

RECOVERING LIBERTIES

One of the world's leading historians examines the great Indian liberal tradition stretching from Rammohan Roy in the 1820s, through Dadabhai Naoroji in the 1880s, to G. K. Gokhale in the 1900s. This powerful new study shows how the ideas of constitutional and later 'communitarian' liberals influenced but were also rejected by their opponents and successors, including Nehru, Gandhi, Indian socialists, radical democrats and proponents of Hindu nationalism. Equally, *Recovering Liberties* contributes to the rapidly developing field of global intellectual history, demonstrating that the ideas we associate with major Western thinkers – Mill, Comte, Spencer and Marx – were received and transformed by Indian intellectuals in the light of their own traditions to demand justice, racial equality and political representation. In doing so, C. A. Bayly throws fresh light on the nature and limitations of European political thought and re-examines the origins of Indian democracy.

Professor Sir Christopher Bayly, KB, Litt.D., FBA, is Professor of Imperial and Naval History at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St. Catharine's College. He is currently Director of the Centre of South Asian Studies at Cambridge. He has published works on the history of the city of Allahabad in north India, Indian merchant communities, empire and information in India, and the origin of nationality in South Asia. Professor Bayly was awarded the Wolfson Prize in History for 'lifetime achievement' in 2006 and the Royal Asiatic Society's medal in 2008. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and of the Royal Historical Society. He became a trustee of the British Museum in 2008.

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INDIAN THOUGHT IN THE AGE OF LIBERALISM
AND EMPIRE

*The Wiles Lectures given at the Queen's
University of Belfast, 2007*

C. A. BAYLY
University of Cambridge



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Preface

This book examines the ideas, projects and sensibilities of those Indian intellectuals and public figures who broadly subscribed to the international liberal consensus of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It represents an extension forward in time of my earlier work *Empire and information* (1996) to the high point of India's struggle for freedom. It also raises the issue of the creation and circulation of knowledge to a more abstract level by examining political arguments on their own terms. The subtitle of the book is a tribute to *Arabic thought in the liberal age*, by Albert Hourani, who was one of the finest historians of the later twentieth century. Hourani made it clear that his own book could not possibly engage with the whole of 'Arabic thought' over 150 years. Equally, the present work cannot hope to capture even a small part of the vast and complex intellectual history of India between 1800 and the 1950s. Inevitably, it is extremely selective. It concentrates on Bengal, Bombay and north India and there is little on Madras and the south, which produced its own powerful school of liberal thinkers. In order to break down the simple dichotomy between metropolis and periphery, however, some chapters briefly consider analogous liberal projects in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Sino-Malay world. The sections on Indian Muslims are brief and mainly designed to show that the category 'liberal' can also be applied, with some reservations, to many Muslim intellectuals.

Again, most of the texts, pamphlets and newspapers cited here were initially written in English, though I have referred to some Hindi materials in the sections on north India, since the 'vernacularisation' of liberal concepts remains an important issue. Anindita Ghosh has also very kindly read and commented on the sections on Bengal from her knowledge of the vernacular literature and provided some references from Bengali sources. The heavy concentration on English materials can be justified to a considerable extent because Indian liberal thinkers were attempting to create a national and transnational 'republic of letters' and also to bring their concerns and formulations to the attention of their British rulers and to

American and wider European opinion through their command of the English language. Again, the focus of the work remains on liberal thinkers, broadly defined, though at points it examines the arguments of their opponents amongst British and Indian radicals or conservatives. The book concludes with a discussion of the decline and transformation of liberal thinking after 1914 and the manner in which some classic liberal ideas were taken up by Indian socialists, champions of the disadvantaged, followers of Gandhi and even theorists of the Hindu right.

Recovering Liberties engages with the emerging field of global intellectual history, while at the same time locating itself in Indian thought and Indian society. I am grateful to the editors of 'Ideas in Context' for allowing the book to be published in this distinguished series, since it is perhaps the first to be concerned centrally with non-European or non-American thinkers and public men. Yet this raises presentational as well as intellectual difficulties of a very high order. I hope that some historians of Western political thought will read the book, and hence I have needed to rehearse some material and arguments which are quite well known to Indian historians and based largely on their own painstaking work. Even major figures in Indian thought are unknown to prominent European intellectual historians. Conversely, I have tried to indicate to the South Asian readership how their particular concerns can be understood in the wider context of the history of European and American political thought. Intellectual historians of the Western world may find some of these references otiose or plain obvious.

The book has been a long time in gestation. Some early sections of it were presented as the Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, as far back as 2000. I am grateful to the Page-Barbour Trustees for their invitation. Much of the research was done while I held the Chair of the South at the Kluge Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC in 2006 and I am very grateful to the librarians and staff there for their help. The substance took firmer shape in the Wiles lectures at the Queen's University of Belfast in 2007 and the book therefore forms part of the Wiles Lectures series. I thank the Wiles Trustees for their invitation and support. I was also privileged to give the first Carol Breckenridge Memorial Lecture at the New School, New York in 2010, where I received valuable comments on some of the book's themes from the audience. Finally, I have participated in a series of European Science Foundation conferences organised by Peter Bang. I warmly thank the trustees and managers of all these institutions and those who attended the lectures organised by them.

My greatest individual debt is to my colleague in Cambridge, Shruti Kapila. Her intellectual vigour and her creativity in inaugurating a series of meetings on aspects of global intellectual history reignited my interest in Indian thought and Indian history more generally. Shruti's own work on the radical, insurrectionary dimension of Indian political ideas has acted as a powerful counterpoint to the tamer and more politic figures which appear in these pages. I must also thank Sunil Khilnani, David Armitage, Faisal Devji and Sujit Sivasundaram, all of whom commented incisively and helpfully on the draft in different ways. Gareth Stedman Jones, Richard Drayton, Eugenio Biagini, Simon Layton, Sunil Purushotham, Aishwarj Kumar, Derek Elliott, Tim Harper, David Washbrook, Sugata Bose, Emma Rothschild and many others in Cambridge, Oxford, London, Harvard, New York and India have helped me to formulate some of these ideas better and to avoid at least some error. As ever, Susan Bayly patiently listened to many of the arguments of this book and responded to them from her perspective as a historical anthropologist, working now on the very different society of Vietnam. Finally, I am grateful to librarians and archivists, here in Cambridge at the Centre of South Asian Studies and University Library, at the British Library in London and at the National Library, Calcutta.

Sections of the book have appeared in the collections on Indian thought in *Modern Intellectual History*, 1 (Apr. 2007) and 2 (Aug. 2010) and also in 'Empires and Indian liberals', in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (eds.), *Race, nation and empire: making histories, 1750 to the present* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 74–93.

Note on Indian names

The rendering of Indian proper names, particularly for the early nineteenth century, remains a perpetual headache. I have generally used the ‘corrupt’ contemporary forms (e.g., ‘Bholanauth Chunder Ghose’ rather than ‘Bholanatha Chandra Ghosha’) because these were the names under which these authors published in the Roman script and their texts are central to the book. Generally, I have used lineage names (e.g., Naoroji, Sen) except where this is likely to cause confusion (when I have sometimes resorted to given names) or when the final name is simply a title (e.g., ‘Rammohan’, rather than ‘Roy’).