

Introduction

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This special issue is a set of articles that arose from a discomfort felt by the contributors, a deep anguish at how the figures they were reading had been read thus far, both in historical narrative and in political commentary. In most cases, the authors felt the figures under study had been circumscribed by the treatment they had received, usually as the most obvious symbols of a political tradition, and in one case, by the figure's absence from any such summaries. In that sense, this is an exercise in liberation, for the authors of the pieces, I daresay, more than for the figures they were writing about. At its core, the ambition underlying some of the essays quite explicitly, and the issue at large, is to reinstate these figures as thinkers, rather than as men concerned with statecraft. The essays look at Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Narendra Deva, Ram Manohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Jawaharlal Nehru. The contributors tackle the moments of intellectual crisis these thinkers found themselves in, treating their texts as events that catapulted each individual thinker into the posture they next adopted. The thinkers are reinstated as political figures, certainly, but are also recovered in other capacities – as intellectuals, crusaders, and travellers. This allows for us to shed previous notions of what makes a political thinker and to think of the anxieties fostered by these men and is important because the framing of the questions of nationalism or socialism or violence or knowledge arose from these very anxieties, and in many ways, remain with us today as foundational ideas.

The implications that follow from this exercise are twofold and are both concerned with writing intellectual history. First and foremost, what the essays in this issue set out to achieve is an acknowledgement of the breadth of the thinkers they were writing about. By tracing the development of their thought as a process of recovery, the essays capture how the thinkers recovered multiple traditions, but also how they formulated multiple registers in which those traditions could be read. In outrageously original ways, rather than attempting to enter an intellectual space that was foreclosed to them, these thinkers created space wherever they could find their feet and expanded that space in concentric circles until they were located simultaneously in the local and in the global. At a later stage, the historical consciousness that informed these thinkers became more than an individual credo; it became activated through the circulation of their ideas through writings and speeches until it began defining modern India's public life. It is equally important to note that these processes of recovery, translation and critique were far from derivative. The intellectual traditions that modern Indian thinkers drew upon were subjected by them to waves of devastating critique, so that in time, they came to have a resurrective quality about them. The ability of each of these thinkers to insist upon their points of view, indeed to parlay upon them, made Indian political contests combative and vibrant.

Second, these essays illuminate the intellectual conscientiousness of the thinkers at hand. It has proved rather seductive to think of this conscientiousness as a political term, and to slavishly reproduce it in the disguise of electoral politics. It is true that given the anti-colonial fervour of the period, these thinkers often brought their ideas into employ in the cause of India, but they were not limited to that one objective. It is thus a deceit to see them as such, and to narrow the scope of their reflections in hindsight. These thinkers were neither insular or nativist nor did they loathe Indian intellectual traditions, as contemporary accounts often suggest. Rather than following that course, these essays take a more expansive view of how these thinkers located themselves. The real gain in having a medley of thinkers is that there is

no need for a consensus, and the essays pull away in different directions at this point, exploring what are differences not merely of degree but of kind. It is not very useful to think of these figures as aligning with each other, not because they never did, but because it reduces these narratives to lessons in continuity. Dinyar Phiroze Patel's essay on Naoroji that reinstates him as a Parsi intellectual and scholar of Zoroastrianism takes issue with studies that are fastened on an idea of him as an economist. The essays by Daniel Kent Carrasco and Rakesh Ankit, complementary in the sense that they both tackle socialists, take off in opposite directions, with one using Lohia and Narayan to shed light on the battle over the meanings of socialism in early independent India, and the other renewing scholarship on Narendra Deva, a prominent figure in early Indian socialism, now all but forgotten in the literature on it. Robert Upton resituates Tilak's attempts to synthesize English and Maharashtrian political traditions in the history of that time, with inferences for ours. Swapna Kona Nayudu's piece is an exploration of the anti-political, in attribution to Tagore but also in search of Nehru.

Notwithstanding their obvious, and sometimes mutually intolerable normative differences, these essays show that modern Indian thinkers wrote and spoke in ways that can continue to offer idioms for political action in India. It is blasé to call them visionary, because those visions – held across the political spectrum – have now been severely compromised. Yet, these were men capable of the sort of interplay between history and politics that holds capacious meaning for political change. Placed against the worldliness of their ideas, we are able to not just rescue the meaning of their work from becoming a pantomime, but we might also find a way of overcoming our own assumptions about India's past. These essays offer biographies not just of the men they tackle, but of the ideas those men found especially attractive and reinforced through their lives. It is this exercise on their parts that distinguished Indian political history from that of other nation-states, while ironically, opening India up to the world. That is the most conspicuous facet of the narratives recollected here, and one that on further exploration, could serve well in the cause of expanding scholarship on political theory and global intellectual history, amongst other fields.

This collection came together through social networks, where the interactions were primarily in the realm of the digital, although sometimes they were not quite so ephemeral. The editor would like to thank the contributors for their enthusiastic scholarship. The editor would also like to thank Andrew Sartori and David Armitage for their encouragement in bringing these essays to *Global Intellectual History*, the editorial board for giving space to this rather eclectic collection, and to Richard Whatmore for his kindness and patience in seeing the issue to its culmination. Finally, the editor is grateful to Quentin Skinner and Sudipta Kaviraj for their encouragement, without which the pursuit of such ideas would remain but an aspiration.