. Explanatory load has to be matched with conceptual differentiation: the more we want an explanatory concept to accomplish the further we have to refine it. Anderson’s analytics does not follow this rule. The primary trouble is that it uses the term religion as a resolute singular—too broadly, vaguely, abstractly, unhistorically and indiscriminately. Attention to the internal history of Indian religious life will show that Gandhi was not the ingénue Marxists often think he was—using ‘religion’ in politics. He had read widely and thought closely about religion precisely because it was so important for his conduct; and he recognized that Indian religious thought contained varying, conflicting strands. Avoiding trends which interpreted religious belonging in ways that promoted conflict, he carefully selected strands advocating accommodation. For him, that strand of religion reinforced a pluralist

nationalism and a pluralist-secular state.<sup>14</sup> Radical commentators, usually unaware of the differentiation in religious ideas, because of their general distaste for religion, and trusting a long European colonial tradition of depicting Indian history as a long war between religious communities, often conclude that any injection of religious belief into politics must fuel discord. Gandhi and Jinnah drew upon ideas coming from the religious past—but they drew on ideas that were of very different provenance, which we lose sight of if we only recognize ‘the religious.’

Anderson, along with some Marxists and many traditions of social scientific thinking uses a crude, entirely undifferentiated category of ‘religion’ and refuses to look more closely at what they are using as a crucial explanatory tool for their analysis. By contrast, Ashis Nandy, who pioneered the modern debate about secularity in India, after introducing the theme of politicians using ‘religion,’ provides a preliminary refinement between four types of political leaders—with the large methodological implication that what can be said about one cannot be said about any other.<sup>15</sup> What one kind of ‘use of religion’ does to politics is quite different, often opposed, to what other ones do. Conceptual proliferation—creation of new concepts to capture creases in reality that we discern when we look closely—is a first condition of historical analysis. One professional hazard for analysts of society is that often they might have to look closely at something they deeply disapprove of. But abhorrence against the caste system does not mean that, if we undertake serious social analysis, we can avoid close and differentiated inspection of how caste really functions. An ideological aversion to religion often leads to unwillingness to get into conceptual refinements in reading religion in social life. Anderson’s use of ‘religion’ is so devoid of discrimination that for him Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru, and probably Indian scholars working on Indian politics are all ‘religious,’ with various degrees of adherence—clear-headed or self-delusive—to Hinduism. Their protestations that they are not believers or practitioners are of no avail, because of another convenient tool of Marxist analysis—false consciousness.

Anderson’s category of ‘religion’—which recognizes no differentiation and no history—does not register the specific kind of religious thought that different actors brought into religious life. Anderson’s treatment of Jinnah is different, because he was a personally secular individual who used religion only for political purposes, as a rational instrumentalist. He was using Muslim separatism for entirely rational political purposes. Though he called for a state for Indian Muslims, Jinnah was free from religious obscurantism: he knew what he was doing, the mark of a rational orientation in action. Compared to Gandhi and Nehru, to Anderson,

Ambedkar too appears less disingenuous, because of his explicit advocacy of a communal demand. What he applauds about Ambedkar is his clearheaded assertion that because of the nature of Hindu society, it is impossible for untouchables to be treated well or equally, and their only recourse is to act as a negatively defined religious collectivity. His approval of Ambedkar comes at the cost of some inconsistency. After all, at the end of his life Ambedkar too succumbed to the seduction of Buddhism. Jinnah and Ambedkar explicitly acknowledge the indelibility of religious division and base their politics on the assumption of religious exclusivity. This analysis expresses the firm conviction that Indians are irredeemably religious: they can either engage in a frank politics of communal interests, or hide it behind a deceiving facade of fraudulent secularity. Modern politics can only articulate the untransformable religiosity of India, not change it. A few remarkable individuals, educated in the secular culture of the West, can withstand its pressure—Bose, Ambedkar, in our times, Vanaik—but they are too few to shape the political destiny of the state. With this as the true character of the national movement, it is hardly surprising that politics after independence followed a bleak trajectory of failures.

### **The Truth about Partition**

Independence was of course inextricable from partition. This was truly a defining moment for modern India, as Anderson says, and any serious history must try to understand how that happened. Two complementary explanations are offered in Anderson’s work—a long term history and a short-term analysis of fateful decisions. Anderson agrees with a ‘revisionist’ view that questions the simple narrative that the Muslim league and its leaders, at the end of the colonial period, wanted to create a separate state of Pakistan and historical circumstances of the endgame of empire gave them eventual victory.

Recent writing about partition has explored it extensively; but there is hardly any settlement of the contentious judgments. A section of academics contend that Congress was primarily responsible for the tragedy, not Jinnah, the Muslim League, and certainly not the British administration. Anderson seems to be persuaded by the British colonialist version of Indian history—that the British, as rational colonial masters of a land gripped by irrational religious fanaticism, did their best to hold two warring communities apart; and their only purpose was to keep India united and lead it towards democracy. The genealogy of this line of thought is to be traced to the other strand of European theory—James Mill’s History. It is odd, to say the least, to dismiss Jinnah and the Muslim League’s repeated demands for Pakistan as mere bargaining devices; and to turn

Congress leaders, especially Nehru—who emerges from Anderson's narrative as a Hindu chauvinist authoritarian—and Gandhi as the real creators of Pakistan. It is one thing to claim that politicians often say one thing and believe something else, quite another to read them as meaning exactly the opposite of what they consistently say. There is no doubt that politicians bargain, mask their motives, make excessive demands in the hope of getting a more realistic settlement; but Namierite history and subtle reading of motives are taken to implausible lengths when agents' declared objectives are entirely set aside, and they are credited with achieving just the opposite of what they professed to demand. A simple reading of Sumit Sarkar's book on the *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* would provide evidence that the British were not intent on keeping India united, and they were not exactly in despair when Hindus and Muslims clashed over political objectives.<sup>16</sup>

Anderson correctly emphasizes the elitist character of the constitutional settlement—but with some contradiction. On the one hand he believes Indians—elites and masses alike—recognize only their religious-communal identity; on the other he wishes for the establishment of a modern [liberal?] constitution. His criticism, after all, is not that those constitutional principles—*borrowed* from the Enlightenment, obviously—were faulty; but that Congress governments paid lip service to those principles and actually violated them in practice. But, the question then is, where did these principles come from? Not from the enlightened reflection of Ambedkar and Bose? Ambedkar was isolated and actually advocated the communal principle. Bose was not involved in the deliberations leading to the adoption of the document. The Indian constitution becomes a parting gift from the benevolent colonialists, as the draft was based in part on the previous 1935 statute. The constitution appears as a massive operation of deception by the Indian elite to get good marks from Western powers who still dominated the world. Once more, this fundamental paradox—of universal suffrage being established by an assembly elected on a limited electorate—has been noted by previous commentators. Anderson notes that Khilnani noted this; but he could have gone further and noted that even Nehru did so. Campaigning before the first general elections, he repeatedly portrayed it as a popular ratification of an elite constitution.

Two other arguments against Nehru are equally remarkable. The first one is a curious argument about Indian democracy. “The *larger* truth, however, is that Nehru could be the democratic ruler he was because once in office, he faced little opposition. . . . Given the ease of that monopoly of power—political scientists would dub it a ‘one-party democracy’—there was no occasion to resort to the conventional forms of authoritarian rule.” First, the characterization by politi-

cal scientists is strictly about the peculiar structure of the party system—actually dubbed ‘a one-party dominant system’—precisely to avoid conflation with one-party systems of ‘popular democracies’ like China or the Soviet Union. But it is hard to understand “the larger truth”: there is something unreliable about this democracy. Is it that Nehru actually wanted to establish an authoritarianism, but he did not need it? It is hard to understand an argument of this kind of arcane psychology. That India established a democratic system after colonial rule is a small matter, the larger truth is that it is not really democratic.

His second claim is that Nehru established a regime which was really, despite the secular constitutional trappings, a confessional Hindu state. Congress again is a vast, solid, *single* political formation. If Anderson went into some of the internal dissensions, he would have found it a very complex organization with different segments trying to make their own constructions of nationalism dominant in the new state. Important segments of the Congress leadership interpreted secularity in ways vastly different from Nehru—driving him to despair. It is sobering to read what he wrote to G.B. Pant, about the gathering atmosphere of assertiveness of Hindu sentiments even among his Congress colleagues: “I have felt for a long time that the whole atmosphere in the UP has been changing for the worse from the communal point of view. Indeed, the UP is becoming a foreign land for me. I don't fit in there . . . I find that communalism has invaded the minds and hearts of those who were pillars of the Congress in the past; it is a creeping paralysis and the patient does not even realize it.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of being a duplicitous leader of a Hindu confessional state, Nehru appears as one who, despite his personal pre-eminence after the death of Gandhi and Patel, was increasingly isolated and forlorn in a Congress party that became more conservative—not because of Nehru's manipulations, but the realignment of political forces.

Prabhat Patnaik in his short review notes pointedly how little Anderson relies on Marxist techniques of analysis of capitalist economies in his Indian analysis. It is interesting to explore the reason behind that methodological suspension: is it because class analysis applies to advanced societies of the West, and some other form has to apply to backward non-Western ones? If a party acts on religious lines, say in Italy, it is essential to reduce that to subtle, inexplicit, underlying movements of class interest: but in India, there is nothing more underlying to grasp. The ontology of Indian society does not admit of any forms of sociability other than religious communities; and even that has only one undifferentiated form. Democracy can thrive only in truly secularized societies like Western Europe: in other cultural ecologies, authoritarian imposition

of majoritarian rule is the only historical possibility. Democracy can only be a deception.

Curiously, British responsibility for the Partition of India vanishes completely. British rulers did not try to entrench and prolong their colonial dominion by 'divide and rule'—that is only a nationalist fable, a major constituent of India ideology. No large political or economic imperial interests complicate this picture of serene colonial benevolence—in which European powers conquer territories primarily to disseminate economic modernity and political democracy. Some vestigial responsibility is assigned—but strictly to *individuals*, not to groups, or elites, or classes or interests. British responsibility for the Partition of India is limited to the arrogant ineptness of Mountbatten and his wife's sexual inclinations. The entire state and society of Britain, minus these two, bore little responsibility for the partition in a distant land. Explanatorily, this makes something of a mystery of the interesting fact that wherever British power had colonial control—Ireland, Palestine—partitions tended to happen. We continue to wonder why.

Anderson's hostility to Nehru simply re-enacts the startled disapproval of colonial elites against modernist nationalists: Nehru should have become an ideal product of Macaulayan education—coming from the colonial aristocracy of modern professionals, educated uninterceptedly in England, trained in the rationalist, Eurocentric condescension towards their own societies. For such a man to turn into an admirer of a half-naked fakir with strange recidivist ideas was an unbearable betrayal of the colonial cultural project. Hostility towards Nehru was also compounded by his fluency in speaking a liberal language and his ability to fling at the West the principles it claimed to cherish. Kennedy resented Nehru's tendency to lecture Western politicians in principles of liberal theory. There are other interesting elements in Anderson's discussion of Nehru. Note his universal contempt for those who fail to write elegant English. It is an incontrovertible argument: elegant English is a fundamental requirement for modern statesmanship. We can only plead weakly against the assumption that just as dogs bark and cattle moo, human beings universally emote in English prose. Many would agree with his disapproval of Nehru's often florid, sentimental style. But in another sense Anderson's withering contempt for Nehru's gushy nationalist fantasies is misplaced, a kind of category mistake. Nehru's works did not offer retrospective historical analyses of the course of Indian politics. They were texts of nationalism whose defining characteristic is to portray as eternally present a nation of recent confection—driven precisely by the anxiety about its recency and fragility. This is not a peculiar failing of Nehru's texts, but a general feature of nationalist thinking.

### Celebratory Rhetoric

Anderson cannot be blamed for his annoyance at the celebratory discourse about Indian democracy. He attributes this to the uniform absorption of state ideology by Indian academic intellectuals, except Achin Vanaik. To ascertain the validity of this particular judgment, we should analyze historically both the checkered career of Indian democracy and the academic discourse that accompanied it. Independence did not inaugurate an intellectual climate of unmixed adulation of either democracy or Nehru's government. Ironically, it is the dismal performance of postcolonial regimes generally that retrospectively raised the stock of Nehru's regime. In fact, after independence, the tendency towards uncritical nationalist euphoria faced unsparing scrutiny from political opponents and critical intellectuals. Few political groups seemed altogether happy about the trajectory of independent India. Communists gave searing indictments of Nehru's failure to remove economic inequality and poverty. Socialists criticized an arrogant English-speaking sub-imperialist elite, which had made an Oxbridge degree almost a requirement for entry into the new political aristocracy. They demanded a second independence movement. Ambedkar, after an initial association with the cabinet, suffered deep disillusionment and was scathing about the continuance of caste domination. Gandhians added their skepticism against a superstitious reliance on modern science and statecraft. Hindu nationalists derided the secular constitution, and demanded a solidly majoritarian Hindu regime. Pride about the new nation-state and its democratic constitution was balanced by sharp criticism against the distance between the moral imaginary of this state and its reality.<sup>18</sup> Nehru himself, despite Anderson's supercilious dismissal, agonized about the ideological shifts towards the right inside his own party, and religious and regional parochialism.<sup>19</sup> China had just become a new communist state; it appeared that, as European empires crumbled, successor states would embrace freedom and democracy across the third world. All these conditions were to change in the next half century—both internally and on the international scene. Democratic regimes stuttered and fell in many postcolonial states—giving rise to a wide range of assorted forms of autocracy. China's path became more authoritarian and subsequently it offered a bizarre spectacle of a communist state supervising a transition to a formidable capitalist economy. A combination of these circumstances added luster to India's flawed democracy. In the last decades this has fueled a less restrained rhetoric of celebration and self-endorsement. The marching music of this celebration of a 'deepening of democracy' drowns criticisms of many troubling aspects of political change. Politicians from lower castes have joined their upper caste predecessors

in an entirely dismissive rhetoric against democratic and bureaucratic procedure; and criticism against corruption is thwarted by a disingenuous rhetoric of electoral validation. Criticism of lower caste politicians is sometimes regarded as traitorous rejection of democracy itself. A political culture of unchecked venality thrived without much resistance from any political force. Deeper mobilization energized not merely the radical identity politics of lower castes, but also the reactionary politics of Hindu nationalism. Powerful forces of economic change unleashed by liberalization disturbed the internal balance of the Central and state governments and tended to intensify economic inequality. There is no doubt at all that democratic political change since the mid-seventies have produced deep systemic challenges that the discourse of celebration hides from our view. Anderson's cryptic remarks about Indian democracy being based on caste—which both sustains and disfigures it—are not helpful without more unpacking. Anderson's mode of thinking about caste impedes serious historicizing analysis. If caste is seen as unchanging, it produces a wholly distorted picture of both India's past and present. To pursue the history of caste involves research in Sanskrit, Persian and vernacular texts—a field radicals are disinclined to enter; and after the textual hurdles are crossed, there is the further question of how far a textualist view of something like caste practice can capture social conduct on the ground. There is a constant temptation, given these difficulties, to shift into a more comfortable comparison with a history that we know somewhat better—the history of the West. Often what passes for a historical analysis, is really a refusal to enter this difficult history, and a substitution by a comparison with the better known history of the West. But that, despite copious reference to historical events, is hardly historical analysis.

Sunil Khilnani's claim that, in the long term, the rise of Indian democracy might be comparable in its historic significance with the French or the American, with the implicit comparison of embattled Indian democracy with the hallowed history of the West, has caused Anderson particular offense. Is that reference outrageous? No one informed about the real history of French democracy, certainly not a Marxist historian, should deny that through the long century when France became the beacon of democracy for the world, it was nothing like a fully realized democratic state. As de Tocqueville observed, the rise of democracy was accompanied by dramatic spells of violence, occasional reversals and colonial expansion. European democracies have become uniformly picturesque only in retrospect. Khilnani is not necessarily claiming that India has the 'greatest democracy on earth'—a phrase that should not be unfamiliar to US residents—but that its historic significance might be remarkable. This is particularly because it is

a standing refutation of the lazy and spiteful 'theory' that non-Western societies are permanent hostages to Oriental despotism. In more recent academic literature, this 'theory' is re-packaged in terms of a series of 'pre-conditions' for successful entrenchment of democratic politics: prior establishment of conditions like individuation, secularization, capitalist prosperity. This is a trick, not a theory—it simply replays European history to extract conditions, which other societies cannot satisfy, to force us into the conclusion that democratic experiments outside the West are predestined to fail. Just as French democracy bore many flaws, as the *Eighteenth Brumaire* showed, Indian democracy is undeniably full of failings. It is futile to argue that Anderson's is a "drain examiner's report," as Prabhat Patnaik's short review rightly suggests; if we have a drain running through our yard, instead of blaming the examiner, we should concentrate on improving our household hygiene. But we should refute the claim that this examiner is the first to reveal the squalor of this particular drain.

### The Truth about Democracy

Like other liberal democracies (*not unlike them*), the Indian political system announces principles and rights realized very unevenly in the lives of their recipients.<sup>20</sup> It would be absurd to pretend that because of some printed lines in the constitution, which few can read and fewer understand, all citizens *have* an equal set of rights. Anderson focuses on cases where Indian democratic institutions have shown the most appalling failures—at times leading to persistent and spectacular violence by the state itself.<sup>21</sup> His examples are the Northeast and Kashmir—to which we must add Punjab, Assam, and the state vengeance against Naxalites. In all these cases, either the promise of democracy to give voice to the people has collapsed or its institutions have failed to provide even minimal legal security to its putative citizens. What is misleading is not Anderson's focus on these instances of repression, but the claim that these are rarely discussed in Indian political commentary, and he is tearing the screens of Indian ideology to reveal them. To take an example from his own list, Ramachandra Guha's *India after Gandhi* sharply deviates from an uncritical nationalist rationalization of the policies of the Indian state both in case of the Northeast and Kashmir.

Failings of Indian democratic politics in other regions of the subcontinent were at times equally dismal. Difficulties with the Northeast continued from the time of independence to the present day—through three clear stages. In the first, Naga nationalists under Phizo's leadership contested the fundamental claim of the Indian state to a sovereign title to the territory; and this resistance was put down by military force. In the second round, the state reorganization of the 1950s faced

insoluble problems about settling the Northeastern part of the country in terms of linguistic entities simply because of the intractable linguistic demography. Even in recent decades, militant movements for Bodoland and protests against presence of the army and its enhanced powers in Manipur have demonstrated the unreality of the claim of democracy in these frontiers. By modifying Gandhi's remark about minorities, we could say that a democracy is known by the way it treats its dissenters. In all such cases, it is evidently essential to step outside the nationalist story of the nation-state.

### **Why Indian Democracy Failed**

The question here is not political, but analytic—not whether we oppose these actions of the state, but how to analyze such developments with the deep historicity that Marxism enjoins. In regions which British power had not brought under its direct control, regimes of graded or layered sovereignty continued—what was controlled by the British and what by local rulers fluctuated temporally, and often remained undecided. Thus, these political difficulties were in part a larger historical problem linked to the coming of regimes of sovereign state power into areas with substantial survivals of pre-modern political forms, and in part a problem of democratic governance. Indians ought to take these problems seriously, because Anderson, after all, is an external critic of Indian democracy; Indian citizens bear an internal relation to it and a collective responsibility for its character.

But this too involves a larger theoretical question regarding the study of liberal democracy. Are such deformations peculiar to Indian democracy, or are these common in democratic systems historically? Is this a feature of all democratic polities, or are these vitiations produced by the peculiar circumstances in India, and non-Western cultures? Arguments of this kind were common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example in J. S. Mill, who used a stage theory of history to argue against the establishment of democratic government in India. Even that kind of objection could have two versions, depending on the precise reading of the reason for India's ineligibility.

First, these objections could be historical, in the sense that Indians at that particular point in time were not sufficiently 'advanced' to manage representative government. But happily, democratic government could itself be a graded thing, and as Indians gained more of those crucial characteristics, they could be given full representative government in future. Mill's thinking, arguably, belonged to this category. However, there could be a harder, essentialist version of this argument which would suggest that these 'national' characteristics were impervious to history: the innate communalism of Indians is an unchangeable brute fact. Indians have prac-

ticed an inadequate democracy for seven decades and have not got over these innate dispositions. Anderson seems inclined to the second version of Mill's argument.

### **Marxism and Analysis of Democracy**

Second, there is another question about Marxism and the analysis of democracy: do techniques of Marxist analysis provide some analytical advantages? I think it does. The deep historicity of Marxism, developed further by thinkers like Gramsci, provides some analytic moves that are not common to conventional analyses of democratic regimes. Academic analysis of democracy often suffers from the assumption that adoption of a democratic legal constitution conclusively proves the presence of democracy in that society, evenly and equally for all its purported citizens. Academic analytics rarely trouble about "unevenness" of democratic experience in formally democratic states. Marxism urges a more skeptical approach that treats democratic practice as uneven across different spaces and classes. Instead of treating democracy as internally even and unproblematic, we should examine if access to democratic rights are equal to all groups and create a more complex map of political practice. Attention to historicity also opens up the possibility that, without formal constitutional change, a democratic polity might go through periodic fluctuations, when these spatial discrepancies expand or contract. Marxist techniques allow us to develop a more historicist, more complex, more uneven as well as a more accurate picture of how democratic states really function. If we apply this augmented arsenal of analytical tools to the Indian case, this demonstrates that the relative tranquility of Indian democratic politics during the Nehru era came with two kinds of severe cost: the spatial exception of Kashmir and the Northeast, as Anderson rightly contends; but it also came at the cost of a low level of popular participation in general. Democracy in the Indira Gandhi period was seriously compromised by the Emergency, and subsequently by outbreaks of regional discontent in Assam, Punjab and Kashmir, followed by the slow descent into a wider set of 'exceptions'—using military force to deal with outbreaks of increasingly lethal militancy. It is equally essential to record the serious abrogation of democratic rights for particular groups in particular regional contexts—even in regions which fall inside the mainland of democratic politics. Marxism should particularly draw our attention to the historical fact that in most cases where democracy is accompanied by a powerful advance of capitalist production, economic forces tend to erode gains in political life: the equalizing logic of democracy, though restricted to the political sphere, seriously clashes with the remorselessly dis-equalizing effects of capitalist growth.

Disappointingly, Anderson's account is almost entirely devoid of any analysis of Indian capitalism and its historical complexities; and the indictment of democracy hardly ever moves beyond the register of individual culpability to an analysis of the historic re-formation of social groups.

### Democratic Audit

How should democracies be assessed? There is a common Western view that such deformities characterize Indian democracy and others in Asia and Africa, but not European ones. By contrast, a Marxist view would contend that democracies everywhere are peculiarly fragile and internally uneven political regimes, and the same analytical format should be applied to assess all instances. Internal enclaves of deprivation of democracy existed in most Western cases—both spatially and socially. If India is not a democracy because of the failures that are specific to that regime, how could the United States in the 1950s with the way it treated black Americans, or the United Kingdom with its Northern Ireland qualify to be shining examples of democratic government? Surely, critics like Anderson will reply that we do not have to lecture them about the failings of their democracies which they know quite well, and which they contest hard through their own political practice. Then the question will return: why are democracies treated by different analytical standards? Despite the treatment of Black Americans or Irish Catholics, the US and UK remain democracies with shortcomings; but India, because of its Kashmir, or the Northeast or its dalits or its women becomes an *authoritarian* confessional state? Failings of democracy are treated in one case as shortcomings, which do not entirely override the reality of democratic regimes, and in the other as facts which turn the democratic regime into a sham. If we apply the arguments by which Anderson turns the Congress into a Hindu confessional party and Nehru into a Hindu nationalist, to Britain, both Conservative and Labor Parties would be parties of White domination. Moreover, we shall be pre-committed, in the name of seeing deeply into reality instead of mere appearances, to deciding their character by the race of the members rather than their political purposes. It is not uncommon for Western critics to applaud Ambedkar's insistence on separate electorates because high caste Hindus could not be trusted to practice non-discriminatory laws and procedures. There is powerful truth in this argument; but they should acknowledge the implication of this argument for their own political regimes. Unless they believe that contemporary Europe is a paradise of non-discrimination, they must advocate separate electorates in Western democracies as well. If they do not, they must candidly state their belief that there is an *essential* difference between

the advanced societies of the West and atavistic ones elsewhere, and while separate electorates are required in countries like India, Western regimes are exempted from such added procedural safeguards. If Muslims in selected parts of the United Kingdom are asked, they might adopt a two nation theory, as much as African and Arab immigrants in France. Such contrastive questions are implicit in analyses of the kind Anderson offers; but these are hardly ever taken up by the Western authors themselves and delicately avoided by their Indian admirers.

Third, in many democratic nation-states, the idea of the nation—drawn from modern European history—introduces an additional complexity. Like religion, Anderson has a highly singularized notion of Indian nationalism. Actually, the question of nationalism was always a deeply contested one in India. Gandhi and Tagore—two of its most influential figures—were irreconcilably critical of European nationalism.<sup>22</sup> And one of the primary occurrences in intellectual history was the sharp contention between two models of nationalism in the initial stages of freedom—a European-style homogenizing nationalism and a competing model based on pre-modern Indic forms of complex and layered identity. A major difficulty with Anderson's analysis is a similar use of a single, Europe-derived notion of nationalism: he does not notice, like many other Western commentators, that colonial nationalists do not always treat European nationalism or its model of a homogenizing nation-state as normative or modular. Anti-colonial sentiments produce nationalist resentment against imperial rule, but in India at least nationalist thinkers see some obvious difficulties of applying a simple Europe-derived institutional form. Thus, some of the major problems with Anderson's critical analysis of Indian nationalism and democracy stem from a similar methodological source—a tendency to analyze vastly complex historical material through narrowly defined singular categories, primarily drawn from definitions in European theory and supported implicitly by their confirmation in the experience of European modernity.

### Ideology

The concept of ideology plays no small part in Anderson's project. His main contention is that Indian intellectual life is not short of intelligent analysis, but some truths are screened off from even intelligent observers by the force of nationalist ideology. Again, the concept is never analyzed: its meaning and its applicability are assumed. The Marxist argument about ideology makes a powerful connection between cognition and interest, but it can be read at different degrees of conceptual complexity. At its simplest, use of the term ideology against others is simply a form of ungrounded

self-endorsement, the idea that since Marxism is a 'science,' the adoption of Marxist categories enables individuals to see through the screens of appearance—treating others as a vast unintelligentsia who should be saved from their own poor thinking.<sup>23</sup> In India, such self-exemption from the unintelligence of the surrounding world is common among some Western educated radicals who effect a seamless merger between the Marxist disdain for people mired in false consciousness and the assured condescension learnt from an Oxbridge education. Intellectual consequences of this form of reduction have been dismal: for example, the treatment of caste as false consciousness, grounded in the belief that ordinary people require expert assistance to understand the real causes of their misery. Marxism of this kind led to a half century of indefatigable preaching of class consciousness to a cognitively recalcitrant Indian peasantry.

The Marxist tradition contains a second strand of thinking about ideology which applies its effects more generally and does not use the move of self-exemption. Gramsci does not reserve the term ideology for non-radical forms of thinking, but often likens Marxism itself to Catholicism. In this second form, the notion of ideology points towards something much deeper as a condition for thought: it is hardly ever possible for any group of thinkers to be entirely clear or critical about all the conditions of their own thinking and therefore to attain complete self-transparency. In this second reading, ideology can also be viewed as a complex theory of utterance. It suggests that inside what we say, there are said many things that we only vaguely grasp. Our own thinking has unreflected entanglements and implications. A lot of things get said through our own sayings that we might not intend to convey if we were wholly conscious of them. If this is how ideology operates, as a dark penumbra around clear utterances, then much of Indian political writing would contain ideological elements. But so would Western thought. Thinking is always attended by provisionality, probabilism, insufficient understanding of its own grounds. Anderson's invocation of 'ideology' is closer to the first, simpler move which only sees the external view as privileged: as an outsider, he is unburdened by 'Indian ideology' and therefore free to unmask India's democratic shamming. But here too it is possible for Marxists to make two quite different arguments about democracy being a sham. The first version implies that democracy is itself a sham; there is actually nothing like real liberal capitalist democracy. The second version suggests that under some conditions democracy can exist, with all its flaws; but in the Indian case democracy is a sham. Anderson seems to incline towards the second view.

Several reviewers have noted that Anderson's analysis does not use much of the Marxist conceptual apparatus; and it is possible to infer a reason for this puzzling

absence. Indian democratic politics is driven by identities that are quite different from class, and therefore, Marxist analytics are inapplicable. Marxism does not offer a deep sociology of caste or of religious identities because its primary epistemic object were societies where capitalist development had already made class the dominant form of collective identification and agency. This is certainly methodologically appropriate, as a first, negative move, rather than the conventional reductionism practiced by Indian radicals. Reductivism concealed a form of explanatory substitution. Since Marxists were fluent in class analysis, if actual historical agents' grounds for action could be discredited as false consciousness, analyzing their acts by their hermeneutically 'internal' categories became unnecessary; however much the actual actors might think they were acting on the basis of caste or religion, Marxists could go on analyzing their actions in terms of class. Anderson avoids class reductionism, and he is quite right to focus on other identities—like religion and caste. A sociological analysis of political action in non-Western settings require conceptual refinements of precisely those forms of solidarity that are prevalent—like religious or sect communities, castes and subcastes, linguistic and dialectal regionality, tribal solidarity. Explanatory use of these identity markers requires increasing conceptual refinement concentrating on these collective agents—capturing in analysis the different ways in which such identities can be causally effective. In the absence of such a sociology, Anderson tends to explain significant facts of Indian history—events like Partition or processes like democratic change—through an unsociological register of analytical categories—mainly individuals and their psychological dispositions. True, we are spared an inappropriate reduction of other forms of sociality into falsely universal class sociology; but the consequence is an explanation of one of the major questions of Indian history by a British Cleopatra's nose.

### **Identity**

Anderson's treatment of the Partition illustrates another serious problem. We get the impression that since Indians are generally incapable of acting on any other identity except communal ones—religious or caste-based—democracy must degenerate into majoritarianism. Under such circumstances, what can minorities do? Indian Muslims thus had no other option except the creation of Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Ambedkar, similarly, could not march the dalits out of India, and therefore saw a separate state, a separate electorate and reservation as options in a descending order of preference. Pakistan was a state based on religious identity, not on disingenuous secularist declarations.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the Pakistan story is

also disconcerting. Pakistan was a failed experiment in imposing the logic of a Westphalian state-formation on the diversity of South Asian society. It would be an interesting question to ask a political theorist: what governmental form should we—non-Western people, mired in our terrible history—try to construct? Are we condemned to perpetual degradation under declared or disingenuous autocracy? A relatively simple but elemental difficulty with the Westphalian solution—of herding people of one identity to retire into mono-religious states of their own—where minorities are necessarily disadvantaged—is that individuals possess a complex medley of identity-attributes, which they foreground depending on historical circumstances. Consequently, the achievement of political purity by creating a state consisting of a single type of people might prove an illusion; because people of the same religion might have different linguistic identities, of the same caste might be divided by class. At a point in history, the pure state might develop unexpected fissures along other lines of identity. It appears therefore that modern states in the dark continents outside the West are condemned to seek some kind of resolution of these potentially catastrophic differences not in an elusive state of purity, one meaning of Pakistan, but in a fallen state of pluralist democratic design. Anderson as a political theorist does not offer any suggestions for the resolution of political conflicts, but simply a continuation of a constitutive belief of colonial ideology that what Europeans have achieved is out of reach for others. For Anderson, as much as for J.S. Mill, Europe is both the norm and the exception—it is what the rest of the world must try to emulate, but never can.

Anderson offers characteristic snides about the relation between caste and democracy, instead of an explanation. What he says is not contentious: Indian democracy works through caste and is degraded by caste at the same time (167). Caste is a contentious and difficult subject to understand, and we would have had invaluable help if the historian of the world had given us some assistance about how to think about it historically: but we get little except a degrading exoticism. Caste is hard to theorize in many different ways. Its high theory is contained in Sanskrit texts about which Marxists usually know little beyond rumors. The Vedas and Manusmṛti may have contemptible ideas, but we have to read them to ascertain that they are despicable. Acquaintance with Sanskrit is so rare among modern intellectuals that it has become a dark, impenetrable world. Even if we knew the texts, there are immense discrepancies between textual pronouncements and social practice. Finally, we need not just a grasp of the 'internal' theory of the caste order which produces a hermeneutical understanding of the system, but an external theory which offers an Archimedean point from which it can be subjected to

historical critique. On caste too we get from Anderson little except an empty superciliousness.

All these problems lead to a much larger question for modern social science theory: lack of developed theoretical analytics of social identity and its connection with political action. It is clear that political actions, and institutional behavior in the non-Western world, are not based on class interest or national solidarity of the Western kind. Ordinarily these are based on other types of identity—like caste, sect or religion. But a theory that can adequately deal with such identities is still inadequately developed.

Anderson's study is described as 'historical' in the blurb of its Indian edition: and indeed Marxists are committed to a deep historicist method in their political analysis. Political events are to be seen not as occurrences attributed to ephemeral impulses of individual agents, but to be linked to slow-forming and slow moving social forces—classes, identities, structures. This is because of a further underlying belief that individual decisions or group dynamics have complex causal genealogies which can be understood only in a historicist fashion: the causes of all events are not folded conveniently into two years before their occurrence. There is an irreducible element of the structural in the historical. To understand how caste affects democracy, we need to understand what caste structures are, and how they have evolved through their long and often obscure history. To explain events by 'religion,' we need to enter the bewilderingly complex evolving universe of religious ideas, institutions, and ideologies. The illusion of fixity—no serious historical change—is a logical consequence of a lack of conceptual differentiation. A great deal of change in the character of religion and the political action it generates can pass unnoticed as all these states are characterized as 'religious;' use of such broad, undifferentiated categories is a block to more nuanced historicized thinking. Without such engagement with real long term history 'historical explanation' remains an empty boast. Politically the implication of Anderson's argument is hazardous, because it condemns Nehruvian politics as a disingenuous version of the politics of Hindutva, which would imply that there is not much difference between Nehru's India and an India controlled by Modi. Either we have already lost the battle, or there is no battle to lose.

The major difficulty with Anderson's book is not the severity of his judgments about Indian democracy and nationalism, which ought to be taken seriously. It is the belief that these are historical facts that require a simple form of 'unmasking' explanation, rather than what is required in serious cases of European history. It is the explanatory asymmetry that sits at the heart of a long tradition of European thinking about 'universal' or comparative history. That characterized Hegel's practice, as

much as—surprisingly—it does Anderson's. Ironically, for some, the relation with the West is still most significant; Western certificates are still of the highest value, and therefore Western approval or disapproval is a matter of special exultation or mortification. We should not start somber soul searching about our past and present after reading Anderson. We should politely decline the invitation to rejoin debates of the nineteenth century—even if these were started by Hegel and J. S. Mill.

#### NOTES

1. I use the phrase from Samuel Moyn's history of the idea of human rights—which is characterized by a universal announcement of rights, and its suspension in the case of workers, women, and other races. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

2. Incidentally, this is a prejudice that was also absorbed by Marx through the early ethnography of authors like James Phear.

3. Clearly, even among those who were educated in England, there are serious differences. In case of some—notably Bose and Ambedkar—it resulted in serious mental uplift, but in case of Gandhi and Nehru it did not.

4. Since we excel in imitating Europeans, we could think of a good and bad Hegelianism—the first following Hegel's historicism, the second his essentializations.

5. Prabhat Patnaik notes this in his review, "Modern India sams the impact of capitalism," *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVIII, 36 (September 7, 2013).

6. His judgments about Indian political history are dealt with in the accompanying essays by Partha Chatterjee and Nivedita Menon.

7. See the suggestion in *On Liberty* that in some future time Indians might become capable of managing a democratic government themselves. Anderson's account of their ineptness makes us doubt if that time has still arrived.

8. Note how here Anderson is a true successor to another great figure of Western thought, James Mill, and how little his sense of the Indian past has changed from Mill's classic work of colonial history.

9. The quality of English prose plays a very serious role in Anderson's ranking of intellectuals. We have to admit that Indian communist writing has been generally stylistically unpossessing.

10. Fear of a revolution was quite widely shared. Here is what Ambedkar had to say: "These downtrodden classes are tired of being governed. They are impatient to govern themselves," but "this urge for self-realization of the downtrodden classes must not be allowed to devolve into a class struggle or class war . . . That would be a day of disaster." B. R. Ambedkar, in *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 25 November, 1949, <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/lb/debates/vol11p11.htm>.

11. Anderson's difficulties with Gandhi are not substantially different from M N Roy's, except that he was Gandhi's contemporary. Roy wrote approvingly of the movements in Indian political thinking represented by the rise of early liberal thought. He thought, basing his expectations entirely on European history after the French revolution as a template of all future history, that gradually intellectual dominance by liberal ideas would be challenged and replaced by socialist conceptions which would be propelled by the increasingly intense political activism of the working class. Though numerically

small, this working class will nonetheless ideologically show the way to the peasantry who were less capable of a cognitive mastery of the world, because the boundaries of their plots of land were also the boundaries of their consciousness, encapsulated in Marx's famous insult calling the French peasantry 'a sack of potatoes'. Roy was right that Gandhi was primarily a leader of the potatoes, not of the cognitively masterful Indian proletariat politically controlled by communists. (It is interesting that Marxists do not always repose great cognitive faith in the proletariat. On their own, they tend to be misguided, they are invincible when they are guided by a theory that is all powerful because it is true – i.e., by communist intellectuals.) Actual history however refused to follow the script that Roy thought he had, and others did not, giving him an unassailable cognitive advantage through historical clairvoyance. Uncomfortably for him, the peasantry responded to political mobilization on a large scale through Gandhi's peculiar mixture of religious beliefs and political purposes—like his description of the colonial government as Satanic, or his insistence that sedition for him was a religious duty. These facts were reluctantly acknowledged through various subterfuges: like the 'appropriation of the peasantry'—which meant that Gandhi really mobilized the peasantry, but the long term structural fruits of this mobilization did not benefit them. There is a genuine problem underlying this complex history. Mobilization required a translation of political and economic grievances of social groups into a language they understood, not one that made sense only to those who were highly educated through an English-based cultural formation. Refusal to use religious language meant an inability to mobilize ordinary people. Indian Communists refused not merely the language of religiosity, but also, through similar fears, the language of caste. This led to repetitive situations in which there was a disconnection between radical, secular, in effect deeply Western-oriented enterprises of political emancipation and the masses of the real peasantry. Mobilization through religious language made vast mobilizations of the peasantry possible, though, certainly, that remained vulnerable to discursive reconfigurations in a recidivist direction.

12. The Sanskrit adage correctly states that true education 'opens our eyes' ("chakshur unmilitam yena").

13. For a disagreement from an Indian, see Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi as a philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, 39 (2003): 4159–4165.

14. See the explanation of political secularism in Rajeev Bhargava, "Reimagining secularism: respect, domination and principled distance," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 68, 50 (December 14, 2013).

15. Ashis Nandy, "Politics of secularism and the recovery of religious tolerance," in Rajeev Bhargava (ed), *Secularism and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 321–344.

16. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2013).

17. Letter to G.B. Pant, 17 April, 1950, *Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru, Volume I*, edited by S. Gopal and Uma Iyengar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 184.

18. For a discussion of the political imaginary of Indian nationalism, see Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

19. S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, especially Volume II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

20. For a recent study of the differential enjoyment of the rights of citizenship, see Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

21. A collection of papers by Rajni Kothari, in the 1970s, bore the title, *State Against Democracy* (Delhi: Ajanta Publishers, 1978).

22. But this is a much deeper and wider phenomenon. Earlier thinkers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay or Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay in the nineteenth century showed profound suspicion about the European form of national patriotism. Among twentieth century figures, Iqbal evinces deep unease about the idea of a European style nation-state. Yet, nationalists had to foster a form of intense anti-colonial nationalism. And after independence, the states faced the problem of dealing with demands of homogenizing nationalism of exactly similar kinds.

23. This too has a long history: starting from an early modern idea that ordinary people cannot think; therefore they must be guided.

24. That incidentally was not the drift of Ayesha Jalal's argument: she regarded the creation of Pakistan as unnecessary, not inevitable.

25. That said, Jinnah's speech in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly enunciated political principles that were remarkably similar.

**Sudipta Kaviraj** teaches Indian Politics and Intellectual History at the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies, Columbia University. His fields of interest are political theory, and modern Indian literature and historiography. He has previously taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and was a Research Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford. His latest publications are *The Imaginary Institution of India*, *Trajectories of the Indian State* and *The Enchantment of Democracy and India*.