

# INDIAN ESSAY – 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Essay

### Overview

**Varieties** Essay-writing in this period took diverse forms. While the scholarly treatise and commentary continued, and while the beginnings of literary criticism were evident, most discursive prose writing engaged with the two pressing debates of the day, both in response to the heyday of the British Raj. First, the reform movements of the nineteenth century continued to argue for change in religion and society. Second, again picking up threads from the previous century, there was a demand for political freedom and eventually independence. The genius of Aurobindo and Gandhi was to combine the clamour for religious and political change, although each spent many years in British jails.

**Government regulation** Although controversial pamphlets calling for radical change in religion and society did not much trouble the British authorities, they cracked down hard on political writing that they considered seditious. Newspapers, as established businesses, proved easy to control through legislation, but not so the pamphlets that could appear and disappear in a day. In these times of campaigning journalism and political pamphleteering, the essay moved out of the university and into the public imagination.

### Gujarati

**M.K. Gandhi** Although Gandhi (1869-1948) is not always appreciated as an essayist, his early writings display the argumentative power (he had already practiced law in South Africa) that would later persuade even his enemies. He edited newspapers in Gujarati, Hindi and English, and produced numerous essays on a wide variety of topics from vegetarianism to economics. He usually wrote in Gujarati and then translated himself into English.

**Hind Swaraj** A good example of his prose and his process is *Hind Swaraj*. It was written in a little over a week, as he travelled by boat from South Africa to India in November 1909. When it was swiftly banned by the British, he translated it into English as *Hindi Swaraj or Indian Self-Rule*. Believing it would have little impact on English-speaking elites, the authorities let it sell. The book takes the form of a dialogue between author and reader (a typical Indian), whose doubts about independence are swept aside by the cogent reasoning of the author. For instance, when the reader says that he would be content for the English to leave, the author replies that just the people but the system of government must change. An independent country with an English-style government would not be India, he says, but 'Englishtan.'

### Marathi

**Vinod Damodar Savarkar** The religious nationalism begun by Aurobindo and Gandhi took a virulent anti-Muslim turn with V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966). His extremism began when as a student in London and Paris, he learned bomb-making from a Russian émigré and planned the assassination of Lord Curzon (responsible for the hated partition of Bengal in 1905). When a member of his revolutionary group shot and killed an official in the India Office in London, Savarkar was arrested. But when the ship carrying him back to India docked at Marseille, he escaped and claimed asylum on French soil. Recaptured, he was sent to the Andaman Islands to serve a fifty-year sentence but was released in 1921 and subsequently led the Hindu Mahasabha, an extreme Hindu nationalist organisation.

**Essays** Savarkar wrote extensively in Marathi, although much of it was translated into English. An example, with an amazing history, is his book *1857-The War of Independence*, which was originally written in Marathi in 1908, but was published in English, in Holland. The British authorities had tried to suppress its publication in Marathi and then again in English, in both England and India, even stealing two chapters of the manuscript in London. All because the book dared to recast the 'mutiny' of 1857 as an act of insurrection. Savarkar's most

famous work, *Hindutva-Who is a Hindu?*(1923), was written in English, while he was in prison, but its author was named only as a 'Maratha'.

### English

**Rabindranath Tagore** The essays written in this period by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) represent a mixture of interests. Although he wrote about nationalism (a collection by the title was published in 1917), he devoted himself more to aesthetic and spiritual issues. *Personality* (1917) is a collection of six essays, including the famous 'What is Art?', while *Sadhana* ('The Perfection of Life', 1913) expresses his mystical idealism. Tagore transcended many categories, as is illustrated by his eclectic collection of writings entitled *BicitraPrabandha* ('Miscellaneous Essays,' 1907), which includes letters, poems and reminiscences. Always an original thinker, he did not hesitate to criticise what he saw as Gandhi's error in calling on Indians to burn their foreign-made clothes ('The Call of Truth,' 1922).

**Sri Aurobindo** Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose, 1872-1950) was a patriot who became a mystic. He participated in the nationalist movement at the highest level before retreating to Pondicherry in 1910 to escape another term in a British jail. Even his political essays, however, reveal a spiritualism, not dissimilar to Gandhi's. Indeed, he wrote a series of essays as early as 1907 outlining the philosophical foundation of passive resistance to aggression. In other early prose writings, he argued passionately for the revival of Hinduism in the service of nationalism. Later essays moved away from temporal problems and urged his followers to act for World Peace as 'instruments of the Divine Will.'

**B.R Ambedkar** B.R Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of the most extraordinary men in this period of remarkable people. Born into an untouchable caste, he went on to gain a PhD from Columbia University and pass the bar from Grey's Inn, London. He made his mark on the nationalist movement in the 1930s, when he broke ranks with Gandhi and argued the case for the millions of Harijans in India. While others saw Hinduism as the antidote to colonialism, Ambedkar argued that Hinduism was itself as oppressive as foreign rule.

**Essays** Ambedkar bravely published his ideas in a series of fiercely argued books and essays. In 1936 he wrote a speech called 'The Annihilation of Caste' to be delivered at a conference in Lahore. He sent it in advance to the organisers for printing and distribution, as was the custom, but they objected to its condemnation of the caste system. When they requested changes, he printed it on his own. Later, he published *What Gandhi and the Congress have Done to Untouchables* (1945). It is a closely argued polemic, citing facts and statistics to condemn the Gandhian position that the caste system (including Untouchables) was desirable. The book was banned by the Indian government after Independence in 1947. In the early 1950s, he wrote *Buddha and His Dhamma*, in which he explained why he had converted to Buddhism.

### Tamil

**E.V. Ramaswami Naicker** E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973, 'Periyar') epitomises this age of the fervent pamphleteer. He, like Ambedkar, opposed Gandhi on the question of caste, but Naicker's protest was on behalf of all non-Brahman Tamils (not just Untouchables). He protested endlessly against what he saw as the historical domination of Sanskrit/Hindi and Brahmins over the language and people of south India. His 'rationalist' movement attacked superstition and idolatry, while his 'self-respect' movement aimed to restore dignity. He also championed women's rights in the form of 'self-respect marriages', which were conducted without a Brahmin priest. A tireless orator (even in old age he would speak for three or four hours), he edited several newspapers (such as *Kudi Arasu* and *Viduthalai*). He is still the guiding spirit behind every political party (DMK and its offshoots) that has held power in Madras.

**Essays** Naicker articulated his unorthodox, even offensive, views in a florid but easily understood Tamil. It was a Tamil ostensibly scrubbed clean of all Sanskrit influences (an impossible task), so that his language would embody his political message. Perhaps his most famous pamphlet is *Iramayanam, Unmaiyanakatai* ('*Ramayana, the True Story*', 1936?), in which he unmasks Rama, the symbol of Hindu virtue, as a cad and a coward. Other important works include *Namatu Kurikol* ('Our Aims,' 1938) and *Pen Yen Atimaiyanal?* ('Why did Women become Enslaved?', 1942).

### Questions/Discussion

1. The British Library holds an enormous collection of essays, books, pamphlets and tracts that were banned by the British government in India prior to Independence. Most of these sources have never been studied by scholars. The story of Indian Independence has yet to be told in full.

2. Most of us know the names of Gandhi and Nehru, and understandably so, but their influence was closely matched by Ambedkar and Naicker. These latter two did not always write what people wanted to read, but they reflected the views of a very large segment of India's population, then and now. Again, it is salutary to realise that Gandhi did not speak for everyone.
3. In the end, however, Gandhi's vision of a future Indian society won the day. Why is this? Is it largely because of he practiced what he preached in terms of non-violent political action? Is it because his vision was rooted in traditional Hinduism? Is it because he used his lawyer-trained powers of persuasion, in print and speech, to convert the masses to his cause? What role did the media, most of it British, play in creating the image of the 'Mahatma' ('Great Soul')?

### Reading

Debi Chatterjee, *Up Against Caste: Comparative study of Ambedkar and Periyar* (Rawat, 1981/2004)  
 Stephen Hay (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition: Modern India and Pakistan, vol. II* (Columbia, 1988)  
 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste* (Social Science, 2005)  
 Stanley A. Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford, 2002)  
 AmiyaSen, *Social and Religious Reform: The Hindus of British India* (Oxford, 2003)

### Texts

1. From *BicitraPrabandha*, by Tagore

OUR REAL PROBLEM in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered, in the present age the same spirit continues - and they organize and exploit the whole world.

But from the earliest beginnings of history, India has had her own problem constantly before her - it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence.

This problem of race unity which we have been trying to solve for so many years has likewise to be faced by you here in America. Many people in this country ask me what is happening as to the caste distinctions in India. But when this question is asked me, it is usually done with a superior air. And I feel tempted to put the same question to our American critics with a slight modification, 'What have you done with the Red Indian and the Negro?' For you have not got over your attitude of caste toward them. You have used violent methods to keep aloof from other races, but until you have solved the question here in America, you have no right to question India.

In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history - the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause.

2. From the 'Doctrine of Passive Resistance', by Sri Aurobindo

We have defined, so far, the occasion and the ultimate object of the passive resistance we preach. It is the only effective means, except actual armed revolt, by which the organised strength of the nation, gathering to a powerful central authority and guided by the principle of self-development and self-help, can wrest the control of our national life from the grip of an alien bureaucracy, and thus, developing into a free popular Government, naturally replace the bureaucracy it extrudes until the process culminates in a self-governed India, liberated from foreign control. The mere effort at self-development unaided by some kind of resistance, will not materially help us towards our goal. Merely by developing national schools and colleges we shall not induce or force the bureaucracy to give up to us the control of education. Merely by attempting to expand some of our trades and industries, we shall not drive out the British exploiter or take from the British Government its sovereign power of regulating, checking or killing the growth of Swadeshi industries by the imposition of judicious taxes and duties and other methods always open to the controller of a country's finance and legislation. Still less shall we be able by that harmless means to get for ourselves the control of taxation and expenditure. Nor shall we, merely by establishing our own arbitration courts, oblige the alien control to give up the elaborate and lucrative system of Civil and Criminal Judicature which at once emasculates the nation and makes it pay heavily for its own emasculation. In none of these matters is the bureaucracy likely to budge an inch from its secure position unless it is forcibly persuaded.

The control of the young mind in its most impressionable period is of vital importance to the continuance of the hypnotic spell by which alone the foreign domination manages to subsist; the exploitation of the country is the chief reason for its existence; the control of the judiciary is one of its chief instruments of repression. None of these things can it yield up without bringing itself nearer to its doom. It is only by [organised](#) national resistance, passive or aggressive, that we can make our self-development effectual. For if the self-help movement only succeeds in bringing about some modification of educational methods, some readjustment of the balance of trade, some alleviation of the curse of litigation, then, whatever else it may have succeeded in doing, it will have failed of its main object. The new school at least have not advocated the policy of self-development merely out of a disinterested ardour for moral improvement or under the spur of an inoffensive philanthropic patriotism. This attitude they leave to saints and philosophers, – saints like the editor of the *Indian Mirror* or philosophers like the ardent Indian Liberals who sit at the feet of Mr. John Morley. They for their part speak and write frankly as politicians aiming at a definite and urgent political object by a way which shall be reasonably rapid and yet permanent in its results. We may have our own educational theories; but we advocate national education not as an educational experiment or to subserve any theory, but as the only way to secure truly national and patriotic control and discipline for the mind of the country in its malleable youth. We desire industrial expansion, but Swadeshi without boycott, – non-political Swadeshi, – Lord Minto's "honest" Swadeshi – has no attractions for us; since we know that it can bring no safe and permanent national gain; – that can only be secured by the industrial and fiscal independence of the Indian nation. Our immediate problem as a nation is not how to be intellectual and well-informed or how to be rich and industrious, but how to stave off imminent national death, how to put an end to the white peril, how to assert ourselves and live. It is for this reason that whatever minor differences there may be between different exponents of the new spirit, they are all agreed on the immediate necessity of an [organised](#)<sup>3</sup> national resistance to the state of things which is crushing us out of existence as a nation and on the one goal of that resistance, – freedom.

3. From the author's unpublished preface to *The Buddha and His Damma*, by Ambedkar

A question is always asked to me: how I happen[ed] to take such [a] high degree of education. Another question is being asked: why I am inclined towards Buddhism. These questions are asked because I was born in a community known in India as the "Untouchables." This preface is not the place for answering the first question. But this preface may be the place for answering the second question.

The direct answer to this question is that I regard the Buddha's Dhamma to be the best. No religion can be compared to it. If a modern man who knows science must have a religion, the only religion he can have is the Religion of the Buddha. This conviction has grown in me after thirty-five years of close study of all religions.

How I was led to study Buddhism is another story. It may be interesting for the reader to know. This is how it happened.

My father was a military officer, but at the same time a very religious person. He brought me up under a strict discipline. From my early age I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a Kabirpanthi, though his father was Ramanandi. As such, he did not believe in Murti Puja (Idol Worship), and yet he performed Ganapati Puja--of course for our sake, but I did not like it. He read the books of his Panth. At

the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read every day before going to bed a portion of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house to hear the Katha. This went on for a long number of years.

The year I passed the English Fourth Standard Examination, my community people wanted to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to congratulate me. Compared to the state of education in other communities, this was hardly an occasion for celebration. But it was felt by the organisers that I was the first boy in my community to reach this stage; they thought that I had reached a great height. They went to my father to ask for his permission. My father flatly refused, saying that such a thing would inflate the boy's head; after all, he has only passed an examination and done nothing more. Those who wanted to celebrate the event were greatly disappointed. They, however, did not give way.

They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father, and asked him to intervene. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded, and the meeting was held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a copy of his book on the life of the Buddha, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it.

I began to ask why my father did not introduce us to the Buddhist literature. After this, I was determined to ask my father this question. One day I did. I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeated the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables. My father did not like the question. He merely said, "You must not ask such silly questions. You are only boys; you must do as you are told." My father was a Roman Patriarch, and exercised most extensive Patria Pretestas over his children. I alone could take a little liberty with him, and that was because my mother had died in my childhood, leaving me to the care of my auntie.

So after some time, I asked again the same question. This time my father had evidently prepared himself for a reply. He said, "The reason why I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana is this: we belong to the Untouchables, and you are likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is natural. The value of [the] Mahabharata and **Ramayana** lies in removing this inferiority complex. See Drona and Karna--they were small men, but to what heights they rose! Look at Valmiki--he was a Koli, but he became the author of [the] **Ramayana**. It is for removing this inferiority complex that I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana."

I could see that there was some force in my father's argument. But I was not satisfied. I told my father that I did not like any of the figures in [the] Mahabharata. I said, "I do not like Bhishma and Drona, nor Krishna. Bhishma and Drona were hypocrites. They said one thing and did quite the opposite. Krishna believed in fraud. His life is nothing but a series of frauds. Equal dislike I have for Rama. Examine his conduct in the Sarupnakha [=Surpanakha] episode [and] in the ValiSugriva episode, and his beastly behaviour towards Sita." My father was silent, and made no reply. He knew that there was a revolt.

This is how I turned to the Buddha, with the help of the book given to me by Dada Keluskar. It was not with an empty mind that I went to the Buddha at that early age. I had a background, and in reading the Buddhist Lore I could always compare and contrast. This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and His Dhamma.

## Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Essay

### Overview

Several strands of essay-writing are now practiced in India, most of them continued from the first half of the century. Journalists and critics write in all regional languages, notably in Hindi, Tamil and Bengali. However, as with fiction and poetry, writers in English have a far greater reach, and many command international audiences. These English-language writers can be divided into different types of essay-writing (periodical journalism, literary criticism and campaigning journalism), and many are novelists, as well.

### Hindi

**KuberNathRai** As a specialist in the essay, KuberNathRai (1933–1996) was unusual among his contemporaries. Although he was a student of English literature and a scholar of Hindi literature, his essays ranged over many topics, from agriculture to folk songs. His romantic outlook, lamenting the loss of tradition in the rush to modernity, combined with a keen eye for beauty, endeared him to a wide Hindi-reading public. His most important essays have been published in two collections (*Kuberanatha Raya kepratinidhiNibandha*, 1991, and *KuberNathRaiSanchayan*, 1992).

### Tamil

**VenkatSwaminathan** The Tamil cultural critic VenkatSwaminathan (1933-2015) was an iconoclast, whose witty essays gave pleasure even to his enemies. He delighted in puncturing the inflated balloons of his contemporaries. At a time, when any self-respecting Indian intellectual was at least a communist, he argued that the Soviet Union was destroying human enquiry in the arts and science. When the Tamil literary world was enamoured of the poet Bharatidasan, he wrote an essay to show that Bharatidasan's poetry had been corrupted by work in the film world. Swaminathan was prolific, writing caustic but revealing essays about painting, sculpture, film, music and theatre. His book *Kalai-Anubhavam, Velipadu* ('Art -Experience, Expression,' 2000) is a collection of essays, articulating his central idea that art derives from experience, not from ideology.

### English

**ArunShourie** Among the many distinguished journalists in this period is ArunShourie (1941-), who came to national prominence during the 'Emergency' in 1975-1977 when the government of Indira Gandhi used the pretext of national security to suppress civil rights across the country. Shourie wrote courageous articles in the *Indian Express* protesting against these measures, and fought hard to prevent censorship in the media. In 1979, he became editor of the paper and continued to campaign against corruption and for a free press. Later he served in government, but even today he still writes fearlessly about politics.

**M.J. Akbar** M.J. Akbar (1951-) is a younger gadfly who has gained international acclaim for his journalism. He distinguished himself first within India by his investigative reporting on several newspaper and magazines, particularly *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in the 1970s. He vigorously opposed the censorship and dictatorship during the Emergency in 1975-1977. Later he creating India's first 'modern' daily newspaper when he set up *The Telegraph* in Calcutta. He edited several other periodicals, and spent time in politics, as well. However, he is best known outside India for his series of books, on Nehru, the intractable Kashmir issue, Islamic politics and Pakistan. Perhaps his most influential book is *India: The Siege within - Challenges to a Nation's Unity* (1996), which examines the centrifugal forces in India's fragile nationhood and concludes with a memorable sentence: 'If India learnt more of the truth of its own past, it would perhaps have fewer problems today.'

**Pankaj Mishra** Pankaj Mishra(1969-) represents a different strand of journalism in contemporary India. Rather than working at a particular paper or magazine, he is a free-lancer, who roams across a broad spectrum, from travelogue to fiction to politics. He has published several full-length books, many of which explore the problems posed by globalisation, but with a focus on India and China. At the same time, he frequently appears in periodicals, such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times*, with pieces on literature and culture that challenge accepted views.

**Arundhati Roy**Arundhati Roy (1961-) first came to international attention when she won the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things* in 1997, but she has since devoted herself to reporting on controversial social and political issues. She is now an indefatigable campaigning journalist, with more than a dozen books, scores of major essays and hundreds of newspaper articles to her name, covering armed insurgency, the Iraq war, India's

nuclear policy, the Kashmir dispute and a controversial dam project. Perhaps her most influential reportage resulted from the time she spent living with tribal rebels in the jungles of central India in 2010. Using her storytelling skills, she produced a number of articles, published around the world, explaining the rebels' grievances against the Indian government. She has won many awards for her original writing, but has also been criticised in some quarters for her 'anti-India' views.

**AmitChaudhuri** AmitChaudhuri (1962-) is an award-winning novelist, short-story writer, poet and classical musician who also excels as an essayist. His primary territory is literary criticism, but he mixes in social history and personal anecdote. Having grown up in Bombay and received his education there, he now spends half his life in England, primarily as a professor of comparative literature. His writing ranges very widely, from a book-length critical study of D.H. Lawrence to essays on Indian politics to memoirs about Calcutta. His anthology (*The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, 2001) has played a role in forming the canon of modern Indian literature.

**A.K. Ramanujan** A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993) was an internationally-known poet, scholar and critic. Born in a Tamil Brahmin family in Mysore, he received his PhD in linguistics in the US, where he eventually settled as a professor at the University of Chicago. His essays, which covered a wide spectrum from folklore to Sanskrit poetics, had the precision and concision of his poetry. But they also brimmed with new ideas, which often ruffled established feathers. An example is his 'Three Hundred Ramayanas,' in which he celebrated the diversity of Rama stories and argued that there is no 'the' Ramayana. This angered traditionalists who regard the Sanskrit Rama story as a sacred text, and they lobbied successfully to have the essay removed from libraries and university syllabi.

**M.K. Rukhaya** M.K. Rukhaya (1980-) belongs to the newest generation of essayists in India, who use new media to communicate their ideas. She works as a professor of English in a small town in Kerala, but she has an international following through e-journals, blogs and other social media. She is a young Muslim woman whose views on contemporary events and literature are unpredictable and refreshing.

#### Questions/Discussion

1. Literary criticism in India is almost entirely in English about English literature (written in India and elsewhere). Moreover, many of the leading essayists live part of their lives outside India. Is this a necessary condition of a post-colonial, global literary culture? Does it suggest a long-term decline in the literary culture of India's regional languages?
2. The other major strand of essay-writing in India addresses social and political issues. Here, too, though to lesser extent, English-language journalism predominates. One could argue that this linguistic link to the rest of the world has given India a place on the international stage that it would not otherwise have. However, this also means that the great majority of Indians, who do not read English, are left out of these public debates.

#### Reading

M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature* (SahityaAkademi, 1995)

G. N. Raghavan, *The Press in India: A New History* (Gyan Books, 1994) *Contemporary Literary Review India* (a quarterly journal, edited by KhurshidAlam)

AmitChaudhuri, *Clearing A Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2008)

#### Text

From Arundhati Roy's 'Walking with Comrades,' 2010

In Dantewada, the police wear plain clothes and the rebels wear uniforms. The jail superintendent is in jail. The prisoners are free (three hundred of them escaped from the old town jail two years ago). Women who have been raped are in police custody. The rapists give speeches in the bazaar...

Across the Indravatiriver, in the area controlled by the Maoists, is the place the police call 'Pakistan'. There the villages are empty, but the forest is full of people. Children who ought to be in school run wild. In the lovely forest villages, the concrete school buildings have either been blown up and lie in a heap, or they are full of policemen. The deadly war that is unfolding in the jungle is a war that the Government of India is both proud and shy of...

It's easier on the liberal conscience to believe that the war in the forests is a war between the Government of India and the Maoists, who call elections a sham, Parliament a pigsty and have openly declared their intention to overthrow the Indian State. It's convenient to forget that tribal people in Central India have a history of resistance that predates Mao by centuries. (That's altruism of course. If they didn't, they wouldn't exist.) The Ho, the Oraon, the Kols, the Santhals, the Mundas and the Gonds have all rebelled several times, against the British, against zamindars and moneylenders. The rebellions were cruelly crushed, many thousands killed, but the people were never conquered.