

## **Development and Sentiment: The Political Thought of Nehru's India**

### *Gopal's historical sensibility*

It's a great honour to give the first 'S. Gopal Memorial Lecture' and I would like to thank Professor Khilnani and the Board of the Kings India Institute for the privilege. I am going to discuss the ideologies, sensibilities and aspirations of key figures of the age of Jawaharlal Nehru's period of office as first Prime Minister of independent India between 1947 and 1964. Sarvepalli Gopal himself wrote four key volumes on these years: his three volume study of Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>1</sup> and biography of his father, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who was the second President of India.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, then, Gopal was the official historian of early independent India. So I will first mention some features of his historical writing.

Gopal, Reader in Indian History at Oxford was my key mentor during my doctorate at St Antony's College in the late 1960s. His mixture of shrewdness and candour was later revealed when I realised why he had suggested that I work on the politics of the city of Allahabad. At the time he was shifting his own interest from studies of British viceroys to the biography of Nehru, whose home town was, of course, Allahabad. I heard very much later that Gopal was inclined to gently caricature my detailed local prosopographical work, typical of that era, as: 'one Brahmin equals three Vaishyas, equals six Kayasthas,' or words to that effect. But in my defence, I would only suggest that if the Brahmins and Kayasthas in question were Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Rajendra Prasad- all central figures in India's struggle for independence- then there was perhaps something to be said for my study, antiquated as it now seems.

Actually, Gopal was an ideal figure to have in the common rooms of Oxford, which in those days were still alive with immediate postcolonial condescension. With his Brahmanical status, poise, hauteur and wonderful command of English, he had a remarkable capacity to reduce annoying 'racialist creatures', as he put it, to shocked

silence. His work displays a similar aloof grandeur. Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently located a 'Thucydidean' style in Indian historiography, one that strongly emphasises the political over the social, or 'Herodotean' version, and pictures both elites and subalterns struggling with the problems of their respective life-worlds.<sup>3</sup> Often, this Thucididyeian theme has been tinged with a notion of the heroic: the hero leader, sometimes a leader doomed to failure, in the case, for instance, of the historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar's vision of the political struggles of the eighteenth-century Indian leaders.

Gopal was definitely a historian in the heroic Thucydidean guise. His earliest works depicted British viceroys, alien and ignorant, though occasionally enlightened, battling with national aspirations they could never understand and Indian political leaders struggling Laocoon-like with the serpent of colonialism. Later, his depiction of Jawaharlal Nehru extended this heroic trope. Nehru was a great liberal leader, horrified by the early events of the Independence which he had craved: communal massacre, compromise with a dying British imperialism through Dominion Status and the Commonwealth; the assassination of Gandhi, and the Cold war. Even in the final volume of Gopal's biography of Nehru, the statesman is shackled by the persistence of poverty and his final years wrecked by the confrontation with China, which should have been a friend.

Similarly, Radhakrishnan, Gopal's father, emerges as a flawed hero in the biography- or is it, in fact, his own semi-autobiography? Radhakrishnan's ideology was, Gopal claims, one of 'civilised individualism'<sup>4</sup> and he was a proponent of the tolerance and inclusiveness of India and the Indian spirit against all the problems thrown at it from internal-communal conflict to the persistence of imperialism in the international arena. Yet, Gopal insists, Radkahrishnan was no 'plaster saint'<sup>5</sup> as was demonstrated by aspects of his personal life and also by his compromised position on various issues of public policy, notably religion. Nevertheless, he was 'one of the great transformative personalities of our age.'<sup>6</sup> Gopal's superb command of the rhetorical form of the English language is often reminiscent of Carlyle.

Gopal was, therefore the pre-eminent historian of the Nehruvian era of Indian politics. How does his assessment of the era stand up now, a decade after his death and half a century after those years? I'll try to reinterpret his work in the light of the new style of Indian intellectual history which has been developed by Andrew Sartori, Shruti Kapila, and Faisal Devji, among others. My own approach is to create a politically contextualised history of ideas. But rather than tracing a concept, such as 'development' or 'non-alignment', I will examine the life-worlds of several key individuals. For Indian intellectual history there is no firm canon of works; so that in addition to examining the often contradictory 'speech acts' of public figures, we need to take into account what I call their 'meaningful practices.' Together these constituted what Raymond Geuss terms 'an amalgam of historically contingent fragments of ideologies', the more fluid because it emerged in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural polity, long subject to the constraints of foreign domination.

*The partition tragedy and development.*

First, I will consider the ideologies and sentiments with which Nehru and members of his circle approached the key event and the greatest tragedy of twentieth-century South Asia: Partition. It is not really possible to understand the post-independence state in isolation from Partition. According to Nehru himself, the whole of India's history of assimilation of cultural difference pointed towards the gradual emergence of a sense of unity, as he wrote in his book *The Discovery of India*. The masses of Hindus and Muslims were hardly distinguishable from each other. It was only recent psychological and economic differences between the Hindu and Muslim middle classes, which made Muslim separatism even plausible. Pakistan was no solution for economic and social 'backwardness.'<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, it was likely to strengthen the hold of 'feudal elements' and 'delay the economic progress of the Muslims.'

Yet, as against this idealism, an important aspect of the prevailing sentiment of 1945-8 was a widespread view amongst Congress leaders, intellectuals and the business

community that, in Gopal's words, while India should not be a 'theocratic state' as such, it should nevertheless be 'a state which symbolized the interests of the Hindu majority.'<sup>8</sup> This view, Gopal attributed to a wide range of Nehru's supporters and rivals such as Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad. Their position was supported by Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and a large part of the Congress leadership in Bengal.<sup>9</sup> It was also fiercely backed by the Hindu Mahasabha, the Hindu majoritarian organisation. The issue was not so much religion as such, but the territorial coherence and identity of the new state. It therefore provides a context for the idea of economic development which is the main issue I want to discuss in this lecture.

This sentimental and territorial coherence of the state provided the background to the deliberations of the Cabinet Mission of 1946, when two federated unions, Pakistan and Hindustan, weakly linked at the centre, was under consideration. It also informed the rapid and epochal decisions to enact a complete Partition of the country made by Mountbatten and the political leadership between May and August 1947. In fact, historians have probably overstated the support among Congressmen themselves for a completely secular and inclusive state along Nehru's lines. Majority opinion seems to have favoured a 'state for Hindus,' just as Jinnah called for 'a state for Muslims', though not yet an Islamic state.<sup>10</sup> This perhaps helps provide an ideological background to the ultimate acquiescence of much of the Indian leadership in the complete Partition of the subcontinent, painful as it was for them.

Jinnah himself drew attention to this symmetry citing 'a great professor, Dr Gadgil' to the effect that 'a Hindu state or more fully a federation of Hindu national states' is the only proper description of the new Indian Union. To call it a 'Hindu state' brings out its 'dominant and most significant characteristic' Gadgil argued.<sup>11</sup> Gadgil, Director of the Gokhale Institute in Pune and later one of the key intellectual forces behind Nehru's economic planning serves as an important gauge of Indian intellectual history over this period. In 1946, during the deliberations of the Cabinet Mission, Gadgil wrote *The Federal Problem in India*. This tract was not published by the Gokhale Institute until 1947, by which time full Partition was on the table.<sup>12</sup> But it illustrates a wide range of

Hindu opinion. It stated 'Muslims and Hindus in India must be considered as not forming one community, but two communities desirous of cultivating traditions which are in the main divergent.' It was not possible or desirable for Hindu and Muslim regions to be forced into a union. Hence 'a Muslim' and a 'non Muslim' federation must come into existence.<sup>13</sup> Gadgil wrote of Muslims as a 'tight-knit community.' Conversely, though some Hindus were 'heavily impregnated with the results of past Muslim rule', a 'large number of Hindu regions do not share in these traditions' and demand the 'rebuilding of society on Hindu foundations.' Implicitly, some form of division was essential. In this respect, the Hindu Mahasabha- the integral Hindu party- was an equivalent to the Muslim League. Unfortunately, though, these two bodies could not agree because the Mahasabha still clung to the irrational and 'mystic' cry for the 'integrity of India.'<sup>14</sup>

Here Gadgil's ideas bore a striking similarity to those of the Dalit (untouchable) leader B.R. Ambedkar who was also to be a founding figure of the early Republic of India. Ambedkar went further than Gadgil arguing that the Muslims were not simply a community; they were a nation in the sense understood by Ernst Renan, the French philosopher. Hindus and Muslims had opposing historical myths: their imagined historical communities, in Benedict Anderson's sense, were fundamentally different.<sup>15</sup> The future West Pakistan at least had a common language and was economically self sufficient. Both Gadgil and Ambedkar were worried by the immediate problem of the potential splits within the Indian Army between Muslim Sikh and Hindu. Both of them also pondered the recent history of multi-ethnic empires and federal states: the former Ottoman Empire, the United States, Austro-Hungary and Czechoslovakia. For Ambedkar, looking into the past, forcibly holding the Greeks within the Ottoman state, or the Czechs within in Czechoslovakia, eventually guaranteed the collapse of both these polities. Gadgil looked into the future. Even if 'India'- meaning the whole territory of British India- could be held together, he envisaged a gradual escalation of inter-communal tensions so that after the ten-year period of accommodation set by the Cabinet Mission, a more dangerous break-up was likely to occur.<sup>16</sup>

Both Gadgil and Ambedkar also feared that in any surviving Union the ‘centre could not hold.’ The Union government would be ‘colourless’ in Gadgil’s view, and unable to raise taxation for defence, welfare provision or the development of communications. Many of these concerns emerged strongly in the Constituent Assembly debates of 1946-‘49. Their priorities in this area were, however, significantly different. Gadgil had already written much about the need for central state support for rural development. Ambedkar agreed, but his more immediate concern was the fate of the Dalits. The state would have to act rapidly to counter the scandal of untouchability through reservation policy. ‘Internal slavery’, he wrote, was no better than the enslavement by an external master, such as the British. The state, contrary to Hegel, did not represent the ‘march of God on earth.’<sup>17</sup> Instead, it should be a pragmatic and democratic form devoted to the alleviation of inequality.

In fact, the further we go beyond Nehru himself, even in his own inner circle, we find a great deal of ambivalence towards the territorial status of Muslims in India, both before and after Partition. If we take the case of Gobind Ballabh Pant, the UP leader and later Chief Minister of the state, we detect an intellectual stance closer to the Hindu Mahasabha than to Nehru, Pant’s revered leader. It is true that Pant objected vigorously to the Mahasabha’s call for ‘direct action’ against Partition in August 1947.<sup>18</sup> But his language, symbolism and what I called ‘meaningful practices’<sup>19</sup> constantly tipped towards Hindu populism. His convocation address to the University of Allahabad in December 1946 on ‘the Unity of India’ seems on first reading like a paraphrase of Nehru’s *Discovery of India* and contained the usual gestures towards the Mughal Emperor Akbar as a fount of communal harmony.<sup>20</sup>

Yet in this speech, India rapidly became the land of the Hindu sages beginning with Kapila and ending with Bhaskar.<sup>21</sup> The recently deceased Madan Mohan Malaviya, once described to me by Gopal as a ‘communalist’, and certainly someone distrusted by the Muslim leadership, was a *brahmarishi*, according to Pant. Allahabad was ‘Prayag’, a blessed Hindu place. Elsewhere, his language was even clearer. Congress would remove ‘discrimination against ‘Hindi and the Nagri script.’<sup>22</sup> While denouncing the ‘two nation

theory' of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Pant pointed out that Gandhi should be trusted because, above all, he had helped to prevent 'cow-slaughter.'

Both Nehru's 'developmentalism' and his multi-faith, and strongly secularist vision of India's future had relatively little purchase in 1947-50, compared with the more free-market stance of most of the Congress (and Mountbatten) and the soft Hindu populist stance of many others, notably Patel and Tandon. Nehru also had to fall back on conservative former Indian ICS officers who had been involved in wartime economic governance, somewhat to his own discomfiture.<sup>23</sup> Nehru, observed Gopal, did not expect his officials to be partners in ideology.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Nehru's own liberal stance on popular representation and democracy was in conflict with the need to get economic growth moving ahead rapidly. So, most interpretations stress the pragmatic, *ad hoc* nature of the changes over the first three years of independence. Yet I want to argue that this pragmatism was, nevertheless, inflected by strong, but varied ideological commitments which were held both by the Prime Minister and by his immediate circle of supporters, officials and political allies.

### *The ideological sources of 'Nehru's judgment'*

Let's first consider Nehru's political judgement, as Khilnani terms it, in some particular cases. I am struck above all by Nehru's regular invocation of affect or emotion in his discussion of political concepts, quite unlike the statements of 'scientific' Marxists or even many Indian socialists. Discussing the need to limit the range of nationalisation of industry in 1948, Nehru is aware, of course, of Mounbatten's view that large-scale nationalisation would deter desperately-needed foreign capital from investment in India. He also noted that it was better to spend money building new industries than 'buying up existing ones'<sup>25</sup>, thus implying a degree of compensation to owners, which would have been incomprehensible in the cases of the Soviet Union, China or Vietnam. But Nehru also emphasised the need to retain the 'goodwill' of expert personnel and colleagues. He admitted to a 'strong tendency towards' socialism, but the slate 'could never be wiped clean' and 'intelligence' demanded a 'gradual' approach. Again, he often referred to his

own 'non-doctrinaire' version of socialism. Evidently, central planning was needed to diminish inequality and poverty, but this had to be achieved 'through democratic planning without too much compulsion.'<sup>26</sup>

This emotional contractualism with the populace, even the old elites, as much as fear of a right-wing reaction, counselled Nehru to limit *zamindari* abolition to large landowners while protecting the property of the yeomanry and of smaller landowners. Reading Nehru's remarks about rural development, one also gets the sense of an almost Ruskin-like emphasis on small-scale improvement, even though he is widely associated only with the promotion of large scale industry. Nehru was appalled by the poverty which he saw in places such as Kanpur where 'big industry' had spawned impoverished labourers villages.<sup>27</sup> Of course, Gandhians attacked Nehru's vision and Radhakamal Mukerjee, the prophet of economic regionalism,<sup>28</sup> denounced Nehru's government for too rapid industrialisation. This was, Mukerjee said, to 'put the cart before the horse'. What was needed first was basic protection and security of living for the people which could be assured by the introduction of scientific farming and careful rural planning to peasant holdings, not through any form of collectivisation. Industry should be developed in association with agriculture, not in opposition to it.

All the same, it is clear that Mukerjee's and Nehru's positions were not so far apart. Nehru's collectivization was far from Mao Zedong's. The prime minister praised examples of refugee settlement and rural up-lift, powered by panchayats (local deliberative bodies), emphasizing small-scale cooperation, rather than the development of heavy industries. It seems fair to say that both Nehru and Mukerjee were, in large part, communitarian liberals in the tradition of G. K. Gokhale before the First World War, though they differed in emphasis.

Nehru's generosity was exhibited in the stance he took in international relations, though many would make an exception for his, and, for that matter, Gopal's rigid position on the Kashmir issue. Nehru saw India, like Truman's USA, as a great multi-ethnic society which represented the future of humanity better than the smaller European nation states



which had dragged the world to disaster. Earlier he had referred to G. D. H. Cole's vision of a future Indian democracy lying between the coming socialist societies of China-Japan to the East and an Ottoman-Arab Islamic state to the West.<sup>29</sup> Nehru was appalled by the 'avidity' of the great powers and believed in building connections with other emerging post-colonial nations through a new 'spirit of Asia' signalled in the Bandung Pact and his pressure for a World Peace Conference.<sup>30</sup> This idea of 'the spirit of Asia' had recurred constantly during the twentieth century. In Nehru's youth Okakura Kakuzo's work *The ideals of the East* (1903) had deeply influenced Indian intellectuals.

Nehru's generosity of spirit and fine political judgment was most in evidence when dealing with the 'communal issue' during the crisis of Partition between 1946 and 1948. But he found himself embattled by Hindu reaction on many occasions during his premiership. This was notably the case in 1950, when more than a million Hindus fled East Pakistan and there were countervailing attacks on Muslims in India. One of the centres of this new outbreak of Hindu-Muslim discord was UP, Nehru's home state. 200,000 Muslims migrated from the state as they came under pressure and P. D. Tandon, himself president of the provincial Congress, urged Muslims to adopt 'Hindu culture.'<sup>31</sup> Nehru stamped hard on this sentiment and disciplined his lieutenant, Pant, who was recalled to Delhi.

Nehru exhibited, I think, a form of Fabian socialism, very close to the 'communitarian liberalism', espoused by Hobson, Hobhouse, Green and, in India, Gokhale, before 1914. This politics was inflected with notions of trust, loyalty and hope, rather than the rigorous political-economic analysis favoured by India's Communists or Socialists. A former Harrow-and Cambridge-educated Theosophist, Nehru himself acknowledged his own complex emotional and ideological heritage including 'the Indian or the European, for after all, I have that European or English aspect also.'<sup>32</sup>

*Nehru's team: Gobind Vallabh Pant*

I now return to Pant, but this time in his guise as a developmentalist. As a radical Hindu liberal with a 'tendency to Socialism', Pandit Gobind Ballabh Pant was one of the closest of Jawaharlal Nehru's immediate entourage. Only on Hindu-Muslim problems did he move away from Nehru's inclusive position. Pant's biographer, M. Chalapathi Rau, stressed Pant's nation-building role in fashioning the Republic's linguistic provinces, while at the same time praising him for his pragmatism on issues such as nationalisation and landlord abolition. In this way he became, in Rau's view, a somewhat unlikely hybrid of Herbert Asquith and Bismarck.<sup>33</sup> Pant was not an abstract thinker. His sonorous speeches seem mainly to have been sermons to justify his political pragmatism as Chief Minister of UP and later as Home Minister in the few months before his death in 1961. Yet there were two issues on which Pant deliberated, where one gets a sense of a wider intellectual programme: rural labour and the role of the state in economic development.

As a Brahmin from Almora in the UP hills and later as a lawyer in Allahabad during the 1919 peasant agitation, Pant grew up with an acute awareness of issues of rural labour. In the later-nineteenth century the hill regions still maintained a system of forced labour which Pant and his colleagues viewed as a form of slavery. Peasant farmers and rural workers were regularly made to offer personal service or part of their crop to landlords, officials and the upper castes.<sup>34</sup> In the hill regions, this was particularly onerous as ordinary people were coerced into carrying crops and other loads up and down the hills for their masters. Here, as across India, these non-monetary perquisites became more valuable as the value of rent became erratic during the Great War and Depression. Pant was active in the movement to abolish these forms of labour coercion.

Yet Pant's own caution and gradualism was very much in evidence when he came to discuss the issue of landlordism both before Independence and as Chief Minister of UP after 1948. He made a sharp distinction between large-scale landlordism in Bengal and the USSR, for instance, and the situation over much of the hills and Indian plains where smallholders were predominant.<sup>35</sup> Poor rural families might often be tenants in one place

and very small landholders in others. A blanket attack on the zamindars, the landlords, would therefore damage the move towards social equality rather than advance it, he believed.

Pant's political ideas were rarely expressed in theoretical terms, but he had long grappled with questions of *laissez faire* and state intervention. We find him in vigorous dispute in 1936 with the Finance Member of the Indian Government, Sir James Grigg. Pant argued that if Britain had already moved away from *laissez faire* and was inspired in its programmes of house-building by major economists and politicians, such as Lloyd George, Roosevelt, John Maynard Keynes and Harold Laski, how was it that the Indian Government still adhered to rigid ideas of small government?<sup>36</sup> Pant invoked Sir Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, who was trained as an engineer and had been Treasurer of the Mysore state between 1912 and '19. Visvesvaraya had used state funds to promote large scale irrigations works.<sup>37</sup> He founded factories and educational institutions in Mysore, calling on Indian business to invest capital to promote rapid industrialisation. As in the cases of Nehru and P. C. Mahalanobis, whom I'll discuss presently, social, industrial and scientific advance were deeply interconnected in Visvesvaraya's and Pant's understandings of economic planning. They participated directly in the Nehruvian consensus on this issue and approved Congress's creation of the National Planning Committee in 1938.

*Nehru's team: Gadgil and Mahalanobis.*

If we move from Nehru's associates among the politicians to academics and public figures associated with the Planning Commission and the three Five Year Plans, a much more considered intellectual lineage become apparent. P. C. Mahalanobis, who founded the Indian Statistical Institute, represented above all a version of the tradition of Bengali scientific and mathematical modernism which counted P.C. Ray amongst its luminaries. It was now turned outward towards detailed statistical analysis of economic problems.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, Mahalanobis believed that rural psychology needed to be totally transformed and orientated to constructive industrialism. Though Mahalanobis continued

to talk to Radhakamal Mukerjee and the earlier school of 'economic regionalists', he effectively turned their arguments on their heads. Mukerjee had insisted that small-scale industry had to be adjusted to the mentality of the peasant and that technical innovation had to be closely controlled so that 'crimes against trees and water' could be avoided. The peasant was a total person and this included his religious and cultural life. Mukherjee was, in effect, a more economically prescient and informed version of Gandhi. Such culturalism played little part in the planning regime of Mahalanobis who insisted on the objective validity of scientific knowledge.

Mahalanobi's brief, but approving foreword to Devabrata Bose's *Problems of Indian Society* (1968) makes it clear that he saw industrialisation as a major force in loosening the country's caste hierarchy which restricted economic growth. It would equalize wealth in the rural areas and weaken marriage restrictions by 'expanding opportunities between man and woman in industrial areas.' Mahalanobis pointed to the 'steady increase in the number of inter-caste and also Hindu-Muslim marriages.'<sup>39</sup> Detailed statistical knowledge, he implied was essential to monitor such developments. Evidently, Mahalanobis drew on and transformed the contemporary trans-national trend both towards centralised economic planning and the use of sample surveys and social statistics. He had encountered the work of the British social statistician and eugenicist, Karl Pearson, while studying mathematics and physics at Cambridge, where he also met the noted mathematician, Ramanujan. His own statistical journal, *Sankhya* (number) was modelled on Pearson's *Biometrika*.<sup>40</sup> Equally, his great faith in the transformative capacity of heavy industry was reinforced by observation of the Soviet Union and later, Communist China, and also by conversations with noted European leftists, such as J.B.S Haldane and Joan Robinson.

Yet at the same time, Mahalanobis was also representative of a specifically Indian rationalist tradition.<sup>41</sup> *Sankhya* meant not only 'number' but something like a rational understanding of the universe. Mahalanobi's family, from the famous small Brahmin gentry of Bikrampur in East Bengal, had converted to the rationalistic strain of the reforming Brahma Samaj. His father was an activist in the widow re-marriage campaigns

of the mid-nineteenth century. Mahalanobis himself was connected with the Samaj throughout his life, opposing the reintroduction of rituals and paying homage to the memory of the founder of the Samaj, Rammohan Roy.<sup>42</sup> In fact it is striking how many of the Bengali intellectuals of the Independence generation, including Satyajit Ray, the filmmaker and Nirad Chaudhuri, the self-declared 'Unknown Indian', were Brahmors or were influenced by the Samaj. For his part Mahalanobis declared that he was not a Hindu, but added paradoxically, a 'Brahmo by religion.' He also revered the great Bengali sage, Rabindranath Tagore, himself a covert Brahmo. So Mahalanobis's cultural and religious stance stood on that intriguing Indian cusp between pantheism and what might be called 'pan-atheism.' As he once said, the human race would be improved by 'thinking about him who cannot be known, by trying to know.'<sup>43</sup>

At any rate, for Mahalanobis, progress was dependent on knowledge: knowledge of irrigation statistics, of educational statistics and particular on statistics about the size, shape and capabilities of people. In 1925 he had published a paper on the characteristics of Calcutta's Anglo-Indians based on measurements of the skull size, nasal length, etc.<sup>44</sup> He concluded that these families were the result of unions between upper caste Hindus and Europeans. There is definitely a whiff of eugenics about this and a later 'anthropometric study of the United Provinces,'<sup>45</sup> though it did not display the almost pathological social Darwinism of Mahalanobis's mentor, Pearson. Yet we see here an Indian colonisation of what Nicholas Dirks has called 'the ethnographic state.' Colonial observation of 'tribes and castes' was appropriated and transformed into a national project by the Indian Statistical Institute and the National Sample Survey which Mahalanobis led. All these statistical tools were deployed in support of Nehru's centralised developmental planning during the 1950s and early 60s, though the promise of planning was, at the best, stunted by regulation, red-tape and bureaucracy: the so-called Permit Raj.

Whereas Mahalanobis represented a particular style of Bengali scientific modernity, D.R Gadgil's ideological stance in public life represented a coming together of three dominant strains of western Indian political thought. Firstly, he inherited the statistical

liberalism of figures such as Naoroji, and Telang, penning detailed analyses of rural impoverishment and writing the history of the Indian economy under colonial rule. Secondly, he was committed to the communitarian developmental liberalism of Gokhale. Rural development through properly funded and directed rural cooperatives was the key dimension of Gadgil's practical economic policy. He later became first director of the Gokhale Institute in Pune. Finally, however, Gadgil was deeply influenced in his youth by the uncompromising nationalism of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was a frequent visitor to the house of his maternal uncle.<sup>46</sup> The young Gadgil met Tilak and read his 'Gita Rahasya, the commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, which endorsed struggle and a new beginning as Shruti Kapila has argued.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Gadgil later came to see the economic struggles and political violence which beset the young Republic of India in this light. V. M. Dandekar records that Gadgil had little sympathy with Gandhi's political stance, which he regarded as 'anti-intellectual.'<sup>48</sup>

Gadgil had in common with Mahalanobis a deep concern with statistics. But his interests lay in localised collections of data on farm sizes, indebtedness, the location of wells and so-on, as exemplified in his work on the environs of Pune. Gadgil also had an interest in the historical origins of inequality which had received the attention of Telang and R.C. Dutt in the nineteenth-century. Gadgil's *Industrial evolution of India in recent times* represented a more detailed but milder version of Naoroji's criticism in his *Poverty and un-British Rule in India* of 1893. Gadgil argued that the administration lacked 'the human and the local touch' and that it was bound by 'financial limitations' and 'prejudices.'<sup>49</sup> Notably he argued that even in times of boom and 'commercialisation', poorer farmers hamstrung themselves with debts which they could not pay off during later periods of depression.<sup>50</sup> Above all, the co-operative movement had failed to keep pace with either the limited economic expansion of the late nineteenth century or the Great Depression.

Arguably, then, it was the strain of economic and social thought, derived from Gokhale, with its concern for agricultural co-operation which was most significant for Gadgil. Throughout his academic and public career in the Planning Commission, he

remained focussed on attempts to fortify tenant right and limit peasant indebtedness. He was suspicious of the mathematical idea of the 'perfection of the market' which sometimes seems to have underpinned the approach of Mahalanobis himself. It was no accident that, in addition to the Gokhale connection, Gadgil recognised the economic thought of Harold Laski, on one occasion giving the Laski Memorial Lecture at the Laski Institute of Political Science in Ahmedabad.<sup>51</sup> Laski's notion of a decentralised 'guild socialism' was very close to his own position. Moreover, Gadgil's notion of a specifically Indian form of localised social and economic development also seems quite close to Radhakamal Mukerjee's 'economic regionalism', though devoid of its freight of religious rumination. Both men argued for the development of 'intermediate technologies.'<sup>52</sup>

Critically, then, Gadgil occupied a median position between Gandhi's near-anarchic view of village self-government, spinning and counter industrialism and the top-down planning programme of Mahalanobis or, in the political sphere, state interventionism in the form of reservations urged by B. R. Ambedkar. Mahalanobis wanted to re-forge the 'village habits and psychology' to force peasants to engage with 'the industrial outlook with interests in tools, gadgetry and new innovations.'<sup>53</sup> By contrast, Gadgil pressed for a softer, bottom-up version of local cooperation. Yet, Gadgil remained in tune with Mahalanobis to the extent that he saw local co-operation as a stage in development towards an industrial society, rather than as an existentially desirable form of rural life like Gandhi and his supporters.<sup>54</sup>

These differing intellectual positions within Nehru's advisers reflected their various institutional and educational backgrounds. But it also seems likely that their regional context played a part, too. Maharashtra and Gujarati rural society had long been dominated by small independent landlords and substantial tenants who had shown continuous resistance to British land-revenue policy, moneylenders and urban intrusion. Gadgil must have realised that any over-centralised philosophy of economic planning could well have alienated them. By contrast, Mahalanobis's experience was drawn from Bengal where the peasantry had long been dominated by the state and landlords. Here, 'village habits and psychology' perhaps seemed more malleable.

*Radhakrishna: Vedanta and the end of conflict*

The final member of Nehru's diverse circle discussed here is Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, philosophy professor, Indian ambassador and finally second President of the Republic. Radhakrishnan differed quite sharply from the other actors I have mentioned. If Gadgil and Mahalanobis distantly set their economic and social projects against the background of a Hindu or Brahmo idea of the progressive development of the human spirit, Radhakrishnan asserted with textual rigour, as Gopal wrote, that 'the divine was already present in the self and that the goal of cosmic evolution was the release of the imprisoned splendour in all men and women.' If the ape could evolve into man, 'the human could become the divine.'<sup>55</sup> As he stated in his Kamala lectures in Calcutta in 1942, Christianity was only one religion among many and the West had forfeited all right to moral superiority through warfare and greed, a point he emphasised more vigorously when the lectures were published in 1948 after the dropping of the Atomic Bomb.<sup>56</sup>

Radhakrishnan was, in fact, one of the last of the great 'counter-preachers', the public men who turned the ideological tables on the West and placed Indian, or more precisely Vedantic Hindu belief and culture at the apex of human achievement. This was a distinguished line stretching from Keshub Chandra Sen through Vivekananda to Gandhi himself. But Radhakrishnan's learning made it possible for him to mount a sustained intellectual challenge to Western theorists, while simultaneously employing idealist philosophers such as Henri Bergson to refute materialists, Marxists and European cultural supremacists. Radhakrishnan argued that Western philosophy needed to engage again with the concept of 'spirit', so that ultimately Hegel trumped Marx, or indeed Shankara trumped the Sankhya tradition of hyper-rationalism.

For Nehru, Radhakrishnan's worth was his ability to project at home and abroad the moral gravity and uniqueness of India. As a philosopher statesman, he was one of the few who could take up Gandhi's own mantle after 1948. Yet Radhakrishnan's beliefs did more than simply legitimate the texture of his politics; they actively informed it, whether



as ambassador to the USSR and the UN, or as President. In 1942 he praised the Atlantic Charter as a humane document, but castigated Churchill for excluding colonial subject peoples from it. After the Atom bomb fell, he used the Bhagavad Gita to urge humanity to retreat from the world's conflicts, reflect on the horror of war and return to the world armed with the spirit of *nishpal karma* (desireless action). This of course did not rule out the necessity of principled war for Radhakrishnan any more than it did for the hero Arjuna.

As the Cold War took hold, this attitude served the Republic of India well. In Moscow between 1949 and '54, Radhakrishnan knew of the repression employed by Stalin. He nevertheless considered that centralised planning had brought great benefits to the Russian people and that the majority favoured socialism. Above all, he urged accommodation and adjustment on both the Soviet Union and the West: moral and political problems were rarely solved by armed conflict. In his mind, a late-Vedantism, reminiscent of Vivekananda, informed the politics on Non-Alignment. As Vice-President he urged the policy of 'developing the graces of mind and the virtues of spirit'<sup>57</sup> on the great powers as well as on China and Vietnam.

Radhakrishnan undoubtedly provided something powerful and different to Nehru's circle and policies: a degree of spiritual gravitas. But it would be unrealistic to ignore the fact that this was not always a harmonious grouping. Quite apart from the conflicts over Hindu-Muslim relations when Pant found himself on the wrong side of Nehru, or disagreements about the role of the free market which went back to the days of Vallabhbhai Patel, there were also negative reactions to Radhakrishnan's patrician deportment. When the question came up of his succession as President to Rajendra Prasad, for instance, some politicians from the South told Nehru that they would rather have a president from another part of India, than a Brahmin from Tamilnadu, a reflection of the rise of non-Brahminism and regionalism in the young Republic.<sup>58</sup>

### *The end of an era*

Historians and economists have been ambivalent, to say the least, about the legacy of the first two decades of independent India. As the initial spurt of GDP growth slowed in the mid-1950s, they began to articulate criticisms of the Nehruvian regime which were later epitomised in the phrases 'Permit Raj' and the 'Hindu rate of growth.' These criticisms of the policies of Nehru and his generation have persisted to the present day, partly as a justification for the liberalisation of the economy after 1990. So, it is argued, aversion to dependence on Western aid made India equally dependent on the USSR which was later revealed to be economically sclerotic itself. The emphasis on the expansion of state-run heavy industry choked off more efficient small production. Land-reform was too limited to achieve any degree of income equalisation, while the failure to tax larger agrarian incomes left the state penniless. By 1962 Gadgil himself was pointing to the take-over of the country by the 'ugly business man'<sup>59</sup> a trope that became more prominent during the rule of Indira Gandhi.

Others argue that the preservation of caste reservations created a 'creamy layer' of rich peasants, which left behind vast swathes of the urban and agricultural poor. It also created a formalistic democracy at the mercy of 'identity politics.' Nehru's hopes for world peace across a socialist ecumene were smashed by the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and, most bitterly, by the India's own military failure in the conflict with socialist China. Imperialism, which the United Nations and the Bandung pact were supposed to terminate, had taken a new lease of life with the Suez adventure and the war in Algeria. To Gopal, ending his final volume of the biography, Nehru 'seemed a prophet frustrated, with his hopes unfulfilled.'<sup>60</sup>

Yet we must avoid the 'infinite condescension of posterity.' Firstly, it is clear from Nehru's own writings that he felt that the very survival of the fragile independent state was at risk for at least the first decade of his premiership. His policies were calculated responses to danger. There was no easy transition from the 'steel frame' of British rule to the governance of a stable republic. The trauma of Partition had been followed by

successive waves of refugees flooding across the new borders. It had also led to a mini-cold war with Pakistan interrupted by real conflict on three occasions. Separatist cries had been heard across the country: in Kashmir, amongst the Sikhs of the Punjab, in the northeast and the South. These fissiparous aspirations had been held in check by the brave and by no means predictable decision to institute universal suffrage. Moderate land reform had limited the Communist-led movement which surged into the open in the Telangana uprising of the late 1940s. But more radical reform might well have greatly increased the danger from separatists and sparked a reaction from the privileged, quite apart from shattering the fragile unity of the Congress itself. So many of the decisions on economic and social policy, rather than being half-hearted or indecisive, as critics then and now allege, were reflections of 'Nehru's judgement.'

Yet, to sum up, the policies and politics of Nehru's era cannot simply be reduced to political instrumentalism implemented in an atmosphere of fear. For Nehru and his circle also inherited a great weight of ideologies, sentiments and 'prejudices' in Gadamer's sense of the word from earlier Indian liberals, socialists and anti-colonialists. These were precious doctrines precisely because they had originally been forged in the depths of a humiliating subjection to colonial rule.

Alongside the often qualified support for heavy industry, for instance, Nehru's team instituted a system of local responsible government in the shape of Panchayati Raj. While historians have tended to dismiss this system as corrupt, or a failure, it was nevertheless ideologically critical and politically symbolic. To Nehru this was the most revolutionary development in India. This was the 'real Swaraj [self government] of the people.'<sup>61</sup> His top-down approach to planning was always modified by personal experience of the self-empowered peasant associations which he encountered when he drove out from the city of Allahabad into the countryside in 1920 and '21. Nehru believed, along with Pant, that, as one observer put in 1920, the cry 'all power to the panchayats' would presage a true recovering of liberties, unlike the case of the Russian Revolution. This was because the peasant assemblies would be affiliated to, and mould the Congress party, rather than becoming its servile agents. These, though, were not Gandhi's village assemblies, but

those of Gadgil's mentor, Gokhale who always insisted on the significance of economically productive local co-operatives.

To this pattern of ideas Nehru similarly brought an insistence on women's rights, long adhered to in his own family and a commitment to republicanism which had also been favored doctrine among some sections of the elite for generations. These sentiments echoed the political philosophy of earlier Indian liberals and socialists. Equally, the centralising statistically-empowered drive for heavy industry favoured by Mahalanobis drew on the ideas of Indian political economists stretching back at least to Naoroji who insisted on tariff protection and the need to build local units of production even if they were initially less efficient than foreign ones. In the case of Radhakrishnan, a vedantic urge for harmony and progress informed his contribution to Nehru's policy of non-alignment.

Finally, Nehru himself subscribed to, and yet modified a whole host of sometimes contradictory doctrines adjusted to that long-past 'age of the expert' which lay between the first atomic bomb and the launch of Sputnik. It was this age of aspiration, and yet of contradiction between elite intellectualism, centralisation and popular democracy, which Sarvepalli Gopal exemplified so well, both in his life and his work.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarvepalli Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru. A biography, 3 volumes (London, 1984)

<sup>2</sup> Sarvepalli Gopal, Radhakrishnan. A biography (London, 1989)

<sup>3</sup> Chakrabarty, 'Empire and the historical imagination in colonial India' Smuts Memorial Lecture, 18 October 2011, University of Cambridge,

<sup>4</sup> Radhakrishnan. A biography, p. 372.

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- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 379.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 384.
- <sup>7</sup> Nehru, *Discovery of India* (London, 1947), p. 323.
- <sup>8</sup> Gopal, *Nehru, A biography* 2, 1947-56, p. 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided. Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-47* (Cambridge, 1994)
- <sup>10</sup> A theme fully developed by Faisal Devji.
- <sup>11</sup> Quaid- e Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah , *Speeches and statements 1947-8* (Lahore, 1993), pp. 83-4.
- <sup>12</sup> D.R. Gadgil, *The Federal Problem in India* (Pune, 1947), p iii
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 99
- <sup>15</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the partition of India* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Delhi. 1946), Vasant Moon (ed.) Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Speeches and writings*, 8 (Bombay, 1990), p. 35.
- <sup>16</sup> Gadgil, *Federal problem*, ., p. 37.
- <sup>17</sup> D. R. Jatava, *The political philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar* (Agra, 1965) p. 133.
- <sup>18</sup> *Selected works of Govind Ballabh Pant*, ed. B.R. Nanda (Delhi, 1998), 11, p. 162.
- <sup>19</sup> I use this term as a complement to intellectual historians' use of the term 'speech acts' to indicate that practice can also represent an element of political theory.
- <sup>20</sup> *Selected works of Pant.*, p. 421 -9.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 439.
- <sup>22</sup> Letter to the Vice-President of the Hindu Mahasabha, *National Herald*, 1 August 1947, *ibid.* p 158.
- <sup>23</sup> Sunil Khilnani, *The idea of India* (London, 1999), p. 81.
- <sup>24</sup> Gopal, *Nehru*, 2, p. 36..
- <sup>25</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 25 Jan 1949, cited Gopal, *Nehru*, 2, p. 34.
- <sup>26</sup> Address to chief ministers, 15 Sept 1954, *ibid.* p. 231.
- <sup>27</sup> Gopal, *Nehru*, 2, p. 199.
- <sup>28</sup> For Mukerjee , see C A Bayly, *Recovering liberties. Indian thought in the age of liberalism and empire* (Cambridge, 2011), chapter 10.
- <sup>29</sup> Nehru, *Discovery*, p.

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- <sup>30</sup> Gopal, Nehru, 2., p. 44.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 92.
- <sup>32</sup> To Vijayalakshmi, 24 August 1949, cited Gopal, Nehru, 2. p. 59.
- <sup>33</sup> M. Chalapathi Rau, Govind Ballabh Pant (Delhi, 1981), p. 40-60.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-1.
- <sup>37</sup> M. Visvesvaraya, *Reconstructing India* (London, 1920); *A planned economy for India* (Bangalore, 1937).
- <sup>38</sup> Ashok Rudra, *Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. A biography* (Delhi, 1996); see also Sunil Khilnani, *The idea of India* (London, 2003), pp. 82-93.
- <sup>39</sup> Mahalanobis, 'Foreword', Devbrata Bose, *Problems of Indian Society* (Bombay, 1968), p. vi,
- <sup>40</sup> Ashok Rudra, *Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 271-2.
- <sup>41</sup> Khilnani, *Idea*, p. 84
- <sup>42</sup> Rudra, *Mahalanobis*, pp. 64-6.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 67.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 135.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. 136
- <sup>46</sup> V. M. Dandekar, 'D. R. Gadgil', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6, 19, May 8, 1971, p. 938
- <sup>47</sup> Shruti Kapila, 'History of Violence', *Modern Intellectual History*, 2011.
- <sup>48</sup> Dandekar, 'D. R. Gadgil.'
- <sup>49</sup> D.R. Gadgil, *Industrialisation of India in recent times* (Oxford, 1924; 1959 edn.), p. xiii.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 153.
- <sup>51</sup> Dandekar, 'Gadgil', *EPW*, p. 941.
- <sup>52</sup> Nirmal Kumar Chandra, 'D. R. Gadgil on political economy of planning. A centenary tribute', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 36, no. 36, 8 September 2001, p. 3482.
- <sup>53</sup> Cited by Khilnani, *Idea of India*, p. 87.
- <sup>54</sup> Dharma Kumar, 'Gadgil's industrial evolution', *IESHR*. October 1973, 10, 409-10.
- <sup>55</sup> Gopal, *Radhakrishnan*, p. 97 commenting on Radhakrishnan's *The Hindu view of life*.

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<sup>56</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London 1947), p.10; originally given as lectures in the University of Calcutta and Benares Hindu University in 1942.

<sup>57</sup> Gopal, Radhakrishnan., p. 283.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 289.

<sup>59</sup> D. R. Gadgil's convocation address to Nagpur University, 20 Jan. 1962, Gopal Nehru, 3, 166.

<sup>60</sup> Gopal, Nehru, 3, 301.

<sup>61</sup> Message form Nehru on anniversary of establishment of Panchayati Raj, 20 )ct 1960, ibid. p. 168.