

Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture on

De-Centring European Liberalism in India's Democratic Struggles

by

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De-Centring European Liberalism in India's Democratic Struggles

The man we have come to honour would have been remarkable in any age and any country. Maulana Azad was publishing a poetry magazine at the age of eleven, editing a major Urdu journal at the age of fifteen, and teaching students higher philosophy, mathematics and logic (Azad 1988, p. 3). By the age of twenty-four he had mastered and outgrown the rigorous courses of study required of the most respected Ulamas and acquired and outgrown the foundational logic of Baconian rationality, and was challenging the rationale of British rule in India and colonial rule in all Asian countries. From then on, he became one of the major figures in the phalanx of great thinkers, who both through their writings and speeches and their actions gave the direction to India's freedom movement. Even in that remarkable cohort, he was singled out for the depth and range of his knowledge and sagacity, so much so that an exasperated Sarojini Naidu had once quipped, 'Do not talk of Maulana's age. He was fifty the day he was born' (Datta, p. 13).

What is also remarkable is that Azad was born not in India but in Mecca, with Arabic as his mother tongue: the preferred languages in his father-dominated household were Persian and Arabic, with Urdu holding the same position as, for example, the Bangla vernacular did in the perspective of Pandits learned in the Shastric lore. Azad, I am told, came to be regarded as one of the great stylists of Urdu prose. But it is obvious that his Arabic-Persian competence gave him access to Pan-Islamic anti-imperialism, and enabled him to view India's struggle for freedom against the backdrop of struggles in Egypt, Syria, Turkey or Iran.

Challenges to Nineteenth-Century Liberalism

Coming to our times, contemporary neoliberal ideologies and policies are a direct descendant of the ideology and the jurisprudence of classical European liberalism. The latter found its expression in the works of David Ricardo, James Mill and J. B. Say and its evangelists in James Mill again in his History of British India and in the writings of J. R. McCulloch, Nassau Senior, Harriet Martineau and the writings and deeds of a man like Sir John Bowring, British Consul in Canton from 1849 to 1854, and Governor of Hong Kong from 1854 to 1859, who was among the chief

instigators of the Second Opium War, and who is reported to have declaimed, 'Free Trade is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is free trade'. These doctrines were propagated through books, print media, telegraph, church sermons. To take one example, *The Economist*, a journal founded by James Wilson, who became the first Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, when it came into being after the assumption of direct rule of India under the British redoubtable parliament, became a propagandist of imperialism and free trade. That role has continued unbroken through more than one hundred and sixty years of its history. Of course, even in its home ground in Britain or France, the free trade imperialists did not have it all their own way. Workers put up resistance against a one-way freedom of contract on the part of employers. The threat of a surge of socialist the workers forced many following among governments to curb the licentiousness employers. But the media onslaught and education ensured that jingoism and racism naturalized in the mindsets of most common people of the imperialist countries. That was one of the reasons why the formal imperialist dispensation survived until the 1940s and 1950s,

In order to establish the moral authority of their struggle, all the most important Indians who fought for India's freedom had to fight against those ideologies and practices of capitalist colonialism rampant. This was by no means an easy task, given the coercive and propagandist instruments at the command of the rulers. Moreover, European ideologies of liberalism had deep roots, which came into view only in periods of crisis of the imperialist order. Capitalism was born with an ideology of aggrandizement at any cost, including the use of violence against the ruled Although and against competing groups. capitalism was born in the city states of Italy, it found its instrument of global conquest in the constructed solidarity of the nation state (Bagchi 2005/2006). The legitimacy of that construction came out of the sixteenth-century discourses on the reasons of state that legitimized the nation state bereft of the moral authority or the theodicy of the Christian church, - whether its creed was some denomination of Protestantism or post-Reformation Roman Catholicism.

In the works of Giovanni Botero, or for that matter, Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes theorizing secular sovereignty, the actions of state for controlling the necessarily fractious world of a commercial society do not need justification in terms of morality or religious sanction: the selfprotection of a state in which competitive acquisitiveness has come to form the dynamics of a new kind of economic and social order is justification enough for any of its actions, however morally repugnant they may appear from the point of view of an impartial observer.

In the very beginning I want to put in some caveats. My talk concentrates on the writings and actions of some of the leading thinkers involved directly or indirectly in India's freedom struggle and on a particular aspect of those discourses and actions. However, while leaders lead, the struggles are conducted by the people. I do not discuss here how, for instance, in Satinath Bhaduri's fictional account, a Dhorai becomes a representative of Ganhibawa (Gandhibawa) in the Tatmatuli of a Bihar village, and induces many lower-caste communities to join the freedom struggle of the (Bhaduri 1920s 1930s 1949-1951/1973). and Moreover, I have not tackled one major component of the fractional story I narrate. The struggles conducted by Indian women such as Pandita Ramabai and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to spread education among women, mitigate to oppression of widows, to end the seclusion and sexual exploitation of women, or other women who followed them in different parts of the country to both end gender oppression and get rid of foreign rule are not covered here. As in the case of great educators such as Mahtma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Rabindranath Tagore, Babasaheb Ambedkar or Ramaswamy (Periyar) Naicker, these women thinkers and activists used multiple means such as journals, books and institutions created by them to get their messages across to ordinary people, and not just to the elite educated in the European, Brahmanical or traditional Islamic curricula (Barnita Bagchi 2009; Dutta Gupta 2010; Sarkar and Sarkar 2007).

The consolidation of a view of the society and state in which self-interest is always regulated to serve the interests of the community, whose broadest contours were defined as that of a nation of multiple creeds and languages took place only with the progress of the struggle for freedom. But the seeds of that view had lain in the long traditions of struggle for equality and dignity among the peoples of South Asia. Raja Rammohan Roy has often been called the maker of 'Modern India'. It is said that he imbibed the ideas of civil freedom and justice for everybody irrespective of creed or caste and gender through his acquaintance with European learning. But in fact, Rammohan was pleading for justice among all persons, irrespective of their religion long before he had learned English (Roy 1803/1906; 1975/1985). Rammohan Roy definitely welcomed

European science and discourses on freedom, and wanted his countrymen to imbibe those essential elements of European learning. However, as Sudhindranath Datta, the eminent Bengali poet, pointed out in his address delivered before the Second All India Progressive Writers' Conference in December 1938, 'Ram Mohan's mistake was not in believing that British rule was the beginning of the awaited resurrection; it consisted in thinking that the British rule was anything but accidental in releasing the indigenous forces of progress which..., resides in the masses' (Datta 1938/2008, p. 23).

The de-centring of classical western liberalism in the Indian discourses resulted from three different directions. In some ways, the most opposition arose from the direct elemental experience of imperialist liberalism in action. The second type of displacement resulted from a fundamental questioning of the process and the logical consequences of the working of liberalism, free trade and the sovereignty of private property. The third impulse for resistance to the would-be hegemonic ideology of imperialism came from observation of the international political order and the vision of an alternative that would prepare a more just social and political order for all human beings. In actuality, of course, the three directions often converged in the imaginary of the most important thinkers in India, but it is convenient nonetheless to keep these separate strands in mind.

The earliest attack on British colonialism pointed to the economic devastation and drain of resources caused by the extortionate taxation and unrequited export surpluses taken away from India, and pooh-poohed the idea that the British were carrying out a civilizing mission in India. In Bengali journals, often edited by conservative highcaste men, in the 1830s, the decimation of the handloom industry figured prominently. But for a sustained attack on the policies of the British which impoverished India, we have to look towards Maharashtra. Taking advantage of the short-lived freedom of press introduced by the Governor-General, Charles Metcalfe, Bhaskar Pandurang Karkhadkar wrote a series of articles in the *Bombay* Gazette, from July to October 1841, attacking oppressive British policies, comparing them to the marauding Danes in Anglo-Saxon Britain and the original Muslim invaders of India (Naik 2001; Naik 2012; Bayly 2012, pp. 124-127). 'The British were " a horde of foreign usurpers whose sole aim was to enrich themselves"..... under the British all Indians were excluded from offices and even under the corrupt Portuguese, "India had not been so degraded and impoverished" (Bayly 2012, p. 125).

Of course, the British editor of the Gazette lost his job for publishing such incendiary stuff. Karkhadkar was not alone in this anti-colonial campaign. Ramkrishna Viswanath published a book in Marathi on the history and political economy of India in 1843, probably the only book of its kind for a long time in any Indian vernacular. Bhau Mahajan published a series of journals in Marathi from 1841 to 1854, with *Desh Kalyan* (welfare of the country) as their guiding motto¹.

Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the two most charismatic figures in the history of Indian democratic struggle under colonialism, analysed and resisted the consequences of British rule for Indians. But more fundamentally, they rejected the whole conception of human society encapsulated in the ideology of free trade liberalism. In doing so, they also projected imaginaries of an alternative human society. Maulana Azad may also be regarded as somebody who, like Tagore, recognized the necessity of acquiring European learning, but

¹ It should be pointed out that the fact of the drain of resources from India and their consequences had been analysed by a number of British politicians, merchants and scholars from Edmund Burke and Anthony Lambert to Lord Lauderdale and Horace Hayman Wilson (Bagchi 1994). But by the 1840s that discourse had disappeared from official or non-official discourse in India. Robert Knight may perhaps be credited with its brief revival among non-official Europeans. Then Dadabhai Naoroji carried it forward into general Indian anti-imperialist discourse.

totally rejected the amoral perspective that impels scientifically advanced nations to subjugate their own peoples and to conquer others in a drive for aggrandizement.

Very early on, Tagore rejected the acquisitive freedom driving the imperialist powers to degrade the ruled but also to engage in genocidal conflicts with one another and create graveyards of the innocent all over the world. Jawaharlal Nehru, among the major Indian leaders perhaps followed the international developments from the end of World War I to the eve of Indian independence most carefully. He was acutely aware of the fascist alternative that capitalist rulers often choose when confronted with workers' resistance, and more particularly when that resistance is stiffened by the vision of a socialist alternative. It is the dream of such an alternative that led Tagore to write positive accounts of his visit to Russia in 1930, coupled with a warning about the long-term consequences of one-party rule. In some ways, Maulana Azad's entry into politics was caused by the degrading results of European imperialism for all Asians and North Africans in general and Muslims in particular. In his case the outrage regarding their civil condition was combined with an anguish about the moral corruption caused by rule through sheer coercion.

Democratic struggles have been conducted in India for millennia by peoples oppressed by caste, class, ethnic and gender discrimination and by overarching structures of the ruling state, including an alien capitalist imperialist state. Great activists and thinkers can crystallize the different components of the struggle and can give a direction to those struggles. The activism and thinking can change with circumstances and with further reflection. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay can write tremendously satirical articles about the quality of British justice and can create a godhead, who embodies the reason of state that overrides morality, because that is what he thought the Indian people needed to revitalize themselves, namely, a theory of (Kaviraj1993). A Maulana Abul Kalam Azad can first dream of an Islamic community purged of the accretions of ignorant adulation and ultimately discovers his mission in his struggle for India's independence and trying to mobilize all the people, irrespective of their religious affiliations, in that struggle (Azad 1988; Datta 1990; Douglas 1988). Great thinkers often use myths as history and history as myth. Jotirao Phule finds his myth in the tales of Parashuram killing the Kshatriyas and King Bali being subdued by Vamana, one of the Brahman-created avatars of Vishnu (O'Hanlon

1985; Deshpande 2002). On the other side, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi finds his myth in the utopia of a Ramarajya (Rajmohan Gandhi 2006).

From Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore, from Jotirao Phule to E. V. R. Naicker and B. R. Ambedkar, from Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and from Sayyid Ahmad Khan to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, most Indian leaders have drawn upon older Indian (South Asian) resources not only to fight British colonialism, but also to build up their vision of a democratic society, partly absorbing ideas of European liberalism but partly rejecting it.

In pre-British India, democratic struggles often took the form of fighting against the dominance of Brahmanical hierarchy and ideology (Bagchi 1995), or after the advent of Islam, the rigid injunctions of Islamic jurists (Datta 1990, chapters 1 and 2). Such struggles continued among the common people even after the British conquest of India, but gradually the struggle assumed that of a fight for independence from British rule. But simultaneously the social struggles against oppressive hierarchies continued. Such hierarchies often had crystallized around earlier movements of liberation. The *sufi* orders had often degenerated into *piri* taqlid, Veerashaiva movement had

forgotten the call for gender equality embodied in the *vachanas* of Mahadevi Akka. In fact, the landlord dominance needed by the British as the intermediary layer of rule had further fossilized older Brahmanical and Ulama-driven rigidity, and struggles for independence and struggles for social reform became intertwined in the thinking and even activism of many of the fighters for independence: these included many of the local leaders of big organizations like the Congress or the Self-Respect movement.

Many of them were attracted by the apparent equality before law British justice promised, and pioneers of the women's movement such as Pandita Ramabai and of anti-caste movements such as Jotirao Phule, Ramaswamy ('Periyar') Naicker and B. R. Ambedkar utilized that promise to try and break down caste and patriarchal obstacles to human freedom. But none of them, at least from the twentieth century advocated the ideology and policies that were associated with the liberalism of the Gladstonian variety.

All the leaders of the epoch of the struggle for independence were born in the nineteenth century, when what has been styled as 'classical liberalism' had become the dominant ideology of the ruling class of virtually all the imperialist nation states. Interestingly enough, whatever their beginning ideologies were, virtually all of them had come to be united in rejecting European liberalism and the doctrines of a minimalist state and maximalist rights of private property.

With free trade liberalism as the dominant ideology, the Enlightenment ideals were simply ignored when it came to colonies. It was inevitable that not only the implementation but also the tenets of that ideology should come to be questioned in India, both from a conservative and a 'progressive' standpoint. As mentioned already, one of the unstated premises of European liberalism was the reason of state, which grew into prominence precisely when European-style (capitalist) nation states were being constructed in England, the Netherlands, France and the Scandinavian countries. That reason was invoked whenever the rule of the propertied class was threatened in the core capitalist-imperialist countries, and much more frequently in the dependent colonies peopled by non-whites. Even under the normal 'law and order' proclaimed by the British, Indians were at the mercy of arbitrary actions by anybody from the District Collector down to the village chaukidar. But in any situation when the ruling power felt threatened, the minimal protection enjoyed by Indians was revoked, and emergency was declared: the Rowlatt Acts and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre being the clearest examples of such actions (Hussain 2003).

Questioning of Caste Hierarchies and British Promises of Equality

While in the society of peasants, artisans, small businessmen, especially those who belonged to the 'lower castes', the questioning of hierarchies and meaningless rituals continued as continuations of, or more accurately, innovations in so-called obscure religious cults, they did not pose direct challenges to the British government, either to its authority or to its accountability in terms of unfulfilled promises. The latter kind of challenges came up first in Maharashtra, but they were followed by similar movements in South India and in Bengal. Practically all of them then came to pose challenges to the authority of the colonial government even though the latter tried to use them as weapons against the dominant nationalist led by Mahatma Gandhi. movement Maharashtra, the pace-setter was Jotirao Phule, who viewed the Hindu society as being polarized between Brahmans and the rest, whom he styled as Shudras and Atishudras, and called for the liberation of the latter from the many legal and religious disabilities they suffered from. He also

saw how many women of upper castes were subjected to early and lifelong widowhood through their early marriage, very often resulting in the premature death of widows, or their unwanted and socially unaccepted pregnancy and crimes like infanticide and enforced prostitution. He founded a home for the rescue of pregnant widows and their unwanted babies. He also wrote against the of Brahmans in the Education dominance Department of the colonial government, and wanted education for the masses (O'Hanlon 1985. Phule 2002; Deshpande 2002). The trouble is that the colonial government was unable to fulfill any of the demands Phule made on it in the name of legal equality. It needed an upper-caste Indian elite as intermediaries between itself and the general population. It could not spread mass education because that would eat into the surplus it needed to transfer to England every month (Bagchi 2010). Moreover, in the general view of the government, the few thousand educated Indians were already creating trouble for the government and more education would invite further trouble. It could not do much for the women without conferring on them enforceable property rights and educating them. The latter was out of the question because again of the increased expenditure involved. In Bengal, when Ishwarchandra Vidysagar became

the Special Inspector of Schools in 1855, he opened a large number of schools for girls and ran many of them at his own expense. Most of these schools had to be closed later, because the government would not spend anything for their support. The government could not confer property rights on women without violating the rule that personal laws of all the religious sects would have to be respected except when they trenched too greatly on the surplus needed by the government. Moreover, in their own country, women suffered a civil death on their marriage. Interestingly enough, women enjoyed better property rights under Muslim law than under the personal laws of all other religions (Fyzee, 1974; Esposito 1991).

While Jotirao Phule did not found any political party, he left a rich legacy of dissent which against casteism energized many movements later. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar), who was eleven years old when Phule died, founded a movement, became involved in two political parties, both of which he left, converted the old Justice Party into a social movement (Dravidar Kazhagam), whose followers then left him to found two political parties which are now in constant tussle for dominance in Tamil politics. Periyar became an atheist, renouncing not just Hinduism but all forms of religion, after an

experience in Varanasi in 1904, where he was denied a free meal in a religious charity founded by a non-Brahman, because he was a non-Brahman². In 1919 he quitted his business, joined the Indian National Congress, participated in the noncooperation and temperance movements, imprisoned more than once. He was elected President of the Madras Committee, but left the Congress when it refused to support his demand for reservation for lower castes in government jobs. He participated in the Vaikom satyagraha that had as its objective the permission of 'untouchables' to enter the temple premises and offer their puja. In 1925, he founded the Self-Respect Movement, with multiple objectives. They included equality of status among all castes, education for the people, prevention of child marriages, equality of men and women, and eradication of superstitious beliefs and unnecessary rituals, and so on. He was equating gender oppression and caste oppression, as Phule had done before him. Like Maulana Azad and Mahatma Gandhi, he launched a journal in the language that the ordinary people of Tamil Nadu understood and devoted the rest of his life to the spread of the movement all over South India. He invoked a Tamil past to reject the accretions of a

² My main sources of information here are Diehl (1977), Baker (1976) and Pandian (1999). There are several highly informative entries in Wikipedia, which have also been helpful.

Brahmanical orthodoxy. Periyar, like the other leaders, was acutely aware of the interconnections among the peoples of the world, and the knowledge that Indians needed to absorb from other countries. Between 1929 and 1932, he visited many countries of the Tamil diaspora, including, Malaysia, for example, but also taking in major European countries. After spending three months in Russia, he came back as an admirer of communism, and began to profess socialism. In 1934, the government 'jailed him for a seditious article which, among other things, accused the Justice Ministers of "sharing the spoils" government', and arrested him again for conniving in the publication of a revolutionary pamphlet. After the electoral debacle of the Justice Party (which had been founded by upper-caste non-Brahmans in 1937), Periyar was made president of that party, but he converted into the Dravidar Kazhagam, a social movement which aimed to pursue the ideals of the original Self-Respect Movement. Here we can see again how through experience of both Indian hierarchies and the limited nature of the liberties doled out by the colonial state turned a leader into an opponent of both colonialism and the Indian social order. His dissent from many of the unstated assumptions of the national movement in fact enriched the legacy

of the struggle for freedom and enriched the imaginaries alternative to free trade liberalism.

The Construction of a Post-Independence Imaginary for India

According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Gandhi era of the Indian National Congress and the predominant stream of the final struggle for freedom began with the special session of the Calcutta Congress in 1920, which discussed and approved, against the wishes of the old guard, Gandhi's proposal that the Congress should launch the Non-cooperation Movement (Nehru 1936/2004, pp. 69-73). But there was a long preparation for Gandhi to emerge as the dominant, if not an undisputed leader of the struggle for freedom. There was a similarly long preparation for Rabindranath Tagore to become one of the greatest friends of Mahatma Gandhi (a title conferred on him by Tagore) and one of the most eloquent critics of the Non-cooperation movement. The friendship had begun long before Gandhi became the national figure and Tagore had received the Nobel Prize for literature, and endured beyond Tagore's life. One of the common taproots of regard and friendship between two such charismatic figures lay in their rejection of acquisitive liberalism.

Both Tagore and Gandhi rejected European liberalism, but for different reasons. Tagore saw in it the embodiment of possessive individualism underlying the construction of nation states that inevitably came to contest one another, and was at the basis of imperialism in India and elsewhere. His method of fighting it also differed from Gandhi's. He believed in the creative engagement of individuals in close co-operation with others and with nature, and the possibility, as it were, of of the rigid shell of bursting possessive, exploitative and violently competitive liberalism, which promised what it could never deliver. He believed in the inventive genius of mankind, which through scientific and aesthetic advances, could find a balance between modern industry and nature, and ultimately convince mankind that cooperation rather than competition was the way to realize the full potential of mankind.

Gandhi was, in a way, far more radical in his vision, rejecting modern industry altogether as a future for mankind. But he concentrated on man (woman) as a moral being labouring to earn his simple needs and it is on labouring for the welfare of others that he concentrated his attention. Tagore was an innovator in exploring the creative potential of human beings, Gandhi was an innovator in methods of struggle against the coercive power of

the liberal, capitalist, imperialist, racist state. Gandhi's method was always political: his promotion of charkha and village industry was as much a political weapon for fighting the British government as an instrument for constructing an alternative future for India.

There are two distinct ways in which Tagore distanced himself from the nineteenth-century liberal or for that matter, Lockean conception of what it was to be human. One was the idea that a fully human being is a being connected with other human beings, past, present and future, and cannot be an island or a being who is guided only by self-interest, narrowly conceived. Second, human beings are fully human when they live in harmony with nature rather than by all the time trying to dominate nature (Bagchi 2011). The evidence can be culled from a whole range of his enormous corpus. I will here quote just a passage from *Sadhana* (1914):

.... in ancient India we find that the circumstances of forest life did not overcome man's mind, and did not enfeeble the current of his energies, but only gave to it a particular direction. Having been in constant contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to

realise, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings. He felt that truth is all-comprehensive, that there is no such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects.....

The man who aims at his own aggrandisement underrates everything else. Compared to his ego the rest of the world is unreal. Thus in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, one has to be free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties—for sharing the burdens of our fellow-beings. Every endeavour to attain a larger life requires of man "to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy." And thus to expand gradually the consciousness of one's unity with all is the striving of humanity....

Just as Tagore appealed to his conception of ancient in motivating his own conception of the destiny of mankind, so did Gandhi. Both of them regarded the kind of urban civilization that grew up in Greece and Rome, which were regarded by their contemporary Europeans as the fount of their separateness, to be a travesty of true civilization. In his foundational text *Hind Swaraj* originally written in Gujarati, during the days he was perfecting

satyagraha as a political weapon, he wrote (Gandhi 1908/1938):

Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means "good conduct".

Except when he wrote as the capitalist nation state as a major driver of imperialist aggression, Tagore tended to bypass the question of the nature of the state, whereas Gandhi challenged the idea that human beings needed a state as a coercive apparatus. When Gandhi as editor asks the (Indian) reader, what Swaraj would mean for him and the reader replies:

We may get it when we have the same powers; we shall then hoist our own flag. As is Japan, so must India be. We must own our navy, our army, and we must have our own splendour, and then will India's voice ring through the world.

Gandhi's response was, then the independent would no longer be India but would become 'Englishtan'.

There were major differences between Tagore and Gandhi on how to nurture mankind

and how they should live³. The Phoenix Settlement boys whom Gandhi brought to Santiniketan did not fit in there, and Gandhi removed them to his own ashram. The Santiniketan boys could not adopt the rigours of labour combined with study that Gandhi's regimen demanded. But beyond these differences, in both these great men, there was a principled rejection of the acquisitive society (Tawney 1921) and a lifelong quest for the principles of a good life for the whole of humanity, as that untypical Anglican priest, Charles Freer Andrews clearly recognized. Gandhi helped Rabindranath in various ways, including fundraising for Visva-Bharati, Tagore rushed to Yeravada jail when he learned that Gandhi had there begun his fast unto death on 20 September 1932, if his demand for revoking separate electorates for the untouchables encoded in the Act passed by the British Parliament on 17 August 1932 was not reversed. Tagore stayed at his side until Gandhi's demand was met and he broke his fast on

³ For the record of friendship and major differences of opinion see Bhattacharya 1997; Gopalkrishna Gandhi 2007. On pp. 96-109 of the latter volume are to be found the differences of opinion between the two on the question of non-cooperation over the period 21 May -13 October expressed in articles of the Modern Review and Young India, and in a closed door meeting between the two arranged by Andrews at the Jorasanko house of Tagore on 6 September 1921. Tagore voiced his reasons for opposing the Non-cooperation Movement to other friends and is relatives throughout the period 1921-1923 (Dutta and Robinson 2005, pp. 285-306).

26 September 1932. Tagore requested Gandhi to take care of Visva-Bharati, after his death, and Gandhi fulfilled that pledge, visiting Santiiketan between 18 and 20 December 1945. Among other things, he laid the foundation of a hospital named after C. F. Andrews (Gopalkrishna Gandhi 2007, pp. 366-35).

I can never presume to sum up the qualities of greatness these men had. But I would like to point out again, that with all their different starting points, they had the ability to recognize the sincerity of purpose of other persons involved in the freedom struggle, even though they might have very different conceptions of the methods to be employed. One outstanding example of this occurred in the case of Subhas Chandra Bose. Gandhi repeatedly expressed his disagreement with Bose on the methods of struggle, openly opposed his election as President of the Indian National Congress, but when interviewed by Louis Fischer on his view of Bose, he called him 'patriot of patriots. Tagore also had come to abhor violence as a method of struggle after his experience of the aftermath of the anti-partition movement in Bengal starting in in 1905. But in 1939, he called Subhas Bose 'Deshnayak' in the speech he gave on the occasion of laying the foundation stone of Mahajati Sadan in Calcutta.

Both Gandhi and Tagore evolved through their lives, learning from their experience and from others. Although both were outstandingly innovative, they did not have to revolt against their families. Tagore was a school-dropout, but his father accepted that. They learned from their home background but extended the original conceptions of say, truth and sociability way beyond anybody could ever have foreseen. In his autobiography, Gandhi has recorded the experience that turned him into a political messiah (Gandhi 1927-29; see also Rajmohan Gandhi chapters 1-6). We have a kind of synoptic view of Tagore's beliefs and vision of the world in his Religion of Man (Tagore 1931/1061), in which he stresses the uniqueness of mankind's striving towards higher and higher levels of creativity in this immense and amazing universe, which through the working of the second law of thermodynamics, may destroy itself.

Maulana Azad absorbed an extraordinary storehouse of Arabo-Persian learning but revolted against the rigidity and narrowness of the interpretation of Islam provided by the typical Ulama. That revolt was directed in a productive direction through his eager study of the works of Sir Sayyid Ahmad and his exhortations that Muslims as well as Hindus must acquire mastery of modern Western science. But he had a

cosmopolitan home background with a wide network of contacts in the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran. In all these countries, the assault of the European powers against the Ottoman empire, which among other fall-outs, threatened the holy cities of Islam from Jerusalem to the Hejaz, led to a surge of resistance and rebelliousness and Azad had been exposed to these developments on his travels west in 1908 (Azad 1988; Datta 1990). It is invidious to single out the influences on the mind of as complex a personality as Azad, but the antiimperialist writings of Al-Afghani, who debated with Ernest Renan the place of science in the Asian imaginary and society (Al-Afghani 1883-184/1968), and writers and activists following him, such as Rashid Rida, almost certainly influenced the formation of Azad's world-view. So for him, unlike many of Sayyid Ahmad's followers, collaboration with the British government was unthinkable. Since the British government was the real enemy, Azad strove for Hindu-Muslim unity all his life. Moreover, as a deeply religious man, Gandhi's invocation of the ethical character of his methods of struggle greatly appealed to him.

Azad, Tagore and Gandhi remained religious in their own ways throughout their life, although each redefined the religion they were born into in new ways. Another contemporary of

theirs, Periyar became an atheist after his Varanasi experience, and regarded organized religion as an enemy of social and political equality among human beings. Anti-caste movements in Bengal also partly adopted a religious idiom⁴, and ultimately became marginalized in united Bengal, because the Bengal Congress was dominated by a zamindar-lawyer nexus which refused to take up the minimalist programmes of the peasants and the Krishak Praja Party, which came up to represent mainly the interests of the better-off peasants came to be dominated by Muslim leaders, among whom A. K. M. Fazlul Haque became the most prominent mass leader of undivided Bengal. Between the British government, a faction-ridden Bengal Congress and the Muslim League, Fazlul Haque was soon made ineffective as the Prime Minister of Bengal in the Bengal government formed after the elections of 1937. So the peasantry, Muslims as well as lower-caste Hindus lost out under that deal. Two other Indian savants and leaders who suffered caste discrimination, namely, Ambedkar and Meghnad Saha, played important functions in visualizing, in the 1940s, the contours of planning for an alternative to free trade liberalism in an

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The Matua movement, which arose among namasudras an 'untouchable' caste, was founded by Harichand and taken forward by his son, Guruchand, became a separate religious cult headed by scions of the Guruchand Thakur family (Bandopadhyay 1993). In 1946, the Bengal anti-caste associations adopted Ambedkar to represent them in the Constituent Assembly.

independent India. But their very different political and intellectual backgrounds did not prevent them from closely collaborating in that visualization. Saha was a scientist, with very radical leanings, and did not demonstrate any need for an alternative religion; Ambedkar was an economist training, probably the most prominent spokesman against caste hierarchies in late colonial India. He ended up, along with thousands of his followers, embracing Buddhism, because unlike Marxists, he believed that everybody needed a religion, and he regarded Buddhism as the most egalitarian one (Keer 1987; Aleaz 2012; Basu 2012) Given the background of major participants in the freedom movement, and given their awareness of the place of religion in the lives of the common people of India professing a great diversity of creeds and practices, it as almost inevitable that the Republic of India should begin its life in a foundation of multi-religious secularism.

The Coming Together of the Disparate Strands - Conceptually

Starting with Jawaharlal Nehru and Saha, we have a set of major figures, for whom religion was not a central preoccupation of their lives. Nehru did not have to fight against religion in his home background, and although he often differed from

his father Motilal in his political perspective, that difference was easily contained within the Congress as a platform for fighters for freedom rather than as a party with a fully well-defined manifesto.

Nehru openly professed socialism as his goal, and wanted a planned economy for India. His *Autobiography* (1936/2004) and his *Discovery of India* (1946/2004) clearly indicate his horror of the fascism let loose by a capitalist class threatened by the surge of protest among the workers in Europe from the end of World War I and his admiration for Soviet Russia which was able to avoid the unemployment seeping the capitalist world in the 1930s and was able to enormously increase incomes and levels of social welfare in that country. Even before those writings, he was aware of the basic social revolution needed in agrarian relations for Indians to be able to dream of a more egalitarian society⁵. As I had said earlier (Bagchi 2008):

There is little doubt that among the top leaders of the Congress, Nehru was the one person who was aware of the need for thorough-going land reforms that would free the peasants of civil bondage and release their full productive and human potential. He had protested against the

⁵ For the story of curbing Nehru's socialist and anti-big business proclivities, see Chandra 1975.

shooting down of unarmed protest of peasants against an oppressive landlord in Rae Bareli in 1921 (Nehru 1921/2007); while in Naini prison, he had drawn up an agrarian programme for the Congress in 1930, in which had noted that 'the basis of any agrarian programme must be the good of the man in the field—the cultivator as well as the landless man if he had the chance' (Nehru 1930/2007, p. 220). He also noted, however, that 'the Congress does not desire to precipitate a class conflict. It is wise in avoiding it...'(Ibid).

As chairman of the National Planning Committee set up by the Congress in 1938, Nehru and other members of the committee were able to bring together, besides the fifteen members nominated by the Congress, to quote Nehru (1946/2004, p.435):

representatives of provincial governments and such Indian states as chose to collaborate with us. the members were well-known Among industrialists, financiers, economists, professors, scientists, as well as representatives of the Trade Union Congress and the Village Industries Association. The non-Congress Provincial Governments (Bengal, Punjab and Sind), as well as some of the major states (Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, Travancore, Bhopal) co-operated with this committee. Ιt was remarkably а

representative committee cutting across political boundaries as well as the high barrier between official and non-official India – except for the fact that the Government of India was not represented and took up a non-co-operative attitude. Hardheaded big business was there as well as people who are called idealists and doctrinaires, and socialists and near-communists. Experts and directors of industries came from provincial governments and states....

It is remarkable that the objectives and tests of progress that were suggested by the National Planning Committee have a highly contemporary ring, except that some of the objectives are far more ambitious than the current policy-makers of today's neoliberal and so-called high-growth India dare even to put down in their vision documents. Apart from increases in agricultural and industrial output and per capita incomes, they also had as basic objectives and criteria of success, 'a balanced diet having a calorific value of 2400 to 2800 units for an adult worker', increases in annual cloth consumption from 15 to 30 yards per head, housing space of at least 100 square feet per capita, 'liquidation of illiteracy', increase in expectation of life and an enormous increase in medical aid (Nehru 1946/2004, p. 438).

The National Planning Committee was working in atmosphere in an which impoverishment and de-industrialization of India under British rule had become part of the commonsense of the educated public in India. A host of writers, following the lead of Karkhadkar, Naoroji and others, had documented the incidence of famines, the decimation of handicraft industries, and decline in agricultural production in major regions, and demonstrated the deleterious effects of the one-way free trade policies pursued by the British. These writers included M. G. Ranade, G. V. Joshi, R. C. Dutt and also dissident British civil servants such as J. C. Geddes and William Digby (Chandra 1967; Bayly 2012).

The National Planning Committee was also meeting when the necessity of planning of some kind to cure he ills of India had been bruited by a far-sighted engineer turned statesman such as Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, a businessmanpolitician such as N. R. Sarkar, and a host of economists and publicists who were impressed by the rapid progress of Soviet Russian industries under planning. Even a Finance Member of the Governor's Council, George Schuster, openly talked about the necessity of planning in India -of course, only after he had quitted his job as Finance Member (Chattopadhyay 1985; Zachariah 2005).

War II, During World the colonial government had worry about to postwar reconstruction of India. So a Planning and Reconstruction Committee was set up. This was replaced in the later stages of the war by a Department of Planning and Development, and Sir Ardeshir Dalal, one of the authors of the industrialists' Bombay Plan (1944) was inducted as a Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and put in charge of that department (Zacariah 2005, p.258). More interestingly from our point of view, Ambedkar was in charge of the Department of Labour from 1942 to 1947, in the Viceroy's Council under the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935. Irrigation and electricity also formed part of the Department of Labour. Plans for largescale river valley projects that would combine the generation of hydroelectric power with irrigation were formulated under his leadership (Thorat 2006, chapters VI and VII). In 1943, devastating floods occurred in the Damodar valley. The government was perturbed not so much by the travails of the people (it might have derived a feeling of Schadenfreude at their misery because Medinipur, which formed a large par of the lower Damodar valley was one of the storm centres of the Quit India movement starting in August 1942), but the floods badly disrupted communications

movements of troops and their supplies. In a series of articles in Science and Culture starting in 1943, just after the Damodar flood, Saha presented an analysis of the problem and suggested solutions. His scheme was presented to the Damodar Flood Enquiry Committee 1943-44 of which Saha was a member (Bose 1967). The Bengal scheme for flood control was then presented to Ambedkar-headed Labour Department. It was then expanded into a composite project of flood control, irrigation and generation of hydroelectricity and eventually took the shape of the Damodar Valley Corporation. Many are still debating whether that was the best plan for the people of the valley. But the point is that persons from so very different backgrounds had, at that point of time a perspective which was totally opposed to the slogan of 'Leave it to the market'

I want to end this talk by referring to a statement Mahatma Gandhi made during his conversation with the workers of the Lancashire cotton mills on his visit to London in 1931 to attend the Round Table Conference convened by the British government. The workers were very courteous but had been made to believe, through the working of the usual propaganda machine, that a large part of the blame for their unemployment lay with the boycott of foreign cloth in India under

Gandhi's leadership. 'Many of them saw the background of the boycott which he had sponsored when he told them: "You have three million unemployed, but we have nearly 300 million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is seventy shillings. Our average income is 7s. 6d. a month" (Nanda 1958, p. 178).

Under the neoliberal dispensation, which is a more ferocious child of Western liberalism, is the unemployment and underemployment situation of Indians much better than when Gandhi talked about it (his unemployment for half the year included the underemployment of peasants and Are the workers of the Western artisans)? neoliberal lands assured now of even the shillings equivalent of seventy week unemployment insurance of England in 1931? Moreover, in country after country, neoliberalism is mining the foundations of multi-religious, multiethnic secularism. Thus the fight for displacing acquisitive liberalism begun by some of our great ancestors is far from over.

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