

Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph

A Tribute

ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

Reflections on the work of Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, the political scientists who studied India for more than half a century.

Ashutosh Varshney (*ashutosh_varshney@brown.edu*) teaches International Studies and Political Science at Brown University, the US.

After over six decades of marriage and intellectual companionship, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph are no more. On 23 December 2015, aged 85, Susanne died. About three weeks later, on 16 January 2016, Lloyd followed her. He was 88. They met as PhD students at Harvard in the early 1950s and retired, in 2002, as professors of political science at the University of Chicago, where they served for nearly four decades.

The Rudolphs, as they were often called, will be greatly missed as scholars of South Asian politics. They generated new ideas, concepts and arguments. They nurtured generations of students and

younger colleagues. They provided intellectual stimulation to all who met them. They turned, along with some terrific colleagues, the University of Chicago into a leading centre of learning on South Asia. Peer groups elected Susanne to several great professional honours, the two most important being the presidencies of American Political Science Association and the Association of Asian Studies. The Government of India honoured them both in 2014, when they received Padma Bhushan for their scholarly contributions on India.

Broad Corpus of Work

The corpus of their scholarship is truly broad. They wrote about: how caste and democracy interacted; the politics of education and curricula; the emergence of “bullock capitalists,” a new economically and politically influential class born after the Green Revolution; how an extreme left or extreme right

takeover was virtually impossible in Indian politics, which is driven towards a “persistent centrism;” how modernity was seeking to change traditional Indian religions; how princely India viewed British India; how India’s contemporary federalism could learn from the pre-modern architecture of sovereignty; Indo–us relations; and Mahatma Gandhi, who was an object of lifelong fascination for them.

In what follows, I will concentrate on two corridors of scholarly themes that dominated their work: the roots of Mahatma Gandhi’s politics, and the interaction of caste and democracy. Other themes were also important but, in my view, their arguments on Gandhi and caste stood out for their depth and nuance.

Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the original reasons India fascinated the Rudolphs. Gandhi was all the rage in the 1950s. Even figures such as George Orwell (1949) and Bertrand Russell (1952) wrote essays on him. The Rudolphs, as young scholars, devoted a large part of the first 10 years of their professional life, the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, to understanding the roots of Gandhi’s politics, philosophy and success.¹ The term “modernity of tradition,” the title of their most influential book, summed up the framework in which they approached Gandhi. Their fundamental claim was that Gandhi deployed Indian tradition, drawn from his understanding of Indian religions, for modern purposes—namely, building a mass-based modern political party, the Indian National Congress, and persuading Indians to participate in a mass movement aimed at wresting self-rule from the British. The use of tradition for modern aims was the foundation of his politics and power.

Had Gandhi sought a modern metamorphosis of his spiritual, intellectual and political demeanour, à la Jawaharlal Nehru, he would have been ineffectual. A Nehru could lean on Gandhi’s mentorship to rise; a Gandhi in a Nehruvian mould would have been a political non-starter. A much greater anchorage

in Indian tradition than Nehru could summon was necessary to generate a mass movement. The masses did not know of the Fabian Socialists; they did know their own religious books and cultural traditions.

But how exactly was this achieved? The answer that the Rudolphs gave anticipated ideas that reached their psychological culmination in Ashis Nandy’s well-known 1983 classic, *The Intimate Enemy*. This connection is not drawn in the literature, in part because Nandy was trained in psychology and the Rudolphs in political science. These two traditions of inquiry rarely met.

But from the perspective of intellectual history, it is important to compare the two. The purpose is not to devalue the fiercely brilliant imagination of Nandy’s formulations. It is only to acknowledge that from a different background and following a different path, the Rudolphs came close to generating the same ideas, if not the same conceptual vocabulary. In Part 2 of *The Modernity of Tradition* (1967), consisting of six chapters on Gandhi, five of which have been reproduced in *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* (2006),² the Rudolphs trespass from mainstream political science to political psychology, a subfield which is becoming more popular now, but was in its utter infancy when the Rudolphs wrote in the 1960s. Lacking a disciplinary base, their early ideas had a striking originality about them. The Rudolphs realised that political science concepts were remarkably inadequate for explaining Gandhi’s popularity, power and success. Gandhi attracted them intellectually, but political science helped very little. They had to take recourse to psychology.

Let us recall Nandy’s famous central claim in *The Intimate Enemy*. He argued that British rule in India was not simply a military and political victory; it was also a psychological triumph of sorts. Not only India was won as a territory, but Indian minds had also been captured. In the first 50 years of East India Company rule, there was no evidence of a colonial ideology. By the 1830s, however, when it could safely be assumed that British rule had come to

stay, a full-blown ideology was born. It was an ideology shared both by British rulers and their colonial subjects. As a clinical psychologist turning his gaze towards history and politics, Nandy wrote the following:

Crucial to this cultural co-optation was the process psychoanalysis calls identification with the aggressor. ... In the colonial culture, identification with the aggressor bound the rulers and the ruled in an unbreakable dyadic relationship. The Raj saw Indians as crypto-barbarians who needed to further civilize themselves. It saw British rule as an agent of progress and as a mission. Many Indians saw their salvation in becoming more like the British, in friendship or in enmity (Nandy 1983: 7).

The Rudolphs, too, turned towards political psychology to understand both colonial rule and Gandhi’s challenge to it. In a deft analytic move, they first marshalled the authority of Nehru, always read as a practitioner of political economy, not political psychology, to suggest that probing the psychological roots of Gandhi’s project was necessary for a proper understanding of his politics.

The essence of (Gandhi’s) teaching was fearlessness and truth and action allied to these. ... So, suddenly, as it were, that pall of fear was lifted from the people’s shoulders, not wholly, of course, but to an amazing degree. ... It was a psychological change, almost as if an expert in psychoanalytic method had probed deep into a patient’s past, found out the origins of his complexes, exposed them to his view, thus rid him of that burden (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 177).

But not formally trained in psychology, the Rudolphs did not put the matter in psychoanalytic terms. The concept of “identification with the aggressor,” central to Nandy, did not figure in their analysis. This is how they read the psychological core of the colonial culture:

(A)s the psychological and moral effects of Britain’s conquest and subjection of India spread and deepened, and Indians adapted to the roles the empire required, both Britons and Indians began to believe that non-violence and the corollaries the British attributed to it—passivity, weakness and cowardice—were the norms of Indian culture and character. The belief led many Britons to think that the superiority of British power and culture was an inherent rather than a historical phenomenon (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 178).

Further:

No ideology legitimizing superior-inferior relations is worth its salt unless it wins at least a grudging assent in the minds of the dominated. ... Reading recent history back into an undifferentiated past, Indians came to believe that they lacked valor and moral worth (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 182).

The Rudolphs did not sketch out the details of a colonised mind, as Nandy did, using the examples of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra, Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda. If, for example, they had noticed the letter below by Syed Ahmad Khan, sent from London in 1870, not used by Nandy but hugely relevant, they would have gathered a most remarkable proof of their claim that “Indians came to believe that they lacked ... moral worth.” Khan, after all, was no puny mortal. He led the movement for, and founded, Aligarh College in the 1870s, and was a major figure in the post-1857 Indian politics.

It is nearly six months since I arrived in London, and ... although I do not absolve the English in India of discourtesy, and of looking upon the natives of that country as animals and beneath contempt, I think they do so from understanding us, and I am afraid I must confess that they are not far wrong in their opinion of us. Without flattering the English, I can truly say that natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contracted with the English in education, manner and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. The English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes. ... All good things, spiritual and worldly, which should be found in man, have been bestowed by the Almighty on Europe, and especially on England.³

Gandhi, too, as a young man, sought in part to anglicise himself, but he reached what French structuralists would call an “epistemological break” in the first decade of the 20th century, the fourth decade of his life and the last decade of his sojourn in South Africa.⁴ It became clear to him that independence was not possible without breaking the British psychological trap, into which a leader as tall as Syed Ahmad Khan had so effortlessly walked. Indians had to be psychologically retooled.

What sort of ideas would constitute the foundation of Gandhi’s retooling

project? The colonial ideology depicted Indians, among other things, as children lacking rationality,⁵ or as effeminate creatures incapable of masculinity. The British especially pointed to the “Bengali effeminacy,” a subculture they encountered first and the longest in the subcontinent. Gandhi’s psychological revisionism, argues Nandy, relied on a reversal of the colonial equation of courage and masculinity and a proposal that courage and femininity were not antithetical: “Activism and courage could be liberated from aggressiveness and recognized as perfectly compatible with womanhood” (Nandy 1983: 54).

In simpler terms, this is the Gandhian idea that masculinity, as exemplified by modernity and the British, was too enamoured of external strength, domination, aggression and subjugation, whereas femininity was not a source of weakness, but could be an exemplification of internal strength. Taking blows in satyagraha was not a sign of cowardice; hitting back like men in anger, most definitely, was. How hard, after all, was it to pick up a gun and shoot?

Suffering for the sake of truth, Gandhi argued, would be immeasurably harder and would require inner strength. Equally important, non-violent taking of blows had the capacity to make the suffering plain in the eyes of the oppressor, changing him as well and leading to his liberation from the crudities of colonialism. If colonialism as a state of mind imprisoned both the oppressor and the oppressed, an “uncolonisation” of the mind would liberate both.

As early as the 1960s, the Rudolphs, too, seized on to this way of reading Gandhi.⁶ They developed the concept of “self-suffering,” and espoused the view that non-violence “expressed not the impotence of man but the potency of woman” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 204). Gandhi, they argued, “built a life on rejecting the aggressive, masculine aspect of the human potential” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 224). They carefully excavated Gandhi’s own precise formulation in support of this view: “Has she not greater intuition, is she not self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage?”

(Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 204-05). Finally, they could also see that “such courage relies for its effectiveness on the moral sensibilities, or at least capacity for guilt, of the more powerful perpetrators of injustice, using his conscience to reach and win him” (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 200).

This last point kept reappearing in debates about the efficacy of civil disobedience. Gandhian non-violence succeeded against the British, but it is often suggested, counterfactually but not without plausibility, that Gandhi would not have succeeded, if the adversary had been Nazi Germany. The American Civil Rights movement, led by Martin Luther King and influenced by Gandhi, was also a huge success. But did these successes say something about the inherent strength of non-violence, or also about “the moral sensibilities, or at least capacity for guilt, of the more powerful perpetrators of injustice,” in Britain and the us, as the Rudolphs put it? It is noteworthy that even Nelson Mandela, albeit a great admirer of Gandhi, expressed reservations against the effectiveness of Gandhian civil disobedience, if the fight was against an apartheid-like state:

Both Gandhi and I suffered colonial oppression, and both of us mobilized our respective peoples against governments that violated our freedoms.

The Gandhian influence dominated freedom struggles on the African continent right up to the 1960s because of the power it generated and the unity it forged among the apparently powerless. Nonviolence was the official stance of all major African coalitions, and the South African ANC remained implacably opposed to violence for most of its existence.

Gandhi remained committed to nonviolence; I followed the Gandhian strategy for as long as I could, but then there came a point in our struggle when *the brute force of the oppressor* could no longer be countered through passive resistance alone. We ... added a military dimension to our struggle. ... In 1962, in which I stated, ‘Force is the only language the imperialists can hear, and no country became free without some sort of violence’ (Mandela 1999, italics added).

The enduring validity of the argument made by the Rudolphs should now be obvious. If the oppressor denied the humanity of the oppressed, there would be no psychological controls over the

perpetration of violence: a “final solution” could be envisaged and executed. The Rudolphs came to develop enormous respect for Gandhi, but they never lost sight of their scholarly objectivity. To appreciate Gandhi’s great success against the British was one thing. But to say that non-violence was, therefore, always an effective weapon for fighting oppression would have been an unintellectual act of admiration.

Caste

The ideas of the Rudolphs about Gandhi were original, but their arguments about caste and politics were both original and influential. The problem with their Gandhi arguments was that biographies were a kiss of professional death in political science, if not in psychology. Surprising as it might seem, political scientists did not analyse political leaders in the 1960s (they still do not). Moreover, political psychology, which is where the Gandhi arguments of the Rudolphs belonged, was not a dominant subfield in the discipline.

These problems did not afflict the subfield of political sociology, a more traversed site of political analysis. That is where the arguments about caste and democracy made by the Rudolphs were located. Here, the Rudolphs engaged in production of new concepts and inaugurated an entirely novel way to understand the interaction of democracy and caste.

Their originality not only lay in proposing a new framework for understanding caste as a basis for politics, which would have been of interest to specialists of India or Asia. More broadly, they also challenged modernisation theory, the dominant social science paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s. This theory argued that modern economics (capitalist or socialist), modern politics (democracy or communism) and modern means of communication (railways, radio, television and newspapers, post and telegraph) would destroy traditional social categories such as caste (as well as ethnicity and religion). Individuals would become members of different classes, economically defined, and democratic politics everywhere would begin to resemble the left-of-centre and

right-of-centre politics of Western Europe and North America.

Modernisation theory, it should be recalled, was not simply an academic enterprise. Many political leaders of the time also believed in it, partially or wholly. Nehru, for example, was in no doubt that democracy and caste were implacably opposed to each other. In an oft-cited famous passage, whose spirit accompanied him right through his life, Nehru said:

In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible reactionary, restrictive and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy... Between these two conceptions conflict is inherent and only one of them will survive (Nehru 1992: 227).

The Rudolphs thought otherwise.

(C)aste has responded to changes in its political and economic environment by transforming itself from below and within. Hierarchy, privilege and moral parochialism no longer exhaust its secular significance. ... (C)aste has helped peasants to represent and rule themselves by attaching them to the idea, processes and institutions of political democracy (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 19).

It was not that Nehru was entirely wrong. It is simply that he did not clearly see that the caste framework was so ingrained in rural India that, to participate in modern politics, the rural folk had to use the categories they knew:

There is a variety of ways in which caste has affected political life in contemporary India. Some have been inimical to the realization of political democracy. Others, however, as demonstrated by extensive and weighty evidence, have contributed more to its realization than to its inhibition.

Nehru rightly believed that political, if not economic, equality was the defining principle of democracy, whereas caste was, above all, marked by ascriptive and entrenched inequality. But the formulation that either caste or democracy would survive was too unrealistic a binary. And modernisation theory was myopic in believing that modernity would obliterate traditional social categories.

Both Nehru and modernisation theories missed what was all too evident to the Rudolphs: namely, it was possible for caste to leave its ritualistic home and morph into a new vehicle of interest articulation.

EPWRF India Time Series

Expansion of Banking Statistics Module

(State-wise Data)

NEW

The Economic and Political Weekly Research Foundation (EPWRF) has added state-wise data to the existing Banking Statistics module of its online India Time Series (ITS) database.

State-wise and region-wise (north, north-east, east, central, west and south) time series data are provided for deposits, credit (sanction and utilisation), credit-deposit (CD) ratio, and number of bank offices and employees.

Data on bank credit are given for a wide range of sectors and sub-sectors (occupation) such as agriculture, industry, transport operators, professional services, personal loans (housing, vehicle, education, etc), trade and finance. These state-wise data are also presented by bank group and by population group (rural, semi-urban, urban and metropolitan).

The data series are available from December 1972; half-yearly basis till June 1989 and annual basis thereafter. These data have been sourced from the Reserve Bank of India’s publication, *Basic Statistical Returns of Scheduled Commercial Banks in India*.

Including the Banking Statistics module, the EPWRF ITS has 14 modules covering a range of macroeconomic and financial data on the Indian economy. For more details, visit www.epwrfits.in or e-mail to: its@epwrf.in

Just as one can only fight with the army one has, caste was the dominant, perhaps the only, framework available to the rural people to organise themselves for modern politics. The vast numbers of lower castes began to use it—not to reaffirm the traditional hierarchy, but to challenge it.

This last argument was prophetic, in that in the early days of Indian democracy, the Rudolphs clearly understood the idiom of caste and perceptively saw the logic of democracy. The argument was born in the trenches of field research in Madras (and partly, also Maharashtra), where anti-Brahmin movements had acquired visibility and force. But they saw its logic extending to other parts of India. By the time *Modernity of Tradition* was out in 1967, Bihar tasted its first flush of lower-caste politics. In the 1980s, such politics spread to Uttar Pradesh (UP). By now, lower castes have come to power in many states.

But the Rudolphs did not celebrate caste. Theirs was a threefold Weberian-style category construction. They divided the caste-based political mobilisation, which they saw as ubiquitous in rural India, into three parts: vertical, horizontal, and differential.

Vertical mobilisation depicted a “notable”-led mobilisation of lower castes for democratic purposes. The notables would normally come from the upper or dominant castes. This would not upset the traditional caste hierarchy much and democratic politics would more or less mirror the hierarchy of the yesteryears.

Horizontal mobilisation became the master concept for understanding the unsettling capacities of caste in a democracy. Though a “caste association,” lower castes, if large enough in numbers, could mobilise their own without relying on the upper-caste notables to lead them and accumulate political power in a democratic competition for votes. The Rudolphs cited the rise of Nadars in Tamil Nadu as a clearest case in point, and they also pointed to the Jats in Rajasthan, but they saw the logic of horizontal mobilisation as national in scope, with a potential for extension elsewhere, if the lower castes had the

demographic weight to make a difference to electoral outcomes. The Bihar and UP examples are cases in point.

Differential mobilisation, the third caste-based democratic calculation, was sponsored by a political party, not by the “notables” or a caste association. Using electoral arithmetic, political parties could make use of emerging class divisions in a caste (“fission”) or a putting together of several castes (“fusion”). Once again, the best example came from Tamil Nadu where, by the 1960s, the Kallan, Maravar and Agamudayar castes had coalesced into “Mukkulator,” but the Rudolphs foresaw the larger logic of the process, anticipating its extension beyond Tamil Nadu. The formation of the Other Backward Classes category in the North, bringing together several lower castes, which did not cooperate earlier, exemplified the larger relevance of the analytic hunch of the Rudolphs.

These arguments became mainstream later. As Jodhka notes in his overview of the study of caste politics since independence (and before), “Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph were the first to study the phenomenon of caste associations in democratic India” (Jodhka 2010: 159). These formulations not only carried originality, but also began to gather conviction, especially as the processes identified spread far and wide beyond Tamil Nadu.

A Final Note

A scholarly obituary is never simply intellectual. It is also, at least in part, social and personal. It is in that spirit that I conclude this obituary.

The Rudolphs not only wrote together, but in Chicago, Jaipur, Vermont and California, their four homes since the 1960s, scholars and friends also, nearly always, saw them together. It seemed as though meeting only one of them was an exercise in intellectual inadequacy. They formed a whole, which transcended the sum of the two parts.

Intellectual stimulation was always on hand. But also touchingly infectious was the civility of their intellectual interlocution. Moreover, their circle of intellectual civility was not simply confined to students and colleagues, which

is not uncommon. They reached out more widely to almost all who studied South Asia, including critics. Against critics, arguments could be forcefully made in print and in professional settings, but outside those arenas, perhaps influenced by Gandhi, an unfailing civility and a kind touch marked their conduct.

In their death, the scholars of South Asia have lost two towering intellects, whose nobility of spirit was as remarkable as their scholarship.

NOTES

- 1 *The Modernity of Tradition* (1967) contained their first essays on Gandhi, and in *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* (2006), four more essays appeared. A final essay, “Gandhi’s India, the World’s Gandhi: Gandhi at Home and in the World” was published in Kohli and Singh (2013).
- 2 I will cite henceforth from the 2006 publication.
- 3 Reproduced in Mcdermott et al (2014: 149).
- 4 Whether this happened in 1904, after his reading of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* on a train ride from Johannesburg to Durban, or in 1909, when he published *Hind Swaraj*, may be debatable, but both events were in the fourth decade of his life.
- 5 See the discussion of John Stuart Mill’s arguments about India in Mehta (1999).
- 6 Nandy recognises the intellectual contribution of the Rudolphs. See his reference to their arguments about Gandhi’s “new courage” (1983: 54).

REFERENCES

- Jodhka, Surinder S (2010): “Caste and Politics,” *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*, Niraja Gopal Jayal and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (eds), Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 154–67.
- Mandela, Nelson (1999): “The Sacred Warrior,” *Time*, 31 December.
- Mcdermott, Rachel, Leonard Gordon, Ainslie T Embree, Frances W Pritchett and Dennis Dalton (eds) (2014): *Sources of Indian Tradition: Modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Third Edition, Volume 2, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mehta, Uday Singh (1999): *Liberalism and Empire*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nandy, Ashis (1983): *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal (1992): *The Discovery of India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Orwell, George (1949): “Reflections on Gandhi,” *Partisan Review*, January.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph (1967): *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (2006): *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (2013): “Gandhi’s India, the World’s Gandhi: Gandhi at Home and in the World,” *Routledge Handbook of Indian Politics*, Atul Kohli and Prerna Singh (eds), London: Routledge, pp 39–53.
- Russell, Bertrand (1952): “Mahatma Gandhi,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol 190, No 6, December.