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A False Step
Kuldip Nayar

**Re-emergence of Regional
Parties Bothers BJP**
Anil Sinha

The Enigma Called Gandhi
Salil Misra

**Secularism and the State:
Categorising the Nehru Model**
Anil Nauriya

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Raj Kishore: An Uncompromising Journalist

Prem Singh

Veteran journalist Raj Kishore passed away on 5 June 2018 at the age of 72. He had recently lost his 42 year old son Vivek, also a journalist, merely one and a half months ago. Vivek met a sudden death on 21 April due to a massive brain stroke.

Raj Kishore, as usual, was calm at the crematorium and even discussed with me the possibility of bringing out a Hindi magazine on the pattern of *Mainstream Weekly*. I came to know from other colleagues that he had similar discussions with them as well. Despite the numbing loss, he resumed his writings the very next day. I could feel that he was in some sort of a self-denial mode. The mental shock of the death of his young son ultimately took its toll sooner than one might expect. Raj Kishore suffered an attack of pneumonia just a few days later. He was first admitted to Kailash Hospital at Noida on 15 May. Next day, with the help of Dr. Anup Saraya, he was shifted to the AIIMS and admitted in the ICU for 22 days till he bid farewell to this world.

Raj Kishore started his career as a journalist in Calcutta with *Ravivar* under the editorship of Surendra

Pratap Singh. He was admired by the readers for his innovative ideas, deep human and social concerns, philosophical insights, playful language and a novel style. The aspiring youth who sought to pursue their career in journalism learnt a lot from his writings. He left *Ravivar* for a short period to start his own magazine *Parivartan*, but later again joined *Ravivar*.

He was brought to Delhi by Rajendra Mathur in 1990 and was assigned the responsibility of the editorial page in *Nav Bharat Times*. He took a rented accommodation in Anand Vihar which is where I first met him. He inspired me too for writing in newspapers. After a service of seven years, he was ousted from the *Nav Bharat Times* by the new management of the Times Group because he outrightly refused to accept their decision of converting *Nav Bharat Times* into a 'Hinglish' newspaper.

Raj Kishore, a staunch Lohiaite, was groomed in the values of the freedom movement and the post-independence era of nation-building. He was firm in his ideological and ethical convictions. Therefore,

he never got a job in any of the media houses till his death. In fact, he became the first victim of the neoliberal political economy adopted by the media houses in the beginning of the nineties.

From 1997 onwards, Raj Kishore did freelancing for the survival of his family. He started his own Hindi monthly journal *Dusara Shanivar* in 1997, but could not sustain it due to financial constraints. Apart from writing articles / comments / features for newspapers and magazines, he wrote and edited several books. The *Aaj Ke Prashan* series edited by him became very popular, particularly among young readers. The series was focused on contemporary contentious issues related to Dalit, women, subaltern and minority discourses, the impact of neoliberal policies and the secular–communal question. He developed and encouraged several new writers through this series.

He edited the 'Panchayati Raj Update' in Hindi and English for

more than a decade for the Institute of Social Sciences. He made study tours to certain European countries during this period. He also worked briefly with the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwa Vidyalyaya as writer-in-residence. He stayed there from 2011 to 2014 and edited *Hindi Samay*, an online site of the university. It is one of his important gifts to Hindi literature apart from his invaluable contribution to Hindi journalism.

As the remuneration in Hindi writing is negligible, he had to burn the midnight oil to make both ends meet. The continuous pressure of work affected him badly. However, there was no choice before him but to work hard for sheer survival. He started editing *Ravivar Digest*, a small Hindi monthly in 2015. True to his uncompromising self, he left the job a few months ago because the owner declined to publish an article selected by him which critiqued Deen Dayal Upadhyaya's *Ekatm Manavwad*.

A few days before the death of his son, Raj Kishore, in search of some new assignment, asked me to talk to Dr. A.K. Arun, editor of *Yuva Samvad*, just to check whether he would be inclined or interested to associate him with the magazine. Even before we could make any move on this, everything ended rather abruptly. The philosopher journalist left his family—wife, daughter, daughter in law, two little grand children—and all of us totally unprepared!

For a life as brilliant and committed as Raj Kishore's, his passing is definitely an irreparable loss to his family, but the larger vacuum it has left in the world of journalism is tangible, even if it doesn't seem apparent. The damage is most to Hindi journalism as it has lost a figure that stood up staunchly to the pressures of corporate commerce, cynicism and the new age madness of neoliberalism.

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A False Step

Kuldip Nayar

Pranab Mukherjee has accepted the invitation to visit the RSS headquarters at Nagpur to address the cadre. To quote RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, "Mukherjee was graceful enough to accept the invitation." Mukherjee accepting the invite is a surprise because the place never put up the picture of Mahatma Gandhi because he represented an ideology of pluralism and egalitarianism, which are not conducive to the RSS philosophy of establishing a Hindu Rastra.

Actually, Pranab Mukherjee is a man of all-political affiliations. He

has occupied the highest position as a Congressman and has also floated a political party with a few of his associates in the Congress. But one can call him a self-made man in the political arena.

I recall Pranab Mukherjee as a man of humility who invited me to his house to hear the recital of his wife, a vocalist. Then he was struggling to make his mark as a politician. His residence gave a modest look with minimum furniture. He was known as a man of simple habits. But everything changed over the years as he gradually established himself as

an affluent politician with authority.

During the emergency I happened to visit him at his residence and to my surprise I found a well-furnished sitting room. He was then the Commerce Minister in the Indira Gandhi cabinet and very close to Sanjay Gandhi, who was an extra-constitutional authority and practically held the reins of power. To say candidly, Pranab Mukherjee was his Man Friday who carried out his orders.

The latter virtually ruled the country with Pranab Mukherjee on one side and Bansi Lal, then Defence

Minister, on the other. It was during this period that Pranab Mukherjee granted or stopped licences at the bidding of Sanjay. Raids on shops and residences of critics were carried out throughout the country. People rightly defeated him and Indira Gandhi when elections were held after the lifting of the emergency in 1977.

Pranab Mukherjee was a contender for prime ministership, but Sonia Gandhi's compulsion and determination to make her son Rahul Gandhi the prime minister came in the way of Mukherjee's political ambitions. Realising the mood, he announced that he would not contest the 2014 elections.

It was because he had served the dynasty faithfully that Pranab Mukherjee appointed the President by Sonia Gandhi. It was a gift to a loyal person who was even willing to say that the sun rose from the west if she said so. He was another Giani Zail Singh, whom Mrs Indira Gandhi had got appointed as President out of the blue.

The rule of Pranab Mukherjee was an insult to the democratic ethos of the nation. If he had been a sensitive person, he would have felt the wrongs done during the 17 months of emergency. If nothing else, he could have at least regretted the imposition of the emergency when more than one lakh people were detained without trial, the press was 'disciplined' and civil servants lost the distinction between right and wrong, moral and immoral.

I have followed the period when he was at Rashtrapati Bhavan and I found to my horror that it was a rule which had a negative impact. I cannot spot one instance when he upheld democracy and pluralism. It did not behave the President

to release his memoirs during his tenure. Seldom have people felt as let down as they did during his presidency.

Had there been a Lokpal, he would have pointed out where Mukherjee failed as President. Alas, there is no such institution to assess a President's tenure. Heads of institutions are not generally assailed. The idea behind such thinking is that criticism may harm the institutions, which are essential for the sustenance of democratic polity. Among the most important of the institutions is that of the President. Therefore, the President is spared even when he or she crosses the line that the office delineates. Maybe it because of this consideration that Pranab Mukherjee has escaped censure.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Pranab Mukherjee has weakened the struggle against communal forces. The RSS or, for that matter, the Bhartiya Janata Party can tell the nation that Nagpur does not represent communal forces because Mukherjee has chosen to address the RSS cadre. Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has defended the former President's decision to address the RSS cadre by saying that he was not visiting an ISI camp.

Surprisingly, the Congress has not uttered a word to condemn Mukherjee's step. The silence is a sort of endorsement of what he is doing. Only one former Congress minister has urged him to reconsider his decision in the interests of secularism.

Some Congressmen believe that the former President, who has been a Congressman all his life, would deliver a strong message on pluralism from the RSS platform. In fact, veteran leader Salman Khurshid

defended him saying that the party must have faith in Pranab Mukherjee and "trust him not just for his true allegiance to the idea of India, but also for being sagacious and wiser than us."

This is a weak argument. The very presence of Mukherjee at Nagpur would confuse the nation because they have heard from every Congress leader that the RSS is an antithesis of pluralism. Sonia Gandhi and Congress President Rahul Gandhi should have criticised Mukherjee for his visit. Had they done so, Congress would have gained much respect among those who wish to stand up for secularism and pluralism in the country.

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Re-emergence of Regional Parties Bothers BJP

Anil Sinha

The regional parties have again taken a centre stage in the politics of the country. The assumption that the BJP led by Narendra Modi may politically marginalise the regional forces has come under serious doubt after the results of Karnataka assembly polls and the bypolls across the country. They have demonstrated the re-emergence of regional parties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah, who are virtually deciding everything in BJP, will try hard to neutralise the repercussions of this change. This can be done only by forcing the regional parties to remain limited to their own areas. Is it possible? Of course it is possible, but only if regional parties are prevented from getting national visibility.

For the BJP, this is not only necessary if it wishes to win 2019 polls, but also for getting to the throne if a hung parliament is the outcome of the Lok Sabha polls. Regional parties can only be prevented from performing a role at the national level if they do not get a truly national ally. It does not need any elaboration that the Congress is the only party in the country which can provide such an alliance. The corollary of such an assumption is that the Congress should not in position to do this.

If we give a closer look at the recent moves of Prime Minister Modi and BJP president Shah, we can have a glimpse of their strategy. They have started targeting the Congress and Rahul Gandhi individually to isolate them from regional parties.

The accelerated pace with which the cases of corruption against Congress leaders like Chidambaram are being investigated also points to the same. It is not difficult to understand as to why the criminal case against senior leader Shashi Tharoor has now become a priority after a very long period.

The change has indeed come after party's failure to install a non-Congress government in Karnataka. The Congress could blocked BJP's way to power in the state with success. The event also generated a hope among regional parties that they could even capture power at the Centre if they join hands in opposing Modi and are able to prevent splitting of anti-BJP votes. The BJP is rightly apprehending the potential threat Rahul Gandhi is posing to the party's prospect of reelection in 2019. That he can mobilise diverse political forces against the BJP is now a reality. The BJP was expecting a slow and timid response from Rahul-led Congress in Karnataka after its defeat as had been the case in Goa and Manipur. However, Rahul Gandhi acted with the required speed and stitched an alliance with the JDS without losing any time. This move changed the scenario in the State as well as at the national level. All the important regional formations came together to celebrate the installation of a non-BJP government. And this has given a loud and clear message of Opposition unity.

BJP has other reasons also for targeting Congress. It fits into the

broad narrative that India has lost almost six decades under an 'inept family rule'. It is also easy to hold Congress responsible for all that which India has failed to achieve in these decades. It helps Modi build up an image of a saviour who can give leadership to the country to make it a leading nation of the world. His campaign on completing four years in office is directed towards this end only. Addressing a rally at Cuttack in Odisha he alleged that all these years, the Congress has been pursuing a policy of "family first instead of country first." Modi alleged, "During UPA regime, the Congress party was running the government through remote control. It only gave the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' but did not serve the poor. Half of the population does not have gas, electricity or road connection."

When it came to the poor health infrastructure in Odisha, he refrained from directly accusing the State government which is in power for over one and half decades, and held the UPA government responsible for it. Modi said, "The situation is worse here in Odisha. I wonder what were the previous governments doing? If the State governments do not carry out their responsibilities properly, the Centre does it."

Odisha Chief Minister has been following a policy of equidistance from both the BJP and the Congress. He did not attend the oath-ceremony of H.D. Kumaraswamy as Chief Minister of Karnataka. The BJP had become ambitious in Odisha after getting an impressive vote share

in the panchayat elections held in 2017. However, it soon realised that it would be premature to celebrate the success because the party had to face a drubbing in an assembly bypoll that was held soon after the panchayat polls.

In its campaign in Kairana and Noorpur bypolls in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP targeted the Congress and its politics despite the fact that the Congress had no candidate in any of these constituencies. In a public meeting near Kairana, Modi had targeted the Nehru-Gandhi family. This seems to be a part of the fresh campaign the Sangha Parivar has launched against the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. The same old allegations of purported disrespect to Sardar Patel and Subhash Bose are being made.

However, the results of these byelections show that personal attacks are not fetching votes. The weapon was used extensively in Gujarat and Karnataka also, but it failed to give the expected results.

In addition to attacking the Congress, the Modi-Shah duo is trying to tie up with regional parties to force Congress to go to the polls without allies. However, the party is hardly finding it easy. Most of the dominant regional parties have by now gone away from it. Even in the States where the Congress is in direct contest with the regional forces, the latter are considering the BJP to be a bigger threat. In these States, regional parties are not averse to some kind of arrangement with the Congress. There are not showing any inclination towards joining hands with the BJP. They consider the BJP as their main enemy.

The BJP is finding it difficult to retain existing allies as well. The TDP has left the National Democratic

Alliance, while its other allies are also showing uneasiness. Its pre-poll allies in Bihar, the Lok Janshakti Party of Ramvilas Paswan and the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party of Upendra Kushwaha, are exhibiting discomfiture. The post-poll alliance with JDU is also showing strains. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has started attacking his partner. Once a supporter of demonetisation, Kumar has now become a critique of it. He is also unhappy with the amount sanctioned for the flood relief. The Chief Minister has also indicated that he might agitate for a Special Status for the state.

Tensions have been brewing in Uttat Pradesh as well. Smaller parties like Apana Dal are not happy. They are asking for more seats to contest and BJP is in no mood to oblige them. The BJP is also trying to bypass these parties by directly addressing the social segments they are representing. The BJP is contemplating a change in the reservation formula to provide separate reservation for the more backward classes within the quota for backward classes. The party had won many seats in 2014 with the support of other backward classes.

On the other hand, Congress has been winning allies. The regional parties are also restructuring their relations with each other. Till recently, an SP-BSP alliance was considered to be a most difficult proposition, but it is now a reality. The bypolls in Uttar Pradesh have proved the effectivity of this alliance as well.

If Congress' open arm policy is giving sleepless nights to BJP leaders, the attack from opposition on issues like unemployment, price rise and farm distress is also causing discomfort to the ruling party.

“The ruling party before coming to power made big promises such as employment to 2 crore youth every year, remunerative prices to farmers, bringing back black money stashed abroad, eradication of corruption, and so on and so forth. There were 42 big promises made but none of the promises has been fulfilled,” said senior leader Sharad Yadav who has just launched a new political party, the Loktantrik Janata Dal.

Weakening of federalism is the major cause of regional assertions. But this is hardly being recognised in the ruling political circle of New Delhi!

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The Enigma Called Gandhi

Salil Misra

Politics in independent India has shown a tremendous obsession with Gandhi. Khadi, worn by most politicians, protests through Satyagraha, hunger strikes, voluntarily courting arrest, civil disobedience, all carry the indelible stamp of the politics practised by Gandhi during the course of the national movement. Most rituals and symbols of Indian politics today emanate from Gandhi. It would appear to any outside observer that politics in independent India is deeply influenced and inspired by Gandhi and his ideals.

Such a conclusion would be wholly wrong. The ritualistic obsession with Gandhi is accompanied by an amazing ignorance about him. Indian politics today is completely devoid of anything remotely Gandhian. It would be fair to say that since Gandhi has been elevated, or reduced, to the level of an abstraction or a mere idea to be celebrated, we have done away with the need to understand him and engage with his legacy.

The first basic misunderstanding pertains to the kind of individual Gandhi was. Anyone trying to construct Gandhi on the basis of his pictures of 1920s and 1930s would easily conclude that he was an illiterate poor villager clad only in a peasant *dhoti*. This of course would be a completely false picture. The truth is that Gandhi was born in a reasonably affluent Gujarati family. His father was a Diwan in a princely state, combining the functions of a chief minister and an estate manager. Gandhi went to good schools to

study and lived his early life mostly in cities—Rajkot, Kathiawad, Ahmedabad and later Calcutta and Bombay. For his higher studies he went to England and acquired a Law degree from London. After spending three years in England, Gandhi spent around 21 years in South Africa. It was only in 1915 after returning to India that Gandhi began to encounter and experience village life from close quarters. He was also a full-time journalist who set up a press in 1903 and started a paper *Indian Opinion* from Johannesburg. In short, he was an anglicised, West-trained, cosmopolitan, lawyer-cum-journalist.

If Gandhi was no illiterate peasant, he was no Mahatma either, at least not in the conventional sense of the term. The Mahatma-hood had been conferred upon him by Rabindranath Tagore as early as in 1915, when Gandhi was only 46 years old. The conventional Indian understanding of a Mahatma is that of an otherworldly saint-renouncer. Gandhi could be considered a Mahatma in the restricted sense that he firmly believed in the moral foundations of social life. He was convinced that our collective social life must be rooted in a moral conception. But apart from this, Gandhi was no saint renouncer. He constantly thought about and engaged with the world he lived in. And he was always busy with trying to solve some social problem or the other. Between his return to India in 1915 and his death at the hands of a fanatic in January 1948, Gandhi was constantly busy grappling with

some important issue or the other. Consider the following. In 1925 he was involved in a social movement in Vykam (Travancore) seeking to open temples, wells and roads for the lower castes. In 1938, he led the struggle against the ruler of Rajkot, a princely state, for introducing some democratic rights for the people. In 1917, 1918 and 1928, he led the peasant movements in Champaran (Bihar), Kheda and Bardoli (both in Gujarat) against forced cultivation of indigo, enhanced revenue and high taxes imposed by the government, respectively.

In 1918, Gandhi led the strike of the Ahmedabad textile workers for an enhancement of wages and undertook a hunger strike for the first time. In April 1919, he was at the helm of a civil liberty campaign against the Rowlatt Act imposed by the British, under which anyone could be arrested without any notice or warrant. During 1920–22, 1930–34, 1940 and 1942, Gandhi led huge anti-imperialist struggles against the British rule. Gandhi thus led movements against caste oppression, for democratic rights in a princely state, peasant movements, strike by industrial workers, movement for civil liberties and direct struggles against British imperialism, all within a span of less than 33 years.

This was not all. During 1933–34, Gandhi undertook a long tour on foot, called *Harijan* tour, in which he went from one village to another in order to open public wells and temples for the lower castes. Further, he spent around five months in Bengal (November

1946–March 1947) visiting the areas hit by communal violence and trying to restore communal unity there. He also underwent imprisonment six times for a total period of more than five years. Gandhi was also the full-time editor of the English weekly *Young India*, started in 1919 and renamed *Harijan* in 1934. He wrote editorials, articles and also answered questions from the readers. Gandhi set up three major organisations—*Harijan Sevak Sangh*, *All India Spinners Association* and *Hindustani Prachar Sabha*. He wrote many books during this period, the most important being his autobiography (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, published during 1927–29) and *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928).

All this was done in a period of around 32 years. Could he have done it if he had been a Mahatma of a renouncer variety?

From the above description, what is the kind of picture of Gandhi that emerges? That he was a man fully dedicated to the service of humanity, a social reformer committed to purge Hindu religion and society of its evils, a leader determined to infuse moral values in human conduct, and a visionary involved in a mammoth social engineering project in which men and women will live their lives by moral standards. Gandhi lived a life of service. He had a blueprint of an ideal social order in his mind and he devoted all his life towards its realisation. He was committed to the idea of a transformation in human life without violence or coercion. He never gave up the effort. Nor did he give up the thought that all this was possible. If he thought that this could be achieved in his lifetime, he would be considered either too ambitious or too naive. He obviously

did not succeed in his endeavour. But even the severest of his critics would not deny that he was sincere and truthful—albeit impractical—in his mission.

The question is: what made Gandhi what he was? Is there an explanation? Or should we simply give up the effort by declaring him as idiosyncratic?

Some explanation can be found in an amazing and rare combination of continuity and change. There were certain traits he picked up early in his life and they remained with him throughout. A certain edifice of a wholesome life got constructed early in his life and continued to guide his actions till the very end. At the same time, Gandhi also displayed a rare flexibility in being adept at growing and changing. He possessed a rare capacity for incorporating new changes in his personality and interactions with the world outside. As he himself wrote in 1933: “I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he still has faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.”

So what remained constant and

what changed?

Very early in his life Gandhi decided that he would lead a life of service to human community. It did not matter where this community was located. It could be the indentured Indian labourers in South Africa, or the peasants of Champaran, or the Indian people suffering under British imperialism, or the people of England corrupted and dehumanised by their own imperialism, or entire humanity increasingly cut off from its roots and swept aside by the huge tidal wave of modernisation. His life was at the service of a cause. In his life of service he learnt the techniques of assertion without aggression and standing up to injustice without giving in. All this of course was to be done wholly non-violently.

In his diagnosis of what ailed human civilisation, Gandhi identified two fundamental elements—poverty and discrimination. The two were independent of each other. India, his own society, suffered from both. But he also saw the affluent European societies being gripped by the virus of discrimination. His own remedy for this malady was that the world could be transformed through human effort. Contrary to the dominant doctrines of his times, he did not look upon humans as passive members of the social order in which they lived, whose lives would be transformed following a change in the social order. Gandhi credited humans with a capacity for independent action, capable of transforming the social order. As a result, Gandhi constantly worked on humans, training them, organising them, educating them and preparing them for action. He evolved his technique of non-violent *Satyagraha* (action leading to the triumph of

truth) and declared that *Satyagraha* could never fail if the individuals could be trained to practise it properly. He wrote in his weekly *Young India*: “I have repeatedly stated that *Satyagraha* never fails and that one perfect *Satyagrahi* is enough to vindicate Truth. Let us all strive to be perfect *Satyagrahis*. The striving does not require any quality unattainable by the lowliest among us. For *Satyagraha* is an attribute of the spirit within. It is latent in every one of us. Like *Swaraj*, it is our birthright. Let us know it.” The privileging of organised and trained individuals over any laws of social action was one trait that remained constant with Gandhi. This human force had to be constantly pushed into a life of service.

If service of humanity through non-violent *Satyagraha* was one feature that remained constant, an uncompromising faith in religion was another. Early on in his life, a search for a source of morality led him to explore religion. And he explored them all. The Vaishnav Hinduism was inculcated to him during his early socialisation. His first exposure to religion was through his mother. In England he came into contact with Christians of various denominations. He also read *Bhagavat Geeta* (in English) and the *New Testament* in England. Many years later he read the *Quran*. In South Africa he came into contact with his Muslims patrons and Evangelical well-wishers. Both in England and in South Africa he moved in very different and diverse circles. He engaged with them with empathy and compassion, but always as an outsider. His search for a perfect religion took him to the shores of many faiths. Interestingly he was looking for a religion that

did not monopolise Truth and which recognised the prevalence of Truth in other religions. Through this journey he discovered what was common to all religions—Truth as a moral force. This discovery took away from him the need to adopt any particular religion as his own. So even though he remained a Vaishnav Hindu denominationally, he became a universalist in matters of faith. For Gandhi, the importance of religion was not so much in specific rituals—each religion had its own—but in morality, which was common to all religions. He began to distinguish the two with the use of ‘R’ (Religion as a source of faith and morality) and ‘r’ (many religions). “There are many religions, but there is one Religion”, he would say. He also explained this plurality at one end and oneness at the other through the imagery of the tree. Just as a tree had one trunk and many branches, so did Religion. Religion had one trunk but many branches. This Religion became his great ally, his greatest strength and his biggest shelter in times of crisis and despondency.

It is thus clear that Gandhi’s basic philosophic vision of human life and the techniques for transforming it remained unchanged throughout his life. What however changed was the manner in which he understood the nature of the world being transformed in a modern direction. In England he witnessed the dissolving old world and the triumphantly emerging modern industrial society. He encountered the optimists celebrating the arrival of the new order capable of taking humanity to the shores of prosperity and happiness. He also met the pessimists who bemoaned the loss of soul under the new world order but looked on helplessly at the

juggernaut of industrialism. Gandhi was attracted to the pessimists, but temperamentally he was not given to passivity and resignation. He was initially convinced that industrialism was a ‘curse’ that had gripped human society. In his book *Hind Swaraj* (1909) written during the ship journey from London to South Africa, he delineated the ills of the new industrial civilisation and also tried to suggest a way out of it. His understanding was that the whole of mankind had moved away from its original moorings and—without reaching the destination—was floating around without any rudder or compass. Fully convinced that the industrial civilisation could only enslave humanity, not liberate it, Gandhi raised a fundamental question: Is there a way out?

There is no evidence that Gandhi found the answer (though he never admitted it). But there is evidence that Gandhi’s basic outlook to modernity began to undergo a change. During the course of the national movement, Gandhi came into contact with some of the finest minds of the times. And, as he transformed the national movement with his leadership, he was also transformed by it. Gandhi began to look differently at the entire paraphernalia of the industrial civilisation he had dismissed earlier in *Hind Swaraj*—hospitals, courts, parliamentary democracy, bureaucracy, modern State, modern science, etc. He began to see their utility for human life. Without abandoning his basic position on the modern industrial civilisation, he now began to see it as an important instrument. ‘How to use the instrument in one’s favour without being enslaved by it’ was now his concern. There is plenty of evidence that by the 1940s Gandhi’s

uncompromising opposition had been moderated quite a bit. He was still not a 'convert' to the new world. But he could see that the new world, given the intervention by trained, organised and committed men and women, was indeed capable of alleviating the basic problems of poverty and discrimination.

In July 1946, 18 months before his death, Gandhi spelt out his vision of an ideal social order. He wrote: "In this structure of innumerable

villages there will be ever widening, never ascending, circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life . . . sharing the majority of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Let India live for this true picture, though never realisable

in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want before we can have something approaching it."

This was Gandhi's dream. Nobody knows how such a world can be achieved. But hardly anyone would disagree that it is a world well worth aspiring for.

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Secularism and the State: Categorising the Nehru Model

Anil Nauriya

I. The "Nehru Models": The Historical Nehru Model and the Posthumous Nehru Model

In most circles where opinion making on behalf of minorities takes place, one of the reasons for appreciation of Jawaharlal Nehru's approach towards the minorities generally is his statement that majority communalism, that is, sectarianism, is more dangerous than minority communalism. He said that "the communalism of a majority community must of necessity bear a closer resemblance to nationalism than the communalism of a minority group".ⁱ This statement must, however, be understood along with his insight expressed on the same occasion that majority and minority communalisms feed off each other.ⁱⁱ His approach is not therefore a blank cheque to minority communities to nurture and nurse their own respective communalisms as some of his majoritarian detractors allege.

One consequence of the focus on this aspect of Nehru's approach has been that other features of the Nehruvian secular state have not received as much analysis as these deserved. It was hardly ever noticed

therefore that there are in fact at least two models that contend for recognition as the Nehru model.

The notion of the secular state that was implemented after independence emerged from the Congress-led freedom struggle. Nehru invariably emphasised the connection between the establishment of a secular state and the "whole growth of our national movement".ⁱⁱⁱ It is intrinsic to the Gandhi-Nehru framework. It is a model of equality and equal citizenship.

A secular state was thus established and it went beyond the usual European notion of a denominational state whose secularism consisted merely in the separation from the very church to which that state was simultaneously committed. We understood, and rightly understood, a secular state to be a non-denominational state and a state that was religiously neutral as specified in the Karachi Resolution of 1931. Gandhi, in speaking of a secular state, had also defined it in clear terms in what would now be depicted as a Nehruvian manner, that is, in terms of separation of the state from denominational religion.^{iv}

Similarly, when it came to society, as distinct from the state, both Gandhi and Nehru emphasised the concept of equal respect and protection of all religions, thus reconciling the concept of a religiously neutral state with a concept of equal respect for the humanist values that may be located in each religion. For Nehru, "A secular state means a state in which the state protects all religions, but does not favour one at the expense of others and does not itself adopt any religion as state religion."^v

And then there is a constructed Nehru model or a quasi-Nehruvian model which is actually a posthumous Nehru model constructed largely after the split in the Congress in 1969. This model resembled but was somewhat different from the actual Nehruvian model. It could not last for more than six or seven years and ended dramatically with the firing at Turkman Gate, Delhi during the tenure of the Emergency regime in 1976.

Let me begin by first speaking about the first Nehru model.

II. Has the Nehru Model failed?

It would be fallacious to say so.

It will be my contention that the actual Nehru model in fact succeeded. It contained and managed a very serious situation that had developed after the partition of India. It built a state based on equal rights for all citizens and a consensus behind such a state. It provided for regional expressions of linguistic aspirations as well.

The problem was essentially not here but with what emerged as a posthumous Nehru model. There was, I would say, a cut-off point in 1969. After 1969 what might be called a gloss on secularism came to be projected upon the New Congress. The post-1969 Left-of-Centre circle around the then Prime Minister was well-intentioned in wishing to initiate a break from the old guard in the Indian National Congress which, it believed, was holding up further economic reform. In the process the 1969 split in the Congress which this group helped bring about also, however, cut the Congress off from its roots.^{vi}

In fact, the quasi-Nehru model became more contentious in public discourse when it began to be presented as cut-off from the country's struggle for freedom and as a sort of immaculate conception. More than the model itself, it is this projection that not only became problematic but actually helped the forces of majority communalism in particular to present the Nehruvian vision as an artificial imposition upon Indian society rather than as a natural culmination from its social character and political struggle.

As I have said, the quasi-Nehruvian, or posthumous Nehruvian, model was different essentially in the historical provenance that it sought to project. It sought to delink Nehru from the mainstream national struggle,

pluck him out of the Gandhi–Nehru framework and to establish an isolated posthumous quasi-Nehru model whose definition could be subsumed under what currently passed for academically acceptable progressive ideas. This happened in the context of the Indira Gandhi–CPI alliance post-1969. The alliance itself was unexceptionable; the problem arose in the unhistorical attempt to extrapolate it backwards and seek to diminish or exclude the Congress' own struggles, as it were, from its own history.^{vii}

Perhaps because the post-1969 model did not have a strong foundation in historical fact and was an unhistorical attempt to extrapolate backward the post-1969 alliance between Indira Gandhi's Congress and the CPI, it was easily toppled first by a callow youth and his organised hoodlums, and then after 1980 by a succession of Non-Resident Indian lobbies.

The posthumous Nehruvian model could hegemonise the state but could not take the society with it. This quasi-Nehruvian model lacked Nehru's democratic temper.

It disregarded society though claiming to speak in the name of the people

In the end, in the 1990s, remnants of this model, far from defending themselves against the onslaught from Hindutva, could not defend even the gains from the Gandhi–Nehru framework.

III. Why did this projection become problematic?

The answer to this is a complex one.

To some extent an essential and necessary accompaniment had been absent even in the years of the actual Nehru model but this feature came more prominently to the fore after the 1969 events.

K.R. Narayanan (1920–2005), who would serve as the President of India between 1997 and 2002, saw the point perspicaciously as early as in 1970. In a paper, presented at a seminar on Nehru and Nation-building (December 21–23, 1970) at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur, K.R. Narayanan observed: "In his passion for legislative revolution Nehru and the Indian National Congress did not, after independence, place sufficient emphasis on the aspect of a social reform movement in the country."^{viii}

This defect or shortcoming came to the fore especially after 1969 because the split in the Congress and the lines on which it occurred had the effect of cutting the Congress off from the constructive work movements, that is, the very civil society organisations which were its roots and which had provided it sustenance.

It is necessary to dwell on this point a little further. In the 1930s, the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, made a tour of Bengal. On coming back he spoke at the Bombay session of the AICC in 1934. And the point that he made was to underline the link between the constructive work programmes of the Congress and its political programmes. He said he noticed in the course of his tour that people were willing to come forward and listen to the Congress wherever the constructive work programme had reached. For example, he noticed, that where the khadi (handspun and handwoven cloth) programme had reached and had been able to help generate some income, people would flock to the Congress meetings to hear their message.

The vital link that the Frontier Gandhi observed in 1934 was over time lost sight of in independent India and especially in the post-

1969 phase of the Congress and Indian politics. The flaw which K.R. Narayanan noticed in 1970 was over-reliance, or rather near-exclusive reliance, on state action, legislation and state policies. The prevailing logic appeared to be: now that we are in power, we do not need to build up civil society institutions for social reform and action because we have the state to do this for us.

The wages of this neglect were not immediately obvious because, for one thing, the Congress was historically associated with a network of ground level constructive work institutions on whose support it could implicitly rely in the first 22 years after independence. The 1969 split in the Congress gave a rude shock to this arrangement. The implications were not immediately obvious in the short term. This was primarily for other reasons, such as the short-term electoral victories that the posthumous Nehru model secured in the General Elections of 1971 and the nationwide elections to the State Assemblies which followed in 1972. In the General Elections of 1971 it was the freshness of Indira Gandhi's faction, which had emerged from the Congress split of 1969, that swayed the electorate. In the State Assembly elections in the following year there was the added factor of victory in the Bangladesh War.

Yet the overall impact of the 1969 split in the Congress did not take long to make itself felt and it was soon obvious that the Congress, or what remained of it, was on a declining curve.

Meanwhile, the Hindutva organisations, on the other hand, had been working ceaselessly in society and the rise of these organisations was, in this scenario, like a time-bomb waiting to explode.

A more recent recognition,

especially in the wake of the findings of the Sachar Committee, has been that neither the Nehru model nor the posthumous Nehru model, nor indeed the models of development in force in other Opposition-ruled States, in their action on the ground placed adequate special emphasis on policies to ensure the welfare and human development of the minority communities. [This was although Nehru himself recognised as early as in 1951 that such special emphasis would be required especially in the case of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others.^{ix}] And that more specific steps are required for their education and development.^x

IV. What Now?

The shortcoming or defect, to which K.R. Narayanan drew attention in 1970, remains. Until this is remedied, the outlook would remain grim. Even if the present ruling dispensation returns to power and confines its focus to re-adjustment of state policies, it is unlikely to remedy the flaw that K.R. Narayanan under-lined. Similarly, whatever combination of political parties comes to power in the near future, it is unlikely to be able to provide the durable alternative that is required if it merely follows a statist approach. A long-term alternative can come about only with the emergence of a secular party which has the backing of grassroots civil society organisations with roots in the community life of the Indian people.

Merely taking control of the state will not suffice.

(Lecture delivered at the Dr K.R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies and Centre for Zakir Husain Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia on March 3, 2009. The endnotes are subsequent additions.)

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Endnotes

- i *The Tribune*, November 30, 1933.
- ii Ibid.
- iii *The Statesman*, Delhi, July 8, 1951.
- iv Anil Nauriya, "Gandhi on Secular Law and State", October 22, 2003, <http://www.thehindu.com>.
- v *The Statesman*, July 7, 1951.
- vi For a development of this point see my article "1969 in Retrospect", *The Hindu*, March 17, 2000.
- vii That is, for example, the extensive pre-freedom struggles conducted by the Congress and such peasant organisations as were non-antagonistically associated with it, the various Congress-associated institutions' constructive work programmes, and their strivings for the social rights of the underprivileged and for a linguistically accommodative and non-sectarian understanding of nationalism inclusive of the minorities.
- viii K.R. Narayanan, *Nehru and His Vision*, DC Books, Kottayam, 1999, p. 34.
- ix See *The Statesman*, Delhi, July 8, 1951.
- x Whether this should be achieved through programmes directed at minorities specifically or through programmes aimed at the underprivileged irrespective of religion, caste and creed is a matter for consideration. In my opinion, a mix of the two approaches would be more likely to succeed than the one or the other.

Chavismo: Part III

The third part of a seven part article by Marco Teruggi on Chavismo, the ongoing socialist revolutionary project in Venezuela.

Chavismo Will Be Socialist Or It Will Cease To Exist

Marco Teruggi

‘Made in socialism.’ That phrase resonated a lot in Venezuela a few years ago. It was on chocolates, yoghurts, oils, posters, embedded in a heart logo and the inevitable red five-pointed star. Every ministry claimed to be representative of people's power, and each bakery or route was labelled as socialist. Chavez questioned this obsession on national TV: calling things ‘socialist’ does not make them socialist. If there was something he longed to build, it was a transition to 21st century socialism. Chavismo must be socialist.

It was not like that from the beginning, at least publicly, perhaps because he had not yet reached that conclusion. Or because, in the political arena, the idea was to reach that conclusion collectively: the people must be collectively willing to move in that direction; the historic subject, the epicenter of politics, people, must develop the desire for socialism. Which is why Chavez only mentioned socialism for the first time in 2005.

Until that moment, in his initial writings—for example, the Blue Book—there were strong ideas about combining and mobilising. He talked of the recovery of the betrayed independence project: Bolivarian popular nationalism. The Bolivarian movement was the assertion of a national project with a Latin American dimension: the ethical refounding of a devastated country, plundered for decades

by a corrupt political / business class. The movement had as its symbols the tricolour flag, the red beret, and military discipline, and combined plebian, national and social liberation. It represented the recovery of a country in organic crisis, a recovery brought about by the people involved in a massive mass movement beginning from the Caracazo in 1989 ultimately leading to the emergence of Chavez like a thunderbolt in 1992.

Socialist Roots

The central aspect—and here we can trace the socialist roots before their public announcement—of the Bolivarian project was to implement it through centrally driven programmes like creating spaces for the exercise of participatory democracy, creating popular organisations and creating conditions for their multiplication, and launching several movements which were essentially independent of and parallel to the state, like the various missions, whose aim was to build the human being who could carry forward the Bolivarian project. All these programmes had at their centre the working people, the lower classes, and the centrepiece of the Bolivarian project was the construction of a people's power, which took different forms over the years. The state needed to first assert its control over the economy, and then transfer this control to the organised people, who simultaneously needed

to gradually learn how to exercise that power. A complex architecture, virtuous, possible, necessary. The socialist programmes thus appeared before the announcement of their socialist character.

The Bolivarian project is not about challenging neoliberalism so as to build a more stabilised and a more egalitarian capitalism, but about challenging the capitalist order itself. “This revolution has assumed the banner of socialism, and that requires and demands much more than any other revolution. We could have stayed within the frame of a national revolution, but behind those often undefined terms are hidden statements that end up being reformist, rightwing, that end up eventually toeing the line,” explained Chavez.

The official launch of the socialist project in 2005 coincides with the formation of communal councils, followed by communes. Chavez draws the communal road to socialism, which means rebuilding a new state on the basis of the political, cultural and economic power of the communes. He left it in writing: the bourgeois state had to be pulverised, and for that he outlined a plan and also the steps to be taken within that. It meant democratisation of the inherited state, building a different kind of state, on participatory and self-managed roots, a plan which has its basis in the analysis of Istvan Meszaros. A socialism from below, an endogenous socialism.

State Socialism

This socialist proposal of Chavez was in contradiction with another, which can be summarised in a few points: the centralised state should be at the centre of the whole project, it should be the protector and main player or actor; the various forms of popular organisation should be subordinated to the state and should be limited to only certain areas; the state should enter into agreements with businessmen, both old and the new emerging businessmen, and should strive to create a new national bourgeoisie. This latter project, known as state socialism, is essentially a more egalitarian capitalism, is capitalism with relatively more distributed wealth, is socialism in name but having its foundations in capitalism.

This debate can be understood through concrete policies implemented by Chavez on a national scale in Venezuela. As Meszaros says, "The measure of socialist achievements is: to what degree the measures adopted contribute actively to the constitution and consolidation of a deeply rooted and substantial democracy, of social control and general self-management." The way to build state socialism, where the objective is more efficient management of the state, will be different from the way to build socialism as Chavez understood it, where the aim is to advance towards consolidating power in the hands of organised communities as the basic founding bloc of a new state. The aim of the revolution is not having a more progressive minister or mayor, but organising of the popular classes to collectively control power.

Chavez strived to develop social forms of ownership over the means of production in order to

lay the foundations for building of communal and feminist 21st century socialism. He spent years politically and economically experimenting to build such social forms of ownership, and by the time he died, enough had been done to create the possibility for the revolution to advance further in that direction.

The advance of Chavismo in Venezuela has not been smooth, it has had its ups and downs. In particular, since 2014, the economy has been on the ropes. There have been conflicts within Chavismo about how to deal with this crisis. The revolution found itself at crossroads, with two possible paths: one, to take a conservative stance, retreat from advancing down the road of more communal power, a road whose goal appears to be historically very distant, which would also mean giving up on some of the advances already made; and the second, to further advance down this road

and deepen the changes already initiated as well as expanding the program of democratisation of people's power into more areas. Which path should Chavismo take? Going along with the path to greater community control, or strengthening the agreement with the business community?

It is a river that has stirred up the past in the present. The various actors wanting take Chavismo in different directions have differing desires and interests, depending upon their class interests. There are many who are tired of the deepening economic crisis. They wonder, how much more we need to endure to advance towards socialism. And so, they have come to disbelieve the historical project. There are also many others, who strongly believe that either Chavismo will be socialist, or it will cease to exist.

Breaths of Fresh Air from a Pontifical Mouth of the South

Earl Bousquet

Ever since becoming maximum leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics in 2013, Pope Francis has not minced words to take strong positions on major international issues. But on the eve of a visit to his native South American continental homeland, he was called upon to speak out loudly—and act strongly—against men of his cloth accused of sexual abuse.

All Francis' predecessors – except Syria-born Pope Gregory III in the 8th century -- have been

Europeans. But none has been as outspoken as the first Christian pontiff from the Americas and the Southern Hemisphere in all of 13 centuries.

Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, as a young man he worked as a chemical technologist and a nightclub bouncer before becoming a priest in 1963.

As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio embraced Liberation Theology and the Argentine cleric was admired across South America for his trademark humility.

Rejecting Comforts

Rejecting the comforts guaranteed by his top church position, he traveled by bus across his diocese and rejected the luxurious quarters his predecessors resided in, opting instead to live alone in a small rented apartment.

Elevated to his pontifical throne at the palatial Vatican, Pope Francis did likewise, choosing to stay in a guesthouse and rejecting the papal limousine in favor of an ordinary car.

Less than one square mile in area, located within Italy's vast capital (Rome) and with a resident population of only a few hundred citizens within its walls, The Vatican is officially the smallest country—and with the smallest population—in the entire world.

Officially called 'The Holy See', it also has non-voting rights at the United Nations (UN) and the Pope is its Head of State.

Eternal Wrath

But Francis quickly earned the eternal wrath of die-hard conservatives within his religious empire for breaking with traditional church dogma on several issues.

In 2014, he told the members of the top-ranking Pontifical Academy of Sciences that he supported the 'Big Bang' theory and Evolution—positions he said were “not inconsistent with the theory of Creation.” He also supports actions to protect the earth against Climate Change.

Between 2014 and 2015, Pope Francis spoke out against the misuse of political and economic power internationally, lamented the disappearance and suspected murder of 43 students in Mexico and condemned the dangers and loss of life caused by immigration.

He condemned financial mismanagement at The Vatican; and his decision to excommunicate members of the Mafia, though hailed worldwide, earned him several death threats.

Francis opposes “unbridled capitalism” and sees consumerism as “irresponsible development”.

He played a leading role in facilitating the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the US and Cuba in 2015.

Then, in December 2017, he called for “serene dialogue” between the government and opposition in Venezuela, as they prepared for crucial talks in the Dominican Republic on January 11 and 12, 2018.

Opposing Ills...

In his fifth annual Christmas Message, delivered on December 25, 2017, Francis did not break with his tradition of speaking out against the ills affecting the world.

On Palestine, he urged “a resumption of dialogue” towards “a negotiated solution” that would allow for “the peaceful coexistence of two states within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders.”

Opposing militarism and capitalism, he said, “The winds of war are blowing in our world and an outdated model of development continues to produce human, societal and environmental decline.”

On tensions on the Korean peninsula, he hoped that “mutual trust may increase, in the interest of the world as a whole.”

On refugees and economic migrants everywhere, he said the millions involved “do not choose to go away” but are “driven from their lands” and “forced to travel alone

in inhuman conditions, becoming easy targets for human traffickers” while “risking their lives to face exhausting journeys that end at times in tragedy”.

Francis' 2017 end-of-year message also urged de-escalation of conflicts in Iraq and Syria and he called for peace in South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Nigeria.

His 2018 New Year message, delivered to coincide with the church's observation of World Peace Day, was also dedicated to the cause of refugees, calling on the world to show solidarity with those forced by dreadful conditions to leave their homes in search of better elsewhere.

'Apostolic Exhortation'

But all this didn't just fall out of the sky.

In early December 2013, soon after taking his high office, the still new pope gave an 'apostolic exhortation'—an address calling for big changes in the church, including rethinking long-held but outdated customs.

He said: “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets”, rather than one “which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

“I do not want a church concerned with being at the center and then ends being caught-up in a web of obsessions and procedures,” he added.

Not Above Criticism

However, Francis has not been without or above criticism.

As soon as he was elected to pontifical high office in 2013, the Western press unearthed earlier

criticism that as head of the Argentine Catholic Church, he failed to openly criticise successive dictatorships.

He was even accused of failing to defend and protect priests hounded by dictators—to which he responded by pointing out that he had in fact once given his official ID card to one who resembled him so that he could escape the country.

Francis was also accused of not taking swift and strong enough action against a former Vatican Ambassador to the Dominican Republic who was found to have been a serial sexual molester of little boys. The guilty senior cleric was recalled to the Vatican where internal investigations began, but he died before the proceedings ended.

In more recent cases, Francis came under pressure from critics in Australia and the USA regarding senior clerics also accused of child molestation, both of whom were recalled to the Vatican and one of who died and was buried without paying for his sins of commission.

Now, ahead of his upcoming visit to Chile and Peru, protesters defending the cases of victims of abuse have been threatening to protest during his Chile visit over claims that the Vatican is too slow and ineffective in taking action against senior clerics accused of abuse and of inaction against the alleged perpetrators.

In the Chile case, extremists have attacked churches with explosive devices, even threatening Francis that unless he acts according to their demands, “the next one will be in your Cossack.”

The Pope faced similar criticism and pressure last year before and during his visit to Myanmar, where he was being canvassed to denounce the treatment of Rohingya victims of

abuse and "ethnic cleansing."

No Genuflection

But this ex-bouncer has always found ways and means to not only accept criticisms, but also to act in ways that, in the end, give time to address the issues in manners that do not reflect genuflection to those holding proverbial guns to his head.

Ahead of the Chile visit, for example, while there were no plans to meet the victims of priestly abuse, his spokesman in Rome made it clear that such a meeting was “not impossible”.

Without saying so, Francis seems to be signaling to his loud critics that he is not deaf, but their causes are not the only ones on his large plate in a world that is more quickly turning away from religion than ever before.

Spiritual Eclipse?

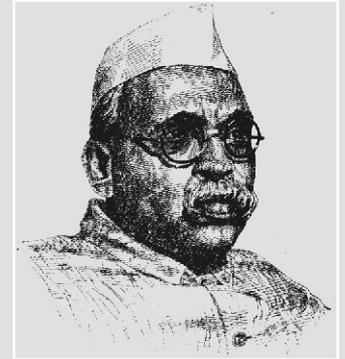
Today, 21st Century automation and innovation, along with other advances in modern science and technology, are increasingly attracting youth away from religion worldwide, leaving most church leaders fearing a growing apparent eclipse of traditional spiritual dominance.

Yet, in the midst of it all, the criticisms notwithstanding, Francis keeps bucking the traditional trend by remaining the loudest mouth of and for the south, in a world still so unfairly dominated by the north.

With popes appointed for life, the words of the first spiritual leader of a major Western faith to emerge from the Southern Hemisphere in 13 decades not only still sound good to his global flock, but also feel like a lasting breath of fresh air they pray will last in 2018 and beyond.

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