

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND ITS SELF-REPRESENTATION TO
THE COLONIAL STATE: TRACING A DISCURSIVE STRATEGY'S
REIFICATION FROM THE ARCHIVE TO THE SCHOLARLY ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Indian National Congress (INC) in the period prior to India's independence from Britain. Over the course of the pre-independence period, the British government in India tolerated the INC, with varying degrees of restrictiveness. Despite legal and societal changes in its ability to operate, the Congress displayed a remarkable degree of consistency in the type and content of its publications, with its central publications never ceasing to be produced.

The Congress's openness and transparency with regard to its publications constituted an implicit argument that it was a orderly and rational organization, fit to succeed the British Raj. This project is structured around a series of questions about the INC's discursive strategy: 1) What is the party accomplishing when it is representing itself to the colonial state? 2) Is the INC's self-representation strategic, and does it change as the organization's goals change? 3) How do the INC's pre-independence discursive relations with the colonial state shape the party's legitimacy in the transition to an independent India? The answers to these questions lead me to contend that the way the party represents itself through published sources forced the colonial Government of India to encounter the party on the party's own terms. Because this move on the part of the INC has become embedded in the archival record, it has shaped subsequent analyses of the INC. The analysis of the post-independence political context, therefore, benefits from an understanding of the ways that the INC's early self-representations are reified in the secondary literature about India's most historically prominent political party.

In contrast to traditional accounts of the Congress tend to focus on either its mass character or its elite leadership, I consider the Congress's relationship with the Colonial state. In my analysis of the ways that the INC's textual culture constituted its

self-representation, I contend that texts about and by the Congress became the foundation for a dialogic relationship with the colonial state which became embedded in the archive. This text-based dialogue has shaped subsequent scholarship on the Congress into a nationalist mode of analysis. By tracing the origins of dominant scholarly accounts of the INC to the organization's own dialogue with the colonial state, I argue that study of the INC is often segregated from potentially useful modes of historiographical or social scientific analysis.

Methodologically, I utilize a multi-disciplinary approach, arguing that both historical-institutionalist theory and discourse analysis are useful when studying this instance of the Congress's activity. I also argue that such an approach is vital when considering political organizations in the pre-independence period because of the way that these organizations defy definitions commonly used in the study of political entities in democratic states. I further argue that the study of pre-independence colonial politics should inform the study of contemporary democratic states since there exist analogous political organizations which do not fit easily within the contours of the nation-state unit of analysis.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Althea Rani Sircar received her M.A. in 2007 from Cornell University in the field of Asian Studies, where she concentrated in the study of South Asia. In 2005 she received an A.B. in Political Science, with concentrations in Comparative Politics and International Relations and a minor in Economics, from Duke University, where she was an Angier B. Duke Scholar. She is a native of North Carolina.

For Hena Sircar
and in loving memory of K.P. Sircar

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PREFACE

This project began with a very different question at its core. I was interested in learning whether the process of decolonization was instrumental in altering political parties' formal organization. I initially focused on long-standing political organizations in former British colonies, of which I took the Indian National Congress (INC) to be an important example. Once I embarked on the research process, I learned that the INC, as well as a few of the other parties I examined, entrenched their formal organizational structures early in their lifespan. Thus, there appeared to be a distinct lack of dynamism in the institutional evolution of a group like the INC, despite a great deal of volatility in its political-institutional environment.

While I still believe there are interesting questions to be answered with regard to anti-colonial political parties, my own research took a methodological turn. While delving into the archival record in India to gather data on the Indian National Congress, I was also fascinated by the way British government officials wrote about the INC in contemporaneous intra-departmental correspondence. It soon became clear to me that the ways that the British officials engaged with the INC's own publications in the decades before Indian independence were one aspect of a larger relationship between the Congress's representation of itself and the colonial state. This thesis examines the ways that this relationship became embedded in the archive and some of the ways that it is both reproduced and overlooked in the post-independence disciplines of political science and history.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Indian National Congress (or, INC) is often cited as an example of an early advocate for reforming British imperialism, as the party of Gandhi and Nehru which led India through a non-violent mass civil disobedience movement into democratic rule, and as an example of an exceptionally long-ruling party post-independence. All of these are important aspects of the history and political development of the Congress and of India, but they are not the subjects of this thesis. Rather, in this study I ask how these and other understandings of the Indian National Congress have become part of a generally understood character of the organization. I examine ways in which the pre-independence practices of the Congress have contributed to understandings of the Congress which persist in contemporary scholarly work. I theorize that early entrenchment of the Indian National Congress's self-representation in the resources through which it was understood by the colonial-era British government in India has been compounded through use and reuse of that era's archive to narrate the history of the INC. The Congress published information about itself prolifically and the British government continually engaged with and used these resources to conduct its contemporaneous analyses of the organization. The INC's self-publications thus were functionally strategic, since they were able to shape and influence the way they were perceived by the state and the public.

Because these publications and the British commentary on them now form a large part of the archival record of the pre-independence period, they are continually incorporated into new scholarship. However, much of this scholarship does not consider the actions that the INC took which facilitated the preservation of these texts into the archive. In addition, the physical archive itself is not a stable location. In the

years since the INC's founding, reorganization of British government ministries, the partition of the subcontinent, and the formation of various Indian states have all been occasions for shuffling of archival sources. Furthermore, some of the files containing self-published texts of the Congress and the official commentary on them have been lost. The archive is thus not a mere repository but a dynamic site for an active political process which began when the leaders of the newly established Indian National Congress sent the proceedings of their first annual conference to the Home Secretary, with their regards.¹

Understanding this process is important for both the discipline of history and the discipline of political science. I position my own project as a connection between history and political science, in order to contribute to the study of nascent political organizations under colonialism through a greater understanding of the implications of a methodological reliance on the colonial archive.

This project is structured around a series of questions about the INC's discursive practices: 1) What was the party accomplishing when it was representing itself to the colonial state? 2) What does the continuity and expansion of the INC's culture of publication explicate about its overall strategy? 3) How do the ways that the colonial government officials engaged with these documents exemplify the government's difficulties in countering the Congress's agenda?

The answers to these questions lead me to contend that the way the party represents itself through published sources forced the colonial Government of India to encounter the party on the party's own terms on many occasions. Because this move on the part of the INC has become embedded in the archival record, it has shaped subsequent analyses of the INC. The analysis of the post-independence political

¹ National Archives of India (NAI), Home Dept. (Public), 1886 – B. no. 38-40. Proceedings of the first Indian National Congress held at Bombay in Dec 1885.

context, therefore, benefits from an understanding of the ways that the INC's early self-representations are reified in the secondary literature about India's most historically prominent political party.

The problem with which I am wrestling here is, at its heart, a question about how to understand past political action using the intellectual apparatus of the present when that action takes place within and through categories which differ from those we now employ. Dipesh Chakrabarty's challenges to notions of epoch—and by extension genre or discipline—in his influential text *Provincializing Europe*, may provide some guidance here.² Chakrabarty's reading of Marx's historicism, namely his formulations of "History One" and "History Two," contribute to his argument that the historical record can and must be used to examine its own interstices. Thus, an examination of the Indian National Congress and its relationship to the colonial state must both consider problems of path dependency with regard to the particularities of the organization's development, but also with regard to how the various biases of earlier archival or scholarly sources are compounded in the secondary literature on the INC. The starting point of analysis in this process, as it concerns this project, is the colonial state archive. It is only by attempting to disentangle these mechanisms that scholars in political science and history can approach a fuller understanding of the relationship between the party and the state, and the legacies of the colonial experience.

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Accounts of the Indian National Congress prior to India's independence in 1947 are abundant, with both Indian and foreign scholars weighing in on its origins and development. A close examination of the many histories and political studies of the INC reveals elisions in the literature that reflect broader methodological issues in historiography and political science. These issues, which relate to the genealogy of source materials, questions of comparison and units of analysis, and the path dependency of institutional development, are not confined to studies of the Congress. However, in the specific ways I outline below, these methodological concerns are central to the way colonialism is analyzed, and thus come to bear on scholarly narratives of the transition from colonialism to contemporary politics in the Indian subcontinent.

Studies of colonial-era political organizations are facilitated by the existence of colonial archives, in addition to documents existing in private collections, libraries, or the repositories of the organizations themselves. In this project I consider some of the linkages between a colonial-era political organization and particular archival sites, in this case the Home Department of the colonial-era Government of India records, which are now held in the National Archives of India. These archives are composed of a portion of the British colonial government's administrative records of their time in the Indian subcontinent, as the bulk of the administration was divided between offices in London and India. Today, the records from the various offices have been transferred and divided multiple times, occasioned by both the partition of the subcontinent and the reorganization of the government of Britain in London.

The Congress as a political party

In a pre-independence milieu, a political party exists as an entity that must face-off against multiple audiences, most notably the colonial government and the polity. These divergent interlocutors thus dictate that parties must negotiate between presenting themselves as legitimate organizations in colonial civil society, while also framing their missions as anticipatory of future democratic independence. Parties' roles in transition are prominently featured in histories of decolonization. In many post-colonial states, the parties-in-power existed prior to independence in one form or another, and the key leaders of the independence movements often headed political parties.

But, the decolonization process was complex, and the post-independence party cannot be studied without reference to the pre-independence period. I argue in this project that this is due to the entrenchment of particular forms of knowledge about the political party, which constitute the data available to study its evolution and character.

Therefore, in order to rightly examine political parties within the pre-independence period, the theories of political parties which emerge from the discipline of political science are not sufficient, nor are accounts which center anti-colonialist civil society adequate to understand these organizations. The pre-independence political party is situated between many political scientific and historiographical theoretical models, and therefore this paper engages with both disciplinary spheres.

The example of the Congress Party in India prior to decolonization is not representative of the dominant modes of analysis of political parties in the field of political science. The study of political parties is focused most often within the theoretical framework of democratic states. Thus, party systems³, the place of parties

³ An excellent example of this mode is Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman, *The Formation of National Party System: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

in relation to other democratic institutions⁴, and the organization of parties as democratic institutions⁵ form the basis for most examinations of political parties. At the same time, there is a rich tradition of studying individual parties and their relation to the political environment of the democratic state in which they exist. Democracy is no less important as a theme in the case of an anti-colonial party such as the INC. As I discuss throughout, the significance of the Congress's infrastructure as exhibited in its textual culture is in part that it represents the potential for democracy. While many of its processes were semi-democratic, the INC is one location for democratic ideas in opposition to the colonial state.

There is scant theoretical work on parties under colonialism within the political science literature. In addition to the study of political parties in democratic systems, there are also many examples of studies of one-party, non-competitive situations. The Congress Party in colonial India does not fit well under this rubric, as colonial India's institutional structures appear to be incomparable with those of an independent nation-state, whether democratically competitive or not. Drawing from observations as to how colonialism as a method of rule shapes the institutional environment under which political parties emerge, what can we learn from the formal relationship between political parties and the colonial state? In the colonial context, the Indian National Congress is positioning itself strategically between the colonial state and alternative political associations or organizations. B. B. Misra's foundational study of the pre-independence party system in India⁶, probably the most thorough examination of the

⁴ See: Russel J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, eds., *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Comparative Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).; Kurt Richard Luther and Kris Deschouwer, eds., *Party Elites in Divided Societies: Political Parties in Consociational Democracy*, Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science (New York: Routledge, 1999).; and Ajay K. Mehra, D. D. Khanna, and Gert W. Kueck, eds., *Political Parties and Party Systems* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003).

⁵ For instance, Kay

⁶ B. B. Misra, *The Indian Political Parties: An Historical Analysis of Political Behavior up to 1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976).

colonial period, frames the organization of the Congress as a function of the larger societal context, with Gandhi's influence as central to the party's mass character. Here, I look not to the organization as it interacted with the masses, but in relation to the colonial state.

Misra's work also exemplifies a mode of historical analysis which emphasizes the details of political organizations' evolution as it relates to their ability to do political work. While there is much to be learned from analyses like these, one of the central difficulties of engaging with Misra's account of the Congress and other political organizations lies in its relation to the archive. The interdependencies of sources used in this thesis are inadequately theorized in both historiographical studies like Misra's and scholarship within the field of political science.

In Pursuit of Lakshmi, the work of Lloyd Rudolph and Suzanne Hoerber Rudolph on the development of the Indian State and its political environment, considers the Congress's transition from its early organizational days to the post-independence government along similar lines. Rudolph and Rudolph point to the INC's early organization by "anglicized regional elites,"⁷ the 1920s Gandhian reorganization "to a cadre-led mass organization based on regional language areas,"⁸ to the superior diffusion of the Congress into "India's regions, social formations, and to a lesser extent, producer groups."⁹ Their understanding of the INC centers on its ability to mobilize the population vis-à-vis the colonial government. Where they consider the relationship of the pre-independence Congress organization to the colonial state, they emphasize the formal political participation of the party in

⁷ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Suzanne Hoerber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 127.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 128.

elections and governance.¹⁰ Thus, there is space for this thesis to consider a less regulated aspect of interaction between the INC and the colonial state, namely the interaction around sources of information.

There is some space within the literature for an examination of political parties in colonial regimes, into which an examination of the Indian National Congress might fit. However, the extent to which the INC can be analyzed productively within the current political science framework is limited. Owing to factors similar to those which have shaped historians' arguments about the Congress, analyses of the INC are molded by the organization's initial textual characterizations of itself. At the same time, the strictures of the discipline of political science shape the study of political parties in a way that forestalls developing robust theories of political parties in non-democratic moments.

While the political science literature on political parties centers on political parties' place within constitutional frameworks such as the executive, the legislature, the electoral system, social science literature on organizations may be a better place to find space for political parties in non-democratic contexts. A standard definition of a political or economic organization comes from Douglass North, who writes that organizations are "purposive entities designed by their creators to maximize wealth, income, or other objectives defined by the opportunities afforded by the institutional structure of the society."¹¹ This definition implies an analysis of the INC which considers its strategic options and choices within the context of the colonial state, but risks leaving out the strong ideological underpinnings of much of the INC's activity. However, if we include in the INC's desires the intention to maximize the furtherance

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, ed. Thrainn Eggertsson and Randall Calvert, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73.

and achievement of their ideological goals, then North's definition of an organization provides a way to connect my study of the INC with the broader rational choice understanding of political organizations.

Given the presence of a nationalist ideology within the Congress, this broad definition of an organization foregrounds my analysis. It allows me to take for granted that the Congress and of the colonial state were purposive entities which aimed to maximize their objectives within the institutional structures of the society. What ultimately concerns me is how the INC's and the state's actions, as theorized in a rational-choice approach to formal institutions, constituted a textually embedded dialogue. In what were likely attempts to further and achieve their ideological goals, the INC created a textual culture which then became embedded in the colonial state's analytic practices, and eventually the colonial archive. The Congress's self-published texts and the government's engagement with these materials within its bureaucracy constituted a type of dialogic textual relationship. The creation of this dialogue and its implications for the colonial relationship and the study of politics are the subject of this thesis. I argue here that the textual relationship between the INC and the colonial state embodied a dialogue which itself constituted a constraining structure. Further, the embedding of this dialogue within the archive is itself an institutional feature which shapes the options and choices of scholars—and thus, of critical understandings of the political party within the disciplines of political science and history.

While scholars acknowledge parties' position as part of the democratic states' political-institutional environments and the ways that parties respond to their state-context, parties' positions as individual institutions interacting with the wider social arena are often overlooked. This is partly due to the fact that there exist few good theories of the characteristics of an essentially "democratic" institution--such as a political party--in a non-democratic institutional environment—such as colonialism.

Parties such as the INC can also be considered subsets of social movements, but the literature on social movements tends to deemphasize organizations' external relationships in favor of an emphasis on network analysis, strategy, and communication. Since this project is concerned with the INC's formal, textual orientation vis-à-vis the state, I focus less on the Congress as a movement or organization, but rather on how a small part of its identity, its textual culture, shaped its relationship with the colonial state.

Yet, alternatively, we might expect that the INC's role as representatives of democratic ideals to the colonial state might have led to the Congress self-consciously stating and embodying democratic practices in its internal organization. At the same time, the logics of anti-colonialism were not manifested in transparent ways in the party's formal organization or practical decision-making. However, paradoxically, a top-down, elite-driven, highly organized party structure allowed the Indian National Congress to pursue its decolonial goals and mass mobilization in efficient and effective ways.

The initial choices of the party's founders are important here. Shvetsova, among others, points out that the initial choice of institutions influences later actions by the initially powerful actors, in ways that may be binding or constricting.¹² As Pierson's institutional theory has it, "Designers seek to constrain themselves to solve the 'time inconsistency' problem" and to "bind their successors."¹³ In this project, the "time inconsistency" problem is not just a conscious feature of institutional founders, but comes to bound the relationship between the institution and the state.

¹² Olga Shvetsova, "Endogenous Selection of Institutions and Their Exogenous Effects," *Constitutional Political Economy* 14, no. 3 (2003).

¹³ Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 144-45.

My analysis centers on the formal representations by the party of itself, and by the state of the party's formal characteristics. The party displays many key features of an institution, exemplified by its reliance on formally reckoning itself in democratic terms. Yet, it is also clearly representing itself in a discursive mode in relation to the colonial state, which relies on the party's representation of itself for much of its intelligence regarding the activities of the party.

It is important to ask whether the Congress was indeed a political party. The answer is that it was not at first, but that over time it took on more features of a party. The simplest way to define political parties is as bodies that present candidates for election. For convenience, I refer to the Congress as a party throughout the paper, since my argument hinges on its eventual construction as a party and successor to the colonial government throughout pre-independence period.

Why question extant histories of Congress?

The problems I outline below in the existing work about the Congress are not limited to the study of politics in the Indian subcontinent. The divide is a more general one between those who study "colonial politics" and those who study "democratic institutions." There are not to date many examinations of colonial state politics as continuous with post-independence politics, particularly going back more than a few years prior to independence, in either the fields of history or political science. Some scholars are beginning to do so, but within the field of political science this is most likely to occur in studies of non-democratic, or partly democratic states. There are numerous questions which can be asked about the importance of political experiences prior to the existence of the current postcolonial states, questions which span both disciplines.

The Indian National Congress, as the oldest and longest-dominant current political party in India, has never fallen out of favor as a subject of scholarship. But, a

long history of representation in scholarly literature lends itself to the reification of certain narratives about the early years of the INC, while obscuring the role that the earliest representations of the organization play in helping to shape later analyses. Accounts of the INC have largely emphasized either the mass-mobilization of the Indian polity under the Gandhian Congress or the guidance of Indian elites towards a predominantly Nehruvian vision of the modern Indian state.

Further complicating the process of examining the INC under colonialism is its status as a subject which inherently crosses the contemporary disciplinary boundaries of political science and history. At the same time, even within the two disciplines, the INC eludes existing definitions of scholarship about the Indian subcontinent.

From the vantage point of the discipline of history, what might be termed “traditional” narratives of the INC origins do not always fall easily into the commonly noted historiographical modes of either “Orientalist,” “nationalist,” or “post-colonial” work. The majority of early works were written by either pro-Congress Indian scholars or in a strictly descriptive mode. These self-avowedly “objective” accounts dominate the pre-Independence scholarship, while analysis-centered work of the INC’s success begin to emerge in the 1950s. The lack of analytic weight in early works contributes to a simplified understanding of the pre-independence INC in later scholarship.

Within the political science literature, scholarship about the Indian National Congress exists in several spheres: not only in the work of US or Europe-based scholars of comparative politics, but also in work by Indian scholars located in India. The latter are increasingly in conversation with Western scholars but, particularly in the past, diverged methodologically. The best work by political scientists tends to

focus on the post-independence period.¹⁴ Myron Weiner's work on the Congress immediately following independence is an exemplar of regionally focused, post-independence scholarship¹⁵, while his study of multi-party politics focuses on the latter part of the pre-independence period, after the Congress' emergence¹⁶. Paul Brass's study of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh presents the post-independence politics with a slight reference to the pre-independence context in U.P., saying that the types of Congressmen valorized in U.P. prior to independence declined in relevance in the post-independence period.¹⁷ The disjuncture in political science between the pre- and post-independence periods may be traced to the dependence on the nation-state as unit of analysis in contemporary scholarship, which forestalls broad comparative attempts at comparing the pre-colony and post-colony. The pre-independence period is difficult to bring into broad comparative analyses, because of its often spatially dissimilar units.

While the pre-colonial period is typically the purview of historians, studies of the Indian National Congress do not obviously suit the logics of postcolonial historiography as exemplified in subaltern studies, for instance. The focus within the tradition of subaltern studies on non-elite historical subjects makes it apparent the difficulty of studying an organization such as the INC. But this does not imply that

¹⁴ See, for example, Zoya Hasan, ed., *Parties and Party Politics in India*, Themes in Politics (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).; for the work of both historians and political scientists see Partha Chatterjee, ed., *State and Politics in India*, Themes in Politics (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).. One noteworthy study is Stanley A. Kochanek, *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One-Party Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968).

¹⁵ Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

¹⁶ ———, *Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹⁷ Paul R. Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1965), 34-35.. Another example of the regional study in the post-independence period is Richard Sisson, *The Congress Party in Rajasthan: Political Integration and Institution-Building in an Indian State*, Publications of the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

the analytics of postcolonial theory can be neglected, since the INC's status as an anti-colonial organization is central to its history. To bring these two approaches into conversation with one another, attention must be paid to the party's elite origins, and to the importance of bureaucratic aspects of the study of the INC as an organization, by engaging with political science theory, while opening spaces for exploration of the colonizer/colonized relationship as it plays out in elite or formal contexts.

Gyanendra Pandey's study of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh¹⁸, based on his doctoral dissertation, merges the "history from above" and "history from below" perspectives in one regional context. Still, regionally focused work has often been less successful in examining the Congress elites' actions in conjunction with the state but rather in developing a narrative about the local aspects of the Congress and its mass-organization¹⁹, in works such as Srilata Chatterjee's on Bengal²⁰, Jim Masselos' on the

¹⁸ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: Class, Community, and Nation in Northern India, 1920-1940*, ed. Crispin Bates, Anthem South Asian Studies (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

¹⁹ It is important to acknowledge the inconsistent character of the INC organization's connections between the national and local groups, which can be observed throughout the secondary literature on the regional aspects of the party. Throughout the pre-independence period, the national character of the party did have a role in shaping the regional work, but the local leaders' also disagreed with the national consensus. As Srilata Chatterjee has discussed with regard to Bengal, the end of civil disobedience, with the eyes of party elites now divided in their focus, was the occasion for disagreements over the future course of the party's work in Bengal. As India was poised to experience provincial autonomy in 1935 the All-India Congress Committee pushed for "council entry", the contestation of elections at the local level. In Bengal, while one prominent political leader was in favor of Congress expansion as a parliamentary organization, Chatterjee writes that "most Congressmen were opposed to council entry. In the elections which followed the introduction of autonomy, it was not the Congress in Bengal, but the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), a Muslim splinter party which had been in existence for about 18 years. The KPP had included its intention to operate as a parliamentary party "in all governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, legislatures, municipalities and other institutions" from the first two years of its inception. While my primary research did not cover the KPP, Chatterjee observes that the KPP's determination to establish itself as a parliamentary party caused it to "orient its organization accordingly." His description of the history of the KPP reveals that it framed its goals formally, beginning at shadow meetings during the INC conferences and subsequently through their own conferences, dissemination their policy goals through publications. The KPP included former Muslim Congressmen who had been members of the legislative councils, whose institutional expertise must have made them ideally suited to start a new political party.

²⁰ Srilata Chatterjee, *Congress Politics in Bengal 1919-1939*, ed. Crispin Bates, Anthem South Asian Studies (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

Bombay Presidency²¹, and Partha Chatterjee's on Bengal²². When historians focus on elites, the emphasis is in a personalistic analysis, rather than on elite actions, as exemplified by J. H. Broomfield's study of Bengal, with its emphasis on the character of the "bhadrolok."²³

To begin at the temporal beginning would mean looking at accounts of the Indian National Congress at its inception. The most readily available of these mainly include the organization's own accounting of itself and the discussion of the organization in contemporary government archives, newspaper stories, or other texts. Because the INC was founded with the stated goal of *not* seeking an independent India, its early position as a political party can only be seen retrospectively. In the earliest days, one can either deem the INC a nascent political party or an organization which was not a party, but later developed into one. These typologies are fluid, however, especially when used in non-democratic or semi-democratic contexts. Thus, I follow Ware²⁴, who examines political parties under authoritarianism (although not colonialism as such) by asking questions that get at features of the party but which do not require a strict definition: "what is the role of party ideology? How are supporters and members recruited? What forms do party organization take?"²⁵ Defining the INC as a pre-party organization is appropriate only insofar as one considers the state of electoral procedure in India contemporaneously. That the organizational features of the INC allowed it to transition into party-like features with ease, and that the stated

²¹ See especially J. C. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India*. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974).

²² Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947*, vol. 1, CSSSC Monograph (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1984).

²³ J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

²⁴ Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

early goals of the INC were centrally concerned with greater involvement of Indians in governance are two arguments in favor of terming the early INC an organization with party-like views. Still, it is important to recall that in many ways the INC in its earliest incarnation appeared to deem itself more of a clearinghouse of ideas and a means to unite varied—but all Indian—interests. This is an argument in favor of applying a wider definition of organization to the young INC, which could be defined as a party, although one existing outside of a multi-party system.

Theoretically, one must approach these early histories with several things in mind. First, their status as “primary texts” means different things in different scholarly disciplines—and in different academic eras. Thus, the first task of this project will be to transparently and reflexively engage with the early histories it discusses. The second point at which these early histories require consideration is in the roles they play in other, later sources. The National Archives of India require the listing on a checklist of the names of each researcher who has requested a particular file, on the back cover. This sort of encounter underscores both the importance of these texts as the “immutable” sources of all later scholarship, but also their very interpretability.

It is important to consider that the sources on the INC in its early years were mainly produced by the group itself. While we cannot look retrospectively to impute a strategic awareness where there may have been none, it is clear from the archival record that the INC saw itself as a public organization, with a discursive relationship vis-à-vis the colonial government. Thus, INC had to keep several audiences in mind in its publication agenda. To begin, it was its own audience, with the central members of the organization publishing reports and summaries for consumption by regular members, and for the furtherance of the group’s agenda. This agenda included the recruitment of others within the Indian body politic (however that can be defined)

which translates to a need on the part of the INC to write with the wider public as one audience. Furthermore, the INC's evolving status as a source of anti-colonial energy included not only an Indian audience, but an international one. I do not seek to argue that the INC attempted to keep all these in view at all times in all texts, but that the continual negotiation of these various audiences helped shape the party's relationship with the colonial state in recognizable ways, and that they laid a foundation for the transition to independence and the post-colonial party. When juxtaposed against the party's organizational structure, we begin to see that the party is enacting multiple narratives about representation, democracy, and nationalism. The INC is acting like a party, like a legitimate national actor, before it becomes one.

The publication of resources about the party thus becomes a way of embedding definitions of the party in India's political discourse. It is able to define itself to the state, to itself, through publication and through its organizational structure.

As I frame the secondary scholarship on the Indian National Congress of the pre-independence period, I use the terms "analytic history" and "narrative history" as rough designations of the types of political-historical literature. An "analytic history" is, for me, one which has as one of its central goals the production of an analysis or interpretation of the INC's history and development. A "narrative history," on the other hand, is concerned with producing and re-producing a sequence of events, often with a self-avowed goal of "objectivity." The terms "analytic" or "narrative" are not able to capture all of the niceties which distinguish the sources at hand. But they do capture those elements of the pre-independence scholarship which influence the type and scope of arguments that can be made by using those sources.

An example of a careful, decorous history would be Dr. N. V. Rajkumar's history of the Congress Constitution.²⁶ Rajkumar, for a time the Congress Foreign Secretary, writes tellingly of the 1907-1908 amendments as precipitated by the secessions at the Surat meeting of the Congress in December 1907. It was in 1908 that Congress amended the 1899-1900 Constitution to include more extensive rules for its internal conduct and regulation. Rajkumar clearly wishes to emphasize orderliness and rationality in his account of the events proceeded following what he calls the "unfortunate" incident. What is clear from his narrative is that the sequence captured in his eyes a moment when the Congress's elite were able to marshal the support of most of the ordinary members of the party and civilly redeem a situation caused by a few hot-heads. Histories such as Rajkumar's constitute a large majority of the available material on the Indian National Congress, but their place as nationalist and official Congress sources continues to shape the post-colonial political science and historiography of the Congress.

Rajkumar's work is a post-independence text, but there are also histories of the Congress which were written pre-independence. Typical of accounts from the pre-independence period are works like P.C. Ghosh's history of the Indian National Congress from 1892-1909²⁷, which serves later in this project as a useful source for some details of the period, as it provides numerous examples of state-congress interaction in the decades it covers. Ghosh's work tends to focus on the movement from young political organization to wide-ranging advocate for independence

²⁶ N. V. Rajkumar, *Development of the Congress Constitution* (New Delhi: All-India Congress Committee, 1949).

²⁷ Pansy Chaya Ghosh, *The Development of the Indian National Congress: 1892-1909* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960).

undergone by the Congress as driven by elites in a type of negotiating dance with the British.

In later historiography we see a shift from this type of elite back-and-forth narrative, that between the INC leadership and colonial British elites. Once the Swadeshi movement was underway, mass-independence-motivations began to hold sway as explicator in the historiography.

One connection between my project and a larger understanding of the disjuncture between political science and historiography of the Congress Party is the status of political analyses of the Congress published pre-1947 as which function today as types of archival texts. One example of these would be a work by William I. Hull, a professor of International Relations at Swarthmore College, published in 1930, on “India’s Political Crisis of 1929.”²⁸ Hull’s work is the sort of narrative which focuses on the elite actions of the Congress working committee, and other leaders’ organizing during the years 1928-1929.

Similarly, an account like B. B. Majumdar’s of the “origin and development of public life in India with special reference to the growth of political associations in the period before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi...”²⁹ is framed by the author as a corrective to others which might place ultimate credit for colonial institutional change on reform-minded British officials. Ultimately concomitant with a nationalist narrative, works like these are notable for being written with access to some of the actors of the periods in question, and with their sense of being groundbreaking.

This thesis draws on both the extant secondary studies of the Congress and archival resources to examine this relationship. The archives of the Government of

²⁸ William I. Hull, *India's Political Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930), v.

²⁹ Bimanbehari Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature (1818-1917)* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965), i.

India, as well as contemporary newspaper accounts are representative of the government's information about the party's workings. Choices by the government regarding inclusion of information about the party, internal notes on the problems presented by the existence of the party and its workings, and efforts taken by the party to represent itself as a particular kind of organization shed light on the recursive interactions between the colonial state and the party. The concern of the state with determining the "reality" of the Congress's organization versus its self-representation seems to reveal the importance of this self-representation in the strategic repertoire of the anti-colonial movement.

CHAPTER 3

CONGRESS SELF-REPRESENTATION AND GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY

From its birth, the Indian National Congress (INC) asserted both explicitly and implicitly its right to speak for itself and for India. Through its self-publication of texts explaining its structure, rationale, and goals, it perpetuated a dialogic relationship with the colonial state. Although these texts were avowedly aimed at its base, the Congress initiated and facilitated the government's incorporation of the Congress's texts into the colonial archive, whereby the state's analysis of the Congress operation became one of the locations for negotiating the competing claims of Indian nationalism and British imperial interests. During the pre-independence period, these texts created a background predicated on Congress's authority to present legitimate data. By disseminating textual representations of itself, the Congress materially increased information about the types and reach of claims to Indian autonomy available in the relationship between the INC and the colonial state, and the government's broad acceptance of the INC's publications conferred on the INC a particular kind of authority to speak for the polity.

The INC's inception as a political organization at the end of the nineteenth century came at a time during which many Indian elites had participated in the British bureaucracy and legislature, as well as in a rich array of voluntary associations. The founders of the INC drew from diverse sources, including liberalism, to espouse political organization, debate and discussion, and the expansion of Indian civil rights.

Much has been written about the ideological orientations of the INC and about the charisma and drive of its leaders.³⁰ Rather than reiterating those aspects of the

³⁰ See, for example: B. N. Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nationalist Movement, 1885-1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).; Jim Masselos, ed., *Struggling and Ruling: The Indian National Congress 1885-1985* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1987).; and Richard Sisson and

INC, I focus here on the INC's decision to print and circulate its proceedings and resolutions within the subcontinent, and to submit these official publications to the British government. These publications have not been given much attention in the literature on the INC, since the practice of publication seems on the face of things to be both an obviously useful custom and subsidiary to the INC's overall goals. While I do not argue that these publications were causally determinative in the process of India's gaining independence from Britain, I contend that the self-publication of texts relating to the INC's organizational structure and agenda achieved multiple results in their initial publication, and that understanding the functions of these texts helps us to better theorize the relationship between the colonial state and the anti-colonial organization.

The primary function of the INC's texts was the dissemination of factual information about the INC to its own membership and potential membership, in order to solidify its base and foster organizational growth. This aim had a secondary result of presenting the Congress as an ideologically transparent organization to both the polity and to the colonial state. As such, the INC was able to position itself as a repository of democratic ideals, even if imperfectly so. Furthermore, at a time when it was much more difficult to spread information at a national level, the Congress was able to control the story being told about it. Thus, aspects of the Congress apparatus that were less than perfectly democratic may still have been presented as such in its publications, since a published account of a working committee meeting might outline the idealistic-sounding final decision but not the acrimonious factional debate. The following analysis gives some examples of instances in which the colonial state officials were fearful of just this: that the Congress's self-representation was rose-

Stanley Wolpert, eds., *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

tinted, thereby misleading the gullible populace. Yet, what is equally striking about the archival record is the extent to which the Congress did “own up” to its failures or internal divisions. It can reasonably be claimed that the INC was not strictly publishing as a means of propagandizing, but that transparency, efficiency, and internal democracy were among its desired ends.

Early entrenchment of legitimacy

From the first annual meeting of the INC, which took place at Bombay in December of 1885, the organization published the proceedings and circulated them to the members of the congress, as well as to the Home department and other official recipients in India and the UK.³¹ The proceedings are incorporated into the colonial archive as information about a new political organization. The INC’s move to draw the attention of the state from its first moment fits with its stated goals of highlighting within the public sphere questions about Indian rights.

At each annual Congress conference, a year’s worth of deliberation and planning were articulated for the general body. The results of the conferences were then re-enacted textually through published reports, initially in newspapers, and subsequently through publications by the Congress. The INC continuously made provisions to publicize and disseminate its proceedings, which became increasingly specific as to its political aims. By the 1890 meetings the group’s goal was to propose schemes for elections to the legislative councils, with the introduction of a majority of locally elected officers. The suffrage goals were relatively broad, the electorate to be comprised of male British subjects over the age of 21, with the representation proportional by "Parsees, Christians, Mahomedans or Hindus" when they are in the minority.³² The primary stated purpose of the organization in this early period was to

³¹ National Archives of India (hereafter, NAI), Home Dept. (Public), Dec. 1886, no. 38-40.

³² NAI, Home Dept. (Public), Jan. 1890, no. 272-275, p. 7.

articulate the demands of the subjects, increase civil liberties in various capacities, such as trial by jury, separation of executive and legislative functions, relief from income and salt tax, provision for training of Indian military officers, and local administration of civil service examinations.

The proposals which related to the electorate and legislative councils exemplify the INC strategy at this point. By drawing a proposal to expand the electorate, the INC joined the international debate over suffrage, including that of Great Britain proper, whose electorate was notoriously circumscribed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, the attention given to proportionality of minority group representation contributed to the INC's claims to speak for all Indians, even though its composition included few from these populations.

In that same year, the INC also set up a Subjects Committee to consider the details of its proposed electoral plan by “[settling] the questions of the qualifications and disqualifications for the voters, representatives, members of provincial legislative council, members of the imperial legislative council.”³³ This move served to shift the INC's from being a group which primarily advocated policy changes to one which created institutional structures within which it debated and deliberated. It was thus able to position itself as a group that investigated and resolved policy questions, justifying its demands through the marshalling of evidence and by demonstrating that it was a deliberative body in its own right.

Although at this juncture the INC was not operating as a political party, the organization's clear interest in resolving the technical issues of voting and candidate qualifications opened spaces for the consideration of political procedure. The INC also resolved at the 1890 conference “that the tentative rules for the constitution and

³³ Ibid.

working of the Congress which were first considered at Madras, and in regard to which various addenda have from time to time been circulated, be thoroughly considered during the coming year by the several Standing Congress Committees, and definitely dealt with by the Congress at its next session."³⁴ The consideration of the organization's constitution and rules would only become more intense in later years. Monies were allocated and a system of audit was begun, with standing committees required to send in reports on use of funds. Congress leaders' concern with the mechanics of the organization's internal political activity mirrored their concern with the composition of the electorate, and reinforced implicit claims to the INC's authority on citizenship and praxis. These claims laid the foundation for the dialogic relationship with the colonial state. As the INC's rationalized organization and fostering of a particular form of textual transparency took hold, the government would, over the next several decades, begin to enact in its analysis and examination of the Congress a complex relationship with measures of both respect and threat.

Expansion and Continuity in Organization and Publication

The early norms of self-publication and articulation of goals regarding to the mechanics of political life took hold in the INC-State relationship while the organization was still quite small. In 1920s the INC organization underwent a period of institutional clarification and expansion. With Mohandas Gandhi's entrance into the Congress leadership, there was a massive reorganization of the INC and its stated political goals shifted.

It is at this point in the usual narratives of the INC history that the party is presented as beginning to take on a mass character, morphing into the familiar *swadeshi*-based organization. As with all major policy decisions, the *swadeshi* goals

³⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

appeared in the Congress publications. British officials could observe connections between Gandhi's desires for support of home industries and the potential expansion of the Congress organization. When, in 1925, the AICC proposed an extension of the Congress franchise (voting members) to all those "who can pay 4 annas per year or 2000 yards of evenly spun yarn," there was also a provision requiring the wearing of khaddar cloth to all Congress or political functions as an alternative.³⁵ By requiring for membership a visible marker of adherence to *swadeshi* aims, the INC shifted the register of party discourse from solely legal sounding resolutions to policies that dictated more of members' actions. The changing language of the resolutions within the INC's published reports do demonstrate that the party began to acquire a mass character, but at this juncture the party's goals were more complex than is often revealed in considerations of the nationalist movement as either mass-based or elite-dominated.

Even as the organization's membership became more diffuse and diverse, continuity in the INC's textual culture contributed to the ongoing dialogic relationship between the Congress and the colonial state. Indeed, there was a striking continuity in the Congress' efforts with regard to self-publication of proceedings. At the same time, the INC began to generate more types of publications, while adding layers to its organizational structures and entrenching itself in more areas of the subcontinent. The expansion of types of publications, such as the publication of reports by the general secretaries and of working committee resolutions, broadened the varieties of information that the Congress made available to its base and to the government. While the resolutions taken at the annual conferences tended to contain high rhetoric and sweeping goals, the resolutions at working committee meetings and the reports by

³⁵ These proposed changes were approved at the Cawnpore Congress later that year: "Report of the General Secretaries, All-India Congress Committee, 1925," (New Delhi, India: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1926).

the general secretaries were diagnostic in nature. Thus, they dealt more with the failures of the INC. As the congress sought to expand its mass base, this took the form of acknowledging that the espousal of expansion or shifting to mass politics did not necessarily indicate that the party machinery was well-oiled. The annual report of the general secretary in 1925 noted that “most of the provincial committees have not been working properly and few have sent annual reports. It does not appear in most instances what, if any, collections were made by the provinces; probably little money was collected by them.”³⁶

The willingness of the INC to openly state its weaknesses added to its dialogic relationship with the colonial state in a particularly interesting way. By creating an ethos of openness and transparency, the INC diminished the need for the state to investigate its activities. It is, however, important to reiterate here that neither the INC nor the colonial state enacted a single viewpoint during the course of the Indian nationalist period. The Congress’s self-representation as a transparent political organization necessitated the creation of numerous texts, with some of the information contained therein being threatening to the government and some of it serving to reassure the government.

The state responded in contradictory ways to information Congress provided about itself. At some moments it reiterates the Congress’s claims to being the premier political organization in India, possessing both a base and reputation which contributed to its ongoing health. In one letter to the under secretary of state, a Home Department official wrote that among the colony’s “principal political gatherings, “the Congress still holds indubitably the first place, both in respect of the numbers attending and in the prestige that attaches to its name.”³⁷ But, while the government

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1927, F. 6/1927

acknowledged the Congress' abilities, it could still view the INC as a threat, and thus at certain moments departed from its usual position of tolerance with respect to the organization. In 1931, for instance, the Political branch of the Home department attempted to stop the Congress Conference in Karachi, although at this juncture annual conferences had been occurring for over 40 years.³⁸ This effort ultimately fell through. That this attempt occurred and was debated within the Home department points to the dynamism of the relationship between the INC and the state. As the INC's annual resolutions made more explicit demands regarding self-rule for India, more evidence of government interest in the INC appeared outside of what the INC published itself. This coincided with changes in the legality of the Congress in the eyes of the state. The government's distrust preceded the outlawing of the Working Committee, but in light of the radical nature of the claims being made by the Congress, it is telling that their transparency continued, although the government often distrusted the norm of transparency in the Congress.

Government unease at institutional challenges to the state

As the INC became more explicitly nationalist, more evidence appears in the archive of the government not taking the Congress's self-publication at its word, with the expected accompanying increases in secret intelligence surveillance.

The early part of the 1930s saw the Congress attempting to set up parallel institutions, which was viewed by the Home department as a challenge to the British colonial government. These village *panchayat* style arbitration courts³⁹ were not typical activities for a political party to pursue, although for a village to have internal

³⁸ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1931, F. 122/1931

³⁹ local, village council level assemblies.

mechanisms for mediation of civil disputes was not uncommon, and indeed constituted one tenet of a Gandhian understanding of Indian life.⁴⁰

Despite fears on the part of the government that these institutions would spread, INC-sponsored courts were instituted in a localized fashion. Lack of systemization was probably reflective of both the INC's inability to create widespread institutions, but also local fears of imprisonment by the government. At the same time, these courts arose in response to Gandhi's endorsement of resolution of civil disputes at the village level, as they dovetailed with his philosophy of a village-based Indian society.⁴¹ The government did take measures to deal with a particularly visible court which had been set up in the Midnapore District of Bengal.⁴²

Although the government had intercepted INC correspondence in the past, the most frequent instances of interception were of letters between the Working Committee and the lower levels of the organization. Although the Congress had not yet been declared illegal, the government had become increasingly uneasy about its various organizational plans, particularly those which could simultaneously challenge its ability to monitor the INC and challenge the state's supremacy as the only legitimate governing entity.

Knowledge of government surveillance appears to be what prompted a proposal for a Congress postal system in 1930.⁴³ This proposal seems to have exercised the government officials more than the Congress itself, although it is likely that the INC used couriers wherever interception was particularly undesirable.⁴⁴ The

⁴⁰ See: M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ Gandhi did not advocate local arbitration in criminal cases, but this also was occurring in the courts.

⁴² NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1931, F. 14/8/31

⁴³ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1930, no. 409, 1930

⁴⁴ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1930, F. 21/18/30

postal system question encapsulates the government's dilemma vis-à-vis the INC in several crucial ways. Although the government's internal debate, at least in its written form, considered the matter with regard to how it would affect the gathering of intelligence, it is also important to consider in retrospect that the Royal postal system was a matter of pride for the colonial government, and that for the latter to tolerate institutions which threatened its monopoly on both postal revenue and legitimate infrastructure would have been astonishing. Of course, the government did not take these attempts lightly, and the INC backed off of the proposal to create its own postal system.

But the government had a continuing dilemma with regard to the Congress, which was magnified by the INC's position within the contours and infrastructure of ordinary daily life in British India. In at least one instance the Working Committee members insured letters sent via the postal service, justifying the expense because of the frequency with which their letters were being lost. Of course, the lost letters were precisely the intercepted ones, including those which were subsequently insured. The problem of insurance prompted an inter-departmental debate within the government as to whether "we" needed to pay the requisite amounts, as they did not like for members of the Congress to know that their correspondence had been intercepted.⁴⁵ The Congress, of course, while incapable of ascertaining that its letters had been intercepted, could have used couriers, of which the government was cognizant. The Communist Party of India, after all, relied almost solely on a courier-based communication system, necessitated by its outlaw status. Yet, even in the face of the arrest of its key members, the INC continued its course of self-publication, annual conferences, committee meetings, and recruitment.

⁴⁵ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1930, F. 21/18/30.

Congress self-representation and recruitment

As the threat of the INC's developing parallel institutional structures became evident to the state bureaucracy, monitoring of the INC's organizational structure by the Home Department increased. For it was not just the institutional proposals outlined above which worried the government, but the prevalence of militias and volunteer organizations which were seen as a looming threat.⁴⁶ As the Congress was declared illegal, the 1930s became a particularly challenging period; many leaders were jailed and its activities were scrutinized. The Congress did not move underground, however, but continued to create the same publications and reports it had as a legal organization. Its published representation of itself thus began to accommodate the detention of its leaders. While the Congress may have experienced internal doubts or strife over the government's actions, it presented itself as an efficient and enduring organization. Procedurally, this was done by senior leadership accommodating the imprisonment by leaving senior detainees in their official party posts, while also providing for replacement leaders who held leadership positions in the interim. In the case of Jawaharlal Nehru, his position on the Working Committee as General Secretary in 1934 was held by K. F. Nariman.⁴⁷

Congress's formal textual actions at this time reveal that the organization was not merely reacting to the government's repression, but making substantive moves to articulate its position. The *swadeshi* resolutions are, of course, a part of this, but more subtle moves also inscribed the textual record with evidence that the INC attempted to present itself as a representative body while negotiating with its various internal factions.

⁴⁶ The Congress had begun a strong push for widespread volunteer corps in the 1920s. (see: NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1922, F. 155-1922, p. 49.) For more on Parallel military and volunteer militia organizations during wartime, see NAI, Home Dept. (Political – I), 1947, F. 28/5/47.

⁴⁷ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1934, F. 3/15; Secret, p. 8.

The composition of the working committee at this juncture embodied Congress's attempts to consolidate the diverse interests and organizations which existed concurrently under its umbrella. In 1934, the committee included those who were explicitly marked as representatives of the Congress Socialists, Nationalist Moslems, All-India Spinners' Association, and *ex-officio* members of the Congress Parliamentary Board.⁴⁸ These were not by any means the entirety of the factions within the INC, nor were the other factions toothless or docile. One cadre of communist members of the party showed vividly their reaction to being excluded when they stormed the meeting location on the first day of the same conference which demarcated the working committee as described above.⁴⁹

For the Congress, then, the uninterrupted publication of its resolutions, meeting agenda, and more explicit propaganda contributed to an image of the organization as legitimate and lasting. But additionally, with regard to publication, the Congress leadership had to keep in view their own membership. There are some signs that navigating the various purposes of something as visible as the AICC-sponsored resolutions was difficult for the Congress. In a 1934 letter to Mohandas Gandhi which was intercepted and analyzed by the Home department's political branch, Jawaharlal Nehru made a comment regarding the organization of the Congress which encapsulates the philosophy behind its top-down character. Nehru expressed concern over what he saw as the "triumph" of opportunism through the Congress, but placed the responsibility on the Congress Working Committee. He wrote,

It is the leaders and their policy that shapes the activities of the followers. It is neither fair nor just to throw the blame on the followers. Every language has some saying about the workman blaming his tools. The committee has deliberately encouraged vagueness in the definition of our ideals and objectives and this is found to lead not only to

⁴⁸ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1934, F. 3/11/34, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5.

confusion but to demoralization during periods of reaction, and to the emergence of the demagogue and the reactionary.⁵⁰

For the government, this sort of self-doubt served as evidence that the Congress is faltering, failing in its mission, and struggling to move forward. But it is also apparent from Nehru's comments that he viewed the precision or lack thereof with which the Working Committee formulated its policies as centrally relevant to the INC's organizational outcomes.

Letters such as the one quoted above were did give the government textual evidence of the Congress's aims and ambitions that went beyond what the INC published, but these were the exception among the efforts that the state made to gather intelligence data on the organization. The archival record shows that there were efforts throughout this period to gain accurate information regarding the Congress strategy and organization through the use of informants. But in many cases, these reports added little to what the INC itself released to the press or made readily available by publication. This is striking in the archive, as press clippings appear in the same files as intelligence reports from secret agents.

If there is anything startling about these reports, it is the extent to which they provide information which contributes to the Congress's appearance of being functional and strategic in many of its high-level deliberations. The report of one such informant, regarding Congress meetings in October of 1934, illustrates Congress's emphasis on ensuring that the qualifications for membership in the party solidified the swadeshi goals. (At this juncture, Gandhi was pushing for strict requirements of a certain amount of hand-spun yarn.)⁵¹ At these same meetings, the specifics for the working of Congress' internal Parliamentary Board were debated and determined.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵¹ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1934, F. 3/15; Secret, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid.

Congress's published reports may have aided the British intelligence corps' analysis of the group, but they also provided a means for growth of membership along a wide swath of the public. The Congress was growing, and one focus of the Home department during this period of civil disobedience was on the gathering of accurate information on the Congress Party's growth. Even in the moment, it was apparent to the government officers themselves that intelligence field reports of raw membership numbers were highly inaccurate, yet they did not refrain from offering analysis and interpretation based on the faulty numbers.

At the same time, the obvious problems with the numerical counts of Congress membership were a source of anxiety to the government officers. While they relied on information which the Congress or informants provided about membership for their own analysis, they were also preoccupied with whether false claims on the part of the INC constituted deception of the populace. Internal debates in the Political branch of the Home department show that some government officials were concerned that the Congress was presenting itself as more "fair" than it actually was.

In one discussion of the Congress's use of "whips", which were sent around to drum up support, one political officer wrote that "in some instances a rich man has put down a sum of money to cover the enlistment fee of many men who otherwise would not join; many of these are believed to be in ignorance of their own enlistment."⁵³ But later in the analysis of the government's INC membership figures the same officer shows that he does believe that the Congress's base is strong:

Personally, I do not attach much weight to some of the figures in the attached list. A total of only 7,100 for the United Provinces is absurd and I have little doubt that the U.P. figures will eventually be found to be at least six times those of the Punjab. We may expect a final total, I think, of at least 400,000, probably more.⁵⁴

⁵³ NAI, Home Dept. (Political) F. 21/8/A/1935, p. 2

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Whether he had a sense of the Congress's strength in U.P. which emerged from his own knowledge or from the Congress's propaganda, the political officer's challenge to the government's own data does indicate that the government was not merely relying on information that it could gather "on its own." The ready availability of textual INC sources and newspaper reports thus served as a baseline of information about the Congress, which if not taken as gospel truth by the Home department, may have functioned as a check or baseline for analysis.

But even with the information at its disposal—and with the input of political officers who seemed inclined to take Congress' membership seriously—some Home department officials' on-the-record analysis shows a misreading of the Congress' organizational structure as revealed by its published constitution. For instance, one set of comments in the Home department about an article in the *Bombay Chronicle* dated 23 October 1935, regarding Bombay's delegates for the Lucknow Congress exhibits a remarkable preoccupation with the INC's mechanisms for internal democracy.⁵⁵ In response to a query regarding the number of delegates per members, the bureau determined by working from the published Congress membership counts that there was 1 delegate for every 545 members, while stating that the new constitution of the party only provided for 1 delegate for every 500 members, and characterizing the congress recruitment as having not cheated "as much as I thought they would have."⁵⁶ The constitution actually revealed that the Congress' formula was complex, as well as providing for the Working Committee to juggle the proportions a bit, in order to allow appropriate representation from Urban and Rural areas.)⁵⁷ This close parsing of the

⁵⁵ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1935, F. 21/8/A/1935, p 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ NAI, Home Dept. (Political), 1934, Constitution of the Indian National Congress, as amended at the Bombay Congress, 1934.

Congress' actions seems rooted in a departmental urge to find points on which the Congress might be discredited on its own terms, but there is no evidence in the political branch's record of this time that this strategy has much traction.

The archival evidence at this juncture also illustrates ways in which the party's savvy recruitment and internal representation allowed it to act in a goal-oriented way, which contrasts with the Political Branch officers' references to the Congress leaders "cheating" in recruitment figures. The constitution's embedded flexibility allowed the party to overcome information gaps and logistical issues. It is clear from our vantage point that since accurate numbers were difficult to obtain then as now, the party's ability to embed flexibility in the constitution allowed its meetings and recruitment to move forward. This flexibility allowed its internal governance structures to continue to operate uninterrupted, with the solidification of the organization as the result. At the same time, the persistent top-down nature of decision-making, with motions emerging in the AICC or the Working Committee and then being gradually ratified by the entire membership on a yearly basis meant that the intricacies and logistical niceties required to incorporate new members into the vast organization did not interrupt the long-term goals of the Congress leaders. It was, ultimately, these leaders who were shaping the Congress's relationship with the colonial state in a dialogic way. By persistently framing the Congress's internal organization and operating mechanisms in ways that emphasized their bureaucratic logic, continuity, and rationality, the Congress created a set of texts which functioned as primary sources for the Government's understanding of the movement.

Seen in this light, the government official who critiqued the Congress's delegate counting machinations appears more prescient. His objections to the Congress' enactment of democratic ideals played, perhaps unwittingly, into a dialogue about whether the Congress could constitute a faithful guardian of an independent,

democratic India. As the INC was continuously presenting itself as a rationalized, competently democratic organization, it was the presence of that organization, the everyday realities of it, which stood as a visible counterpart to the government. Those aspects of the Congress organization which explicitly performed or previewed state-like functions were the ones which threatened the government. The anxiety of the government officers with regard to the Congress's institutions and constitutional provisions for elections points to there having been a sense of this threat. But it is the initial incorporation of these Congress texts into the government's analysis and archival procedure which prompted the dialogue over the Congress's legitimacy, and which in turn continues to structure understandings of the Congress in historical perspective. By biasing the sorts of analysis which took place within the colonial government towards procedure or bureaucratic concerns, the INC instituted a particular notion of its legitimacy which shapes its history as a national organization and precursor to the Nehruvian state in contemporary accounts. At the same time, it may be argued that the Congress was only entering into an existing notion of legitimacy, one which presupposed a certain bureaucratic rationalism. But the existence of the extant notions of institutional rationality were not a sufficient condition for the early and persistent textual culture created by the INC. The Congress organization's self-figuration instituted and shaped the way its history was narrated, from the earliest inclusion of its texts into the British analysis and archive project, to the histories of the party which have been written since. By continually re-enacting a textual conversation with the state, the Congress influenced how its future history would be written. This occurs, as the earlier part of this project shows, not through accounts of the Congress' actions as textual, but through accounts which emphasize its leadership and its presentation of notions of *swaraj*.⁵⁸ It is precisely these figures that

⁵⁸ *Swaraj* means self-rule, particularly as outlined by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.

rose to the surface in the Congress's publications, and which influence the theoretical understanding of the Congress today, not merely scholarly accounts of its chronology.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The observation that the archiving of Congress publications and their subsequent use is rarely discussed in either history or political science monographs was the starting point for this paper's study of the Indian National Congress and its relationship with the colonial British government in India. I have contended that this relationship was constituted in part by an ongoing dialogue which was instituted through the Congress' textual culture, and was subsequently re-enacted, expanded, and embedded within the colonial state through its intra-departmental correspondence and eventual inclusion into the colonial archive. Understanding this process is helpful for both disciplines in question, since they are not only reliant on these embedded accounts, they are also reliant on one another.

At the beginning of this thesis, I laid out three key questions about the INC's discursive practices: 1) What was the party accomplishing when it was representing itself to the colonial state? 2) What does the continuity and expansion of the INC's culture of publication explicate about its overall strategy? 3) How do the ways that the colonial government officials engaged with these documents exemplify the government's difficulties in countering the Congress's agenda?

The examination in this thesis of the dialogic relationship between the INC and the colonial state adds to our understanding of how political organizations' texts can serve as an important means of enacting and furthering a purposive movement, in this case against the colonial state, but with possible extension to other anti-governmental movements. I have pointed toward several instances of how the Congress's culture of self-publication and purported transparency contributed to its status as an influential anti-colonial organization and helped solidify its position as a likely successor to the

colonial state. The Congress was consistent in expanding its publication record since this fulfilled its stated goals of reaching the Indian polity, and also created an implicit argument against the colonial state. The government's varying attitudes toward the INC publications, on the other hand, reflect the overall difficulties that the colonial state faced in seeking to uphold both liberalism and its own power structures.

Earlier in this project, I discussed some of the tendencies of scholars writing about the Indian National Congress. There is the tendency of historiographers to examine Congress history in sometimes elite, sometimes mass-driven narratives and the ways that social scientists focus on the post-Independence party, rather than on the political dynamics of the anti-colonial organization. My analysis of the importance of the texts contained within the archival record has implications for understanding the Congress's pre-Independence strategy and for developing new ways of creating narrative accounts of an de-colonial organization like the INC.

Within the colonial context, the INC as a political organization, through its ongoing re-enactment of a textual transparency posed an implicit challenge to the extant political culture, a culture which had its origins in the notion that the British were the primary governors of the local Indians. Rather than the particularly British pattern of expanding civil rights throughout the polity gradually, the INC was concerned both rhetorically and institutionally with openness of membership. This was a primary institutional value for the INC, in contrast to the British government, which in both its colonial domains and at home, took an incremental approach to democratic institution building.

The Congress did not merely create a new political institution, with new principles. In addition to creating an organizational culture for themselves, this thesis has outlined the ways that they demonstrated an investment in the creation and propagation of narratives and texts about that institution, and more importantly about

its ideals. Within the context of the British civil service bureaucracy in India, these texts took on more power than can be traced in the stated intentions of the INC authors. What is important about these texts' role in the process of decolonization is not their intended weight, but their probably unintended role in the reification of Congress's own self-description.

In challenging the state as it did, the Congress created a new cache of texts which, through their transferal to the colonial archive, became part of an embedded repertoire of knowledge from which the Congress could be examined by the then-colonial state and which are used repeatedly as the INC in the intervening years.

One helpful way to consider these resources is in drawing on the language of the sociologist Ann Swidler, who offers a theory of culture as a "'tool-kit' of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems."⁵⁹ The texts of the Congress, their interrogation and reification in the archive, and the nationalist-narrative voice in historiographies of the Congress comprise the tool-kit for scholars of the INC, just as they constituted the most consistent and embedded means the British colonial state had of analyzing the INC during the pre-Independence period.

Not only do these texts comprise a tool-kit but the causal implications using and reusing these same texts over time are meaningful. Just as the Congress was able to create a textual backdrop for the state's analysis of its efficacy and purpose, the ideological content of the texts which comprise the current repertoire "persistently order,"⁶⁰ as Swidler would say, the actions of scholars over time. This is tellingly seen in the divide between the philosophical bases of subaltern studies and the types of histories written of the INC.

⁵⁹ Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

But perhaps the most entrenched and continually re-constructed aspect of the dialogic relationship between the Congress and the colonial government has to do with the very question of nationalism. The colonial state sometimes missed the essence of the INC's claims, in part due to its inability to conceptualize the organization within its analytic framework. The Congress's dispersed and diverse organizational components added to the difficulty for the state. While the state struggled to know whether it needed to address all aspects of the Congress organization, or merely the Working Committee, the INC itself was able to produce consistent and clear texts which served its dialogue with both the government and the polity. One might say that the empire had a problem situating the Congress within a particular unit of analysis, with the Congress having a clearer task.

The question of who shapes and articulates the unit of analysis used to describe a political-historical situation persists. Using the nation-state as a unit of analysis is a strategy which must be interrogated, in part because the dialogic relationships between organizations, networks, and other political groups, may be continually constituted through the state's own analysis, just as through their self-representation. And, as claims of imperialism in today's world continue to resonate with a diverse array of groups globally, it will be increasingly important to thoughtfully disentangle the ways that political organizations both describe themselves and are discussed by state actors shape the stakes and outcomes of the ubiquitous power struggle between states and non-state actors.

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