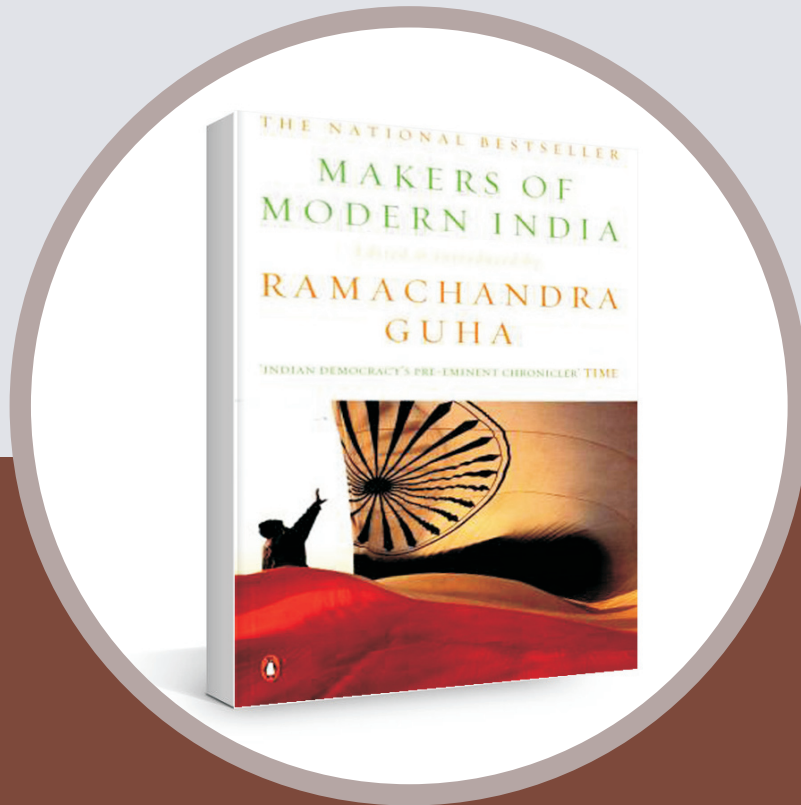




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MAKERS OF MODERN INDIA

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Makers of Modern India is a detailed source of information about the country's political traditions from the past experiences. The republic of India had a very interesting beginning and the author shows how 19 prominent political activists played an instrumental role in the evolution of this country. The author gives a description of the people by including extracts of their speeches and writings they have written. Each phase of the freedom movement and the following years of independent India are shown through the written works produced by these 19 individuals. In Makers of Modern India you will see how caste, religion, colonialism, the economy, language, gender, nationalism, democracy and secularism played a significant role in a historical context. The book is a treat for those who are curious about the formation of the multifarious collection of people, ideas and religions in India. The author shows how the lack of unison in the opinions of the people complemented each other and resulted in the finished product called India.

INDEX

PART-I	1
1. The First Liberal: Rammohan Roy	2
PART-II	3
2. The Muslim Modernist: Syed Ahmad Khan.....	4
3. The Agrarian Radical: Jotirao Phule	5
4. The Liberal Reformer: Gopal Krishna Gokhale.....	6
5. The Militant Nationalist: Bal Gangadhar Tilak.....	7
6. The Subaltern Feminist: Tarabai Shinde.....	9
PART-III	10
7. The Multiple Agendas of M.K. Gandhi	11
8. The Rooted Cosmopolitan: Rabindranath Tagore.....	13
9. The Annihilator Of Caste: B.R. Ambedkar.....	14
10. The Muslim Separatist: Muhammad Ali Jinnah.....	16
11. The Radical Reformer: E.V. Ramaswami	18
12. The Socialist Feminist: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.....	19
PART-IV	20
13. The Multiple Agendas of Jawaharlal Nehru.....	21
14. The Hindu Supremacist: M.S. Golwalkar	22
15. The Indigenous Socialist: Rammanohar Lohia	23
16. The Grass-Roots Socialist: Jayaprakash Narayan.....	24
17. The Gandhian Liberal: C. Rajagopalachari.....	26
18. The Defender Of The Tribals: Verrier Elwin	27
19. The Last Modernist: Hamid Dalwai.....	28

INTRODUCTION

The striking thing about modern India is that the men and women who made its history also wrote most authoritatively about it. The country's leading politicians were its leading political thinkers. This is especially true of the trinity of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar. The first was the father of Indian nationalism who, between the 1920s and 1940s, forged a popular, countrywide movement against British colonial rule. The second was the architect of the modern Indian nation-state, serving as prime minister from the nation's birth in August 1947 until his death in May 1964. The third was the great leader of the country's oppressed castes who also oversaw, as the country's first law minister, the drafting of the Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 26 January 1950. Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar wrote at great length about the world they saw and shaped.

This combination of political activism and theoretical reflection was not peculiar to these three men. Other Indian politicians and reformers were also serious writers, articulating, in their own more restricted spheres, ideas that had a powerful resonance in their own day and continue to do so in ours.

There were, and are, five revolutions simultaneously occurring in India: the urban revolution, the industrial revolution, the national revolution, the democratic revolution and the social revolution. The key word here is simultaneously. In Europe and North America, these revolutions were staggered. Thus the United States proclaimed its national independence in the eighteenth century, urbanized and industrialized in the nineteenth century, and became democratic only in the twentieth century, after women and African Americans were granted the vote.

The individuals featured in *Makers of Modern India* lived through these revolutions, struggled to facilitate or reshape them and— the aspect of their careers that is of most interest to us here— wrote about their impact on themselves and their compatriots. The men and women featured in this book did not speak in one voice. Their perspectives were sometimes complementary and more often competitive. But they were always instructive.

Makers of Modern India deals centrally with the arguments and arguers of the past two centuries. The choice is dictated in part by the fact that I am myself a historian of the modern period, and in part by the fact that the India we know today has been shaped far more by plebeians who lived closer to our time than by ancient monarchs. This is a book aimed in the first instance at those interested in Indian history, who might wish to acquire a fuller understanding of how this unnatural nation and unlikely democracy was argued into existence.

PART-I

THE OPENING OF THE INDIAN MIND

1. THE FIRST LIBERAL: RAMMOHAN ROY

- Rammohan Roy was born in the village of Radhanagar in Bengal in 1772. Roy was unquestionably the first person on the subcontinent to seriously engage with the challenges posed by modernity to traditional social structures and ways of being. He was also one of the first Indians whose thought and practice were not circumscribed by the constraints of kin, caste and religion.
- Roy became less willing to accept the claims and prejudices of orthodox Hinduism. The disenchantment was confirmed by what he saw around him. His elder brother died, and the wife was forced to commit sati, to Rammohan's dismay. After he had finished with his studies, Rammohan Roy worked with the East India Company at various places in Bengal, before settling in Calcutta in the year of the Battle of Waterloo, 1815. By this time he had already published several books. His first book, written in Persian with a preface in Arabic, was an attack on idol worship.
- He translated the Upanishads from Sanskrit into Bengali. He published a tract in English against sati. He debated with orthodox scholars on the rights of Hindu women. He also contested the claim of Christian missionaries that their religion was superior to all others. In 1815 he founded an Atmiya Sabha or 'friendship association' which, among other things, searched for elements common to different religious traditions. Roy himself had now come to believe that the 'omnipresent God, who is the only proper object of religious veneration, is one and undivided in person'. He claimed this was the message of the Vedas, and of the Bible and the Quran as well. Seeking to promote interreligious understanding, Roy wrote a book on the precepts of Jesus, and began work on a life of Muhammad.
- In 1816 Roy opened a school for boys, whose medium of instruction was English. In 1821 he started a weekly newspaper in Bengali— one of the first such in any Indian language. Then he started a paper in Persian (of which, as with its Bengali predecessor, he wrote all the contents). In 1828 he founded the Brahmo Samaj (the Society of God), which preached the worship of the One God on the basis of what its founder claimed were the original teachings of the Vedas.
- When the practice of sati was legally abolished in 1829, the credit for its abolition was given to the Governor General, William Bentinck. However, as a contemporary English observer—herself a woman— pointed out, the legislation could not have been brought about 'but for the powerful though unacknowledged aid of the great Hindu philosopher Rammohun Roy'. Roy's great contribution towards this reform was to demonstrate that sati was not a religious duty sanctioned or upheld by Hindu scriptural tradition.
- Through the 1820s, Roy's ideas were being propagated through his Bengali newspaper, which was called the Sangbad Kaumudi, or the 'Moon of Intelligence'. The historian A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed quotes two remarkable contemporary testimonies to this paper's influence. In December 1921, the Calcutta Journal, a periodical of (and for) the English in India, wrote of Roy's newspaper that 'she will be the means of the moral and intellectual renovation of India'. Nine years later, a London magazine described the Sangbad Kaumudi as 'the Morning Chronicle of India, advocating freedom, civil and religious, opposed to corruption and tyranny, and labouring, we are happy to say effectively and extensively, to eradicate the idolatrous rites of the Brahmins, and awaken the Hindoos to a sense of the degradation and misery into which they have been plunged'.

PART-II

REFORMERS & RADICALS

2. THE MUSLIM MODERNIST: SYED AHMAD KHAN

- Syed Ahmad Khan was born in Delhi in 1817. His grandfather had served briefly as prime minister to one of the Mughal emperors. The family was not orthodox— they patronized musicians and mystics. There was a tradition of scholarship: among Syed Ahmad’s forebears were some keen mathematicians.
- Syed Ahmad was educated at home by his mother and later sent to a traditional school. The language he grew up with was Urdu, the lingua franca of the court and of the city beyond. In his studies he learnt Arabic and Persian. At the age of twenty, he departed from tradition by joining the service of the East India Company. His family of Mughal loyalists were not best pleased but, by identifying with the rulers-to-be, the young man had accurately read the future. He served as a clerk and then a judge in various towns in north India, rising steadily up the Company’s hierarchy.
- During the uprising of 1857, Syed Ahmad Khan was posted in the town of Bijnor, in the western part of the United Provinces. In a quiet but determined way, he took the side of his masters, and helped shepherd several English families to safety. However, he was deeply affected by the revolt and worried about its consequences for his fellow Muslims in particular.
- A book he wrote shortly afterwards challenged the theory that the uprising was planned by disaffected Muslims who opposed British rule. He pointed out that as many Hindus as Muslims had taken part in the revolt; and that more Muslims had stayed loyal to the British. He rejected the theories that the rebels were egged on by Russia or Persia. In his view, the protests were neither a conspiracy nor a crusade. Rather, they were a response to the arrogance of Christian preachers and to the failure of the Company to admit Indian members into the Legislative Council.
- Khan’s book on the 1857 revolt was followed by another whose title gave a clue to its contents, viz. *The Loyal Mohammedans of India*. This documented the various acts of loyalty by Muslim officials and subjects during the uprising. Its author was convinced that the way forward for the Muslims now was to embrace modern education.
- In 1864 he started a Scientific Society for Muslims, whose members would study modern works of history, science and political economy, in English and in translation. Two years later, the society started a journal edited and largely written by Khan himself.
- Khan decided to start a college for Muslim men desirous of modern education. In October 1870, he set about raising funds for the enterprise. He visited the towns he knew in the United Provinces, but also ventured further afield; to the capital of the Punjab, Lahore, and to the great principality in the Deccan, Hyderabad, whose ruler, the Nizam, was reputed to be one of the richest men in the world. After making dozens of speeches and travelling thousands of miles, he had finally collected enough money to formally inaugurate his project. The Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (as it was first called) was founded on 24 May 1875 in Aligarh. Classes commenced three years later.
- Khan died in 1897. In 1920 the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College was renamed the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). Ninety years later, it remains the university of choice for many young Muslims in India— with schools of medicine, law and engineering, it has (and Khan would have approved) an especially well-regarded department of history. The AMU, now well into its second century, is the chief institutional legacy of Syed Ahmad Khan.

3. THE AGRARIAN RADICAL: JOTIRAO PHULE

- Jotirao Phule was born in 1827, less than a decade after the advent of the East India Company in his native Maharashtra. He belonged to the caste of Malis, who had traditionally cultivated fruits and vegetables. Phule's family had supplied flowers to the court of the Peshwas, these grown on a holding of thirty-five acres granted them by the rulers. They were thus not poor, but not really affluent either.
- Jotirao studied in a school in the town of Poona (now called Pune), run by Scottish missionaries. Here he mixed with boys of other castes, including Untouchables. As a young man, he visited and was powerfully impressed by a school for girls run by American missionaries in the town of Ahmednagar. These experiences inspired him, then still in his twenties, to start a school for girls of low castes himself. He also opened several other schools, which admitted children from the Untouchable castes of Mangs and Mahars.
- In 1855 he wrote a play about the inequities of the caste system. (In view of the dominance of Brahmins over book production and publishing in western India, the play was published only after the playwright's death.) By now Phule was convinced that Western education, with its rationalist outlook, could play a key role in the emancipation of the low castes and the concomitant undermining of Brahmin power.
- From the 1860s, Phule's interest shifted from managing his schools to wider programmes of social reform, such as widow remarriage. Meanwhile, he was also active in business, selling hardware to factories in and around Poona. He was also successful as a contractor for roadworks and bridges. The money he made from these enterprises was ploughed back into his social activities. By the 1870s, Phule was a figure of some influence and importance in Maharashtra. His profile was enhanced by a series of powerful tracts that he published, which spoke out against the stranglehold of Brahmins over the social, economic, political and spiritual life of western India.
- In 1873 Phule helped found the Satyashodak Samaj, the Society of Truth-Seekers. To qualify as a member, an individual had to get fifty letters of support and nomination. Some of the rules of the society were typical of reformers of the time—the vow not to consume alcohol, for example. Others were daringly precocious, such as the obligation to spread education among women and low castes. The samaj also promoted marriages that would take place without the involvement of Brahmin priests. Phule's status and achievements were recognized by his nomination to the Municipal Council of Poona in 1876.
- Under Phule's direction, the Satyashodak Samaj lobbied the government to promote policies that would benefit the farmers and labourers who came under the caste category of Shudras. As the samaj's first published report put it, the organization was founded 'in order to free the Shudra people from slavery to Brahmins, Bhats, Joshis, priests and others. For thousands of years, these people have heedlessly despised and exploited the Shudras, with the aid of their cunningly-devised books. This action was taken, therefore, so that through good advice and the spread of education, the Shudras might be got to understand their real rights, and freed both in religious and more general matters from the false and self-interested books of the Brahmins'.
- The British, believed Phule, had a historic mission 'to liberate the disabled Shudras from the slavery of the crafty Aryas [i.e., upper castes]'. Jotirao Phule was a remarkable social activist as well as a gifted writer. By the time of his death in 1890, he had published polemics, plays, songs and ballads.

4. THE LIBERAL REFORMER: GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE

- Gokhale was born in 1866 in a village in coastal Maharashtra, the son of a police sub-inspector. He learnt his letters in a rural school, before proceeding to the inland town of Kolhapur, where he completed his matriculation. He was then admitted to the Deccan College in Poona, from where he shifted to Bombay's Elphinstone College. On being awarded his BA, he began to coach students, to pay back the loans his family had incurred to send him to college.
- In 1884, two brilliant young Brahmin reformers, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, founded the Deccan Education Society. The following year, Gokhale joined one of the society's schools as a teacher. In 1889, Ranade appointed him editor of the quarterly journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha. In the same year he attended his first session of the Indian National Congress.
- By the time he was in his mid-twenties, Gokhale was a regular fixture at the annual meetings of the Congress. At the Calcutta session in 1890, for example, he spoke on the inequities of the salt tax. In 1897, having just turned thirty, Gokhale made the first of several trips to London, where he usually stayed at the National Liberal Club. On this visit, he testified to a Royal Commission on poverty and famines in his homeland.
- Meanwhile, in a speech in the seaside town of Hastings, he compared the relationship between Britain and India to that between a giant and a dwarf, where 'everything went to the giant and what was left went to the dwarf'. Gokhale was now a rising star in Indian politics. He was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1899, and to its all-India counterpart, the Imperial Council, two years later. Between 1902 and 1906 he simultaneously served as the president of the Poona municipality.
- Gokhale's speeches were rich in facts and subtle in argument. Favourite subjects included the excessive tax burden on the peasantry and the need for more and better schools to provide free and compulsory education for all regardless of caste, religion, or gender. He demanded more seats for Indians in the Imperial Council and asked also that the annual budget of the Government of India be open for scrutiny and amendment in the light of criticism. Meanwhile, through his work for the Congress, Gokhale had acquainted himself with different parts of India. His outlook was further broadened by a visit to South Africa, to study the condition of the Indian diaspora in that country.
- In 1905 Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society, whose members dedicated themselves to serving the nation-in-the-making. These 'Servants of India' were required to 'work for the advancement of all [Indians], regardless of caste or creed'.
- The year 1905 ended for Gokhale with him presiding in December over the Congress meeting in Banaras. As a leader of the Congress, Gokhale tried hard to reach out to the Muslims. He was wholly free of sectarian prejudice himself. However, he was regarded as excessively pro-British by militants such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His was the classical liberal dilemma—too moderate for the radicals, yet too extreme for the Establishment. One viceroy, Lord Hardinge, called Gokhale 'the most dangerous enemy of British rule in this country'.
- In 1914 Gokhale turned down the offer of knighthood. He died the following year, not yet fifty. He had already done a great deal for his country, then still a colony, and shown his compatriots many new directions. Summing up his life's work, his biographer B.R. Nanda remarks that Gokhale 'hated foreign rule, but he did not blame all the ills from which India suffered on the British. He wanted her to shake off the shackles of social and economic backwardness as well as of political subjection. He wanted to turn the encounter with the Raj into an opportunity for building a secular, modern and democratic society'.

5. THE MILITANT NATIONALIST: BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

- Tilak was born in July 1856, the son of a schoolteacher and petty landowner. The family moved to Poona when he was ten. He completed high school, then graduated from Deccan College with first-class honours. Apart from his native Marathi, he was formidably fluent in Sanskrit and English. In 1880 he started teaching in a school. The next year, he began publishing two newspapers with his friend Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, one in English, the other in Marathi. The polemical tone of their articles attracted much comment as well as several libel suits. In 1882 both Tilak and Agarkar were sentenced to four months in prison for defaming the diwan (chief minister) of the princely state of Kolhapur.
- Agarkar and Tilak founded the Deccan Education Society in 1884. Six years later, Tilak left the society for more openly political work. Tilak's first major work was an attempt to establish the antiquity of the Rig Veda, to demonstrate that the Hindus were civilized and sophisticated while the rest of humanity, and especially the Europeans, were still illiterate barbarians. In 1893 his revivalism took a more formal shape, through his promotion of a festival devoted to the worship of the god Ganapati, or Ganesh. Previously a private domestic affair, observed in homes and temples, Tilak turned the festival into a mass celebration on the streets of the towns and cities of western India, featuring processions where the deity was led along by young men. Tilak also began another festival, to celebrate the memory and achievements of the medieval warrior-chieftain Shivaji.
- Tilak was much more hostile to British rule than Gokhale. He saw it as leading to the decline and emasculation of India and Indians. He rejected the idea that 'the people of Asia will always remain slaves of the foreigners'. In 1897 Tilak was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for preaching disaffection against the Raj. After his release he travelled through south India, Ceylon and Burma. From these journeys he concluded that there was a common Hindu core to social practice and customs throughout the subcontinent, and that (as he put it in a speech at the Ganapati festival in 1900) 'Hinduism is of higher worth than other religions'.
- The opposition to the partition of Bengal in 1905 was combined with the Swadeshi movement, which opposed the import of foreign goods into India. In these struggles, Tilak played a leading part. He demanded a tariff of 10 per cent on imports to promote Indian enterprise and called for a common language to promote national unity.
- Where Moderates like Gokhale asked young men to serve, Tilak asked them to protest and if necessary, go to prison. In this respect, the sarcasm and sharpness of Tilak's writings are in contrast to the understated reasonableness of Gokhale. As the Poona militant put it in a speech of 1897, 'God has not conferred upon foreigners the grant inscribed on a copper plate to the kingdom of India.' In a speech in Calcutta in 1906 Tilak insisted that 'love of nation is one's first duty. Next comes religion . . .' Claiming that 'no nation can equal India' in the antiquity of its history and the depth of its cultural traditions, he tended to believe that India was (as his biographer Stanley Wolpert puts it) 'God's chosen nation'.
- In 1908 Tilak was charged again with sedition and with intensifying racial animosity between Indians and the British. He was defended by the brilliant Bombay lawyer Muhammad AH Jinnah. The defence could not completely annul the evidence contained in Tilak's polemical articles. In the event, he was sentenced to six years in prison and deported to Burma. When they heard of the sentence, the textile workers of Bombay downed tools in a spontaneous strike that shut down seventy mills. While in Mandalay prison, Tilak wrote a major and still influential work on the meanings of the Bhagavad Gita.

- Tilak came out of jail in 1914, run-down in health and spirit. The fire of his early years was now much attenuated. He was more accommodative of British rule: where he had once thundered that 'swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it', he was willing to settle for Dominion status within the British Empire, rather than full independence. However, he continued to be active in politics, forming a Home Rule League in 1916. The same year he was charged once more with sedition. He was defended once again by Jinnah, this time successfully, and acquitted of the charges.
- Tilak was a militant, populist leader, who did a great deal to encourage young Indians to join the national movement. (On the negative side, the Hindu tenor of his speeches and writings may have alienated Indian Muslims.) For much of his career, he insisted that political freedom must take precedence over all else, including or even especially social reform. Bal Gangadhar Tilak died in Bombay in August 1920.

6. THE SUBALTERN FEMINIST: TARABAI SHINDE

- Born in the 1830s, Tarabai Shinde lived into the early years of the twentieth century. She is known principally through a tract she published in 1882 comparing the situation of men and women in the Maharashtra, and India, of her time. The pamphlet may have been provoked by the case of a young Brahmin widow who became pregnant and then killed— or was forced to kill—the baby. The widow was arrested and sentenced to be hanged for the crime (on appeal, the sentence was modified to transportation for life).
- Unlike some other parts of India, Maharashtra had a long tradition of women who were active in public life. As princesses and queens, women had advised their royal kinsmen and sometimes even ruled in place of a male king who was not yet an adult. Among the leading Bhakti poets of the medieval period were some women. The daughters of Brahmins were often learned and literate. To find learning among Maratha girls, however, was less common.
- Even more unusual was the direct language in which Tarabai Shinde questioned the presumed superiority of men. Through the nineteenth century, men and women had called for widow remarriage, for the education of young girls and for the abolition of practices such as sati.
- These efforts, sincere and well-intentioned though they undoubtedly were, could all be categorized under the label of ‘women’s uplift’. What Tarabai Shinde called for, however, was altogether different and more radical—namely, for equality or parity between men and women. No one before her had so directly challenged the social arrangements and cultural prejudices which underpinned patriarchy and male domination.
- The translator of Tarabai’s text, the British historian Rosalind O’Hanlon, also happens to be the foremost authority on the life and work of Jotirao Phule. O’Hanlon notes that while the two may or may not have met, Phule certainly knew and admired Tarabai’s writings. Their approaches were complementary: ‘For Phule, brahmanic religion oppressed lower caste people, because it had been devised by brahmans; for Tarabai, it oppressed women because it had been devised by men.’
- Phule referred to Tarabai as chiranjivini, or dear daughter, and commended her tract to his colleagues so that they could understand and suitably respond to her charges of the systematic ill-treatment of women by men. Like Phule, Tarabai was a brilliant stylist in Marathi, using sarcasm and satire to puncture the pretensions of the powerful.

PART-III

NURTURING A NATION

7. THE MULTIPLE AGENDAS OF M.K. GANDHI

- Born on the west coast of India in 1869, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi studied law in London and briefly practised as a lawyer in Bombay and Rajkot before leaving for Durban in 1893. He lived in that city and in Johannesburg, fighting cases for his Indian clients and increasingly being drawn into social activism. In 1896 he published a long pamphlet on the condition of Indian immigrants in South Africa. This was the first of many interventions against laws that restricted the freedom of movement and the freedom to trade for those who were not whites. Gandhi's protests against racial discrimination took the form of newspaper articles and editorials, petitions to government, cases in court and mass campaigns of non-violent protest, or satyagraha.
- In South Africa, Gandhi was a diasporic leader whose reach and influence was restricted to the hundred thousand or so Indians who lived there. In January 1915 Gandhi returned to his homeland after two decades in South Africa. Within four years of his return, however, Gandhi had become the most famous— as well as most controversial— person in a subcontinent whose population was in the region of 300 million. In 1917 and 1918 he led localized protests against specific grievances of peasants and workers; in 1919 he organized satyagrahas in the major cities of British India against a restrictive new legislation known as the Rowlatt Act; and in 1920 he launched a countrywide campaign of 'non-cooperation' against British colonial rule. Gandhi liked to refer to Gopal Krishna Gokhale as his 'guru'.
- Gandhi was influenced, and possibly inspired, by both Gokhale and Tilak. Like them, he owed a close allegiance to the Indian National Congress. He borrowed from each, yet his own programme was by no means a mere mixture of Tilak's and Gokhale's. The theory and practice of satyagraha he developed wholly on his own. Again, where Gokhale and Tilak were essentially urban leaders from western India, Gandhi's appeal cut across boundaries of caste, class, region and language.
- His adoption of a dress made of homespun cotton and his generally frugal lifestyle allowed him to come much closer to the peasants who formed the bulk of India's population. At the same time, Gandhi also did far more than his predecessors to deepen the organizational base of the Congress, drawing in many new members, among them young men and women, and extending the party's reach to virtually all parts of the country, the princely states not excluded. The democratization of the Congress was facilitated by a key innovation of Gandhi's, which was to encourage regional committees based on language, such that the proceedings at the provincial level were conducted not in English but in the mother tongue.
- Gandhi led and organized three major campaigns against colonial rule. These were the non-cooperation movement of the 1920s, the civil disobedience movement of the 1930s (whose highlight was his march to the sea to make salt, then a state monopoly) and the Quit India movement of the 1940s. Through these campaigns, Gandhi came to spend extended periods in jail, the suffering and sacrifice further increasing his popularity. The movements were important, but not necessarily more so than Gandhi's programmes of social reform and economic renewal.
- Among his abiding concerns were the abolition of untouchability; the promotion of Hindu—Muslim harmony; the uplift of women; and the revival of the village and artisanal economy. In his ashrams in Ahmedabad (where he was based between 1915 and 1930) and near Wardha (where he moved in 1934), he trained hundreds of men and women to take these programmes further.

- His first appearance in print was in the journal of the Vegetarian Society of London, which in 1890 published a six-part series by him on Indian food habits. In 1903 he founded his own journal, Indian Opinion, much of which he wrote himself. On his return to India he edited a journal called Young India (published between 1919 and 1932) and then another called Harijan, which he ran from 1933 until his death. Gandhi also wrote extensively in his mother tongue, Gujarati, and published several books, among them two volumes of autobiography. He replied to every letter he received, often at length. His speeches were transcribed verbatim and of course, the older and more famous he became, the more interviews he gave to the press. Mohandas K. Gandhi was murdered by a Hindu fanatic on 30 January 1948.

8. THE ROOTED COSMOPOLITAN: RABINDRANATH TAGORE

- Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861, into a family of scholars, social reformers and entrepreneurs. His grandfather was a close associate of Rammohan Roy. The family were among the earliest to join Roy's Brahmo Samaj. As the fourteenth and youngest child of a rich, cultivated man, Rabindranath was educated at home and through his travels. He was admitted to a school in England, but soon dropped out to resume his self-education.
- Beginning in the 1880s, Tagore published a steady stream of poems, stories and novels. These had a profound impact in his native Bengal, but were little known outside. In 1912 he carried some translations of his poems to England. The translations, published under the title Gitanjali, were a great success, going into ten printings within six months. When the award of the Nobel Prize followed, the Bengali writer had become a world figure.
- Tagore was a patriot without quite being a nationalist. He was no apologist for colonial rule; after British soldiers fired on an unarmed crowd in Amritsar in 1919, he returned his knighthood to the King. At the same time, he was dismayed by the xenophobic tendencies of the populist edge of the Indian national movement. He thought that India had much to learn from other cultures, including (but not restricted to) the West.
- Tagore was the most widely travelled Indian of his generation. From what he saw at home and abroad, he arrived at an understanding of India's place in the world that was more nuanced, more layered, more complex and more profound than that articulated by any of his compatriots. He sought to give this vision an institutional form, founding a university in 1921 on land his family owned in rural Bengal. The curriculum he developed here bridged science and the humanities. Music and art were also taught and there was a special focus on the study of Japan and China, the two civilizations with which India might, in Tagore's view, share mutually beneficial interactions in a post-colonial future. The campus where these myriad activities took place was named Santiniketan, the Abode of Peace; with the university calling itself Viswa-Bharati, or India in the World. To forestall criticism that this was an elitist or 'ivory tower' vision of learning, Tagore simultaneously started an institute of rural reconstruction. Tagore died in 1941.
- One of his poem serves as the national anthem of India; another, as the national anthem of Bangladesh. In his own lifetime, Tagore had a profound impact on Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who are commonly (and rightly) regarded as the two most influential individuals in modern Indian history.

9. THE ANNIHILATOR OF CASTE: B.R. AMBEDKAR

- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the son of a small-time military official who hailed from the Untouchable Mahar caste. The boy studied in a school in Satara, where a Brahmin teacher changed his surname from Ambavadekar to Ambedkar. After the family moved to Bombay, Bhimrao matriculated from the Elphinstone High School. He then joined the now well-established Elphinstone College, where his fees were paid by the progressive maharaja of Baroda. He obtained his BA in 1912, whereupon he joined the service of the Baroda state.
- In 1913 Ambedkar was sent by the maharaja for higher studies to the United States. He joined Columbia University in New York, where he did a master's thesis on the caste system and a doctoral thesis on provincial finance in British India.
- In 1916 Ambedkar moved to London, enrolled at Gray's Inn and began another doctorate at the London School of Economics. But his scholarship ran out, and he was summoned back to Baroda, where he was appointed military secretary to the maharaja. However, the discrimination he faced (due to his caste) led him to quit the job in disgust and move to Bombay. He started tutoring students for a living (as Gokhale had done before him). By now he was also politically active. With funds from the maharaja of Kolhapur (who, like his counterpart in Baroda, was a critic of the Brahmin stranglehold on society and politics in western India), he began a fortnightly paper for the depressed castes.
- In 1920 Ambedkar went back to London to resume his studies, funding himself from his savings, supplemented by a loan from a Parsi friend. His DSc thesis on the 'problem of the rupee' was accepted in 1923. He also qualified as a Bar-at-Law. On his return to Bombay, Ambedkar enrolled at the Bombay High Court, as Gandhi had once done, except that the younger man was able to maintain a successful legal practice. He remained active on other fronts, starting a society to spread education among the Depressed Classes (as the Untouchables were then legally known). In 1927 he was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council, where his first speech (pace Gokhale) asked for the budget to be framed amidst less secrecy. Meanwhile, he had also begun lecturing at the city's Law College (he later served a term as its principal).
- Ambedkar argued that religious equality meant little without social and economic equality. As for upper-caste reformers, there was, he thought, an inescapably patronizing tinge to their efforts. It was time for the Depressed Classes to assert their own rights under their own leaders.
- In 1928 a commission headed by John Simon came to India to examine the question of constitutional reforms. The Congress boycotted its proceedings, in part because its members were all white. In his testimony to the commission, Ambedkar argued that the Depressed Classes should be treated as 'a distinct, independent minority'— as separate from the Hindus, as the Muslims already were. He also advocated direct action for the fulfilment of their rights, launching satyagrahas to allow Untouchables to drink water from tanks and to enter temples from which they were excluded. There was determined opposition by the upper castes, leading Ambedkar to conclude that reform could come only through the purposive action of the state. He thus asked, to begin with, for greater representation for the Depressed Classes at all levels of public service.
- Through the 1930s and 1940s, Ambedkar wrote a series of tracts excoriating Gandhi and Gandhism. The two men met several times, but could not reconcile their differences. In 1932 the British government awarded separate electorates for Untouchables. Gandhi went on a fast to protest. To save his life, a compromise was reached with Ambedkar (known as the Poona Pact) whereby a joint electorate would remain for Hindus, but with greater seats for the Depressed Classes.

- In 1936 Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party to fight the elections mandated under the new Government of India Act. (In later years the party changed its name twice, becoming, first, the Scheduled Caste Federation, and later, the Republican Party of India.) In June 1942 he was nominated to the viceroy's Executive Council, the first Untouchable to be so distinguished. This set him even more firmly in opposition to the Congress which, in August of the same year, started its Quit India movement.
- When India became independent in 1947, the new Congress government offered Ambedkar the job of law minister. He served in the post for four years, before resigning in September 1951. By now he had become deeply attracted to the Buddha. In October 1956 Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in the city of Nagpur. Six weeks later he died in New Delhi.
- Like his great rival, Gandhi, Ambedkar had multiple agendas as well as multiple careers. He was, at various times, a lawyer, teacher, legislator, educational organizer, party builder and cabinet minister. Through all these roles and assignments he continued to be a prolific writer. He published important books on many topics, including federalism, theology and philosophy, finance, language, constitutionalism and, not least, the sociology, politics and history of the caste system.

10. THE MUSLIM SEPARATIST: MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

- Jinnah was born in Karachi in 1876, into a Gujarati-speaking family of Shia Muslim merchants. He was the eldest of seven children of a successful businessman, who owned horse carriages. After studying in a school in Karachi, Jinnah proceeded to London to qualify as a lawyer, enrolling at Lincoln's Inn. In 1896 he returned with his barrister's qualification in hand and joined the Bombay Bar. Jinnah was very successful at his chosen profession. In a few years he had developed a very lucrative practice. He was offered a place on the bench, which he refused on the grounds that he normally earned in a day what a judge earned in a month.
- In 1904 he attended his first Congress session, in Bombay. He attracted the favourable attention of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He also came close to the great Parsi nationalist Dadabhai Naoroji. Jinnah was elected to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910, as part of a new quota for Muslims. At thirty-five, he was one of its youngest members. Interestingly enough, one of his first speeches was on the condition of Indians in South Africa.
- By 1915 or thereabouts, Jinnah was being referred to as the 'Muslim Gokhale'. Like his mentor, he was known for his careful research, his closely argued speeches and his focus on harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims. In the politics of the day he occupied a unique position—for he was at once a member of the Congress and of the Muslim League, while simultaneously serving as a member of the Imperial Council.
- When Gandhi came home from South Africa in January 1915, Jinnah spoke at a reception for the returning hero in Bombay. Towards the end of the decade, however, the two Gujarati lawyer-politicians fell out over the best means to advance Indian interests. Jinnah preferred the constitutional route, while Gandhi wanted the Congress to adopt his creed of countrywide satyagraha. The break became final, and irretrievable, when at the Nagpur Congress of December 1920 Jinnah was booed off the stage by Gandhi's eager (or perhaps overeager) followers. Through the 1920s, Jinnah tried, with limited success, to organize a moderate alternative to Gandhi's party. In 1925 he was offered a knighthood, and refused, as Gokhale had done before him.
- In 1930 Jinnah moved to London, where he ran a successful practice at the Bar while also taking part in the Round Table Conferences of 1930 and 1931 which discussed, abortively, India's political future. At one time he seriously considered standing for the British parliament. However, in 1934, he was persuaded to return to India to assume leadership of the Muslim League. Over the next few years, he infused life and purpose into a moribund organization. Under his leadership, the membership of the League increased from a few thousand to well over half a million. Students and professionals flocked to his call. Now, it could no longer be dismissed as a party merely of the Muslim nobility and gentry. Jinnah also laid special focus on strengthening the provincial branches of the League. In all this he was taking a leaf out of his rival's book, for Gandhi had once adopted similar methods to convert the Congress from an elite debating club into a mass-based political party.
- In the elections of 1937 the Congress came to power over much of India. Ironically, electoral defeat actually helped the Muslim League, for they were now able to portray the Congress in office as an essentially Hindu party. Questions were raised about the promotion by the Congress ministries of Hindi (as opposed to Urdu) and the singing of religious hymns in state schools. These campaigns helped the League to alienate the Congress from any Muslim support it still enjoyed. Then the Second World War broke out and the Congress ministries resigned. In 1940 the Muslim League formally committed itself to the formation of a separate homeland for Muslims, to be named Pakistan. Jinnah, once known as 'the ambassador of Hindu—Muslim unity', had now come around to the view that Hindus and Muslims could not live together in a single, united, independent nation.

- When Gandhi and his followers went to jail during the Quit India movement, Jinnah used the opportunity to further consolidate the Muslim League. By now the British were treating the League on par with the Congress. Jinnah demanded, and obtained, a further parity, of himself with Gandhi.
- After the end of the war, elections were held to the central and provincial assemblies. The League obtained a resounding 88 per cent of the Muslim vote. In the crucial provinces of Punjab and Bengal, it won 75 out of 88 and 113 out of 119 Muslim seats respectively. Now Partition and the establishment of Pakistan were more or less inevitable.
- In their campaign to create Pakistan, Jinnah and the League were helped by separate electorates, by the arrogance of the Congress and by the British policy of 'divide and rule'. That said, one cannot and must not discount the quality of Jinnah's leadership or the energy and commitment of his cadres and followers. These made what, in 1937, had seemed a very distant dream, into a concrete reality ten years later. Muhammad Ali Jinnah died in September 1948.

11. THE RADICAL REFORMER: E.V. RAMASWAMI

- Ramaswami was born in the town of Erode in 1879. He was a Kannada-speaking Naiker, from a caste that lay in the upper stratum of Sudras. His father was a moderately successful businessman. We know little about Ramaswami's early life. It is said that he travelled to Banaras as a young man, where he was less than impressed with the city and its religiosity. In particular, he was appalled by the dirt in the streets and by the sight of half-burnt bodies in the river Ganges.
- On his return home, he joined the family business and also briefly served as chairman of the Erode municipality. In about 1920 Ramaswami became active in the Congress Party. He energetically adopted the Gandhian credo, promoting homespun cloth, temple entry for the Untouchables and the like. In 1925 he left the Congress because he found that its leadership was overwhelmingly Brahmin and, with only the rare exception, was insensitive to the claims of the lower castes. A catalytic incident related to a Congress-run hostel whose management insisted, despite Ramaswami's protests, on serving food separately to Brahmin and non-Brahmin students.
- Ramaswami now turned to promoting what he called 'Self Respect'. He believed that ancient history and current politics had consolidated the domination of south India by north India and of non-Brahmins by Brahmins. Oppressed castes and regions needed thus to regain, or reassert, their self-respect and create conditions where they could be in control of their own affairs. A brilliant orator in Tamil, he also ran a series of widely read political magazines where he promoted his ideas.
- From the 1930s, Ramaswami was increasingly known as 'Periyar', or the great one. In his speeches and essays, he took radical stands in favour of atheism, women's rights and contraception. He ran a militant (and eventually successful) campaign against the imposition of Hindi in south India. He wrote critically of the Ramayana and other Hindu epics and texts which, in his view, promoted the message of Brahmin superiority and endorsed distinctions of caste and gender. Brahmin priests were a particular target of his polemics— they were, he claimed, corrupt and cunning, as well as sexual predators.
- In 1944 Ramaswami formed his own party, the Dravida Kazhagam, which asked for the establishment of a separate, sovereign nation-state in south India to be called Dravida Nadu. When India became independent on 15 August 1947, and when it enacted a democratic constitution and celebrated its first Republic Day on 26 January 1950, Ramaswami observed both events as days of mourning. In his view, they merely formalized the rule of the northern Aryans over the southern Dravidians.
- In 1949 a group of Ramaswami's followers broke away to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). In 1967 the DMK became the first professedly regional party to come to power in a major provincial election in India. The Congress, once dominant in Tamil Nadu, has never since regained power in that state. Without the ideological and organizational groundwork laid down by Ramaswami, it is hard to see how this could have happened. To be sure, he may have himself seen this as somewhat less than ideal— for he wanted a separate country for the Tamils, not merely greater autonomy within the existing nation-state of India.
- Ramaswami's message is nicely captured in a statue of his in Tiruchirapalli which carries this inscription: 'God does not exist at all. The inventor of God is a fool. The propagator of God is a scoundrel. The worshipper of God is a barbarian'. E.V. Ramaswami died in December 1973.

12. THE SOCIALIST FEMINIST: KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY

- Kamaladevi was born in 1903, the youngest child of a middle class Brahmin family from the south-western port city of Mangalore. Her community of Chitrapur Saraswats had taken early to modern education and reaped its rewards accordingly. Her own father was in the colonial civil service. Growing up, Kamaladevi was deeply influenced by her mother, who read Tamil, English, Hindi and Marathi and also played the classical violin.
- Kamaladevi was married and widowed in her teens. Her mother encouraged her to study in Madras, where she fell in love with and later married Harindranath Chattopadhyay, who was a brother of the poet-patriot Sarojini Naidu and a versifier and actor of some talent himself. Theatre seemed to be a common bond— for Kamaladevi liked to act in and promote plays, particularly those with social themes. In 1926, still in her early twenties, she stood for elections to the Madras Legislative Council, but lost narrowly. By now she was a convinced nationalist in the Congress mould. In 1928 she was elected to the prestigious All India Congress Committee (AICC).
- Kamaladevi became better known when, in 1930, she prevailed upon Gandhi not to restrict the Salt Satyagraha to men alone. She herself made packets of salt and sold them outside the Bombay Stock Exchange, shouting ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai’. Then she repeated the procedure in the high court. For this breach of the law, she was arrested and sent to jail, the first of several prison terms she was to— the word is inescapable—enjoy.
- Kamaladevi was active in the Congress Socialist Party from the beginning, becoming its president in 1936. She had also become increasingly involved in the women’s movement, lobbying for better working conditions for women in factories and farms and for their right to paid maternity leave. Kamaladevi was arrested during the Quit India movement of 1942 and spent more than a year in jail.
- However, after India became independent in 1947, she refused to enter formal politics. With her abilities, and her record as a fighter for freedom, a place in Parliament and in the Union Cabinet was hers for the asking. If she wished, she could have been a governor of a large state or ambassador to an important country. Offers were made in these directions— she rejected them all, in favour of social work. In the first, difficult years of freedom she worked to resettle refugees in northern India.
- From the 1950s, Kamaladevi turned increasingly to the revival and promotion of India’s rich, varied and endangered craft traditions. She established the All India Handicrafts Board and headed it for twenty years.
- Among the other institutions that Kamaladevi helped create and nurture were the National School of Drama, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the India International Centre. She is now chiefly known for her work for handicrafts and through the institutions that she founded. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay died in 1988, having lived through the most part of a century she helped define and whose finest tendencies she embodied.

PART-IV

DEBATING DEMOCRACY

13. THE MULTIPLE AGENDAS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

- Jawaharlal Nehru was born in Allahabad in 1889. His father, Motilal, was a successful and wealthy lawyer who doted on his only son. He was sent to Harrow, which he did not enjoy very much; and to Cambridge, where he developed what was to become a lifelong fascination with modern science. He also qualified as a barrister. Returning home shortly before the First World War, he ran a desultory law practice before throwing himself full-time into nationalist politics.
- In India, the 1940s and 1950s were the Age of Nehru, just as the 1920s and 1930s had been the Age of Gandhi. To be sure, Nehru was not as original a thinker as Gandhi. On the other hand, Gandhi never held political office. As head of government from 1947 to 1964, Nehru had a colossal influence on the directions taken—and not taken—by this new, large, diverse and very conflicted nation.
- Nehru was indifferent to religion; Gandhi believed deeply in his own version of God. Nehru thought that industrialization was the only solution to the endemic poverty of India; Gandhi called instead for the renewal of the village economy. Nehru had great faith in the powers of the modern state to uplift and reform society; Gandhi was sceptical of state power, trusting instead the conscience and will of individuals and communities.
- Beyond these differences were some fundamental similarities. Both were patriots in the most inclusive sense, who identified with all of India, rather than with a particular caste, language, region or religion. Both abhorred violence and strongly preferred democratic forms of government to dictatorships. It may have been these parallels, as well as Nehru's own independent appeal to the young, that led Gandhi to anoint him his political successor.
- In December 1929, having just turned forty, Nehru was elected to the first of four terms as president of the Congress. Through the decade of the 1930s he was the party's voice abroad, taking the message of Indian freedom to not always receptive audiences in the West. In the elections of 1937 and 1946, both held under colonial auspices and under a restricted franchise, he was the chief vote-gatherer for the Congress. When India became independent in August 1947, he was the natural choice for prime minister.
- He founded and for a time edited a daily newspaper, the National Herald, and wrote often for other Indian and foreign periodicals. He also published three major books: Glimpses of World History (1934), An Autobiography (1936) and The Discovery of India (1946). These books are all extremely well written. They have all been continuously in print since their first publication.
- Of these obscure writings of Nehru, the most important are his Letters to Chief Ministers. Soon after Independence, he inaugurated the practice of writing every fortnight to those in charge of running state governments. The series ran continuously from October 1947 to December 1963. In the 1980s these letters were published in five fat volumes. They cover an astonishing range of subjects. Economic development, linguistic and religious politics, the ethics of governance, the Cold War, the passing of literary giants—Nehru writes about all these, and more, in a tone that is alternately reflective and exhortative. The letters represent Nehru's attempt to make sense of sixteen tumultuous years in the history of India, and the world. They are contemporary history at its best. Jawaharlal Nehru died in New Delhi on 27 May 1964.

14. THE HINDU SUPREMACIST: M.S. GOLWALKAR

- Golwalkar was born in February 1906, son of a headmaster. He studied in schools in small towns in central India before joining the Banaras Hindu University, where he did bachelor's and master's degrees in zoology. Later he also qualified as a lawyer from Nagpur. Golwalkar was well read in science and in the Hindu scriptures. He was also a formidable linguist, fluent in— among other tongues— Sanskrit, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and English.
- In 1931 Golwalkar met the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who was a doctor from Nagpur named K.B. Hedgewar. The RSS stood for a militant and muscular brand of Hinduism. It recruited young men who would prepare themselves for a lifetime of service to the 'Hindu Rashtra', namely, to the creation of a nation-state run for and by Hindus. Golwalkar's intelligence and energy attracted Hedgewar, who adopted him as his protege. He left Banaras and moved to Nagpur, where he took charge of running the RSS's organization. On his mentor's death in 1940 he was appointed the sarsanghchalak, or chief organizer of the RSS. Golwalkar was influenced by Swami Vivekananda's call to worship the Motherland. He also admired Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for making culture so central to national identity and self-assertion. However, his love for India and Hindu culture went hand in hand with a demonization of the West and of what he saw as the enemy within.
- Golwalkar saw three principal threats to the formation of a Hindu nation—Muslims, Christians and communists. All three were foreign in origin, and the last were godless to boot. Golwalkar saw Muslims, Christians and communists as akin to the demons, or rakshashas, of Indian mythology, with the Hindus as the avenging angels who would slay them and thus restore the goodness and purity of the Motherland. The RSS itself was projected by Golwalkar as the chosen vehicle for this national and civilizational renewal of the Hindus. After Gandhi's murder in January 1948, Golwalkar was arrested and the RSS banned. This was because Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, had once been a member of the RSS and because Golwalkar had himself made very provocative speeches against Muslims and the Congress. He was released from prison and the organization unbanned in July 1949 after they agreed to abjure violence and accept the democratic principles of the Indian Constitution.
- Through his three decades as the head of the RSS, Golwalkar exercised a deep influence on the society and politics of modern India. A lifelong brahmachari, or celibate, he acquired, in the fashion of a typical Hindu guru, a cult of younger male acolytes. M.S. Golwalkar died in 1973.

15. THE INDIGENOUS SOCIALIST: RAMMANOHAR LOHIA

- Lohia was born in 1910 in the town of Faizabad, in present-day Uttar Pradesh, into a family of hardware merchants. He was educated in Bombay, where he picked up Marathi; in Calcutta, where he learnt fluent Bengali; and in Banaras, where he may have been most comfortable, since Hindi was his mother tongue. By the time he reached his teens, he was a convinced nationalist—thus in 1928, he took part in demonstrations against the all-white Simon Commission for constitutional reforms.
- Lohia then went to Berlin for higher studies. Watching Gandhi's Salt March from afar, he wrote a doctoral dissertation, in German, on the economics of salt. Lohia returned to India in 1934, an anti-imperialist and socialist. He was an early recruit into the Congress Socialist Party. In 1936 Lohia became secretary of the Congress's new department of foreign affairs, where he became very interested in the fate of Indians overseas and in freeing the enclave of Goa from Portuguese rule.
- Lohia was jailed in 1940 for his speeches against British rule. Two years later, he became a hero of the Quit India movement, operating underground for a year and nine months, issuing pamphlets and letters from his secret locations. He was finally arrested in Bombay in May 1944 and taken to Lahore Fort, where he was tortured and kept in solitary confinement. Released in 1946 as part of a general amnesty, he went to Goa to campaign for its freedom. He was arrested, tortured and deported back to British India.
- After India became independent, the socialists in the party left the Congress to form their own organization. In 1952 the Socialist Party merged with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (founded by the veteran Gandhian J.B. Kripalani) to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Lohia served briefly as general secretary.
- After several unsuccessful attempts, Lohia entered the Indian Parliament through a by-election in 1963. Here, he made many provocative speeches against the Congress and against Nehru and his legacy. He believed that the ruling party and its leaders had deliberately distanced themselves from the people of India, economically, linguistically and sartorially. They were a new elite, brown in colour, but white in language, customs and manners.
- On the economic front, Lohia was a critic of both capitalism and communism. He argued, precociously, for a third way, for a new political and economic system based on the decentralization of political power, on the use of small-scale technology and on fulfilling the basic needs of the poor rather than on the creation of wealth per se. Rammanohar Lohia died in 1967, aged fifty-seven.

16. THE GRASS-ROOTS SOCIALIST: JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

- Jayaprakash Narayan was born in rural Bihar in 1902, into a family of Kayasths, scribes who had traditionally worked as officials, teachers and lawyers. Narayan's own father worked in the state irrigation department. The boy studied in a village school and was then sent to Patna, where he matriculated with distinction in 1918. In 1920 Narayan married Prabhavati, daughter of a Gandhian, who had become a disciple of the Mahatma herself. When the non-cooperation movement started, he left college following its call, attracting the anger of his career-minded parents.
- However, the movement was called off after protesters set fire to a police station in the United Provinces in February 1922. Soon afterwards, Gandhi was jailed. The young Narayan was greatly disillusioned, since freedom had not come, as promised, within a year. At this stage, a friend in America suggested that he overcome his disappointment by going to study there. So in the summer of 1922 Narayan set out for the United States. He spent seven years in that country, studying successively at universities in California, Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio. To make ends meet, he did a variety of odd jobs, cleaning grapes in a vineyard and washing dishes in a restaurant.
- At the University of Wisconsin, then (as now) a centre of progressive thinking, he became a socialist. His studies confirmed his political orientation, since the subjects he specialized in were sociology and political science. In 1929 Narayan was awarded a master's degree. He wanted to carry on for a PhD but, learning that his mother was seriously ill, chose to return home. As his biographers Allan and Wendy Scarfe write, 'Jayaprakash returned from America to India convinced that the central problem of human society was inequality of wealth, property, rank, culture and opportunity.'
- Under Nehru's guidance, Narayan joined the Congress and urged the party to take a more active interest in the problems of industrial labour. Narayan was arrested in 1932 during the civil disobedience movement. In jail he came into contact with communists, whose worship of a foreign country (Russia) disgusted him. He sought with his friends to marry socialism with patriotism, an endeavour that resulted in the formation, when they were released from jail in 1934, of the Congress Socialist Party.
- Now known by the diminutive 'JP', Narayan was arrested again in 1941. In November 1942 he escaped from Hazaribagh Jail and went underground. From his various hiding places he issued a series of letters calling for a socialist rebellion.
- In 1948, JP helped form the new Socialist Party. He served as the president of all-India unions of railway, postal and defence workers, thus being, in effect, the leader of more than a million men. After the Congress defeated all comers in the 1952 elections, Nehru called Narayan for talks to explore the possibility of the Socialists rejoining the Congress. The talks failed, but by this time JP was losing interest in party politics altogether. He had become increasingly attracted to the programmes of the Gandhian Vinoba Bhave, who was campaigning for rich landlords to donate, to the poor, excess land (bhoodan) and, where possible, entire villages (gramdan). Narayan was inspired to do a jivandan, namely, to offer his own life to the service of this social movement. He was also reconsidering his approach to Gandhi, who now appealed to him for his advocacy of village self-rule and his critique of greed and materialism in economic life. Through the 1950s, JP toured the villages of Bihar trying to get land for the landless. In the 1960s this activity was coupled with attempts to reconcile the people of India's borderlands to the Indian Constitution.

- After two decades in social service, Narayan dramatically reentered politics in 1974 to lead an all-India movement against the government of Indira Gandhi, which he (and his associates) held to be corrupt, authoritarian and indifferent to the needs of the poor. When a state of Emergency was declared in June 1975, Narayan was arrested along with other Opposition politicians. He was released after a few months owing to his ill-health (he had a serious diabetic condition), but remained unreconciled to the rule of Indira Gandhi. When elections were called in March 1977 he campaigned, despite his age and ill-health, for a now united Opposition. This new 'Janata Party' came to power with JP's blessings, but its disintegration into rival factions deeply disheartened him. He died in October 1979.

17. THE GANDHIAN LIBERAL: C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

- C. Rajagopalachari was born in 1878, son of a village headman in the Tamil country. He was sent to school in Bangalore and took his first degree in that city's Central College. He then proceeded to qualify as a lawyer in Madras where, still a student, he was moved and inspired by Bal Gangadhar Tilak's arrest in 1898.
- After taking his law degree, Rajagopalachari moved to the town of Salem to practise. He attended the 1906 Congress in Calcutta and was elected to the Salem Municipal Council five years later (he eventually became chairman of the council). In 1919 Rajagopalachari moved to the Presidency capital, Madras, which provided a bigger stage for the law and for public service. The same year, he met Gandhi and at once became his devoted disciple and admirer. The Mahatma, in turn, trusted and respected his integrity and his acumen. Rajagopalachari chose now to only wear homespun cloth and gave up his law practice to devote himself full-time to the nationalist cause.
- By now widely known by the diminutive 'Rajaji', Rajagopalachari went to jail in the satyagrahas of the 1920s and 1930s. However, what brought him even closer to Gandhi was his interest in abolishing untouchability and promoting Hindu—Muslim harmony. He was more committed to these programmes than many other followers of Gandhi, who were interested in the attainment of political freedom alone.
- In 1937, when the Congress came to power in Madras, Rajaji was unanimously elected prime minister. He ran a government that was efficient but also controversial, notably for its promotion of Hindi. In October 1939 he resigned along with other Congress ministers/ ministries in protest against the viceroy's refusal to consult Indian opinion in the matter of the Second World War. Then, in a daring break with his party—and mentor—he opposed the Quit India movement of 1942, asking that the Congress instead work harder to find common ground with the British. He became even more estranged from his old comrades when he advocated a rapprochement with the Muslim League.
- Rajagopalachari had resigned from the Congress in 1942. Readmitted in 1945, he served as the first Indian governor of West Bengal and then as the first (and last) Indian Governor General. Afterwards, he joined the Union Cabinet, before returning to Madras as chief minister. In 1954 he was forced to resign from the post and went into retirement. When he demitted office, Rajaji was in his mid-seventies. He had been continuously in public life for close to four decades. Part of him now simply wanted to read and write.
- However, there was a part of Rajaji that could not keep out of politics altogether. He had changed his mind about Hindi, which he now did not want imposed on the south. He was concerned about the global nuclear arms race. Above all, he was worried about the lack of opposition to the Congress Party. In 1959, aged eighty, he started the Swatantra (Freedom) Party. He undertook this with some reluctance, as he told a younger colleague, he was 'too old, too long a Congressman and too close to Nehru personally to consider an active re-entry into politics'. Under Rajaji's leadership, the Swatantra had mixed electoral success—winning 22 seats in the general elections of 1962, 44 in 1967 and a mere 8 in 1971. It served in coalition governments in some states. However, its chief contribution to Indian democracy was intellectual and ideological, through its searching criticisms of the economic and foreign policies of the ruling party.
- A colonial governor once called Rajagopalachari the 'wisest man in India'. The sentiment was endorsed by Gandhi, who described him as the 'keeper of my conscience'. C. Rajagopalachari died on Christmas Day, 1972.

18. THE DEFENDER OF THE TRIBALS: VERRIER ELWIN

- A remarkable Englishman-turned-Indian was Verrier Elwin, the Oxford scholar who became the foremost spokesman for India's tribal peoples. Born in 1902, the son of a colonial bishop, Elwin was reared in a fiercely evangelical family. It was to escape this background that he came to India in 1927, a freshly ordained priest, with first-class degrees in English and theology under his belt. He joined the Christa Seva Sangh (CSS), an organization that sought to root Christianity in Indian soil and whose members wore homespun cloth, ate vegetarian food and incorporated Indian motifs into their liturgy.
- The CSS was based in Poona. Elwin thus became acquainted with that city's reformist and liberal traditions. He also befriended Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who was living in Poona in the late 1920s. But his most consequential contact was with Gandhi, who often visited Poona and whose own ashram in Ahmedabad was but a night's train journey away. Elwin was deeply attracted to Gandhi, whom he saw as the finest modern interpreter of the message of Christ himself.
- In 1931 Elwin left the CSS to engage more directly with the lives of the Indian poor. He first thought of making his home in an Untouchable quarter of Bombay, but eventually decided to work with the tribal people of central India. With a CSS friend, Shamrao Hivale, he moved to a village in the upper Narmada valley, where he sought to bring modern education and health care to the Gond Tribals.
- In 1936 Elwin was delicensed by the Church of England for his refusal to take the Gospel to the tribes. Four years later he married a Gond girl, deepening his identification with her people. (The marriage broke up after a decade, whereupon Elwin married another tribal.) Meanwhile, he had begun publishing essays and books on different aspects of tribal life and culture. Some of his works were descriptive and ethnographic—others, analytical and polemical.
- As we have seen, Gandhi paid close attention to the problems of women, Muslims and Untouchables. However, despite being some 8 per cent of India's population, the tribals had been ignored by the national movement. Nor had other political thinkers and activists focused on them. Once, when charged with the question of why he didn't take up tribal questions, B.R. Ambedkar answered: 'I have never claimed to be a universal leader of suffering humanity. The problem of Untouchables is quite enough for my suffering strength.' This was reasonable, but it still left a large and vulnerable section unrepresented in public discourse. This was the gap that Verrier Elwin sought to fill.
- After Independence, Elwin became a citizen of the Indian republic. In 1954 Jawaharlal Nehru appointed him adviser on tribal affairs to the administration of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). This was a large territory at the tri-junction of India with China and Burma, inhabited by very many different tribes who were largely unknown to the administration. Elwin was charged with designing policies to facilitate and smoothen their cultural integration with the rest of India. Elwin spent ten years in the north-east, travelling to all parts of NEFA and also spending extended periods of time in Assam and Nagaland. As before, he wrote about tribal art and folklore, but also about land and forest policies. He died in 1964, an esteemed if also somewhat controversial public figure in his adopted homeland.
- Verrier Elwin is represented in this book because of the quality of his thought (and prose), and because he focused attention on the problems of the two large concentrations of tribals in the country. These reside in the forested hills of central India and the north-east respectively. The former is now the epicentre of a Maoist rebellion; the latter, home to apparently intractable insurgencies. Intrinsic worth, as well as contemporary relevance, thus justify the choice of Elwin as a maker of modern India.

19. THE LAST MODERNIST: HAMID DALWAI

- Hamid Dalwai was born in 1932 on the same Konkan coast where Gokhale and Tilak first saw the light of day. There the similarities end; whereas the other two were middle-class Brahmins, Dalwai was born in a working-class Muslim household. We know nothing of his formal education. He does not appear to have attended college. In his early teens he joined a nationalist youth organization, the Rashtra Seva Dal, the only Muslim in his village to do so. In his twenties Dalwai moved to Bombay and became active in socialist politics. He also began publishing short stories in Marathi.
- From the time he came to Bombay, Dalwai's main interest, and perhaps obsession, was with changing the attitudes of Indian Muslims towards democracy and modernism. To this end, he left the Socialist Party and devoted himself full-time to social reform. In 1970 he founded the Muslim Satyashodhak Samaj, the name deliberately echoing that of the organization that Jotirao Phule had established a century before. This newer organization focused on the enhancement of the rights of Muslim women. Among its campaigns was the attempt to abolish, by law and in custom, the practice of triple talaq, whereby the husband could divorce his wife by uttering a single word three times.
- Hamid Dalwai also advocated a common civil code for all Indian citizens. More broadly, he wished to erase communal markers and distinctions in public life, in pursuance of a common citizenship for all Indians in a genuinely secular and democratic nation.
- Dalwai challenged the sanctity of the Quran; in particular, he felt that it had no relevance to social or political life. This was consistent with his attitude to religion in general, which he considered a personal matter, to be negotiated between an individual and his god—or gods—with no relevance to the worlds of law, economics or social relations.
- Whereas his predecessors had campaigned against the caste system, Dalwai's target was orthodox Islam. Dalwai hoped not merely to make Muslims abreast of Hindus in terms of access to modern education, but to liberate them from the tyranny of faith altogether. There was nothing apologetic about Hamid Dalwai, whose modernism was militant and uncompromising.
- Tragically, he lived a much shorter life. Dalwai died in 1977, aged forty-four, of kidney failure.
