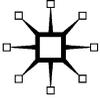


Egyptian-Indian Nationalist
Collaboration and the British Empire

EGYPTIAN-INDIAN NATIONALIST
COLLABORATION AND THE
BRITISH EMPIRE

NOOR-AIMAN I. KHAN

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In Memorium
Iftikhar Ahmad Khan (1924–1999),
Aiman Ikram Siddiqui (1939–1982),
and
Abdal-Ghaffar Abdal-Azeem (1939–2011)

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Preface

In the name of the one God, most compassionate, most merciful.

As this manuscript was being completed, the people of Egypt gathered in Tahrir Square and—miraculously—followed the Tunisians in dislodging their dictator. Even as I type these words, Muammar Gadhafi is slaughtering his disobedient subjects, who are still fighting—against enormous odds—for what they call freedom. And despite studying revolutions and revolutionaries for years, I too am overwhelmed by the courage and commitment of peoples so often treated as pawns in the games of empires, both political and economic. A cynic most of the time, I literally wept with joy many times in the past few months.

The one thing that struck me the most was the verbalization of *that thing* that describes the impulses of those I study, what it was that led the people about whom I write to risk so much. I thought it was “freedom,” a word that defies definitions and, yet, is seen as a universal good, even—perhaps most—by those who have never experienced it. Is that what so viscerally connects the masses of Tahrir to the revolutionaries of almost a century ago? No single cause can explain these events, but the parallels are striking. After all, it was not only economic deprivation that fueled the resistance, as both “my” revolutionaries and many of those on Al-Jazeera this month were middle to upper class, arguably safer in the status quo than in their imagined new world. It was not religion, as I have argued throughout this work. It was not a single understanding of nationalism that brought so many of different ideologies together, particularly as “love of the homeland” was a trope used extensively by their adversaries as well. But in just the past month I understood that it was another word that I was looking for: *dignity*.

Dignity: the people of Tahrir said it, in every interview, Facebook posting, and tweet, more clearly than any of the extensive documents, memoirs, and secondary sources that overflow off my table. Dignity, and the Dignity Revolution: this complicated word is universally recognized as

good—but not often used in discussions of nationalism, imperialism, or revolution. True, as a historian, I look for ideas and trends, shared human decisions that lead to action in the “real world”—a space that has grown exponentially since the era covered by this book. Usually those actions must be made by many, whether together or individually, to change the course of human events. And we know that deep emotions drive many of these actions: anger, pride, courage, and love, as well as greed, fear, hubris, and indeed hate. But this word—dignity—this word caught me as an epiphany, a word that explains so much of the material I study.

As I watched the crowds fill Tahrir Square, I was most moved by the cooperation and hope that was practically shimmering in the air. Egyptians were working together to create orderly triage tents for the sick and wounded, set up a recycling center (?), and even (gasp!) form queues. One video clip of young adults cleaning the streets brought me—and many others—to tears; the children of Egypt reclaiming their country with brooms and mops. When the population of Tahrir swelled rather than shrank after hundreds died on January 28, 2011, I remembered a moment recounted to me so many times that it almost feels like my own memory. It was the moment that my father saw a sign posted at the gate to some club in Allahabad or Lucknow, back in the days of the Raj. It said: “Dogs are forbidden. Natives may be admitted if accompanied by a Member.” He said that was when a lame village boy with a love for English literature became an Indian nationalist. I have come to think of that as my father’s “Tahrir Moment.” The impetus that drove people to challenge power structures, in India in the 1940s or Egypt in 1909, or 1919, or 2011, was an assertion of *presence*, a rejection of the limits that defined their world. It was not just about voting or money or “pride” in the nation. It was dignity, that basic sense of worth and opportunity, which was missing from the lives of so many both then and now—and reclaiming *ownership* of their lives was worth braving bullets and batons.

I knew this; of course, I knew this. The academic interests that led me to the study of history were informed by the belief that all humans have a story to tell, and that power as distributed among the species was a result of many choices and opportunities and not the result of some Grand Plan that made some smarter, stronger, better than others. My own conviction has always been that History, if it has a purpose, has been one of raising all people to a certain measure of equality and hope. However, I still did not recognize how central and how *productive* the human need for dignity is. To me, it was a result, perhaps even a proximate cause, of anticolonialism and nationalism. It was something that was desired by those who recognized that something in the way the world was run was unjust. It is only now, toward the end of my journey with this book, that I really understand

that it is the *soul* of what I study, the font from which the more “sophisticated” demands for political change spring. Economic, social, cultural, perhaps all history can be traced to humans seeking *dignity* in the contexts in which they live.

I share this discovery with some humility; it took more than ten years of working on nationalism and the other *isms* for me to realize something basic about the human soul. My psychologist friends are no doubt snickering at my enlightenment. But I do not think I am alone in having concentrated on *intellectual movements* and *nationalist trends* at the expense of remembering the thousands of daily indignities that fuel them. This need, like food and air, that humans have to feel respected and valued, is something that is often forgotten in the macroworlds of social science, despite being close to the hearts—I believe—of most social scientists. Many of us do recognize it in our own ways, in our work, in our teaching, in activism; however, few of us call direct attention to it in explaining the world we study. Maybe it will help fuel change if we recognize that the need for dignity *is* basic and *does* produce action—action that can shake, and hopefully remake, the world.

Hamilton, NY
July, 2011

Acknowledgments

If it takes a village to raise a child, it has taken a small metropolis to produce this book (and a tricontinental coalition to help me raise a child at the same time). My debt to others is immense, and I can never thank everyone who has helped me enough. I am sure to miss someone, and thus preemptively beg forgiveness for such an omission.

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I was lucky enough to work in archives and institutions truly dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of historical knowledge, including the National Archives of Egypt, India, and the United Kingdom as well as the Nehru Memorial Museum and Archives, the Cairo University Library, the University of Chicago Regenstein Library, and the Library of Congress. In particular, I wish to thank the staff of the Middle East collection at the Regenstein including Marlis Saleh, Mark Stein, and Muhannad Salhi. Also, special thanks go to the staff at Dar al-Watha'iq and the Periodicals Section of Dar al-Kutub in Cairo.

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Note on Transliterations

I have tried to keep transliterations and foreign terms as simple as possible; therefore, no diacritical or other marks have been used with the exception of an apostrophe (') to indicate an *ayn* or *hamza* in an Arabic word. I have also not transcribed the initial *al-* in Arabic words to indicate sun and moon letters; all are transcribed with an *l*. I have indicated a *shadda* or a strong vowel with a double letter but have not indicated the unpronounced *ta marbuta*. Thus, the words *umma* and *fataa* do not end with *h*, and the penultimate letter *alif* in *fataa* is indicated with a doubling of the *a*. I trust that those who know Arabic will be able to recognize the words, while those who do not will find the text easier to read.

For proper names I have tried to use the spelling preferred by the individual if possible. Where it is not, I use spellings approximating the pronunciation used by the individual. Thus, names such as 'Ali and Isma'il have an apostrophe to indicate the *ayn* for Arabic speakers but no apostrophe for Urdu/Hindi speakers who do not pronounce the *ayn*. (The major exception to this is for Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt, who probably called himself Mehmet.)