

Article

Nationalisms inclusive and exclusive: a comparison of the Indian Congress Movement and the African National Congress of South Africa

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Abstract

In this paper, the historical trajectories of the ANC and the Congress Party in India are compared, examining both successes and limitations. The crucial tasks in both cases have involved 1) addressing the poverty and poor living conditions of the majority, in part through economic policies related to industrialisation; 2) establishing effective links between well-honed bureaucratic structures and rising popular democracy; and 3) constructing a nation with which the whole population can identify. The paper assesses both situations critically towards this end.

Introduction

Featuring prominently in the writings of Neville Alexander is *One Azania*, *One Nation* and subsequently his collected essays in *An Ordinary Country*. In his work there is a constant interest in the national question and it can be argued that nobody has written more or better about this subject than him although he has been more of a voice crying in the wilderness than a guide for policy makers. Alexander's ideas about language and education, which in fact could make an interesting commentary on what are extensive discussions of the politics of language in the Indian literature are not discussed below; instead the reference is especially to his achievement in *One Azania*, *One Nation*, a penetrating consideration of the national question in this country that arguably has never been surpassed. Neville Alexander wrote this work in a revolutionary spirit with a belief in the

liberatory centrality of the working class and the possibility of more than a changed set of rulers in South Africa. Alexander's shrewd dissection of the then exiled ANC's policy of often trumpeted non-racialism coupled with its practical acceptance of the four race division, enshrined constitutionally and in every other way by the National Party regime building on its own predecessors, remains powerful. Alexander believed in taking South Africa forward in a new way that reflected its culturally mixed character through deep intervention, not through a *come back, Africa* path. Perhaps it is unfortunate that he chose the word Azania, given its associations with the Pan Africanist Congress, to designate what we might prefer to call Mzansi today. The PAC, which used Azania as a potential name for liberated South Africa, exerted a limited influence on him but essentially, I see this work as a critical further development of Unity Movement thinking on the national question from the 1940s, quite unlike the ANC traditions, although Alexander was not at all oblivious to the structural limitations of the movement (Fine and Davis 1991).

In contemplating the post-apartheid situation in his later essays, Alexander foreshadowed the arguments below. He was well-aware of the racial nationalist side of the ANC and the extent to which socialist ideas in the SACP were drowned, in consequence of 'the subjugation of the SACP to the ANC...the independent struggle of the working class to the primacy and limitations of African nationalist ideology' (Alexander 2002:37). He wrote with a disabused brush about the transition of 1990-94 as to a large extent a victory for business interests who successfully captured a growing black middle class and the apparent stability of the rule of a party that was able to trade on its liberation utopia to retain the loyalty of the masses at the same time. He was alarmed at the growing naturalisation in a new setting of the four-race 'rainbow nation' ideology that was settling into national consciousness in the purportedly 'new' South Africa. On one important specific point, his critical take on the perspective and values of Nelson Mandela personally, who promoted this kind of outlook, as well as an uncritical respect for the chiefly traditions of colonial Indirect Rule, he is particularly acute thanks to his engagements with Mandela as a fellow-prisoner on Robben Island. Alexander did however also believe that South Africa had become an 'ordinary country' which would be the scene of 'ordinary' class struggles and he was uncertain whether racialised identities would remain as powerful as they were still at the time of his death. In general, this paper carries through on these ideas within its tableau of arguments.

Today a slide between elation and despair seems to characterise much of the South African intelligentsia. Alexander certainly knew about and thought about other comparable situations. Yet on this and also other points, the many writings on South African politics rarely set their story within a broader comparative or theoretical context. A weakness in the political science literature is that it has tended either to provide a crude and tedious list of features of development, or Western-style democracy, or the like, in quantitative form as a substitute for serious analytical work on the one side and on the other, an understandable but untheorised form of political commentary, often of course very shrewd, that is not really interested in a bigger international picture or broad comparisons. In the case of the ANC, assessing its orientation and its limitations does not mean that it is on its last lap by any means. Its shopping bag of policies, contradictory as they are, have confirmed a kind of stability within the post-apartheid order at least thus far (Freund 2007).

In my view, while there has been growing resistance and discontent over its failure to deliver a dream to the mass of the population, there remains so far very little reason to expect an overturning of that stability. In the last general election, despite a lower turnout notably in Gauteng Province, stronghold of the most educated and prosperous sections of the black population, the overall black vote went to the ANC by a huge percentage (62 per cent of the total vote) despite the Economic Freedom Fighters breakaway – less substantial than the Congress of the People breakaway in 2009 – and the growing strength of the Democratic Alliance in the Western Cape. The African vote in the anomalous Western Cape has shifted hardly at all; it is the desertion of other voters that has doomed the party there. Moreover, as Susan Booysen in particular emphasises impressively in her lengthy recent study of the party, the Polokwane conference that elevated Jacob Zuma to power was a site of renewal and rejuvenation and the 2012 successor conference at Mangaung to some degree confirmed this (Booyesen 2012).

This paper tries to go beyond this to discuss the ANC in the light of what a literature I have found illuminating on India has to tell us in South Africa. The principal inspirator is Sudipta Kaviraj. Kaviraj, who has recently brought out a series of his essays over the years, is known above all as the man who introduced Antonio Gramsci to Indian political discourse with his conception of hegemony and Gramsci's deeper search to understand the cultural roots of politics. Kaviraj started as a member of the famous historiographically generated subaltern school of New Delhi but has widened his horizons with

a very rich knowledge of political theory as well as Indian culture. Given his orientation, he relies in his analysis on the concept of discourse, on the breaks and limitations of dominant party discourses vis-à-vis the discourses that independently emerge from below. Put very crudely, while Congress enjoyed great political success, it failed to alter hegemonic ideas in Indian popular consciousness in important areas.

Another stimulus lies in the views of another Bengali, Sumit Sarkar. Sarkar too was an exciting early participant in the subaltern school of historians. However, he became in time a critic. He entitled one of his essays 'Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies', criticizing the turn to Foucauldian studies of power-knowledge that left behind many of the empiricist and Marxist efforts of the first two volumes of *Subaltern Studies*. He writes that the socialist inspiration behind the early volumes led to a greater impact in India itself, while the later volumes focus on western discourse, reified the subaltern-colonizer divide and then rose in prominence in western academia.

On economic issues, another influence on this paper is the work of Vivek Chibber on India as a developmental state and that of Pranap Bardhan, an economic commentator with a deep grasp of politics. Finally, the recent, often acute if acerbic judgments on Indian nationalism and Congress of Perry Anderson in the 2012 *London Review of Books* are taken into account. All of these writers are not to be described as hostile to Congress per se or unaware of its substantial achievements but rather as critics who understand and reveal its contradictions, particularly as it transitioned from liberation movement opposing colonial rule to a long-term ruling party itself. In my view, this kind of critique is exactly what is needed in South Africa.

In certain ways, Congress in India is different from the ANC; its hold on political power has always been more soundly challenged and very recently performed poorly in the 2014 national election. It has had significantly sustained competition since independence which of course resulted in Partition: the breakaway of an overwhelmingly Muslim Pakistan. Powerful and impressive leaders fell at least sometimes quite outside the Congress fold such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the key founder of Pakistan, Bhimrao Ambedkar, the extraordinary leader of the so-called Untouchables or depressed class, with an equally elite education to Jinnah and Subhas Chandra Bose, who turned against Congress and British overrule in founding the Indian National Army in alliance with the Japanese during World War II and died in a plane crash [or disappeared] shortly before the end of the war. Within Congress there was the redoubtable Sardar Patel, first Home Minister

and the great organiser, comparable in a sense to Stalin's position in the early Soviet Politburo (although deeply hostile to Communism), a firm friend of big business uninterested in Nehru's socialist posture (Sarkar 2006: 212). Conveniently for Nehru as competitor, he died early on after independence. Then too there have been quite successful regional parties and India has also never had the unshakeable ANC-COSATU-SACP Triple Alliance of South Africa. The Communist Party of India, with its own problematic trajectory, has always been a genuine independent party, not a faction, and it suffered splits from early on. It competed with Congress while occasionally being part of a coalition government.

Congress in fact only had an absolute majority of Indian votes when Indira Gandhi proposed a radicalisation. Its continued importance has depended on a first past the post electoral system in which Congress has continued to be the one real party in India that is a serious player in virtually every corner of the country (Anderson, August 2, 2012: 21). It has been an 'unspectacular dominance' (Kaviraj 2006: 235) perhaps approaching its end. This may be hardly the same as Jacob Duma's dream of ANC power lasting until kingdom come but it has exhibited impressive resilience albeit half-drowned in factionalism (Kaviraj 2010: 243). I follow Kaviraj in seeing Congress as playing the key formulating role setting a tone for Indian politics. However, one must stress that nevertheless it is certainly most unlikely 'to reimagine a socialist agenda for India' under its aegis [and I would venture much the same for the ANC] (Kaviraj 2010: 246). I suggest we will learn far more in avoiding a pre-conceived socialist agenda as a way of understanding either party.

The argument made below stresses instead that the ANC has shared with Congress three huge dilemmas: 1) the challenge of large-scale poverty and transformation to an economy that can provide the masses with a better life in the context of a successful industrialisation; 2) the challenge of steering between the outlook of an educated elite and the outlook of the masses for a nationalist party dependent on mass support; and 3) the challenge of knitting together a population, in one case very diverse and in the other, very differentiated culturally and by history. These must be critical to addressing the national question in South Africa as Alexander conceived it. The hypothesis is that both parties have enjoyed some real success in formulating answers to these problems but have been limited by their own contradictions in solutions on the ground.

In order to do this, however, two key general issues that have to be viewed

beyond the issue of party politics need to be brought to play; indeed, once done the three points listed above may get a relatively brief response. On the one hand, lies the question of success or failure in terms of economic structure and growth; on the other, the impact of what, in both cases, represents a greatly intensified democratisation of political and social life compared to the mid-twentieth century starting point of our considerations.

Political economy

This section will evaluate issues of structure and growth comparatively. In the 1940s, both India and South Africa were countries whose economies had been in good part shaped by the impact of colonial rule. India was a declining source of income and investment returns to Britain from the days when it had really been the jewel in the crown but resentment at the 'drain' was a powerful weapon in the arm of nationalists.

South Africa's mining resources and the general dominance of British commerce were an important asset to British interests. However, both India and South Africa could be said to have developed a varied industrial base in which consumer goods production predominated with a genuine capitalist class of moderate size. A limited heavy industrial sector had also begun to emerge in both. After Indian independence in 1947 and the assumption of the National Party to power in South Africa the following year (and following the blueprints laid down by its wartime United Party predecessor), however, state-directed industry aimed at transforming this situation. The overall structural results were positive in the sense that skills, downward and forward linkages developed and the nature of the economies changed.

In the case of South Africa, there was far more immediate success: high growth rates that fed into the rise of consumer industries as well attracting considerable foreign investment and massive job creation. However the jobs were skewed to fit the racial order promoted by the state and desired by the electorate. White workers acquired industrial skills and achieved a technical and managerial training that were at first quite rare in the country. Secondary industry developed important forward linkages in terms of metal goods and chemicals production while backward linkages tied the giant parastatals to the huge mining industry. However, black men were sucked into industry on a low-wage, low skill, shallow ceiling basis, a pattern already deeply implanted in the gold mines. This process was intense enough to put paid to the viability of most rural households even though the bantustan system as it developed made it hard for these households to leave permanently for town.

Subsistence farming became an economic irrelevance nationally.

In India, however, the state's disinterest in export and in economic activities that smacked of an imperialist hangover went together with the sarcastically named Hindu rate of growth, barely faster than the rapidly growing population of the time. Moreover by the standards of India's massive requirements, there was only a modest growth in employment. To this day an acceptable measure of the size of the informal sector in the Indian economy covers 90 per cent of employment (as opposed to perhaps 20 per cent following the last census figures in South Africa) while the rural population continued to include the large majority. The ensuing linkages were far less than were desired. Both countries engendered a system of licensing preferred firms for imports and even production purposes as protectionist measures but in India the *license raj* seems to have been more deleterious in making entrepreneurs self-satisfied and uncompetitive.

There was certainly a sense of crisis and a need for change in both countries after the middle of the 1970s as the possibilities of this sort of stimulus exhausted themselves in a changing international context. A shift to a more populist rhetoric characterised India's Congress under Indira Gandhi. In South Africa, with its immensely smaller size and population, the most successful firms also hungered for entry into emerging globalised networks, privatisation of parastatals and a general liberalisation of trade conditions. The international isolation of the government which increasingly moved into a siege mode frustrated them. They took the initiative of negotiating with the exiled ANC before the government did and began to court the exiles assiduously after their return in 1990.

It has been proposed with some justice that India was not a genuine developmental state, not that the state was not intimately involved in trying to plan the economy and in many key economic initiatives. Vivek Chibber (2004) has forcefully argued that, once past the dark days of World War II, it was business that took increasing initiative in India and was to have more power shaping the state than vice versa. He believes that Indian big business can be divided between those capitalists such as the Tatas, who became very independent of Congress and early on supported Rajagopalachari's liberal pro-business and pro-Western Swatantra Party which, like the post-1990 Democratic Alliance in South Africa, had little chance of attaining national leadership but constituted a worrying challenge to the ruling party. On the other hand were those like the Birlas who profited from keeping in with the government. The Birla family, for instance, had a

strong sentimental attachment to Mohandas Gandhi personally. This group was more insidious in that they turned Congress itself into a more business-orientated force over time. Indeed Ronald Herring, for one, considers India to have been a 'failed developmental state' (Herring 1999). For this division and perhaps also Herring's perspective, South Africa had its equivalents.

It was under the 1990 Congress government where the tide turned and more and more serious attempts were made to chuck the *license raj* and create a more liberal system of trade although even today not so much privatisation has been instituted in India and the state continues to have a dominant role in finance, largely undamaged by the 2008 international credit crisis. This proved to be a remarkable green light experience for Indian business. India has been transformed, experiencing far higher growth rates, some spectacular wealth creation through a wide range of activities and the qualitative and quantitative expansion of the middle class. Urbanisation has moved ahead into increasingly gigantic metropolises especially. In the countryside, entrepreneurial small farmers of traditionally low status (but seldom from the landless ranks or the scheduled castes), have made the days of desperate dependence on foreign food imports and aid a distant memory. Aligned industry has sprung up in numerous small towns (for which, see Chari 2004). India has started to become an economic giant compared to the days of the Hindu rate of growth and many a liberal economist has poured scorn on the Nehruvian period and the planning impetus associated with PC Mahalanobis (incidentally Sarkar's uncle) and the early National Planning Commission. It is certainly astonishing to see Indian firms today as purchasers of major enterprises in the old colonial power, Britain, such as Jaguar luxury cars (and also in South Africa as witness Dunlop or ISCOR) and nobody would dismiss this as capitalists fleeing India.

This view needs to be qualified in some significant ways. By contrast with China, Indian industrialisation, for instance its dynamic IT sector, is intimately tied to Western concerns and Western business servicing. Its autonomy compared to Chinese economic sectors of importance is far less. Certainly the number of employed workers has greatly increased in India but it remains a relatively small portion of the population of the country's teeming cities. The informal sector which still includes massive circuits of traditional and semi-traditional skill acquisition and genuine and wide-ranging productive activities is incomparably more significant in offering employment. The majority remains active in agriculture and how a big transition to predominantly urban life will transpire, given the massive scale already of

these cities, remains to be seen.

The post-1990 evolution of South Africa is quite different. It is unfortunate but politically useful for the ANC to see South Africa as in some way an 'emerging' industrial society and part of the BRICS giants of the future alongside China, India, Russia and Brazil in which the previous history is written out except as some kind of moral evil. In fact it is a society where industrialisation advanced rapidly and systematically up through the 1970s with far faster growth rates than India was experiencing and consequently (and still) a much higher per capita income. Of course, this can also be equated with mounting inequality as well as dispossession of the poor in both cases.

However, from the 1970s to now, South African economic growth has been modest to halting with some disastrous years in the late apartheid period, followed by renewed slow growth quite comparable to the Hindu one, a better phase when primary product prices shot up in the first years of the twenty-first century and now again, after a recessionary phase, back to faltering modest growth typical of a mature industrial system. Since 1994, the ANC has failed to institute any real dynamism into an economy or establish effective relations with rising capitalists and certainly some Left economists have fingered the importance of systematic capital flight. Employment outside commerce and the service sector has shrunk in absolute terms since the 1970s and unemployment skyrocketed especially amongst young adults by 1990 without any major decline since.

The ANC rewarded business for co-operation over the political transition by allowing much easier transfer of funds out of the country including the relocation of the headquarters of some of the very biggest firms. At the same time, new foreign investments have purchased a considerable part of the industrial economy previously owned by nationals. In short, the intended beneficiaries of the earlier industrialisation drive, which was in its day so successful, have found routes to continued affluence and success mostly and businesses have largely gotten what they wanted out of the political transition. By contrast to India, liberalisation under ANC rule has brought few structural benefits other than some financial stabilisation and dependence on volatile paper stock investments. This contrasts dramatically with boom conditions of post-1990 India. It could be said that South Africa escaped much of the impact of the 2008 credit crisis also. However, the result has fed into congenitally low levels of savings and investment [in the real economy].

A recent article on Indo-South African trade draws the contrast perfectly:

Trade between SA and India has shown strong growth with SA rising to be India's sixth largest trading partner in 2011 from 20th in 2000. SA mainly exports gold, diamonds and platinum to India and imports pharmaceuticals, steel and other manufactured products from India. (Linda Ensor, in *Business Day*, February 15, 2013, at <http://www.bdlive.co.za/business/trade/2013/02/15/sacu-india-to-limit-trade-talks-to-tariffs>)

Nobody would have predicted such a pattern half a century ago.

Politics opens up

If we move from economics to politics, in both countries, there has indeed been a kind of liberatory awakening on the part of the masses but with unintended consequences. Kaviraj quite rightly points to the theoretical poverty of a concept of democracy centred almost exclusively around the regularity of elections and competing parties succeeding one another at the helm of state (2010: 211-12). And Bardhan tells us in words that could apply to South Africa 'India is less a legislative or deliberative democracy than one of popular mobilization' (2013: 145). And yet this can lead to explosive results: As the writer on Indian popular culture Ashis Nandy has written: '[...the] Indian masses are marginalised and no longer believe in the false modernism of progressive politics as couched by the state' (Nandy 1998).

In reality the ANC and Congress were both historically elite parties dominated initially by the wealthiest and most educated members of the relevant populations and most concerned with the interests of this class. Maureen Swan (1985) painted for us a remarkable portrait of Gandhi's success in South Africa in mobilising and then demobilising Indian indentured workers and ex-indentured workers for the purposes of his movement, a tactic he continued to employ very effectively in India but far from unknown to the ANC. However by fits and starts in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the masses entered into the picture (Kaviraj 2010: 162, 226-7). With time Gandhi evoked forces beyond his control or those of his class and the same is true of the ANC amongst black South Africans and more generally by the 1980s.

In India since independence, the masses have by common agreement indeed awakened to something new and are making their demands felt in the light of growing social pressures in a changing world although, as Kaviraj points out, democracy is an open door not always leading to desirable

destinations:

The ‘success’ of Indian democracy ought to be viewed in Tocqueville’s terms – as the historical development of a social force that has transformed fundamental relations of everyday lives. (Kaviraj 2010: 231, see also 32)

He goes on to say particularly that this does not and will not lead to the same trajectory to which it led historically in Europe.

In the course of the struggle against the apartheid state, the masses in South Africa also awakened to the power of the boycott, the riot, the strike – and these lessons are continually being waged against the post-apartheid authorities. Only in South Africa do angry township rioters burn schools and libraries down. The best analysts have made clear the fact that strikers cause damage, unnecessary and anti-social forms of damage, as a means of expressing their rage at the divisions in society and the poor material prospects those with limited skills enjoy [while ignoring the failure of the masses to understand the potential for benefiting themselves in schools and libraries]. The *enragés* are right in thinking that riots do often force the authorities to retreat from some foolish or oppressive policy where nothing else works. However one cannot neglect the continued incidence of violence against Asian and African foreigners or the tendency of demagogues to understand inequality in terms of the continued affluence of ‘the whites’ and ‘the Indians’ racially defined. In India, as we shall emphasise below, the emergence of popular politics, with which Congress has had to contend, has been a gradual process. In South Africa, this kind of emergence, much more tied still, if loosely, to the apron-strings of the ANC, directly echoes the forms of struggle engaged in against the state before 1994.

The economy and the people

At this point, we can turn back to the three central issues on which this paper hinges. On economic questions, both parties have failed to promote a significant way forward for the mass of the population. In India with its apparently impressive economic story, Bardhan correctly points to the ‘feet of clay’ that the rising economic power stands on (2013:29). ‘India has not yet succeeded in a massive expansion of labor-intensive manufacturing jobs of the kind that has transformed the economies of China and Vietnam’ and the immense poverty of the masses has only gradually and moderately been lightened. Not only are members of the scheduled castes, ie Dalits and so-called tribal peoples or Adivasis losing out in what access to resources they

have historically had, they are in armed revolt against the central government in numerous regions. They sit at the heart of continuing Naxalite insurgencies. Moreover greater industrial levels of resource usage are having devastating environmental effects on this access in many areas. In general, the question of mega-projects and their environmental defects looms increasingly large and becomes a growing national problem in India as much or more than in most countries (Sarkar 2006: 213, Bardhan 2013: chapter 10). India fits all too well the classic Kuznets-Lewis model of economic growth coupled with growing income inequalities. Inequality is growing with the expansion of the circles of affluence and the simultaneous dispossession of the poor as 'development' proceeds.

Congress has presided over the liberalisation strategy albeit with much impetus from the opposition and the last Congress prime minister, Manmohan Singh, a long-time Congress Minister of Finance, is intimately associated with them although his BJP successor Modi fits this bill even more. Business interests are powerful and certainly work towards the enhancement of inequality. However, it is also true that Congress has historically been a force on the (moderate) Left. Nehru considered himself to be a social democrat and certainly there were elements of socialist policy present in his day, including a significant if tepid land reform and improvements by the 1950s in the legal status of women. India has recently instituted an important programme of guaranteed work in the countryside where growing proportions of the peasantry are no longer really living from farming. Whether it can in time find a plausible route to a more equitable system of social rewards and create a social protection system is completely unclear, particularly as the hegemonic penumbra of Congress (whose policies also are hardly a continuum) fades.

In South Africa, the persistence of poverty in the form of both massive unemployment figures and the growth in very low-paid jobs (not however directed towards competitive manufacturing) is manifest and frequently written about. The failure of the ANC to devise suitable policies in reaction must be coupled with the inability to kick-start the economy into sustainable growth of any real consequence. Indeed, South Africa would in this measure be one of the most consistently long-term unsuccessful economies in the world since the shifts in capitalist development in the 1970s. The wealthiest tenth of the population is affluent. However, the bulk of the population have been left out and are stuck in a complex of unemployment, crime and violence, unpredictable and poor living conditions difficult to escape. Growing civil

disobedience, the so-called service delivery protests, protests over local administration and conflictual, sometimes violent, work relationships with little trace left of the old paternalism, highlight the unacceptability for the population of these conditions. Their worries can be counterbalanced with the growth of a black middle class of some significance and the alleviation of the worst (as in 'poverty alleviation') through the extensive social grant system. So far though there is little reason to imagine that the ANC has the capacity or the political will to cut through this complex of problems and forge a way ahead that can also jibe with international economic trends. It has however entrenched interests that will fight further change and its comfortable electoral situation blocks consideration of what alternatives to the liberalisation gestures of the 1990s could represent a real transformation.

Bridging the gap

On our second point, the relation of the masses to the state, considerable discussion has already been made of the continued power of a state apparatus not particularly interested in, or sensitive to, voices from below within a growing clamour of popular democratisation. A dramatic recent testimony of the unintended opening of Pandora's box is the recent agitation about an ugly rape case in New Delhi. The panic induced in many Indian men by the beginnings of more independence amongst women intensifies the possibility of a public gang rape; at the same time, the remarkable public reaction shows the equal expansion of social democratisation.

Shortly after the Indian case made international headlines, a parallel rape protest took place in South Africa and President Jacob Zuma weighed in with a strong moral message. Obviously this was felt to be necessary to assuage angry South African women. For a South African audience, there is little to add here to the massive literature in books, magazines and newspapers filled with accounts of popular protest, often very localised. The service or delivery protest wave which continues has increasingly obviously been matched by massive strikes, held in abeyance in the first years of ANC government, which sometimes succeed in securing wage hikes far above inflation rates. However, the inability of the state to rework the labour system beyond reliance on internationally modelled mechanisms which prove ineffective in South Africa has been put into a glaring spotlight by the violent confrontations involving platinum miners, notably the massacre at Marikana near Rustenberg in 2013. In defending the actions of the police, the government appears tied to the interests not merely of the allied National

Union of Mineworkers hierarchy which many workers now reject but also to big business in which a few well-connected black multimillionaires have a stake. The relatively generous social grant policy which makes cash payments available to one-quarter of the whole population represents a beneficial and appreciated extension of what existed before 1994 but it hardly can be said to be transforming the situation of the poor comparable to Brazil's *Bolsa* system, let alone the foundation of a genuinely developmental state. South Africa and India may here be riding the same tiger, or at least identifiably related tigers.

The so-called democracy deficit which has so much to do with both movements, while full of liberation pretensions, taking over the existing state apparatus and in the end falling behind the necessity for order inherent in 'seeing like a state' as James Scott (1998) put it so memorably. Liberation calls for a thoroughgoing if poorly-defined democracy but it does not necessarily contain the seeds of a structurally different way of governing surviving the struggle itself.

In the 1930s Congress liked to suggest that it would never tolerate the high-handed if technically impressive reign of the Indian Civil Service. In power, the ICS came to function much as it had under the British and the arbitrary and authoritarian way of the state continues as ever. By the time of independence, there were quite a few high-level ICS functionaries who were themselves Indian, sometimes educated in Britain. Its arcane ways and incapacity to respond to popular needs have been described as a bigger problem than the corruption which did mar both politics and the lower reaches of bureaucratic conduct in independent India from early on. In India, the state became an insulated, almost immovable force with its own economic interests and prerogatives which has been an invitation to corruption and high-handed decision-making (Kaviraj 2010: 225, 231).

However, in South Africa, while the same sense of an insulated and impervious state is also prevalent, the personnel and the rules for appointing personnel have altered. Gradually after 1948, in most non-technical areas especially, Afrikaners loyal to the regime replaced white English speakers but generally their competence was at least adequate. After 1994, there was a massive purge of white [and largely unsympathetic] civil servants bought off at a considerable price with the 'sunset clause' promoted by Joe Slovo and the rapid expansion of the class of black government workers, often with a poor work ethos and little experience. The ANC legitimates political appointments through so-called party redeployment. The colonial inheritance

of arbitrary and alienated power carried through from the systems of segregation and apartheid is retained. The gap between governed and governors, marked by educational certification, status and the history of 'liberation', remains strong in both cases and makes the creation of a more responsive government difficult to achieve while considerable competence has been lost in the South African case albeit unevenly. In both cases, local government is often a sad failure staffed by people seeking to rise in the ranks of the party and often indifferent to popular needs. As in India, it is notoriously corrupt. Most ANC run local governments are incompetent, have no basis for fiscal solvency and appear rife with power plays and factionalism. An unhappy result has been the occasional violent reaction in poor communities to potential boundary changes decreed from on high with parodic consultation exercises only. After property damage and even deaths, the party tends to retreat. This situation is often critiqued with much beating of breasts from within the ANC but so far without an answer.

This blanket account should perhaps be nuanced, however. In the case of India, despite Congress' centralising instincts, for instance, justifying the almost innumerable suspensions of state governments in the past (Anderson August 2, 2012: 21-2), a success for Congress thinking has been the gradual acceptance of a fairly well-developed regional devolution. In fact, the political autonomy of states has actually enabled the central government to get off the hook in terms of policies in many instances and, albeit reluctantly, new states have been created from time to time usually without too much violence. Many states have become the site of political triumphs for local parties that sidestep overly intense conflict with the centre and never develop a national remit. Anderson, so reluctant with his compliments, calls the present set-up 'a creatively flexible federation' (Anderson, August 2, 2012: 21-2).

By contrast, the ANC divides between a more competent central government and local and regional governments that have little autonomy on policy or basis for revenue allocation and in one instance finds opposition control of a single province deeply hurtful as Congress in India formerly did: this province is seen as 'unliberated' despite being probably the best-administered, at least in the interests of its large middle class consisting predominantly of the racial minorities (Western Cape). A phase, whereby the opposition controls major cities and provinces further afield, may be in the offing but is not here yet.

Politically far more successful on the South African side was the decision

to institute at the time of transition a very big parliament based on proportional representation. This has given a bit of the pie to bite off for even very small parties. For a time, these had the right to switch parties outside the electoral process in an exercise dubbed floor crossing. This mechanism, used cynically by individuals, however has recently been suspended. The more serious problem has been the increasing irrelevance of a parliament always dominated by a single party without real challenge.

The national question

The third basis for comparison is the national question so close to Neville Alexander's heart which can bring some of these strands together. Kaviraj and others have picked apart the claims of Congress to have genuinely forged a new Indian national identity successfully. Particularly in its Nehruvian form, it has emphasized its secularism and its inclusive nature for the international audience comparable to the South African ANC idea of 'non-racialism'. If we look more closely at both histories, the consequent claims are problematic.

The secular Indian stance was easier to achieve and perhaps more accurately established in colonial times when Congress networks essentially linked together a very diverse elite defined by secular qualifications, true as well of the South African ANC particularly before the 1940s. However, the discourse of Congress as it sought to master an unevenly growing mass base began to change subtly.

That the party was able to reach this mass effectively owed much to Mohandas Gandhi. Kaviraj calls this his 'double intelligibility' (2010: 112ff). He was a 'hinge' between two discourses (2010: 115). Gandhi could speak to both two mental worlds stimulated under colonial rule by the double prevalence of direct and indirect rule. The former encouraged modernity with all its complications. The latter invoked tradition through propping up the old royal courts in the princely states. Gandhi's own family had been employed in one of these princely state administrations in today's Gujarat state. The British hesitated between the two forms, just as they did in South Africa (Sarkar 2006: 196, Kaviraj 2010: 220, Mamdani 1997). How to bring this bifurcation with its consequences to an end?

Gandhi had some elite qualifications himself certainly but he also was a profoundly religious man steeped in Hinduism if not especially learned in Hindu texts or philosophy. For Gandhi, Hinduism was of the essence of India: it uniquely defined India and its right to be a nation (although he was not

very radical in the pursuit of independence). And if, as he said, 'India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world', this could only be through Hinduism (Anderson, July 5, 2012: 6). Admittedly, the man who tried to convince – of course with little success – all his countrymen to abstain from sex as a non-violent political exercise to win self-government, had some heterodox interpretations of Hinduism but his genuine tolerance personally should not mask this conventional conformity to popular discourse. Gandhi felt that the outcasting of the Untouchables was a religious distortion, a 'heinous crime' in Anderson's phrase (July 5, 2012:10) but he believed in the virtue and appropriateness of the caste system to the despair of Ambedkar. He was also generally speaking a social conservative who believed that the masses should basically be contented with their lot (see Anderson, July 5, 2012:). He opposed religious intermarriage just as he had always believed Indians should organise separately from Africans during his days in South African politics.

However, here was a fundamental inconsistency. For Gandhi and for Congress it was totally wrong for minorities to demand separate representation and to put it mildly, to request independence for themselves. This went against the nationalist script! It is true that eventually the so-called hill tribes and the scheduled castes, the *Adivasis* and *Dalits* did gain from a formal affirmative action policy but structured representation of this sort was based on the selection procedures of the whole party as opposed to autonomous self-selection. Today they are starting to vote actively but for their own political formations rather than for Congress, another sign of unintended movement from below. It was Jinnah, the Muslim, who was actually indifferent to religious values (and apparently loathed Gandhi) and Bose, who took up left ideas and was committed to what we can call non-racialism and a new sort of Indian society (at first trying to forge an alliance with Hitler but dreaming of one with the Soviet Union), not a reawakening of the old.

It is untrue that Pakistan was created, as Congress leaders liked to claim, to please Muslim landlords longing for the Mogul Empire and its pre-conquest hegemony, an archaic social class. In fact Muslims had fallen far behind in new processes of class formation and were poorly represented in the elite; an estimated 97 per cent of Congress voters at the time of the first important elections in 1935 were Hindu (Anderson, July 19, 2012: 12). Earlier Jinnah had joined the Muslim League to Congress and did his best to convince Congress to work out a system whereby Muslims would receive

a reasonable minority slice of shared power, maybe 1/3 of electoral representation through negotiation. Without this, in a context where voters continued to think in communal terms, large Muslim minorities would be totally unrepresented in a first past the post electoral system on which the Congress mainstream insisted. Instead, adamant resistance, led to Jinnah, a native of cosmopolitan Bombay – reluctantly at first – accepting secession, putting himself at the head of the Pakistan movement and promoting partition (for this, see Anderson, July 5, 2012: 9).

The result was enormous bloodshed and suffering for the mixed populations of the Punjab and Bengal especially where millions of refugees were forced to leave their homes in 1947. The miserable situation for many decades of a majority of the people in Calcutta, Bengal's capital, with vast numbers continuing literally to live on the streets, can be ascribed to this turn of events. Jinnah died soon after Partition but inevitably Pakistan's Islamic character and the 1000 mile distance between the east and west portion led to the unhappy dominance of East Bengal by the west, the war (finally won through Indian intervention) that led to the further secession of Bangladesh and the emergence in Pakistan in time of powerful intolerant and violent Muslim networks. In effect a political discourse that made sense to the elite failed to resonate with, or convert, the masses in either country (Kaviraj 2010: 30).

Nehru promoted a romanticised and truly 'invented' concept of an indivisible India that stretched back, somehow unchanged in essence, for uncounted centuries. In this he followed in Gandhi's footsteps. Of course Nehru was the great secularist but his vision of eternal India was hard to separate out entirely from Hinduism, the almost uniquely Indian religion (barring Nepal and the island of Bali in Indonesia) (Anderson, July 19, 2012: 11). Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, by contrast were all universal creeds and of course separate in principle from the caste system. To an American audience, he insisted in 1938 that 'There is no religious or cultural conflict in India...The tremendous and fundamental fact of India is her essential unity through the ages'.

Moreover, whatever he thought personally, his policy and that of the party was not to challenge or interfere with the ideas of the electorate. In a Gramscian sense there was little point in challenging dominant *cultural* hegemony (Kaviraj 2010: 29). Kaviraj considers the power of subaltern hegemonies which are marked off against the elite by 'a defensive use of illiteracy and strategic incomprehension' (Kaviraj 2010: 81). Congress with

its modernist face has never really been poised to break through this to fertilise its earlier discourse. This is the key hinge I wish to stress in importance.

India has however pursued an aggressive foreign policy, rather dramatically at odds with our stereotypes of Gandhi and Nehru. The zealous concern for India's borders led to the violent if largely unopposed annexation of Portuguese Goa and to a usually but not always cold war with Pakistan in which both countries in time turned, as of course did South Africa under the old regime, to nuclear power. Then came the intervention which severed away Bangladesh from Pakistan. It also led, towards the end of Nehru's life, to a humiliating defeat in the Himalayas in a truly unnecessary frontier war with China (Maxwell 1972; Anderson, August 2, 2012: 24). The implications of enmity with Pakistan and China had inevitably undesirable consequences for Indian foreign relationships and for its pursuit of the bomb.

By contrast South Africa has if anything bent over backwards in 1990 to assuage and sustain the weak and impoverished states on its borders perhaps with unwelcome results in Zimbabwe or Swaziland and also in the clumsy restoration by force of electoral democracy in Lesotho under Mandela. To its credit, the ANC handed over Walvis Bay to Namibia without an argument and accepted the closure of the South African nuclear armaments programme although it is true that currently a return to nuclear energy development may be on the cards. But at the least, aggressive international promotion of the new South Africa has not been a flawed or dangerous policy thrust.

Perry Anderson points to the dark side of Indian nationalism by looking at the north-eastern and north-western sections of the country. In the north-west lies overwhelmingly Muslim Kashmir. The tangled history of the Kashmir question suggests the solution which its most eminent leader in the 1940s, Sheikh Abdullah, once propounded – independence for this quite distinct province. Sheikh Abdullah was eventually convinced instead to push for absorption into the new India through a deal with oppressor *numero uno*, its Hindu maharajah, but with both of them shunted to the side smartly when the time came. India never allowed a potentially embarrassing promise of a referendum to be fulfilled and to this day it holds Kashmir down in a permanent military occupation apart from a section held by Pakistan (Anderson, July 19, 2012: 16-17, 35). Nor can one foresee anything but a stubborn continuation for this basic violation of democracy.

Thanks to the extremely effective voice of the Dalai Lama, whom India has

long sheltered along with many Tibetan refugees, in co-operation initially with the US CIA, we hear a great deal about the noble cause of the Tibetans while few speak up for the possibly equally unhappy Kashmiris but on the other side of northern India towards Burma, there is a problematic but yet far more obscure situation (Anderson, August 2, 2012: 23-26). A tourist planning a visit to Meghalaya or Nagaland or Mizoram will find these states of India more problematic to enter, especially for free-ranging political conversations, than Tibet via China. Starting with the Naga, the resilient and often Christianised hill peoples of this large area, cut off from the rest of India except for a tiny connecting strip of land by the Pakistani secession, have been antagonistic to incorporation in India leading to decades of unrest and guerrilla warfare. Here there is little identification with India culturally (the British contemplated including this area in the course of organising independence for Burma which does have a very large related population but a yet more intense history of civil war); *Hindutva* has little potential as a rallying force.

On these issues, the most positive development has been amongst those who were treated as untouchables within Hindu practice, the *Dalits*. Here the gradual spread of education and the uneven but growing awakening of poor people to democratic impulses has made a difference; affirmative action has paid off to some extent. In Uttar Pradesh, the very heartland of Hindi-speaking India, Mayawati, a *Dalit* woman actually succeeded in becoming premier four times running albeit not via Congress. Still an ex-prime minister called this ‘a miracle of democracy’ (not that the miracle is necessarily cutting down the tendency to abort female fetuses).

The situation vis-à-vis Muslims despite token representation at the highest levels of office, not to speak of national sports teams, is also uneasy. The covert Hindu assumptions, which it can be argued were critical in winning mass support to Congress militant anti-colonialism and then investing them with political power after independence, became far more overt in the rival *Jana Sangh* party, strong in places like the UP. Eventually the *Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP* (note the name in Hindi, not English), its successor party, even succeeded in beating Congress nationally and forming a national coalition government, as it has again in this year’s national election. Its chauvinism, associated with the destruction of mosques that are supposed to represent Mogul victories over Hindu princes long ago (Kaviraj 2006: 24), covers up internal divisions between pure opportunists, fortunately so far politically dominant, and more dangerous and fanatical

elements like Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the hinterland of Mumbai (Bombay).

The far more measured chauvinism of Congress however has been blamed for allowing this kind of political culture to flourish as a sort of logical outflow of the way the nationalist culture was nurtured. Of course, Congress itself can to some extent be vindicated by contrast for its clinging to secular values. To a growing extent, the Singh government (whose leader is currently Sikh, not Hindu) justifies itself in terms of economic policy as well as national security not *Hindutva*. This is in itself a Nehruvian strand if we follow Kaviraj:

One of the major features of Nehru's development policy was its economism: a superstitious belief in the powers of economic growth to dispel all evils like rays of light in the enveloping darkness of traditionalism. (2010:159)

Probably this view would resound quite positively in the ears of Trevor Manuel or Thabo Mbeki, would that GEAR had offered the like. Of course, with the rise of the BJP as a serious opponent, taking a stance to the centre on this identity issue was also a practical strategy for Congress, as Kaviraj suggests. Whether this can work in the long term is uncertain; it moves Congress away from powerful popular currents.

Finally let us point to the political skeleton a dissection reveals. To obtain successful mass support and mass action, Congress required tapping into a cultural imaginary that was fundamentally Hindu and thereby under the surface excluded both people outside the caste system who were not going to like the Hindu order of things and the huge numbers of non-Hindus. In this sense, the secularism associated above all with Nehru was counterbalanced in a contradictory way with the religious overtones and potential chauvinism at the base in the party. I would argue that this is nonetheless a very typical outcome within nationalist movements and gets to the heart of their problematic role in inevitably diverse and class-divided independent countries as they intersect with the awakening of political conscience from below.

For South Africa, as Alexander realised, the same problem exists in terms of ANC politics. The ANC from the period where it began to function as a mass force had to steer militant nationalism which often understood the enemy strictly in racial terms. The 1949 so-called riots in Durban revealed the intensity of anti-Indian feeling amongst black Africans in Natal (Soske 2009). The famous Doctors' Pact in response, which won the loyalty of many South African Indians through the recognition of strictly communal provincial

organisations whatever the militant few privately thought, is still likely to have been a main cause as to why the ANC was in fact so weak thereafter in Natal among Africans. There was extensive hostility to the Freedom Charter of 1955, even though it continued to use the symbol of the racially distinct spokes of the wheel as building blocks of the new society – the racially defined communities – and it is common cause that the Pan-Africanist Congress breakaway reflected a hostility to non-racialism and the presence of whites and Indians in the ANC except perhaps for signed and sealed true lovers of Africa (and, more seriously, those who accepted a racially defined majority leadership).

In exile and after, the strength of racialised nationalism and the conviction that whites and Indians lay outside the imagined nation to be, remained strong under the surface, albeit while nodding equally to the tune of non-racialism. The ANC was successful in ultimately seeing off the rival PAC despite the preferences of anti-Communist Western governments and Africans elsewhere on the continent, but the ANC did not dare to abandon its black nationalist constituency either, for fear of another destructive breakaway. To its credit, the ANC held together the exile movement very effectively. Very few nationalist movements in Africa had this success; most were badly riven between rival factions or parties. The balancing act involved in this kind of politics was skilfully handled, very successfully promoted internationally in circles that were horrified at what they knew of the South African racial system but has become periodically unstuck after 1994 in different circumstances.

If Nelson Mandela appointed many whites, coloureds and Indians to important positions, admittedly men and women who were not necessarily typical or, especially in the case of whites, representative of the views of their racial communities, Thabo Mbeki can be associated with the patronage of courtiers such as Christine Qunta or Ronald Suresh Roberts. Neither of them was strictly African in origin but they were happy to strike an Africanist note. Incoherent promotion of so-called indigenous knowledge that somehow has miraculously survived generations of turmoil intact went hand-in-hand, obviously to Neville Alexander's great regret, with the one-sided promotion of the English language which for so long has been the African badge of status despite the officially proclaimed eleven language policy. Affirmative action policies which often led to black figureheads earning large salaries in prestige positions whilst equally overpaid consultants who were not black did most of the work and under no state discipline apart from that compliant

with commercial exchanges, became typical of Mbeki's South Africa. There has been so far, despite the demagoguery of Julius Malema, full of fire to seize white property and hold up Mugabe's Zimbabwe as a model, a phenomenon which darkened the political climate in 2010-12, no formal abandonment of non-racialism nor is there a breakaway BJP in the making. However the failure of the ANC to find a secure and reliable road to resolving the national question, has had wide ramifications. There is a permanent uneasiness felt by the racial minorities as the party balances between a chauvinistic promotion of preferential interests of "our [racial] community" and the retention of the conservative institutional framework of division based on racial identification and high levels of inequality, if now on a deracialised basis. Both promote the interests primarily of the rising and typically state-employed black middle class. Thus, to take an increasingly public issue, the continuation of the vast institutional inequities in the educational system have led to the remarkable anomaly that the majority of science and maths graduates who know enough to do university level work in relevant subjects remain white where whites of the current cohorts by year must represent under 10 per cent of those cohorts. This logjam in pedagogy has further implications for economic development and the struggle to create a less unequal society while the ANC/SACP tries to pressurise South African universities to 'transform'.

One useful way to explain this is by adapting Kaviraj's Gramscian assessment of Indian nationalism. The ANC has also not been prepared to make unpopular interventions at the level of mass African society at the cost of its unsteady hegemony. The ANC clings to the kind of liberation talk that still has a resonance amongst this majority which allows it to win elections handsomely. Tokens of this are the foolish but folksy faux pas of President Jacob Zuma, who was after all a top cadre in the fighting arm of the exiled ANC, about such topics as how to confront male homosexuals, how to keep one's pets, the cleansing power of showers or his persistent attraction to multiple marriages.

Of course, one discussion beyond this will be about what kind of politics can remedy this situation. As Kaviraj amongst others points out, democracy by itself is not the answer: its consequences may not be what those who have created the political infrastructure that allows it to take root want to see. As Pranap Bardhan writes, 'democracy unleashes both positive and negative forces for development, there is some tension between the participatory and the procedural aspects of democracy in matters of governance as well as

economic management...’ (2013: 126).

India forms a rich field for comparison in the South African gaze because of the longevity and durability of the famous Congress Party and the high quality of the available critical literature which allows even a second-hand exploration at a distance to offer some illumination. Nationalism and liberation are concepts to question and dissect as Neville Alexander did, not use as slogans and explanations. As Kaviraj writes for India, ‘Indian nationalism is a complex, unstable, internally diverse body of ideas in which various strands vie for imaginative dominance’ (2010: 6). Congress’ hegemony, inevitably historically bounded, is fading. The incoherence of this political grab-bag is today apparent in both countries. Maybe we should look at India’s South African equivalent too as an ‘ordinary country’.

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