

# The Bomb, Biography and the Indian Middle Class

*The Indian middle class often sees itself as living amongst, but not living with the majority of its fellow citizens. Through a close reading of the autobiography of the late nuclear scientist Raja Ramanna, this article argues that one of the existential realities of being a middle class Indian is an inescapable desire to escape the rest of India.*

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This is an essay about the habitus of the Indian middle class, and specifically about its attitudes towards politics, the people and the nation, as indexed in the biography of one of its leading members, the late nuclear scientist Raja Ramanna. It argues that the Indian middle class often sees itself as living amongst, but not living with, the majority of its fellow citizens. This self-imposed distance between the middle class and the “masses” sometimes partakes of a genocidal impulse, as is indexed in many milieus – everyday expressions of desire for a country with a smaller population; the occasional wild-eyed scheme for secession from the rest of India by momentarily prosperous enclaves such as the IT sector in Bangalore or parts of Mumbai or Gujarat or Punjab; the oft expressed idea that it may not have been a bad thing if Sanjay Gandhi had had a relatively freer hand for a few more years back in the mid-1970s; urban planning schemes that fantasise bypassing slums through freeways, subways, hovercrafts and helicopters – but is more often indicated by a simple wish for the masses to simply, magically, disappear.<sup>1</sup> Through a close reading of the autobiography of the “father of India’s atomic bomb” Raja Ramanna, I argue that one of the existential realities of being a middle class Indian is an inescapable desire to escape the rest of India. The historical genealogy of such a desire is a complex matter and includes issues of race, colonialism, caste and a social Darwinist understanding of nations and development. The autobiography of Ramanna offers a fascinating contemporary site for the excavation of such intertwined impulses within the habitus of middle class India.

*Dazzling urbanite meets backwaters fisherman:* I would like to begin with a literary detour in this attempt to chart the attitudes of the Indian middle class towards the rest of their countrymen. There are two scenes that stand out in Amitav Ghosh’s recent book on the Sunderbans, *The Hungry Tide*.<sup>2</sup> Ghosh’s story involves a quadrilateral relationship between a driven NRI woman scientist from Seattle (Piya); an urbane, single and successful male entrepreneur from Delhi (Kanai); a rugged and taciturn fisherman, Fokir, who knew of and cared for no world outside Lusibari, their small village within the shifting landscape of the Sunderbans; and his feisty wife, Moyna, who aspires to a life for her son and family beyond the capricious tides of the Bay. In the first scene, Kanai expresses to Piya his disdain for Fokir and admiration for Moyna. Piya, with an acuity that is perhaps more readily available to the NRI, is able to unlock the reasons for Kanai’s preference. Ghosh’s prose on this brief encounter is filled with insight:

(Kanai): “Just imagine how hard it must be to live with someone like Fokir while also trying to provide for a family and keep a roof over your head. If you consider her circumstances – her caste,

her upbringing – it’s very remarkable that she’s had the forethought to figure out how to get by in today’s world. And it isn’t just that she wants to get by – she wants to do well; she wants to make a success of her life”.

Piya nodded. ‘I get it.’ She understood now that for Kanai there was a certain reassurance in meeting a woman like Moyna, in such a place as Lusibari: it was as if her very existence were a validation of the choices he had made in his own life. *It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic.* It reassured him to be able to think, ‘What I want for myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor: everyone who has any drive, any energy wants to get on in this world – Moyna is the proof’. Piya understood too that this was a looking-glass in which a man like Fokir could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear-view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past that was Lusibari. *But she guessed also that despite its newness and energy, the country Kanai inhabited was full of these ghosts, these unseen presences whose murmurings could never quite be silenced no matter how loud you spoke* (219-20: emphases mine).

Kanai’s conviction that his better lot in life arose from virtues such as merit and hard work rather than mere luck or good fortune is, ultimately, little more than an article of faith. Fokir’s inscrutable silence discomfits Kanai, while Moyna’s clumsy and earnest mimicry of the aspirations of the urban middle class Indian restores his sense of self-worth. Kanai’s status as a member of a meritocratic elite hinges on Moyna both trying to emulate his “achievements” and falling short in that effort.

The precariousness of Kanai’s self-esteem, and the very limited ambit of its efficacy, is demonstrated by Ghosh in a second scene where Kanai and Fokir meet in circumstances that favour the latter. Kanai has just fallen face-first into the muddy river bank and is unable to get to his feet as the ooze sucks him back. He is still seething from what he considers a treacherous ploy by Fokir to frighten him by pointing out the fresh spoor of a tiger on the river bank, and is further terrified by shadowy shapes in the water that he believes to be crocodiles. At the edge of land, at the mercy of unpredictable tides, in proximity to nature rather than culture, Kanai’s superiority to Fokir is reversed. The latter subtly shifts to addressing Kanai by the more informal ‘tumi’ rather than the traditionally respectful ‘apni’. Struggling to get recover his balance, bereft of his mud-covered spectacles, and momentarily stripped of his poise,

[Kanai] saw that Fokir was smiling at him. “I told you to be careful”. Suddenly, the blood rushed to Kanai’s head and obscenities began to pour from his mouth. “Shala, banchod, shuorer bachcha”. *His anger came welling up with an atavistic*

*explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village.* He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve ... he was powerless to stop the torrent of obscenities that were pouring out of his mouth now. When Fokir offered a hand to help him up, he slapped it aside: "Ja, shuorer bachcha, beriye ja! Get away from me, you son of a pig!" (326: emphasis mine).

The limits of Kanai's professed egalitarianism are revealed in these two encounters: so long as the subaltern's desire for a better life remains mimetic, aspirational and ultimately futile (as is the case with Moyna), Kanai can be both indulgent and supportive. And yet, the minute it threatens the sedimented hierarchy of an enduring social order, he turns vicious, and a repressed inner-self surfaces with incredible hatred towards the subaltern. A host of unspoken antinomies are mobilised by Kanai – caste, profession, urbanity, literacy – and they are all naturalised as his achievements and Fokir's lack. This is an encounter between two men only in name – when push comes to shove, one of them sincerely believes that the other is unworthy of existence.

To get to the point of this literary detour: Kanai's oscillation between an ideational commitment to egalitarian values and an inability to practise it in reality also constitute the limits of the Indian middle class' commitment to those at the bottom of the socio-economic pecking order. The commitments are primarily rhetorical in the sense that they are more about the self-fashioning of this middle class, its image in the eyes of an imagined western audience, and the shoring up of its sense of self-esteem, rather than any interest in the welfare of the ostensible object of these commitments, viz, the people. This may sound like a damning indictment of an entire society's middle class, and perhaps it is a tad overblown. One could mitigate its sting by noting that such attributes are evident in the middle- and upper-class sections in nearly all societies. My aim here is to explore its specifics in the Indian instance and not to single the latter out for special ex-coriation. In the next section of this essay, we see how the nuclear scientist Raja Ramanna exemplifies a life spent within these limits of a rhetorical commitment to egalitarian values, on the one hand, and an inability to live up to those professed values, on the other.

### **Text of a Life in Our Times**

The scientist most closely identified with India's atomic programme – especially after the death of its founder Homi Bhabha – is the late Raja Ramanna. He was a suave and polished orator, a brilliant pianist with a penchant for Chopin and Liszt, a polymath who had authored scholarly books on topics as diverse as western classical music and its relationship to Carnatic musical traditions, the traditions of science in Vedic India and numerous papers in particle physics. His autobiography, *Years of Pilgrimage* (hereafter YP) is an invaluable illustration of Indian middle class attitudes towards people, politics and merit. In many ways, the renaissance-man quality of Ramanna epitomises the aspirations most Indian middle class parents have for their children. The combination of scientific acumen and western tastes alongside a deep and proficient engagement with high Indian culture is one that is considered ideal.

Ramanna's autobiography opens with the line "It was a typical middle class wedding"<sup>3</sup> and proceeds to detail at some length

the history of his community – the Hebbar Sri Vaishnava community of Karnataka, often known as the Hebbar Iyengars. Ramanna chooses an interesting point of departure: that of his caste origins. At the outset and at points later in the book, Ramanna speaks of the superiority of Sanskritic culture over all others in the world, and of the possible affinities of the Hebbar Iyengars with those of the Slavs of eastern Europe. For someone who was trained in the cutting-edge field of nuclear physics in England (at the very time that the Manhattan Project was culminating in the bomb across the Atlantic), and later became the head of prestigious scientific institutions as well as a minister in the central cabinet, to inaugurate his life story with a detailed description of his caste would seem unusual, to say the least. One might have expected the life story to begin with the immediate or joint family into which he was born, or perhaps to the early signs of intellectual or musical precocity, or literally to a number of other events. As a child of modern India, such an emphasis on individual rather than community would not have been surprising. At one level, beginning with caste indicates the limits of the Indian modern – our sense of our own individualism and of achievement remain uncertain, and we feel the need to anchor our identity in a more enduring (and yet immediately limiting, divisive and fragmenting) idea of community.<sup>4</sup>

Ramanna speaks lovingly of the gentle and courteous people of the ancient city of Mysore, which "remains a place of beauty and hope, despite the onslaught of heavy industrialisation and over-population". We encounter fairly early on, then, the idea that Mysore (or India) is what it is "despite" its "over-population" – in other words, the idea that people are often what come between an individual and one's enjoyment of place or state or country. The first encounter with the "political" that Ramanna remembers is the palace intrigue at the Wodiyar court in Mysore state in the pre-independence period, before he had reached his teens. Ramanna, in his early incarnation as a child prodigy pianist, had been invited often to play for the Maharaja of Mysore. He had been promised a bursary to pursue classical music at Trinity College in England, but the death of the Maharaja, and the machinations of his courtiers, intervened to prevent him from getting the bursary. This episode, recounted with some passion by Ramanna, indicates an early appreciation of politics as a domain not merely of intrigue, but also as something that prevents meritorious people like himself from receiving their just desserts.

Thereafter, Ramanna warms up to the theme of politics as a denial of merit, especially the merit of the twice-born. The non-brahmin movement in the south is attributed exclusively to British machinations, and the upshot of reservations for non-brahmins was, according to him,

... a serious loss of talent, particularly in the teaching profession and government. Once the discrimination took firm root the other communities joined forces and in order to avenge past suppression, began ousting brahmins systematically from every teaching post and government jobs. This had the *inevitable* result: the teaching institutions became cesspools of mediocrity and intrigue, as did the government and the repercussions are evident even today. The better students from all communities today seek intellectual fulfilment in America where, unlike India, the world of education, industry and government makes special efforts to get the best talent from every part of the world. When the great Kannada playwright Masti Venkatesh Iyengar was superseded in the government service purely on a caste basis, it became clear that the old Mysore state had no future for us. We also realised that, however well we performed and however hard we worked, we would never receive the credit due to us (YP: 20, emphasis mine).

For Ramanna, the access gained by the lower castes to education and to the professions had to lead “inevitably” to mediocrity, intrigue and a cesspool. There is no historicisation of the relatively recent circumstances (viz, colonial rule) under which the brahmins gained ascendancy beyond the spiritual-religious domain in southern society, nor is there any effort to place the so-called lack of merit of the lower castes within a historical understanding or context.<sup>5</sup> Merit and achievement are in-born traits to this mode of “reasoning” – they are ontological attributes – and any political interference in this order can only lead to its dilution. Other possible narrations of the widening of social access to education and employment – in terms of a growing egalitarianism, as the very content of democratisation, or the different skills that people of agrarian, mercantile, or other professions might bring to these domains – are not even considered. The word “inevitable” underlined in the above quote shows the limits of this understanding of sociology: upper castes are uniquely fit to govern India and any dilution of their presence could only mean an impoverishment of quality. It would not be amiss to describe this confining of merit and ability to certain castes, and their insistent reproduction on the basis of endogamy, as racism. Viewed against that backdrop, Ramanna is locating his identity among the Hebbar Iyengar community makes for a politics that is exclusionary in its impulse.

These formative statements on the political locate Ramanna as a permanent outsider – initially in his home state of Mysore but gradually elsewhere in India too. They also incidentally narrate the growing enfranchisement of the larger population as the simultaneous disenfranchisement of intelligence and merit. This occurs because politics was now defined as the translation of superior numbers into the negation of quality and excellence. The anti-democratic impulse of this self-definition is hardly unique to Ramanna, but is a characteristic of the middle class’ attitude towards electoral politics as the 20th century unfolds.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it clearly portends the idea that the completion of one’s life cycle must include higher education in or emigration to those areas of the country and the world where the worth of merit is recognised. The “south” becomes merely the launching pad for upper caste careers to achieve fruition elsewhere.

Ramanna’s contradictory attitude towards the “masses” oscillates between seeing them as the reason for his life’s work, and as the chief impediment to national and personal excellence. This is best illustrated by some examples from his biography. Firstly, referring to Nehru, Ramanna observes that “... his desultory thoughts, resulting in incoherent speeches, were not aimed at the elite of India, but the masses who enjoyed that kind of non-interaction – a monologue” (YP: 72-73).<sup>7</sup> In writing about the decade-long delay in the setting up of a cyclotron in Ranchi in the 1970s, something for which the Atomic Energy Commission received a fair amount of flak, he writes:

One of the reasons for the delay was the arrival of ten million Bangladeshi refugees at the site of the project. They were all accommodated near the accelerator location and it seemed as if they had come to stay permanently. But luck favoured us and one day, after several months of squatting around, they all returned to their country and we resumed our work. The machine was a success and became a case study of special value for research students in the universities (YP: 78).

Ten million was possibly the total number of Bangladeshi refugees in India at the time of the Bangladesh war. At best, no more than a few thousands could have been settled at Ranchi,

and even fewer numbers must have been located around the accelerator. To Ramanna, the refugees were, of course, doing little more than “squatting around”. These people, who in many cases had lost all they had owned, had seen family members killed in one of the most violent civil wars, and who were until recently Indians, seemed to Ramanna to have arrived in Ranchi just to delay his experiments. “Luck” favoured the scientists because the refugees, to his mind, left as inexplicably as they came – like a swarm of locusts or some other such unthinking natural phenomenon. The passage is quite incredible in its utter disdain for facts or for the refugees. And, yet the same Bangladeshi refugees and their humanitarian needs are, later in the autobiography, used as the reason why India had to test the bomb in 1974. As he writes, “... it was absurd to succumb to a hypocritical set of countries, who while claiming moral superiority, had not hesitated to use nuclear gun boat diplomacy to stop humanitarian assistance during the Bangladesh war of 1971” (YP: 94). The palpable disdain for the Bangladeshi refugees earlier is now replaced with concern about their welfare during the short-lived American attempt at intervention. The role of the masses alternates between that of an alibi for India’s nuclear programme, and an impediment in the path to scientific achievement. In these contradictory passages, Ramanna exemplifies the liberal who loves the masses in the abstract but detests each one of them individually.

The narrative of Ramanna’s life reiterates the theme that India’s nuclear programme – constructed indigenously under a repressive and biased non-proliferation regime – was a triumph of national sovereignty and self-reliance. In this story, the “people” are the reason, the alibi, for the nuclear programme. Yet, their real state despite decades of independence – in terms of indices of poverty and underdevelopment – constitute a problem for Ramanna. The unease in dealing with this disjunction is reflected throughout the book, but is especially acute in a passage such as the following, written about world reactions to the first tests of 1974:

Accompanying all the noises of protest was genuine shock that a country like India was capable of something as sophisticated as a PNE. The west looked upon India as one of the most backward countries of the world. *Their criterion for measuring progress was different in the sense that they judged the success of a country by its material acquisitions and its overt proof of development – sanitation, quality of roads and a general sense of discipline.* India didn’t conform to any of these and in this context alone, it seemed somewhat relevant when the western world expressed bewilderment, coupled with fear and panic, at the success of Pokhran. Not that these were reasons enough to condone their behaviour (YP: 92-93, emphasis mine).

At various points in his biography, Ramanna bemoans the general lack of discipline Indians show in regard to public spaces and about their poor sanitation habits. Yet, in the above passage, such indices for assessing a country’s development are seen as “western”, “different” – and implicitly inadequate. Ramanna’s locus of enunciation moves between seeing India through western eyes (when critiquing his country), and being a patriotic Indian capable of seeing beyond the superficial heat and dust when defending the decision to test the bomb.

Throughout the text, Ramanna interchangeably deploys the categories “Indian” and “Hindu”. The attitude towards non-Hindu Indians is indexed in multiple ways. Modern-day Ayodhya is described as the birthplace of Lord Rama and he recalls that he placed “a few flowers on the pedestal of a mosque built at that spot some four hundred years ago” (YP: 26). With a preface dated

March 1991, the autobiography must have been written at the same time as the BJP's violently sectarian Ram Janmabhumi campaign was in full swing. The mosque/mandir was/is a highly charged and contested space, and the equation of the mythic Ayodhya of the Ramayana with the contemporary place bearing its name in Uttar Pradesh is fraught with all sorts of problems. Ramanna simply ignores such issues in his memoirs.

Recalling his days at the Madras Christian College in Tambaram, he notes that "... Although Partition was clearly politically motivated, the local Muslim community also began to clamour for it... Yet at the time of Partition, none of them migrated to Pakistan which they'd hankered for from the start." Partition is thus damned for being "politically motivated" (how else might it be motivated, one is tempted to ask) and so is the entire "local Muslim community" for having hankered for it "from the start" – but then choosing not to leave India once Pakistan was created. The narration positions the Indian Muslims exactly where the BJP, and significant sections of middle class Hindus, would have them today – as eternally unfaithful outsiders whose only role could be that of a Pakistani fifth column.<sup>8</sup>

There is an insightful contrast offered by the recollections of income tax commissioner and film critic Iqbal Masud who was Ramanna's batch-mate in the Madras Christian College. Masud speaks of the double bind faced by the Muslim students in MCC at this time. The rest of the student body expected him back then to be a good "nationalist Muslim" and forswear all talk of Pakistan and Partition, while they continued to blithely equate India with

its majority Hindu population and identity. Decades later, amidst the bombs and rubble of Bombay in 1992-93, Masud ruefully observes, today all his "secular" friends ask him why he does not come out more strongly against "Islamic terrorism or fundamentalism" and the extremist mullahs, while the country all around him is on a trajectory that equates Indian with a majoritarian religious ethos. The daily oath of national allegiance that every Indian Muslim is expected to undertake, and the diminution of any sense of national belonging as a result, simply does not register with the likes of Ramanna.

Masud, with the insight of one who has spent many years of his life dissecting films, remembers Ramanna as brilliant but also someone who "... reminded [one] of Queen Victoria's remarks about Gladstone: 'He addresses me as if I were a public meeting'. Ramanna was not so crude but I noticed when talking to him that if people gathered around us, as they usually did because Ramanna always talked about fascinating subjects, his manner changed. It is difficult to describe this, but somehow it became a public address."<sup>9</sup>

Later in his memoirs, Ramanna recounts his trip to Delhi in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination.

When I arrived at my brother's place [in Green Park, New Delhi-SK] his neighbours, who were Sikhs, were hiding in his house. They shared their anguish with me but unfortunately I did not detect any signs of gratitude in them for the refuge they had sought at Shah's [Ramanna's brother -SK] place ... I stayed on in Delhi till Mrs Gandhi was cremated. The funeral ceremony was attended

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by a large number of Heads of States and prominent residents of Delhi, but the Sikhs were conspicuous by their absence (YP: 114).

Anyone remotely familiar with the events of the time would attest there were no Sikhs at Indira Gandhi's funeral because in the preceding four days thousands of them had been killed in a state-orchestrated pogrom. Tens of thousands more were huddled in refugee camps, and had literally lost all they owned. Amidst this carnage, to expect his brother's neighbours to demonstrate their gratitude, or to attend Indira Gandhi's funeral, indicates Ramanna's unself-conscious belief that India's non-Hindus are a permanently suspect underclass.

Ramanna's rhetoric fashions a self that is a permanent outsider in the realm of politics – he is too rational, scientific, honest, and outspoken to succeed in that world. Of course, viewed from a slightly different perspective, his whole career and life seem to be a product of a charmed inner circle of high politics. His initial appointment to Bhabha's atomic laboratory after finishing his doctorate in London on a government scholarship; his rise to the head of the BARC; his appointment to central government cabinets as a minister; his role as a right-hand man to the prime minister on scientific affairs; his key role in the tests of May 1974; and the recognitions bestowed upon him, including the Bharat Ratna (the highest honour possible for any civilian to achieve in India) – all indicate a highly successful life spent in the eye of power. And yet, Ramanna (and the middle class that he so perfectly epitomises) remains convinced that he is the quintessential outsider, a man whose success is not because of politics, but despite it. It is a paradoxical modernity in which a biography can anchor itself in high-caste origins while simultaneously professing an individualism that sounds straight out of Ayn Rand. Towards the end of the book, proud of his inability to suffer fools and his iconoclastic views, Ramanna claims that the Greek phrase "Ou Phrontis" ("Who Cares") is an ideal motto for his life. Given his views on poor illiterates, untrustworthy Muslims, ungrateful Sikhs, Bengali refugees, and various others outside a meritocratic, Hindu, upper caste, middle class, "Who Cares" is the perfect epitaph for such a life – but for reasons other than those intended by Ramanna.

## Conclusion

It is important to understand that Ramanna's biography is emblematic of what one might call the ontology of a middle class in an "overpopulated" society. His views about the excessive numbers of people in India are hardly exceptional, and it is a commonplace in India to see reducing our numbers as the solution to nearly every problem we face.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the un-self-reflexive majoritarianism, the anchoring of identity in caste, the view of politics as that which comes between merit and just rewards, the shallow egalitarianism and democratic ethos, and other crucial elements to Ramanna's "fractured modernity," are very much a part of our *socius*.<sup>11</sup>

Since I began this essay with a literary detour through Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide*, it is fitting that I end by turning to his more literal analysis of India's nuclear politics. In *Countdown*, Ghosh examines the sense of injury and denied membership that animates so many in the Indian middle class to support the nuclearisation of the country. The desire of the middle class to be seen, valued,

and appreciated in international forums, to be welcomed to the status of a great power, is palpable in nearly every encounter he has with members of India's strategic enclave. Nationalism and anti-colonial resistance undergo a strange transformation and become reasons to support the bomb. Amidst this social analysis, Ghosh encountered an Indian army officer, fresh off a tour of duty on the Siachin Glacier. He animatedly tried to convince Ghosh that he had a solution to India's "Pakistan problem". It involved detonating a nuclear device a mile deep within the Glacier, causing it to melt and thereby simply drown Pakistan. Rather than dismiss it as the hallucinations of a crackpot officer, Ghosh sees the murderous embrace of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent as a proof that "... the targets the rulers have in mind for these weapons are, in the end, none other than their own people".<sup>12</sup> The distance between the reasoned prose of Ramanna's middle class autobiography and an unnamed officer's fervid fantasies of mass extermination is less than we would all like to believe.

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## Notes

- 1 While a serious social analysis of the degree to which the Indian middle class was complicitous with the authoritarian impulse behind the Emergency remains to be done, there are very insightful analyses available in Emma Mawdsley, 'India's Middle Classes and the Environment', *Development and Change*, 35 (1): 79-103 (2004), and Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Post-colonial Bombay*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.
- 2 Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2004.
- 3 Raja Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage: An Autobiography*, Viking, Delhi, 1991: 11.
- 4 Considerations of space prevent me from entering a fuller discussion of the issues contained within this choice of biographical origin stories. For an excellent analysis of the role that caste plays in the evolution of the Indian modern see M S S Pandian's 'One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and the Public Sphere', *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 4, 2002.
- 5 While there have been many recent works that have historicised the rise of the brahmin in southern society under colonial aegis, one of the clearer expositions remains Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
- 6 Recent works that make this connection explicitly include, but are not limited to, Sudipto Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1-39; Suhas Palshikar, 'Politics of India's Middle Classes', and Pawan Varma, 'Middle Class Values and the Creation of a Civil Society', both from Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Middle Class Values in India and Western Europe*, Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2001.
- 7 Such a patronising and pedagogic mode of nationalism, one that considers the population as an entity in need of education and awakening, is clearly outlined in Partha Chatterji's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986 and more recently in Benjamin Zachariah's, *Nehru: A Biography*, Routledge, 2004.
- 8 Ramanna is genuine in his praise for the intelligence and administrative acumen of Jagjivan Ram, while excoriating the arrogance and stupidity of someone like Sanjay Gandhi. Abdul Kalam, the current president of India, recalls Ramanna with fondness and gratitude for his support for the latter. In his memoirs, Ramanna talks of how all his children have married into communities other than Hebbar Iyengars and that fact does not seem too exercise him at all. It is critical to realise that these views of Ramanna are not contradictory to his more abstract positions on caste or religion – they can and do coexist as part of a uniquely post-colonial modernity that we are still trying to comprehend in all its tension. This is also important because one's intent here is not so much to demonise someone like Ramanna but rather to point out how representative he really is of our middle class.
- 9 Masud, *Dream Merchants, Politicians and Partition: Memoirs of an Indian Muslim*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1997: 14.
- 10 As far back as 1959, in a speech to a conference on population and family planning, the father of India's atomic programme and Ramanna's mentor, Homi Bhabha, suggested funding for research into a substance that would reduce the fertility of people by 30 per cent when mixed with rice. See Zia Mian, 'Homi Bhabha Killed a Crow' in Mian and Ashis Nandy (eds), *The Nuclear Debate: Ironies and Immoralities* (Fellowship in South Asian Alternatives, 1998): 17.
- 11 I take the phrase from the superb examination of the emergence of colonial