

'Respect Gandhi If You Will, Don't Sentimentalise Him'

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An outstanding Marxist scholar, historian and essayist, and editor of the *New Left Review* since 1962, Perry Anderson is known for a rich, incisive body of work spanning European history, the contemporary world, the Western Marxist tradition and intellectual history. The distinguished professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles, now trains his lens on modern Indian history. His latest book, *The Indian Ideology*, just published by the Three Essays Collective, is a scathing critique of the dominant celebratory discourse of the Idea of India, or the lionising of the democratic stability, multi-cultural unity and impartial secularity of the Indian state as a miracle. His three recent essays on the subject in the *London Review of Books* have already generated considerable debate. In an e-mail interview with columnist and writer Praful Bidwai, Anderson discusses his book at length.

Praful Bidwai - Your new book *The Indian Ideology* is just out. What prompted this first foray into Indian terrain ?

I was working on the contemporary inter-state system, and after writing about the US, Russia, China and Brazil, and India was the next step.

How would you sum up the book ?

You could say that, very roughly, it advances five main arguments that run counter to conventional wisdom in India today. Firstly, that the idea of a subcontinental unity stretching back six thousand years is a myth.

Secondly, that Gandhi's injection of religion into the national movement was ultimately a disaster for it. Thirdly, that primary responsibility for Partition lay not with the Raj, but Congress. Fourthly, that Nehru's legacy to Republic was far more ambiguous than his admirers will admit. Lastly, that Indian democracy is not contradicted by caste inequality, but rather enabled by it. This is a crude summary. Obviously, in each case, much more is said than this.

Why then did you call your book *The Indian Ideology*— what do you mean by the term ?

'The Indian Ideology' is another way of describing what is more popularly known as 'The Idea of India', which celebrates the democratic stability, multi-cultural unity, and impartial secularity of the Indian state as a national miracle. There are, of course, other ideologies in India, some of them more dangerous. But this is the mainstream discourse of the state, the media and the intelligentsia. The book aims to show its limitations.

Quite a few people, though, who are critical of the Indian state's claims to be uniquely democratic, secular and respectful of diversity were upset when your text first appeared in the London Review of Books, admittedly without the scholarly apparatus of the full version now published by the Three Essays Collective. How do you read these reactions ?

My guess— it's not more than this— is that the upset could be due to two things. The first would be that, although this or that strand in the Indian Ideology may be questioned, a systematic deconstruction of them hasn't previously been attempted. To inter-connect these as a dominant discourse throws each of them into a sharper and more critical light. That, at any rate, would be one surmise. The second thing which may be disconcerting is really a question of tone. One of the effects of the Indian Ideology, even on many who might disclaim subscription to it, is the diffusion of a culture of euphemism, in which disagreeable realities are draped with decorous evasions or periphrases - 'human rights abuses' for torture or murder, 'hostiles' for rebels, and the rest. To any sensibility accustomed to this kind of verbal emulsion, calling a spade a spade is bound to be jarring.

Still, haven't you ignored or under-rated the sharply critical, even iconoclastic thrust of writings by many Indians that are a far cry from the self-congratulatory imaginary of the 'Idea of India' ?

I wouldn't say so. If you look at the book, you'll see that there are plenty of references to Indian scholars—Upendra Baxi, Sumit Sarkar, Achin Vanaik, Zoya Hasan, Javeed Alam, Arvind Verma, Aijaz Ahmad, Pranab Bardhan, Benjamin Zachariah, Radhika Desai and others - who are highly critical of much in today's Union. With more space, I would have liked to discuss Ranajit Guha's *Domination without Hegemony* at some length, a brilliant work that I don't entirely agree with, but regard as essential reading not just about India, but the mechanisms of political power in general. Nor, indeed, do I think all those whom I cite as voices of the Indian Ideology are pure prisoners of it, since they can often themselves express criticisms of a good many aspects of Indian reality. But as an overarching set of tropes about India, the ideology remains in place, and I believe hasn't yet been the object of a systematic critique. The hope of the book would be to set the ball rolling for less general piety about them.

You've explained that one of the reasons why, instead of writing simply about contemporary India, you start by looking at the struggle for independence, was your shock at the reception of Kathryn Tidrick's work on Gandhi, so thoroughly blanketed by silence that most Indians are unaware of its existence. Tidrick concentrates on the relationship between Gandhi's self-perception as a world-saviour— his religious beliefs— and his politics. She doesn't really explore his role as a mass leader and tactician of the independence struggle. How far is your own account of Gandhi, which many in India would regard as a savage criticism, based on hers ?

Tidrick's biography of Gandhi is an extraordinarily careful, calm and courageous work. Not just I, but any serious student of this historical figure, would have more to learn about his outlook from her work than from any other extant study of him —the vast majority of Gandhiana being, to one degree or another, hagiographic. The silence covering it in India is an intellectual scandal which reflects poorly on local opinion. The problem here is not, of course, confined to her work. More recently, the reception of Joseph Lelyveld's much more superficial and not very political, but extremely respectful, book about Gandhi—it's even entitled *Great Soul*—tells the same story. Because it dismantles some of the legends Gandhi propagated about his time in South Africa, we have his grandson complaining that it 'belittles' him. It's only in this climate of deference that my treatment of Gandhi could be regarded as sacrilege. Actually, I single out not only his remarkable gifts as a leader, and his achievement in making Congress a mass party, but also his personal sincerity and selflessness—he did not want power for himself, as most politicians do. In his own way he was a great man.

But that does not exempt him from criticism. He was gripped by a set of regressive personal fixations and phobias, had a very limited intellectual formation, was impervious to rational argument, and entirely unaware of the damage he was doing to the national movement by suffusing it with Hindu pietism as he reconceived it. He is to be respected, with all his blindness. But there is no need to sentimentalize him. The complete latitude he gave himself to declare as truth whatever he happened to say at any time, and then change it from one day to the next, still as the word of God shining through him, set a disastrous example for his followers and admirers. Nowhere more so than in his inconsistencies on satyagraha itself. For when it suited him, he was perfectly willing to contemplate violence—not only to send Indian peasants to their death on the Somme in the service of their colonial masters, or applaud Indian bombers taking off to conquer Kashmir, but calmly to envisage communal slaughter—‘civil war’—in the subcontinent as preferable to expelling the British. As a historian, one has to take cool stock of all this, not skate over it as Gandhi’s apologists continually do.

But can the dynamic of the national movement be reduced to the individual choices and actions of its leaders ? Congress had a significant base, especially among the middle class, although it may not have had a sustained universal mass appeal. Doesn’t a focus just on Gandhi and a few other top leaders ignore the popular agency driving the struggle for independence of some 300 million people ?

It’s difficult to imagine any credible account of Congress, whatever its persuasion, doing that. But too often a defensive reflex comes into play here. Confronted with irrefutable evidence of just how badly the Congress high command bungled the achievement of independence, splitting the national movement in its hubristic claim to monopoly over it, a common reaction is to change the subject, by saying ‘don’t over-personalize things, that’s elitist - think about the masses, not the leaders, it’s more democratic’. This is a bluff. The reality is that Congress was, socially speaking, far from unlimited as a mass movement : it never really included poor peasants, workers, untouchables or the great bulk of the population in the princely states, and when it came to power in the provinces in late thirties, was sometimes more repressive of labour, or anything that threatened it from the left, than the Raj itself. The British governor of Madras actually had to tell Rajagopalachari to moderate the zeal of his crackdown on ‘sedition’. That aside, the central fact is that Partition itself—the moment of truth for Congress—was decided top-down, without any popular consultation whatever. The masses reverently invoked in this kind of objection had no say in the matter. The high command made sure of that. It was the political elite that called the shots.

You absolve the British or the Muslim League from any responsibility in the disaster ?

Certainly not. Mountbatten’s conduct in ramming through Partition at break-neck speed, at the behest of Nehru and Patel, while washing British hands of the unimaginably bloody consequences, has many claims to be the most contemptible single act in the annals of the Empire, replete as it was with so many others. After 1945 British policy towards India was actuated by concern for imperial amour-propre and fancies of strategic advantage, and little more. As for the Muslim League, Jinnah miscalculated completely— accepting point-blank Partition, claiming Assam, ignoring Kashmir, abandoning the Muslims of the cow belt, and ending up with what he himself called a moth-eaten Pakistan. But there is little doubt that the principal responsibility for the catastrophe of 1947 lay in the folly and arrogance of Congress, from the late twenties onwards, in refusing to accept that it was not the only legitimate political force in the subcontinent, but in composition and outlook an overwhelmingly Hindu party, represented the community that, just because it was stronger, could afford to and needed to be generous in its dealings with the weaker Muslim community. This is not just a foreigner’s standpoint : it is the considered verdict of an Indian historian like B.B. Misra.

You suggest that the Indian state that came into being after independence has been

nominally secular, but to a largely unacknowledged extent, substantively Hindu. It's true that Indian secularism fails by the criterion you employ—the status of Muslims, and other non-Hindus. But Hinduism isn't a confessional faith like Christianity or Islam, based on a set of scriptures. It's more akin to a label for a compendium of different practices. Until more recently most Hindus probably lacked a subjective sense or self-perception of being Hindu. So wouldn't it be more appropriate to describe India as an upper-caste-Hindu dominated state ? That would better capture the status of low castes, whom the state brutalizes, as well of religious minorities.

Yes, Hinduism is indeed a less unified conglomerate of texts, beliefs, rituals and practices than the two big monotheistic creeds. There is always a gap between the High and Low—elite and folk—traditions in any religion, and in Hinduism it is much wider than in Christianity and Islam. This doesn't mean that Hinduism as such is therefore a figment of the imagination, or—in another fashionable version— a fabrication of the British. The shuffling away from any forthright acknowledgment of its presence and power in India, on the grounds that it is all too multifarious to be called such, is a defensive gesture of the kind the French call *noyer le poisson* or 'drowning the fish'—that is, the attempt to evade or deny a phenomenon by dissolving it in some looser and wider category. Hinduism as a faith is certainly dissimilar in structure from Christianity or Islam. But any implication—standard in contemporary Indo-apologetics - that it is thereby better should be resisted. Greater heterogeneity does not necessarily mean lesser toxicity. Shorter in scriptural authority, it is longer in hierarchical cruelty. It is enough to think of the existence of sati. Nor, it should be said, are popular traditions inherently more tolerant than elite versions : there is plenty of European evidence to the contrary. Was the subcontinent historically different ? Maybe, maybe not. That's a question for specialists in comparative religion.

Politically, however, the central fact of modern times remains that it split on communal religious lines, and the Hindu share of the massacres that accompanied partition was not due to any notable influence of the RSS. They welled up from below, though not infrequently—Bihar and Hyderabad - covered from above by leaders of Congress. That said, it's true that calibrating the precise nature and extent of the Hindu imprint on an Indian state born out of religious division is no easy task. Your formulation may well be close to the right one, though of course it would have to be unpacked in more detail. What can be said with confidence is that the imprint itself is systematically denegated in the Indian ideology.

You bracket India with Malaysia and Sri Lanka as other countries that have held regular elections since independence. But polls in Malaysia have always been rigged within a corrupt Lebanese-style ethnic power-sharing system ; there is no independent electoral commission. In Sri Lanka, a state of war and emergency has prevailed for decades, with effective disenfranchisement of the Tamils. So isn't Indian democracy a unique achievement within the Third World after all ?

It is unique, as I have written, by reason of the size and poverty of its electorate. But too often this is taken in a vainglorious, rather than comparative spirit. In most of the Union, polls are indeed freer than in Malaysia ; but there is also far more torture, and the lot of the least advantaged is much worse. Tamils have indeed been long disenfranchised in Sri Lanka, but the same can be said, for similar reasons of Kashmiris ; if these form a far smaller proportion of the population, it is also true that Sri Lanka has a much longer record of political alternation in government than India. Jamaica or Mauritius would score higher than any of this trio as examples of parliamentary freedom.

Doesn't your critical account of Nehru miss his progressive embrace of a mixed economy, state-led development, and public cultural institutions at home, as well as a more spirited fight against the forces of Hindutva than Gandhi put up ?

It's true *The Indian Ideology* doesn't say much about these sides of his record. But had I written about them, the balance-sheet would not be significantly altered. He was, of course, mildly Fabian in outlook, and did want state-led industrialization and public universities and technical colleges. But this was such a general feature of post-colonial states that it is difficult to feel it was a particularly distinctive achievement on Nehru's part. The public sector created under him was no challenge to private capital or Indian big business, which welcomed it, as Vivek Chibber has shown, while higher education has remained to this day extraordinarily unequal—witness the number of Muslims who have ever made it into the top institutions—as it had to, if elementary education continued to be as grossly neglected as it was under Nehru. The record was not all bad, but nor was it in any way remarkable by comparative standards. It is enough to think of what Japan or Korea achieved in the equivalent phases of their development to see how meagre was the balance-sheet in India.

As to Hindutva, Nehru was personally as secular as you could wish (until the perhaps the very end of his life, when he occasionally toyed with scraps of religion), and undoubtedly resisted Patel's drive to purge the bureaucracy of any trace of Muslim personnel. But as a ruler, he led what was always essentially a Hindu party, whose sensibilities he had to accommodate— ditching Ambedkar without compunction, for example, when he raised hackles in Congress. So while it is true that you can find firmer expressions about Hindutva in Nehru than Gandhi, this doesn't mean his actions were necessarily better. It was Nehru, not Gandhi, who had little power by then, that joined forces with Mookerjee and the Mahasabha in 1947 to whip up the Hindu chauvinist campaign against a United Bengal, telling the British he would not permit such a thing unless the whole province belonged to 'Hindustan'. His sabotage of the chances of an inter-confessional Bengal, from which Bengalis on both sides of the frontier have suffered ever since, is among the worst stains on his record.

What about his originality in positioning India as a new kind of power, one armed with moral rather than military force, promoting non-alignment, world peace and nuclear disarmament in the face of US pressure ? Wouldn't you have to concede that his foreign policy was a major achievement.

Yes, it is a commonly heard view today that his foreign policy was Nehru's best legacy. Yet by any objective standard, it was less substantial than his socio-economic record. People, inside and outside India, think of Nehru as a principled champion of Afro-Asian solidarity and the spirit of Bandung. Alas, most of this is an illusion. He did not admire American capitalism, and had as many reservations about Soviet communism. In that sense, he was indeed ideologically non-aligned. But if one looks at the actual facts of Indian foreign policy in this period, Nehru's performance emerges as rather a shabby one. Since a mythology has grown up around these, it is worth spelling out how little it corresponds to the evidence. Three leading examples will suffice.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 is often credited in large measure to Nehru. In fact, this was not an Indian initiative. It was proposed by Indonesia at a meeting in Colombo in April 1954 attended by the leaders of Ceylon, Burma, India and Pakistan. Only Pakistan was strongly in favour. Ceylon was not unwilling. But India and Burma were both sceptical, and the Indonesian PM Sastroamidjojo had to make a special trip to Delhi five months later to persuade Nehru to accept the idea. When the five countries met in Bogor in December to plan the conference, India pressed that Israel be invited—it was Pakistani opposition that stopped this. A day before the conference opened and the arrival of all the delegations had arrive, Nehru insisted that it be modelled on meetings of the Commonwealth (sic), and railroaded this through. On the third day, Nehru intervened to block a resolution, calling for 'the right of the people of Algeria to self-determination', declaring this was 'agitational language' (re-sic). What were Nehru's own aims, apart from hoping that Israel would be present and Algeria not mentioned ? Essentially, he saw the Conference as a means of separating China from Russia, detaching it from Communist solidarity in favour of his version of Afro-Asian kinship. Zhou Enlai did not permit such a wedge to be driven between Beijing and Moscow, but otherwise expressed tactful

support for the objectives of the Conference, and won a good deal of admiration for his constructive role at it.

When consideration of arrangements for further meetings of an Afro-Asian bloc came up at the conclusion of the Conference, so little regard did Nehru have for the idea of building it as a serious force, that he declared these were superfluous. When, close to a decade later, a second Afro-Asian Conference was finally being planned to follow the first, in Algiers, what had become India's main objective ? To force Russia into the gathering as a bona fide Asian country, over the opposition not only of China but of virtually every other country. The reason for this somersault, making a mockery of Nehru's position at Bandung, was simply that Russia was now not only a counterweight against China, but India's crucial safeguard in the Security Council against inconvenient resolutions on Kashmir. In the event, the Algiers meeting was aborted, to the relief of Delhi, which had never had any interest in it in the first place. The reality is that what mattered to Nehru were the endless Commonwealth meetings of the period—he must have attended close to a dozen : there were seventeen between 1944 and 1969. He even thought another of these meaningless sops to British post-imperial vanity more important than presiding in Delhi over the signal for war with China.

What of Suez ? Here too, it is often retrospectively imagined that Nehru played a fearless anti-colonial role in attacking the Suez expedition. But these were verbal pronouncements, that cost him nothing—he was on the same side as Eisenhower, after all. Much more significant was his refusal to supply arms to Egypt when Nasser appealed to him for material help in the spring of 1956, before the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion. To have done that would have not gone down well in the Commonwealth club, and there could be no question of it.

What was the major foreign-policy operation conducted in the name of Nehru's lofty principles of Non-Alignment ? Dispatch of the Indian contingent to the UN operation in the Congo, the first of its now innumerable 'peace-keeping missions' of ill fame. There, it was under the watch of one of Nehru's trustees, Rajeshwar Dayal— previously India's envoy to the UN and subsequently head of its Foreign Service, who was in charge of the whole ONUC operation from September 1960 to May 1961— that Lumumba was deposed, abducted and finally murdered in February 1961. Since this inglorious start, India has made a specialty of dispatching troops under the flag of the UN as a trademark of its foreign policy, with a frequency rivalled only by Pakistan, in both cases— a supportive scholar has observed—because the generous payment for such services has helped defray the expenses of domestic operations. Today, Indian troops are once again stationed in the Congo, this time charged with trafficking in gold and drugs. That would not have happened in Nehru's day. But as a political legacy, the example he set at the UN, where policy on the Congo was determined throughout by Washington, was little better than his addiction to the charades of the Commonwealth in London.

Extenuating circumstances will no doubt be found by Nehru's admirers for all three of these episodes, and it is true that not all Indian officials were as willing to do Western bidding as Dayal. There are at least two cases where the country's honour was signally and bravely upheld, though it is doubtful how far Delhi itself had much to do with them. One was Justice Rabhabinod Pal, the Indian judge on the Tokyo Tribunal, who in 1948 bluntly denounced its findings— in a 1,235 page judgement— as victor's justice. The other was Sir Abdur Rahman, the Indian representative on the UN Special Committee on Palestine, whose blistering minority report on the majority's proposed partition of the area, ghost-written by Bunche, is a comprehensive historical rebuttal of the claims of Zionism that reads as topically and truthfully as if it were written today. But these are the unsung heroes of the time. So far as Nehru is concerned, the sad reality is that foreign policy for him was largely driven by the exigencies of safeguarding his annexation of Kashmir. That was where diplomatic energy really went. A. G. Noorani's verdict is not unjust. Temperamentally, 'he was a

congenital hardliner with little talent for compromise, had a narrow conception of the national interest, and did not reflect on the consequences of his decisions’.

You don't think he left any valuable legacy for India today ?

Nehru both preserved liberal democracy in India, and corroded it. At the national level provincial level was another matter— parliamentary government stood, under his rule, intact. If there were many distortions and limitations of it — and there were—these were not so much a departure from the general pattern of capitalist liberty as typical of it in rich countries too. That was Nehru's positive legacy. But it came with two lastingly negative ones— a pair of albatrosses that still hang, stinking, around the neck of the country. The first was his seizure of Kashmir, which became the West Bank of India, the impossibility of any honest discussion of which has poisoned Indian intellectual life ever since. The second was the curse of dynastic rule, of which his admirers childishly try to absolve him. Himself possessed of a strong sense of entitlement from his father, it was instinctive in him to take his daughter around with him on official voyages throughout the world, and see her installed, with no claim to office other than blood-line, as President of Congress, primed for the next step up. Half a century later, India still groans under his brood, and the example it has set.

At a couple of points in your book, you counterpose Bose to Nehru. But wasn't Nehru a principled anti-fascist, where Bose found protection in Nazi Germany and assistance from militarist Japan ? Don't your references tend to idealize him ?

Bose is a bugbear not only for liberals, but for communists in India, since he took the diametrically opposite line to the CPI's staunch support for the Raj during the Second World War. In *The Indian Ideology*, I don't provide any full portrait of him, or for that matter of Ambedkar, whom I contrast with Gandhi. Had I done so for either, the result would necessarily have been more complex than brief references to them could be. Bose certainly had his own weaknesses and share of blindness. But he cannot be dismissed because he fought with the Japanese, as Aung San and many anti-colonial leaders in South-East Asia did. What distinguished him from the other Congress leaders of the period—Gandhi, Patel, Nehru, Pant and the rest—was that he really did fight for inter-confessional unity in Bengal, against them, and actually achieved it in the INA, which they catastrophically failed to do after the War. The British knew perfectly who was more dangerous to them : not Gandhi or Nehru, who were treated comparatively with kid gloves when they were detained by the British, but Bose, deported to far harsher conditions of imprisonment in Burma, and targeted for assassination when he escaped from Calcutta in 1940.

You attack the spread of dynastic politics in India as the creation of so many family firms, Congress leading the way. But isn't the deeper problem that all Indian parties, without exception, are thoroughly undemocratic, weakening the foundations of Indian democracy as a whole ?

You are right both about the lack of internal democracy in all Indian parties, and its implications for the political system as a whole. But dynastic rule is not just an extreme expression of this, it is a separate degeneration in its own right. It is a mistake to elide the two. There is a big difference between cadre parties like the CPM and the BJP, which are undemocratic but not dynastic, and Congress or the DMK, which are both. Even if dynastic politics operates as a cost-cutting mechanism of name-recognition for purposes of electoral mobilization in very large, poor constituencies, as some of its defenders argue, we still have to remember that the BJP has not required such blood-lines, so they cannot be viewed as an objective necessity absolving the monarchism of Congress, as if it had no choice in the matter.

The most obvious lacuna in your treatment of recent Indian history is any analysis of the Left. What accounts for that ?

I could answer that the Indian left was marginal to the leading developments I discuss. By and large that might be so, but it's not an adequate reply. The key question which I don't tackle in the depth it requires is why the left has historically been so weak in India. I simply note that where religion fuses with the nation in any independence struggle and ensuing construction of a post-colonial state, the left confronts a far more difficult terrain—I point to Ireland, Israel and India as parallel cases— than where this is not the case. That must be the starting-point of any explanation. In India, the socialist component of the left had the additional difficulty that within Congress, Nehru always spoke vaguely of socialism, indeed from early on was valued by Gandhi partly as a figure who could neutralize more radical currents within the party. The careers of Narayan and Lohia, each beginning in Congress and intellectually more impressive than their coevals, illustrate the ensuing handicaps an independent Indian socialism laboured under. Narayan's great eventual achievement was to bring down Nehru's daughter, but by then the socialist tradition as a positive alternative had effectively petered out.

In the case of the much larger communist movement, subordination to the twists and turns of the Soviet party was obviously a fetter, from the time of Third Period in which it was formed, through to the 'People's War' backing the Raj of 1941-145, followed by the insurrectionary Ranadive line— Zhdanov's directives to the Cominform in the background— of 1948-50, and on to the debacle of Dange's leadership in the early sixties. One could speculate that connexion with an exceptionally dunder-headed little CPGB in London was a further drawback. But as K. Damodoran pointed out in a very fine, self-critical interview back in 1975, other Communist parties—the Vietnamese, the Chinese— had to contend with the same manipulations from Moscow and came out of them much better. Moreover, this was not just the tactical burden that Indian Communism had to bear. It was also an organizational one. The CPI was born in a period of high Stalinism, and the internal regime which this created in parties dependent on the CPSU set in place traditions that continue to this day, with predictable effects on the political vitality of Indian communism.

But none of this answers what I believe is the real analytical problem, which is why Indian Communism took durable mass root in two such dissimilar states, at opposite ends of the Union, as Kerala and West Bengal, and nowhere else (if we set aside the more recent and restricted growth of Naxalism in adivasi communities). This is the conundrum that, so far as I know, no one on the left—or anywhere else in the political spectrum—has yet explained. One might speculate that cultural determinants have been at work in Kerala, Christianity and Islam weakening the grip of Hinduism in a society marked both by relatively high levels of literacy and particularly vicious forms of caste discrimination ; political determinants at work in West Bengal, as the victim of a partition presided over by Nehru and Mookerjee which depressed and marginalized it within the Union, as Joya Chatterji has shown, and so visited retribution on Congress for its fate in the long run. But these are only speculations. Proper explanations are still wanting.

Turning to the other end of the political spectrum, there has been very little resistance to crude forms and of neo-liberalism within the Indian elite and liberal intelligentsia. Do you think this is related to the Indian Ideology or to other factors, like the right-ward shift within the middle-class ?

No, I wouldn't link the Indian Ideology to any crude form of neo-liberalism. Most of those who give expression to it uphold the value of free markets, but not unbridled maximization of profits or privatization of all areas of economic life. More typical is rather the hope for a social-democracy, Indian-style. The Indira Gandhi Conference of 2010 (keynote address from Manmohan Singh), which gathered together some of its spirits, was devoted to that prospect. Any radical redistribution of income, speakers agreed, was out. But temperate measures of social justice were in order, even if

the lot of the poor would really benefit most from faster growth powered by deregulation and lower taxes. That said, it would probably be fair to say that true exponents of a radical neo-liberalism are quite at ease with the Indian Ideology, if without investing as much in it themselves.

How would you see the future of India, then, if you look at it through the lens of your book ?

As a discourse of self-congratulation of the Indian Union, the Ideology is in many ways very similar to the outburst of narcissism in the European Union a few years ago, when figures like the late Tony Judt were explaining that contemporary Europe was a paragon of political and social virtues, holding out a beacon for emulation to the rest of the world. The economic crisis has since made short work of these vanities. The comparable tropes in India will not burst so easily, because they are late expressions of an Indian nationalism that is no longer anti-colonial but proto-imperial, and the nation-state is a more storm-proof structure than a quasi-supranational confederation. All the same, the overblown rhetoric of Indian miraculism is liable to puncturing from events too. The current obstacles facing the elite consensus around neo-liberal reforms will no doubt be overcome. But their arrival is unlikely to mitigate social tensions. For these to find a positive outlet, the shortest pathway would be the removal of Congress from the scene, the condition of a serious refoundation of the Republic. Like any dynastic incrustation of old, its life-span is in good measure dependent on a biological lottery beyond prediction. But anyone who wishes to see a freer or more equal Union should be hoping to consign it to the past. 'Children ! Always cling to nurse/ for fear of finding something worse' is a poor motto for adults. Only in a space cleared by its exit could a more natural political dialectic develop, and a front of progress worthy of the dimensions of the country gradually emerge.

P.-S.

* Source : Outlook (New Delhi, India), 12 November 2012,
<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?282832>