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# I

## Introduction

A major shift has been taking place in recent years in the historiography of the Indian national movement (perhaps the most rapidly developing sector of modern Indian history writing) through the emergence of a kind of 'history from below'. The new focus is on popular and particularly peasant initiative and 'self-mobilization', as distinct from the earlier concentration on national or regional leaders, patriotic ideologies, elite pressures or factional manoeuvres by patron-client linkages. To the practitioners of what some have started calling 'subaltern studies',<sup>1</sup> conventional nationalist historiography, Cambridge-type Namierism, and even much of existing Marxist scholarship focussed on party or trade union programmes and organisation appear tainted with various forms of 'elitism'. The transformation being sought for is potentially as significant as those brought about by Lefebvre, Soboul, Rude and Cobb in the historiography of the French Revolution; by Hill (particularly in his later works) and Brian Manning on seventeenth-century England; by Thompson and Gutman in British and American labour history; by Hobsbawm, Rude and Thompson in studies of pre-industrial protest. What we see today are the beginnings of an Indian participation in a worldwide historiographical trend, associated with imaginative use of a wider range of sources, along with a certain distrust or cynicism about more-or-less bureaucratically-organised and outwardly successful political movements.<sup>①</sup>

'Histories from below' naturally begin by concentrating on local or regional developments, but perhaps the time has come

for some tentative generalizations. The first aim of this paper is to bring together the data scattered in a fairly large number of specific studies<sup>3</sup> into some kind of analytical framework, distinguishing various types of 'popular' initiative and 'middle class' response in the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian phases of modern Indian nationalism. I am deliberately using the vague term 'popular', to serve as a convenient shorthand for tribal, peasant, artisan or labour protest, and also because more precise class-analysis is necessarily often difficult in a predominantly pre-industrial society. The category of 'peasant' is, after all, hardly more precise or homogeneous, covering as it does the poor peasant-cum-share-cropper or labourer of Eastern India as well as the substantial *patidar* of Kheda or Bardoli with his two-storied house and command over Baraiya or Dubla labour.<sup>4</sup> 'Middle class' is equally vague and even more controversial, particularly in colonial India where subjective 'bourgeois' aspirations were so often associated with links with professions and tenurial landholding rather than industry or trade; I am using 'middle class' to stand for the groups which began asserting some kind of regional or national leadership from the 1870s onwards and which had a significantly different social composition and outlook from the princes, chiefs or zamindars who had led earlier outbursts against British rule down to and including 1857. The objectives of these leading groups could be quite diverse: national emancipation, regional self-assertion, caste or communal gains, and formulating class demands of toilers. The dialectic of leaders and led, spontaneity and discipline, was, however, not necessarily so very different.

Constructing a provisional typology of popular movements through a comparative study of regional and temporal variations may be useful for bringing out certain complexities and unsolved problems which the new historiographical trend has to tackle if it is to develop further. The intention here, as throughout the paper, is to raise questions rather than suggest definitive answers, which I certainly do not have in many cases.

There has been a tendency in our country for 'history-from-below' to get obsessed by a kind of spontaneity-consciousness debate, with two opposing stereotypes: one emphasizing the key and overriding role of nationalist ideology and leadership in allegedly giving form to sporadic discontent, the other at times perhaps

overstressing or romanticizing peasant spontaneity, initiative and rebelliousness through a theory of a fundamentally distinct 'peasant nationalism'. The debate has been probably more fruitful than the faction versus ideology controversy provoked by the Cambridge school some years ago. That it is still extremely restrictive, and leaves unanswered and even unasked a whole range of questions, would be clear to any reader of, say, Charles Tilly's study of the Vendee or T.W. Margadant's work on peasant resistance to Louis Napoleon's *coup de etat* of 1851.<sup>6</sup> I have in mind problems like the precise location of popular militancy—why certain districts or *taluks* show so much more grass-roots initiative than other neighbouring areas. Gyan Pandey's beautifully worked-out explanation in terms of variations in Congress organizational strength and discipline is a major advance, but the question remains as to why the Congress controls happened to become more effective, say, in Agra or eventually Rae Bareilly but not in Bara Banki during 1930-31.<sup>7</sup> One may also raise more general problems like possible alternative explanations of mass actions in terms of immiserization, growing strength and self-confidence of certain groups, or a setback after a period of relative prosperity,<sup>8</sup> while it is impossible to avoid the thorny but necessary question of precise social class and/or caste composition and of the categories of classification which would be most relevant in this connection. Another vital dimension would be possible differences in deep-rooted political and cultural traditions, for it is important to try to relate the short-term explosions with underlying long-term trends: the 'event' with the 'conjuncture' and 'structure'.<sup>9</sup> And in tackling all these and many other problems, the essential tool of analysis has to be the study of variations over space and time, the comparative method expounded so eloquently by Marc Bloch.<sup>10</sup>

Above all, 'history from below' has to face the problem of the ultimate relative *failure* of mass initiative in colonial India, if the justly abandoned stereotype of the eternally passive Indian peasant is not to be replaced by an opposite romantic stereotype of perennial rural rebelliousness. For an essential fact surely is that the 'subaltern' classes have remained subaltern, often surprisingly dormant despite abject misery and ample provocation, and subordinate in the end to their social 'betters' even when they do become politically active. An explanation in terms of repeated

'betrayals' by the propertied leadership, particularly Gandhi, put forward in a crude form by R.P. Dutt a generation ago and tacitly implied by many later scholars, is surely anything but satisfactory here. It implies a kind of elitism in reverse, the evil 'Jonah of Indian Revolution' successfully torpedoing mass movements, and fails to explain why the betrayer always retained so much more mass popularity than his radical critics. We have to search rather for the weaknesses internal to popular movements, and a central theme of my third section is that both the strength and the limitations of Gandhian movements transcend the greatness or inadequacies of Gandhi as a person or of his ideology. A related problem is what may be described as the frequent interpenetration of diverse and even contradictory forms of consciousness, class, national, regional, caste or communal. A district like Shahabad in Bihar, to take one example out of many, was very active in 1857 under Kunwar Singh, plunged into bitter Hindu-Muslim riots in 1917, became a stronghold of the Kisan Sabha in the late 1930s, played a significant part in the 1942 upsurge, and was torn by communal strife again in 1946. Historians often like to demarcate between rival 'trends' of sentiment, thought and action, attributing validity to some and a lower status of 'false consciousness' to others, but the unpleasant fact remains that the separation was obviously very far from clear to contemporaries. We have to try to grasp the complex and varying interrelations between diverse elements in a hybrid 'collective mentality' of a group, class, or region.

Such limitations led up to the central fact of 1947: an achievement of political freedom successfully divorced by urban and rural propertied groups from fundamental socio-economic transformation. In the concluding section I have raised the problem of categorization of this complex and contradictory transition, and I have suggested the possible relevance here of Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution'.

## II

C. 1870-1917

In constructing a typology of popular movements under colonialism, it is convenient to start with a distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' forms of resistance. This distinction was first made in the field of African studies but is being applied now increasingly also to nineteenth century India.<sup>11</sup> 'Primary' resistance refers to the opposition of pre-colonial, as yet largely unchanged, socio-political structures to foreign intrusion, headed by traditional elements (princes, tribal chiefs, zamindars, established religious leaders, etc.) and having in the main a 'restorative' aim.<sup>12</sup> 'Secondary' resistance develops somewhat later, with deeper colonial penetration; it is characterized by new types of leadership and aims going beyond simple restoration of the past (in content, if not always in form).

Primary resistance need not take much of our time here, for by the 1870s this was clearly fast declining. Its predominance up to and including 1857 is equally obvious. Relatively few historians have followed up the pioneering work of S.B. Chaudhuri twenty-five years ago on 'civil disturbances',<sup>13</sup> and so the role of popular initiative in such movements remains largely unexplored. A recent detailed study of popular resistance in Awadh in 1857-58 highlights the initial impetus coming from sepoys (i.e., peasants in uniform), the relatively late entry of *talukdars* when British rule had already collapsed, the big difference in numbers between regular *talukdari* retainers and the levies which fought a guerrilla war so doggedly under their leadership, and the fact that swords far exceeded firearms in the arms seizures made by the British.

but the fundamental features emphasized throughout remain religio-political 'restorative' aims and *talukdari* leadership (even what is, not too happily, styled '*talukdar-peasant symbiosis*').<sup>14</sup>

The decline in this type of resistance after 1857 was obviously connected with the major shift in British policy towards conciliation of princes and landed elements, typified by the abandonment of the doctrine of lapse and in the Awadh policy of 'sympathy' towards *talukdars*. In addition, traditional patterns of paternalism and deference were being eroded with the spread of the harsher logic of commercialization. As the 'lords of the land' became transformed into mere 'landlords' in a process analyzed recently by Metcalf,<sup>15</sup> Awadh peasants who had loyally followed the *talukdars* in 1857 began, already from the 1880s, to consider them their principal oppressors.<sup>16</sup> A third factor, deserving much greater attention than usually accorded to it, was the decline of the share of state revenue in the surplus from agriculture, benefiting zamindars as well as the upper stratum of *rai-yats* (who consequently often in practice became small landlords) in ryotwari areas, and sharpening the contradictions between such groups and subordinate rural elements. From at least Mughal times down to the mid-19th century, the state had been the principal appropriator of the surplus from the countryside, with groups generically described as zamindars playing a significant but essentially subordinate role. Peasant resistance had consequently been directed in the main against state officials, and normally led by local zamindar elements with whom the upper stratum of the *rai-yats* were often associated by paternalist traditions and often by clan or caste linkages.<sup>17</sup> Rural rebellion in both Mughal and early colonial India consequently seems to have resembled the movements against tax-officials of the absolutist state in 17th century France, rather than late-medieval *jacqueries*, the Peasant War of 1525, or the anti-seigniorial explosion of 1789.<sup>18</sup> Post-1857 moves to extend the Permanent Settlement (which had allegedly kept Bengal loyal) proved abortive, and periodic revenue reassessments led to occasional peasant unrest and to nationalist criticism till the 1920s, but land revenue still steadily fell behind agricultural prices. The share of land revenue in gross Government of India tax receipts fell from 43% in 1880 to 23% in 1920, while in Madras Presidency between 1860 and 1920, average assessment per acre

of cultivated land went up from Rs. 1.7 to Rs. 2.1 during a period in which grain prices rose by between 120 and 180%.<sup>19</sup> After the shock of the successful Bardoli *satyagraha* of 1928, efforts to hike up land revenue virtually ceased, setting a pattern which post-1947 regimes have been unwilling or unable to reverse.

Turning to forms of popular resistance not led by traditional upperclass elements, a further subdivision by the criteria of social composition and objective seems helpful. I would like to distinguish fairly sharply, first, between movements of tribals and low caste agricultural labourers or poor peasants, often very militant and occasionally far-reaching in aims, and those of relatively substantial upper and intermediate caste landholding peasants which tended to be both more limited in objectives and more pacific in methods. Within both social categories, a further subdivision has to be made, demarcating fairly direct movements of resistance to exploitation by *dikus*, moneylenders, zamindars, planters, or colonial revenue, forest or police officials from more complex and ambiguous forms in which the persistence or strengthening of traditional patterns of loyalty cut across or blurred class differences and led to caste movements and communal tensions.

My first distinction requires some further discussion, since it will play a crucial role in the subsequent analysis, and since this is yet another cardinal feature of both pre-colonial and colonial rural society which I feel has been often not given its proper importance. The myth of the relatively undifferentiated and harmonious 'village community' persisted in both nationalist and Marxist circles much longer than warranted by the data. Both R.P. Dutt and S.J. Patel, for example, assumed landless agricultural labour to have been a marginal phenomenon in pre-colonial India, and attributed its obvious later importance to processes associated with colonialism: peasant differentiation through commercialization of agriculture and over-pressure on land as rural handicrafts were ruined while population increased.<sup>20</sup> It is very clear now, however, that there did exist a fairly large class of often semi-servile agricultural labour even in the pre-colonial situation of a general land surplus, and that this was fundamentally connected with caste restrictions inhibiting some from working with their hands and others from becoming landholders.<sup>21</sup> Irfan Habib in a recent article has drawn pointed attention to the way in which this fea-

ture set apart the medieval Indian peasantry from its counterpart in Europe or China, making many petty cultivators, exploited by *jagirdars* and zamindars, themselves also exploiters of low-caste or tribal labour.<sup>22</sup> 'Cyclical' or 'multidirectional' mobility within the peasantry, which one could have possibly expected in a land-surplus situation from the Chayanov model,<sup>23</sup> were thus short-circuited even before the more recent over-pressure on land, with consequences inhibiting severely the unity of the rural poor. This was a fundamental feature of the agrarian scene whose political significance I intend to explore later.

The work of historians like Hobsbawm, Rude and Thompson have made us familiar with various forms of pre-industrial popular resistance in Europe—certain types of crime, conflicts over forest laws, social banditry, millenarianism, food riots seeking to impose a 'just price'<sup>24</sup>—and it would be interesting to consider how far such categories are applicable to movements of the lowest stratum of rural society in colonial India.

The social history of crime in India is still in its infancy, but David Arnold has recently analyzed Madras police administrative reports to bring out marked correlations between years of scarcity or famine and the incidence of food riots and dacoity, as well as certain seasonal variations (the lean months from February to June being the main 'dacoity season', also September onwards if the monsoon failed). There were serious food riots in the famine year 1876 in many districts of Madras,<sup>25</sup> while a particularly intense wave was that of the years immediately after the First World War: 115 grain shops looted in Bombay city in early 1918, food riots in the Krishna-Godavari delta in May and in Madras city in September of the same year, and 38 *hat* looting cases with 859 convictions reported from 7 districts of Bengal in 1919-20.<sup>26</sup> While there are some scattered references to crowds enforcing lower prices and not simply looting markets,<sup>27</sup> such instances of *taxation populaire* seem to have been less common here than in eighteenth century England or France, possibly because of the absence of any firm tradition of fixation of prices by local or state authorities.<sup>28</sup>

Arnold has rightly criticized Hobsbawm's over-facile acceptance of the colonial theory of self-contained 'criminal tribes and castes' as representing the Indian variant of social banditry.<sup>29</sup> How artificial such administrative categories could become is indicated

by the fact that in Kheda district of Gujarat the Baraiya and the Patanvadiya castes, comprising no less than 37% of the population, were branded as 'criminal' in 1911.<sup>30</sup> But certain communities rendered marginal by socio-economic or political developments could turn to professional dacoity more or less as a group, while food-gathering by primitive tribes could easily become 'criminal' in the eyes of immigrant peasant settlers or administrators of forests newly 'reserved' by the state.<sup>31</sup> Traditions of banditry have in fact been remarkably strong in many parts of India right down to the present day. Dispossessed or otherwise down-and-out peasants and labourers would normally provide the main source of recruits for dacoit bands, though the outlaw leader could at times be a zamindar fallen on evil days, and illicit connections with local police or state officials have been and remain by no means uncommon. The typical peasant attitude to banditry is likely to be a varying compound of fear, admiration, and vicarious satisfaction in so far as the victims would normally be the better-off sections of the community. Crooke's account of Northern Indian peasant religion and folklore refers to numerous cases of deification by "criminal and nomadic tribes of notorious robbers"—like Madhukar Shah of Sagar in Central Provinces, the UP Banjara cults of the thief Mana and the freebooter Mitthu Bhukiya, or the Bihar Dom reverence for the thief Gandeh.<sup>32</sup> Two folk tales from Gujarat vividly reflect the complexities of the peasant-bandit relationship. The peasant named Lakha and his daughter are hailed in one story for heroically resisting the demands of Apa Devat, a notorious robber chief. But there is also the tale of Bhimo Jat and his three brothers who are forced to become outlaws after their land is seized by officers of the Thakur Sahib of Gondal for sheltering dacoits. "We give shelter to the dacoits and robbers, because otherwise they terrorise us and kidnap our children. You do not give us any protection. What else can we do?" Bhimo Jat, we are told, "plundered villagers for food. But he never harmed anyone, nor did he hold prisoners to ransom". He died heroically fighting a whole army, and he "is still thought of with pride by the people of his village".<sup>33</sup> Such legends resemble very closely the history of more recent real life dacoits of the same region, like Aliya the Muslim peasant of Borsad in Kheda, who lost his land through mortgage to a Brahman lawyer, committed

35 murders and 55 dacoities between 1918 and 1923, had, occasional links with a rich *patidar* headman who received his stolen goods and also at times with some policemen, but who still retained a social bandit-type reputation within his own community. Aliya was hanged in 1924, but "even today the Muslims of Borsad town worship at the grave of Aliya Pir".<sup>84</sup>

Social banditry of this type was an endemic feature of many pre-industrial societies, varying with the extent of economic distress but providing a kind of historical constant in a more long-term sense—"a protest,... [but] a modest and unrevolutionary protest",<sup>85</sup> at best righting some individual wrongs, but not aiming at or connected with any structural change. Late colonial India, however, also saw numerous 'transformative' rebellions, particularly in tribal areas. Too much should not be made of this distinction between tribals and other sections of the rural poor, for apart from some isolated and really primitive food-gatherers, the *adivasis* were and are very much a part of Indian society as the lowest stratum of peasants subsisting through shifting cultivation, agricultural labourers, and, increasingly, 'coolies' recruited for work in distant plantations, mines and factories. But the characteristic tribal terrain with its hills and forests and undeveloped communications is obviously more suited to guerrilla resistance than more settled parts of the countryside. Tribal social organisation, while seldom entirely undifferentiated and often considerably influenced by shifts towards a caste pattern (the 'tribe-caste continuum'), still tends to retain a kind of unity lost in the fragmented structure of fully-developed caste Hindu society.

Tribal movements in the post-1857 phase tended to acquire two new features: a growing emphasis on the issue of forest rights, and a shift in the initiative for rebellion from traditional chiefs to prophets, who emphasized the need for internal socio-religious change to 'revitalize' the community and at times promised sudden, miraculous change of a 'millenarian' type.<sup>86</sup> Colonial rule and its accompanying commercialization affected tribal societies adversely in a variety of ways. It strengthened already present tendencies towards penetration of tribal areas by outsiders from the plains (moneylenders, traders, landgrabbers, labour contractors, etc.), enforced novel conceptions of absolute private property and alienation through sale for indebtedness on groups with fairly

strong traditions of communal landholding (like the *khuntkai* tenure in Chota Nagpur, for instance), ruthlessly exploited tribals a reserve of cheap 'coolie' labour via the indenture system, and—more ambiguously—offered through missionary activity some education and possibility of social ascent combined with a wholesale assault on established cultural patterns. But the progressive tightening from the 1870s and '80s of colonial state control over forest areas for purposes of revenue and conservation provided perhaps the most deeply-felt grievance of all. The ban on shifting cultivation (*Jhum* in Eastern India, *podu* in Andhra) was particularly disastrous for tribals and poor peasants in forest areas, for unlike settled plough-cultivation it did not require cattle or manure.<sup>37</sup> For millennia (and by no means in India alone)<sup>88</sup> the virgin forest had provided a variety of 'free goods' for the rural poor—timber for fuel, dwellings and tools, grazing facilities, edible roots and plants, fish and game—and Kosambi has emphasized the prodigality of sub-tropical nature as a possible explanation of the remarkable survival in our country of primitive food-gathering side by side with settled agriculture and urban civilization.<sup>88</sup> Nor was the alienation one of a purely economic or material kind. The sudden clamping-down of restrictions on the use of or even entry into 'reserved' forests rudely disrupted deep-rooted and profoundly evocative cultural patterns.<sup>40</sup>

Such pressures, combined with a loss of faith in traditional chiefs due to the failure of the first wave of 'primary resistance', led to 'revitalization' movements of internal religious and socio-cultural reform under messiahs who at times borrowed elements from Christianity or Hinduism. The millenarian pattern typically included brief spells of exaltation and rebellion in the hope of immediately turning the world upside down, followed by periods of quiescence when the movement turned into an inward-looking sect, deferring the prospect of miraculous change to a distant future or the after-life.<sup>41</sup> The brief period of revolutionary hope was often associated also with rumours about the imminent, collapse of British rule—an association by no means confined, as we shall see, to such 'primitive' rebellions alone.

- Among the Santals, the Kharwar or Sapha Hor movement developed in the 1870s after the failure of the great 1855 rebellion. It concentrated in the main on preaching monotheism and inter-

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nal social reform, but was turning towards agrarian issues before the arrest of its first leader Bhagbirath.<sup>46</sup> The *Ulgulan* (Great Tumult) of Birsa Munda (1899-1900) in the Ranchi region is too well-known (through the study by K. Suresh Singh) to require much discussion here. We may note, however, that Birsa emerged in the wake of the failure of the *sardari larai* of the early '90s led by tribal chiefs against the erosion of *khuntkatti* joint tenures (and after missionaries had also failed to provide redress). This son of a poor sharecropper of Chalked, having undergone some Christian and then Vaishnava influence and participated in a struggle to defend village waste lands against forest laws in 1893-94, claimed from 1895 onwards to be a prophet of a supreme monotheistic God, with miraculous healing powers as well as the power to turn guns and bullets to water.<sup>48</sup> Fiery night meetings in the forest against "Thikadars and Jagirdars and Rajas and Hakims and Christians" led up to attacks on churches and police stations in December 1899-January 1900. These attacks were sufficiently widespread to cause a real panic in Ranchi and some concessions on the *khuntkatti* issue a few years later. Though Birsa was quickly captured and died in jail in June 1900, a Birsa sect has survived among the MundaS. This sect preaches monotheism and puritanical social reform in the expectation of a distant deliverance, but not immediate revolt to achieve a new world.<sup>44</sup> The Tana Bhagat movement among the neighbouring Oraons also reveals this characteristic oscillation: beginning in 1914 as a sect calling for monotheism, abstention from meat, liquor and tribal dances, and a return to shifting cultivation, it briefly took on a more radical millenarian colour next year as rumours spread of the coming of a saviour variously identified with Birsa or a 'German' or 'Kaiser Baba', but lapsed back into relative quietism following repression and the end of the World War.<sup>45</sup>

The forests and hills of south Rajasthan and northwest Gujarat were another centre of tribal unrest. In 1868, the Naikda tribe of Panch Mahal (Gujarat), attacked police stations in a bid to establish a *dharmaraj*. Here religious messianism seems to have merged with memories of the recent Rebellion, for an 1857 survivor, Rupsingh Gobar, led the attacks along with the messianic leader Joria.<sup>48</sup> Some forty years later, a Hinduizing temperance and purification movement led by Govind Guru among the Bhils

of Banswara, Sunth and Dungarpur states (adjoining Mewar) and of Panch Mahal district in Gujarat suddenly flared up into a brief attempt to set up an independent Bhil raj in November 1913. Four thousand Bhils assembled on Mangad hill, and the British were able to disperse them only after considerable resistance in what seems to have been a kind of semi-symbolic battle, rather reminiscent of the last-ditch stand of the Birsaites on Sail Rakab hill a few years back.<sup>47</sup>

At the other end of the country, the Kacha Nagas of Cachar district of Assam had attacked the whites in 1882, inspired by a messianic belief in a sixteenth-century Bhim Raja who was said to be sleeping in a cave, and more immediately by a miracle-worker named Shambhudan, who claimed that his magic made his followers immune from bullets.<sup>48</sup> The millenarian note was absent, however, from the major revolt of the Thadoe Kukis in Manipur in 1917-1919 which was led by powerful established chiefs and did not extent to the Kabui or 'old' Kukis who had a more democratic kind of tribal organization. British efforts to recruit tribal labour for menial service on the Western Front provided the immediate issue, but there were also other grievances like *pothang* (forced labour to carry baggages of officials or to build roads), a heavy house tax despite near-famine conditions, and British efforts to *stopjhum*. Further complexities were produced by intra-tribal feuds (Thadoe vs. Kabui) and a dynastic rivalry (with rebels developing some connections with a claimant to the Manipur throne). These features have been pointed out by Gautam Bhadra in an analysis refreshingly free from the usual simplistic treatment of tribal movements as homogeneous entities. Guerrilla war went on for two years, affecting a population of 40,000 in an area of 6000 square miles.<sup>49</sup>

But the principal area of virtually endemic tribal rebellion lay in the forests and hills lying to the north of the Godavari, constituting under the British the Godavari and Vizagapatam Agency Tracts, extending northwards into Bastar, Malkangiri and Koraput, and inhabited by Koyas, Konda Doras and Kondhs largely dependent on shifting cultivation (*podu*). The epicentre was Chodavaram, the 'Rampa' country (so-called by the British after the family name of its traditional chief or *mansabdar*) along with the neighbouring Gudem region.<sup>49</sup> The earlier revolts (1840,

1845, 1858, 1861, 1862) were led by subordinate hill-chiefs (*muffadars*) against their *mansabdar* superior, with whom the British had come to an arrangement in 1813, and who had utilized British protection to extort "a considerable revenue from taxes on fuel and grazing and other unauthorised cesses".<sup>60</sup> The biggest rising of all—that of 1879-80, which affected 5000 square miles—had its epicentre in Chodavaram and Rekapalle in Godavari, and extensions towards the Golkonda Hills of Vizagapatam, parts of Malkangiri, and Bastar.<sup>61</sup> The rising is sufficiently well-documented to allow a more concrete analysis of the pattern of tribal grievances and resistance. In Chodavaram, oppression by the *mansabdar* (now taking the form of eviction of old *muttadars*, as well as the *kalapapannu* and *poolary* taxes on wood-cutting and grazing) remained a principal grievance, though the Madras official Sullivan noted a general impression that the British were fully behind the *mansabdar* and so had the ultimate responsibility for tribal woes.<sup>51</sup> The immediate cause of the rising, however, was the recent extension of Madras *abkari* laws to the Rampa area., with the auction-purchaser of the toddy *ijara* imposing a heavy *chigurupahnu* tax (to which the *mansabdar* promptly added *modalupannu* cess) on what had been not only an age-old free good ("It is never collected since creation", complained a captured rebel)<sup>68</sup> but "an absolute necessity of life to the hill-tribes during certain months of the year".<sup>64</sup> In neighbouring Rekapalle (transferred along with Bhadrachalam from CP to Madras in 1875), the attempt to impose forest laws, which had not yet been enforced in Chodavaram, became the major issue. Once again an ancient tradition was being rudely violated through restrictions on *podu* which Sullivan considered "wholly unnecessary".<sup>66</sup> Tribals in both districts also complained about increasing penetration by Komati trader-moneylenders from the plains.<sup>66</sup> Petty exactions by local police officials was another major grievance.<sup>67</sup> The revolt which began in March 1879 with attacks on police stations developed into a guerilla war which the British could suppress only in November 1880 after deploying six regiments of infantry, two companies of sappers and miners, and some cavalry.<sup>68</sup> The rebels, noted an official report, had only a few matchlocks and muskets, but were accompanied by "a large rabble with sticks, bows and arrows", and owed their success to "the large extent of dense jungles, and...

the thorough sympathy of the people\_\_\_\_"<sup>69</sup> There are no references to any millenarian dimension in this rising, possibly because (as with the Thadoe Kukis) the leadership came mainly from established *muttadars*.

The British responded to this formidable rising by relaxing *abkari* regulations, pensioning off the *mansabdar*, instituting direct revenue arrangements with the *muttadars*, and (from 1892) buying the support of *muttadars* for forest law enforcement by giving them extra allowances.<sup>60</sup> Far from ending unrest all this seems to have imparted an even clearer anti-British edge to tribal discontent by removing the *mansabdar* buffer. The conversion of *muttadars* into collaborators opened the way for a new type of leadership with religious and millenarian overtones. A rising in 1886 was led by Surla Ramanna and Rajana Anantayya, a young tribal and an ex-constable and teacher who claimed to be incarnations of Rama and Hanuman and called their rebel band *Rama Dandu* (Rama's army). Anantayya also made an interesting 'proto-nationalist' appeal to the Maharaja of Jeypore (in Koraput), revealing some awareness of broader political developments:

Is it good, if the English be in our country?... We...should wage war with the English. The Russians are also troubling the English. If the assistance of men and arms are supplied to me, I will play Rama's part.<sup>61</sup>

In 1900 in Vizagapatam Agency, a Konda Dora named Korra Mallaya

"pretended that he was inspired... gathered roundhim a camp of 4-5000 people from various parts of the agency...gave out that he was a reincarnation of one of the five Pandava brothers [and] that his infant son was the god Krishna; that he would drive out the English and rule the country himself; and that, to effect this, he would arm his followers with bamboos, which should be turned by magic into guns, and would change the weapons of the authorities into water".

The rebels drilled with bamboos "rudely fashioned to resemble guns"; they were shot down by a police party on 7 May, with 11 killed. The Konda Doras of Vizag, incidentally, were worshippers of the Pandava brothers.<sup>62</sup>

Tightening of state control over forests (annual forest revenues



## 16 Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India

in Godavari district went up from Rs. 21,000 in the 1870s to over Rs. 2 lakhs by 1904-05<sup>88</sup> remained a perennial source of discontent in all tribal areas. The very primitive food-gathering Chenchus of the Nallamalai hills (Cuddapah and Nellore districts of present-day south Andhra), for instance, found their traditional rights to forest products being increasingly restricted by the government from 1898 onwards, though the latter were somewhat inhibited by the fear that pure repression could lead to the total destruction by fire of the Nallamalai forests.<sup>64</sup> In predominantly tribal princely states, even disputed successions often developed connections with forest grievances, and quickly took on a strongly anti-British colour. The rising in Bastar in 1910 was led by a former *diwan* who was claiming the throne, but the main cause was again the recent imposition of forest regulations banning shifting cultivation and free use of forest produce. The rebels disrupted communications, attacked police stations and forest outposts, burnt schools (which were being built by forced labour and compulsory levies on tribals), and even tried to besiege Jagdalpur town.<sup>66</sup> In the Orissa feudatory state of Daspalia in October 1914, a Khond rebellion over a succession dispute quickly took on a different colour, as rumours spread that a war had started and soon "there would be no Sahabs left in the country" and the Khonds would "live under their own rule". The British feared a general Khond rising which could "set ablaze the whole of the vast inaccessible mountain tracts stretching along the Eastern Ghats so far as Kalahandi and Bastar", and so went about burning Khond villages.<sup>66</sup> During the war years, there was yet another *fituri* (rising) in the Rampa area in 1916, while, as among the Thadoe Kukis, recruitment of tribal labour for the war effort led to a revolt in Mayurbhanj.

Movements of settled peasant communities in colonial India usually had more limited objectives and employed much less violent methods than tribal revolts—with one major exception: the Mappilas of Malabar, with their 32 recorded outbreaks between 1836 and 1919, culminating in the very major rebellion of 1921. The agrarian dimensions of Mappila unrest have been repeatedly emphasized ever since Logan in 1881 drew pointed attention to the ways in which British rule with its usual insistence on absolute proprietary rights had reestablished and vastly enhanced the posi-

## c. 1870-1917

tion of Namboodri and Nayar *jenmis* (many of whom had been driven out by Tipu Sultan) and correspondingly worsened the conditions of the largely Muslim leaseholders and cultivators. Sixty two out of the 82 victims of Mappila attacks between 1836 and 1919 were upper-caste Hindus (22 Namboodris and 34 Nayars), about 58 of them were either *jenmis* or moneylenders (or both),<sup>67</sup> and links with *jenmi-ten* disputes are clear in 12 out of the 32 incidents.<sup>98</sup> The vast majority of the activists were petty tenants or agricultural labourers,<sup>69</sup> but they clearly enjoyed the sympathy of the entire Mappila community, being revered as *shahids* in a holy war. The agrarian grievances were hardly unique to the Mappilas; what makes these 'outrages' so remarkable were their highly localized nature and extremely distinctive form. The incidents were largely confined to two *talukas* of south Malabar (Ernad and Walavanad). The actual participants were relatively few (only 351 in all 32 cases). After murdering their chosen upper-caste Hindu targets, the assailants invariably attempted a kind of collective suicide instead of trying to abscond, frontally confronting the police and fighting till the end to achieve the status of *shahid* (no less than 319 out of 351 died fighting). Conrad Wood relates these peculiarities to the settlement pattern of Ernad and Walavanad (as distinct from north Malabar or the coastal area): scattered homesteads with very poor communications instead of nuclear villages, making collective mass resistance difficult, and leading to a situation in which the mosque was the one unifying social centre.<sup>70</sup> One might hazard a parallel here with the Mauges region of western France, the heart of the Vendee counter-revolution in 1793 with its dispersed settlements and priestly domination as contrasted to neighbouring Val Saumurois with agglomerated villages, greater urban-rural integration, and republican sympathies.<sup>71</sup>

The recent study by Stephen Dale, however, emphasizes religious and cultural traditions rather than agrarian grievances alone, with some justice, perhaps, for there was no lack of oppressed Hindu peasants in Malabar, rack-rented and evicted by *jenmis*, whose protest at times took the form of banditry, but never the distinctive suicidal terrorism adopted by the Mappilas.<sup>78</sup> Dale tries to trace the roots of Mappila militancy back to the bitter hostility to the infidel whites generated already in the 16th century by Portuguese seizure of the spice trade and forcible conversions—

a spirit reflected in Zaynal-Din's *Tuhfat-al-Mujahidin* of the 1580s or in ballads honouring *shahids* in the anti-Portuguese struggle like *Kotturpalli Mala* (still popular today). There were even a few cases of suicidal attacks on Europeans and Nayar landlords already in the early 18th century, anticipating the characteristic pattern of the 'outrages' of the 19th century.<sup>78</sup> The number of mosques in Malabar went up from 637 in 1831 to 1058 by 1851,<sup>74</sup> and there were largescale conversions to Islam by untouchable Cherumars for whom this meant a definite rise in social status.<sup>76</sup> The major ideological stimulus for Mappila outbreaks in the 1840s and early 50s came from the Tannal of Mambram mosque near Tirurangadi, Sayyid Fadl (exiled by the British in 1852), who preached that it was lawful to murder a Hindu *jenmi* evicting a Muslim tenant, and that the honorific plural should not be used when addressing Nayars.<sup>76</sup> Mappila war songs contained vivid descriptions of the often frankly carnal pleasures of paradise awaiting *shahids*.<sup>7\*</sup> The appeal of the Islamic conception, of paradise to people deprived of most earthly pleasures by poverty should not be underestimated. This is indicated by the curious fact that a translation of the Koran seems to have been one source for the amazingly radical ideas of Menocchio, the 16th century Italian miller recently resurrected from Inquisition records by Carlo Ginzburg's fascinating study.<sup>78</sup>

Mappila rural terrorism, which probably did impose some checks on *jenmi* oppression, thus represented a kind of defensive millenarianism, promising heavenly pleasures to *shahids* and vengeance for specific acts of injustice, not a wholesale this-worldly transformation. But there is at least one reference to millenarianism of a more positive kind. The *Hal Illakkam* sect (literally, "frenzy-raising") in Ernad in 1843 was preaching "that a ship would arrive with the necessary arms, provisions and money for 40,000 men" to liberate the country—an exact echo, strangely enough, of the Pacific 'cargo-cults' analyzed by Peter Worsley.<sup>79</sup> And in 1921 rumours that British rule was collapsing before the Non-Cooperation—Khilafat onslaught set off a wholesale mass rebellion among the Mappilas of Malabar.

Food riots, social banditry, or millenarian rebellions remained very distant things for the new intelligentsia which by the late-19th century was emerging as the bearer of both patriotic ideology and of various types of more 'sectional' awareness emphasizing com-

munal, caste or regional affinities. Nationalist journals like the *Bengalee* wrote one or two articles sympathizing with Birsa Munda<sup>80</sup>—after his revolt had been safely crushed—and the Congress in the 1890s passed a number of resolutions critical of the forest laws.<sup>81</sup> But the prevalent attitude ranged from indifference to hostility, and there is at least one recorded instance in which food rioters sacked a Congress leader's house, no doubt because he was also a landlord and moneylender.<sup>88</sup> The solitary exception is the strange case of Vasudeo Balwant Phadke in 1879, a Chitpavan clerk who dreamt of reestablishing a Hindu raj by forming a secret band financed through dacoities, but whose anticipation of revolutionary terrorism differed sharply from the later pattern in its recruitment of lowcaste Ramoshis and Dhangars. The outcome was a kind of social banditry, which seems to have persisted for some years in this part of Maharashtra, even after Phadke himself had been captured.<sup>88</sup>

Turning from tribals and Mappilas to movements like the Pabna disturbances or the Deccan riots of the 1870s, we enter a rather different world. The issues were not too dissimilar: defence or assertion of tenant rights against zamindari rent-extortion, *abwabs*,<sup>82</sup> and eviction mainly in Permanent Settlement areas; moneylender oppression or revenue and canal water rate enhancements in J raiyatwari regions; and exploitation by white indigo planters. But the initiative and the bulk of the support for these movements came from relatively better-off sections of the peasantry. Thus Pabna was a district with a lot of double-cropping and a flourishing trade in jute, where more than 50% of the cultivators had managed to win occupancy rights, and the movement there never touched on the grievances of subordinate *korfa raiyats* or the large seasonal immigrant force of agricultural labourers.<sup>84</sup> The Maharashtra Deccan had witnessed some rich peasant development during the cotton boom of the 1860s. As in Pabna, unrest was sparked off by attempts to reverse a trend towards relative prosperity, through zamindar counter-offensive in the one case and moneylender exploitation in the other. In the raiyatwari areas, the *raiya*s paying revenue to the state and complaining of enhancements could at times be in reality small landlords and not actual cultivators. The movements of such groups were not necessarily always non-violent, but they had specific limited objectives, lacked

millenarian dimensions, and the rumours that at times stimulated them were, significantly enough, not of the imminent collapse of British rule but of some pro-peasant measures said to have been taken by the rulers. Middle class nationalist interest in and sympathy for such limited movements was considerably more in evidence than in the case of tribal revolts, though there remained numerous hesitations and ambivalences here till the coming of Gandhi, and even later.

In the Pabna disturbances of 1873, best-known among a series of movements in a number of East Bengal districts provoked by zamindar efforts to restrict the scope of occupancy rights created by Act X of 1859, peasants of Yusufshahi *pargana* fought back the claims of 'high landlordism' through largely legalistic and predominantly peaceful methods. They organised an agrarian league which raised funds to meet litigation expenses (for the 'Rampa' tribals, in contrast, the law court had been an utterly alien institution)<sup>86</sup> and used collective non-payment of rent as a weapon to win specific demands like an end to arbitrarily short standards of measurement (which automatically enhanced the cultivated area and therefore the rent), abolition of illegal cesses, and some reduction in rents.<sup>86</sup> Even the most radical demand occasionally raised by the Pabna peasants—to be 'ryots of Queen of England'<sup>87</sup>—reveal no trace of conscious anti-imperialism; but rather an appeal to the distant overlord as against the immediate oppressor, not uncommon in peasant movements elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> A proclamation by Lieutenant-Governor Campbell in July 1873 permitting peaceful combinations by peasants seems in fact to have been a major source of encouragement.<sup>89</sup> As for middle-class attitudes, professional groups with less connection, with big zamindari (who were soon to form the Indian Association as the rival of the landlord-dominated British Indian Association) did show a certain sympathy for the demands of the occupancy *raiyyats*, balanced however by a fear of "excesses".<sup>90</sup> The Indian Association even organised some *raiyyat* meetings on the eve of the Tenancy Act of 1885 demanding preservation and extension of occupancy rights. But the claims of *korfa raiyyats*, share-croppers and agricultural labourers went completely by default, whether in the Pabna movement, the Indian Association agitation, or Government legislation, and no emphasis was ever placed on linking up occupancy rights

with actual cultivation.<sup>91</sup> The ultimate effect of this entire period of agrarian unrest and tenancy legislation in Bengal was to foster the growth of *oijotedar* groups, as exploitative and parasitic as the zamindars they gradually displaced.

Despite the presence among the leaders of the Pabna league of Ishan Chandra Roy and Shambhu Pal side by side with Khoodi Mollah, the bulk of the Pabna peasants happened to be Muslims while their zamindars were Hindus. Yet the efforts of the *Hindoo Patriot* to brand the movement as communal were largely unsuccessful, though a generation later the 1906-07 disturbances in Mymensingh with a considerable anti-zamindar and *mti-mahajan* content would be immediately interpreted in religious terms alone, by both Hindu and Muslim middle-class opinion.<sup>98</sup> One may note a parallel with the Mappila attacks on Hindu *jenmis*, with few repercussions outside Malabar throughout the 19th century, but which in 1921 included a novel emphasis on forcible conversions, and immediately led to all-India Hindu *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* movements. Middle-class nationalism and communalism, as we shall see, developed 'populist' dimensions at about the same time, with consequences ultimately disastrous for the unity of the country.

The Deccan riots of May 1875, affecting 33 villages in 6 *talukas* of Ahmednagar district, were somewhat more violent than the Pabna disturbances, but hardly more radical. The sudden fall in prices<sup>93</sup> as the cotton boom was succeeded by a slump, accompanied by revenue enhancements in certain areas, made repayment of debts very difficult for the richer or more enterprising peasants who, banking on the high prices, had borrowed heavily from *sowcars* during the 1860s. The target of the riots was therefore the *sowcar*, but an official report noted "the absence of serious crime... [as]... a very remarkable feature in the outbreak", with the peasants interested only in seizure and destruction of debt-bonds. The villagers were often led by their headmen (*patels*), and it seems that official enquiries connected with the preparation of a gazetteer had led to rumours that "Government was enquiring into the ryots, circumstances, and that Her Majesty had ordered the *sowcars* to give up their lands".<sup>91</sup> Significantly enough, only immigrant Marwari *sowcars* were attacked, and not indigenous elements who had turned to trade or moneylending (like the *knots* of Ratnagiri).

In Bengal, too, the rich peasant or jotedar-turned-moneylender was seldom attacked, unlike the Marwari or Bengali usurers among Santals or the Sahas among East Bengal Muslims.<sup>96</sup> A successful member of the broad community of landholding peasants, however exploitative, would be envied, admired and often looked up to for favours and leadership.<sup>96</sup>

" The Poona nationalist press did express considerable sympathy for the Deccan *raiya*s, but significantly enough, it tended to blame excessive revenue pressure rather than moneylender exploitation as primarily responsible for peasant woes.<sup>97</sup> Revenue enhancement in fact was the one type of agrarian grievance which won unequivocal support from the patriotic intelligentsia, since it fitted in with the general drain of wealth scheme, basic to the emerging ideology of middle-class nationalism,<sup>98</sup> and had (unlike issues like zamindari or moneylender exploitation) no divisive potential setting Indians against Indians. But the great distance between the intelligentsia and the peasant world in the pre-Gandhian era kept nationalist involvement in no-revenue movements fairly minimal still, and the peasants seem to have fought back revenue hikes through indigeneous methods possibly having a long history behind them. The basic forms were not insurrection—very difficult, if not impossible, for a disarmed countryside with well-developed communications, unlike tribal pockets—but petitions, collective refusals of revenue, and mass emigration, buttressed very often by appeals to caste loyalties. The leadership came from local notables or the upper stratum of the peasantry—who would be the principal revenue-payers, and such movements did not disrupt the traditional structure of hierarchical subordination within the rural community.

In the Kamrup and Darrang districts of Assam, a revenue-hike of 50-70% in 1893 was met by *raij mels*—mass assemblies of villagers, led by the rural elite of Brahmans, Gossains and Dolois, which enforced non-payment of revenue through the weapon of social boycott or ostracism of those who broke the popular consensus." There was also some looting of bazaars, and two cases of police firing, at Rangiya and Patharaghat. Urban nationalist support was confined to resolutions of the Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha and speeches on the floor of legislative councils.<sup>99</sup> The intervention of Tilak and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha he had recently captured

during the Maharashtra Deccan famine of 1896-97 was more substantial, and seriously alarmed the government. Agents were sent into the countryside to hold meetings and distribute pamphlets educating the peasant about his right to demand revenue remissions under the Famine Code in a year of scarcity, and some short-lived no-revenue combinations were started in Thana, Kolaba and Ratnagiri. The basic autonomy of the peasant movement was revealed, however, both by the looting of grain-shops (which middle-class nationalists of course had never advocated)<sup>100</sup> and the continuation of popular resistance well after the urban agitators had withdrawn and Tilak had been jailed on a different issue. Instances of distraint of movable property for non-payment of revenue in the Central Division of Bombay Presidency went up from an annual average of 26 during 1892-97 to 2269 in 1898-99.<sup>101</sup> In Gujarat, still a backwater so far as urban Congress nationalism was concerned, a powerful no-revenue campaign was organised during the famine of 1899-1900 when the government refused adequate remissions, with village leaders maintaining solidarity through caste boycott of those paying revenue. The *kunbi-patidar* peasants of Kheda had enjoyed a period of prosperity in the late 19th century from expanding markets for tobacco and dairy produce. But this was rudely disrupted by plague and famine. The peasants here also had a well-established tradition of *hijrat*: collective migration to escape excessive tax burdens, which was specifically mentioned and justified even by the basic text of the influential Swaminarayan religious sect.<sup>102</sup> Tilak has been occasionally hailed for anticipating Gandhi through his 1896-97 no-revenue campaign; the honour properly belongs much more to the peasantry whose traditional armoury included most of the weapons (collective non-payment, social boycott, migration) to be used under the Mahatma's leadership from the 1920s.

The second major example of a pre-Gandhian linkage between nationalism and agrarian unrest was provided by the Punjab in 1907, with the movements of Chenab canal colonists against bureaucratic control by white colonization officers, Bari Doab peasants against an increase in the canal tax, and Rawalpindi protests against a land-revenue hike. The prosperous Sikh and Muslim canal colonists (land had been given in large blocs to peasant immigrants, ex-soldiers, and urban investors, and the estates at

times exceeded 2500 acres) were certainly quite capable of organising an independent agitation.<sup>108</sup> Though Lajpat Rai was deported in May 1907 for allegedly inciting the peasants, his autobiography reveals him to have been rather unenthusiastic about the matter. He did address a couple of meetings of Chenab colonists at Lyallpur, but only with considerable hesitation. The more radical Ajit Singh, however, did carry on an active no-revenue campaign, and frightened Lajpat by his seditious talk.<sup>104</sup>

The disjunction between early nationalism and peasant unrest is revealed clearly also by the Bijolia movement in Mewar from 1905. At a time when in far-off Bengal patriotic intellectuals like R.C. Dutt, D.L. Roy, Abanindranath and Rabindranath were writing novels, plays, stories and poems hailing the chivalry and heroism of the medieval Rajputs of Mewar, the latter's modern descendants were combining servility towards the British with the grossest forms of feudal exploitation of the peasantry. In the Bijolia jagir of Mewar, the burden of no less than 86 different cesses imposed by the *thikanadars* led peasants in 1905 and again in 1913 to collectively refuse to cultivate lands and attempt a mass migration to neighbouring areas—the classic pattern of peasant protest through flight, so often mentioned in medieval sources.<sup>105</sup> The leadership at Bijolia was provided initially by a *sadhu*, Sitaram Das, but a link with nationalism was provided, more or less accidentally, by the internment in that region of an ex-revolutionary, Vijay Singh Pathik. Pathik and a disgruntled Udaipur official, Manik Lai Verma, were leading a no-tax movement in Bijolia again in 1916, and both later became prominent Congress leaders.<sup>108</sup>

Peasant resistance to white indigo planters forms a rather special category. The racial aspect here had aroused considerable middle-class sympathy already in the Bengal 'Blue Mutiny' of 1859-60.<sup>107</sup> Planters in Champaran at first had a somewhat easier time, for unlike Central Bengal this was an outlying region and a mutually profitable arrangement had been reached with the local zamindars, with Europeans becoming tenure-holding *thikadars* in the Permanent Settlement hierarchy. But there was already some resistance in 1867-68, winning a reduction on the land compulsorily put under indigo from 5-6 to 3 *kathas* per *bigha* (the *tinkathia* system). Tensions sharpened after c 1900 following the decline of the indigo demand in face of German synthetic dye competition. Planters

sought compensation through rent-enhancements (*sharahbeshi*) and lump-sum payments (*tawan*) in return for releasing peasants from the obligation to grow indigo. There was a major movement in the Motihari-Bettiah region in 1905-08, affecting 400 square miles and involving the murder of a white factory manager and 57 criminal cases.<sup>108</sup> The resistance over the next decade took the forms of petitions, cases and efforts to get the support of Bihar Congress leaders and journalists, and it was as a part of this on-going confrontation that Raj Kumar Shukla contacted Gandhi at the Lucknow Congress in 1916. While many sections of rural society had their grievances about the planters,<sup>109</sup> the initiative for organizing what Jacques Pouchepadass has described as "upward pressure from the rural masses themselves"<sup>110</sup> came from the peasant upper crust which resented "the lost opportunity of doing business which the indigo obligation represented" as prices of foodgrains and sugar-cane rose with a growing export trade from Champaran.<sup>111</sup> Raj Kumar Shukla himself had 20 bighas of land in a district with an average holding of 3i bighas, plus a small moneylending business, Poorer sections, both in 1905-08, and in 1917, were rallied also through religious and caste sanctions, with threats of social boycott and peasants taking oaths before village shrines, non-compliance carrying the penalties of beef for Hindus and pork for Muslims.<sup>112</sup>

Thus a recurrent feature of most popular movements was the reliance on traditional community consciousness and sanctions based on it, whether tribal, caste or religious. It is noteworthy that tribals uprooted from their native earth and clan-linkages apparently also lost much of their militancy. Despite atrocious, semi-servile conditions, Assam tea coolies recruited in large part from tribal areas failed to develop organized protest movements—as distinct from sporadic cases of violence—till a fairly late date. The strength of traditional ties is evident even among social groups connected with the genuinely new capitalist sector of the economy. With the exception of the Parsis, whose relative weight within the Indian bourgeoisie has declined over time, business groups in our country have been marked on the whole not by any unequivocally 'modern' ideology, but rather by the strength of institutions of joint family and caste—elements which according to some historians actually go some way towards explaining the remarkable

Marwari success-story.<sup>113</sup> In the Surat protests against the salt duty in 1844, revised weights and measures in 1848, income tax in 1860, and a license tax in 1878, (which judging by most of the issues must have had a strong merchant component) the main weapon was the closing of shops (*hartal*) organised by caste and community leaders, and government officials were sometimes threatened with social boycott.<sup>114</sup> The importance of traditional forms in the early labour movement is indicated by the existence, at least in Bengali, of a purely indigeneous synonym for the strike (*dharma-ghai*), unlike much of the remaining vocabulary of the working-class and socialist movement.<sup>116</sup> The term indicates both early and spontaneous origins (in fact, probably a carry-over from peasant no-rent movements, which were described as *dharmaghat* by the Derozian Pyarichand Mitra in 1846),<sup>116</sup> and a connection with some kind of religious vow. During a strike at the Kharagpur railway workshop in September 1906, the leaders are said to have brought the workers out "under the penalty, in the case of Hindus, of being made to eat cow's meat, and in the case of Muhammadans, pig's flesh".<sup>117</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently emphasized the importance of 'community-consciousness', as distinct from a unified and clear recognition of class, among jute mill workers in and around Calcutta in the 1890s. Muslim workers demanded holidays for *Id* or *Muharram*, Hindus for *Rathajatra*, and there were occasional fratricidal riots over issues like cow slaughter.<sup>118</sup>

It is true that communal or caste divisions did not prevent united action against employers, and as in peasant movements, the initiative in early strikes came almost entirely from the workers themselves. Late 19th century middle class interest in industrial or plantation labour as embodied in the efforts of Sasipada Banerji, Dwarakanath Ganguli, or N.M. Lokhande did not go beyond philanthropy. Swadeshi barristers like A.C. Banerji and A.K. Ghosh who led strikes and helped to start unions in Bengal during 1905-08 seem to have done so usually after workers had gone on strike and sought their help.<sup>1180</sup> Though some organizational work in Bombay city by Extremists through jobbers did precede the great profest strike following Tilak's transportation in July 1908, the main initiative again probably came from mill-hands, for Tilak's speeches in the factory area had been remarkably free of class war tones.<sup>118n</sup> The Bombay strike, along with *hartals* in Cal-

cutta on 16 October 1905, protest strikes in Rawalpindi after the deportation of Lajpat Rai, and in the Tuticorin-Tinneveli area in February-March 1908 following the arrest of Subramaniya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai, revealed that the Indian working class was not incapable of political strikes.<sup>118c</sup> But the oscillation between united class action and caste or communal conflicts was never entirely overcome, even the great Girni Kamgar strike in Bombay in 1928 being followed within a few months by a communal riot.

The persistence of pre-industrial traditions is nothing peculiar to the Indian working class. Herbert Gutman, for instance, has emphasized the importance of "artisan work-habits and diverse ethnic...subcultures" in the formation of the American industrial labour force from consecutive waves of immigrants.<sup>119</sup> The essential problem really lies in the specific nature of these traditions. As E.P. Thompson has shown so brilliantly, the making of the English working class was enormously helped by the rich tradition of artisan radicalism which had preserved and extended the more democratic aspects of the English bourgeois revolution of the 17th century. However, the Indian tribals and peasants, or dispossessed tribals, peasants and ruined artisans sucked into factories, had little to fall back upon except sectional, and often divisive, ties of kinship, region, caste or religion. Caste and religion did play an important part, as Irfan Habib has argued, in the organisation of peasant revolts in Mughal India,<sup>120</sup> while even for the 20th century, E.M.S. Namboodiripad once remarked that caste associations were at times "the form in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism".<sup>121</sup> But the extent to which caste and religious loyalties have often cut across or blurred class differences and led to disastrous internal divisions is of course very obvious.

So far as caste is concerned, I feel the crucial problem lies in the combination, in varying proportions, of two contradictory aspects in the caste-class relationship. Caste has often had a congruence with class sufficiently strong to enable the articulation of genuine socio-economic demands through the language and forms of caste. But this is combined with an asymmetry in detail which tends to blur class lines and foster various forms of sectional or 'false' consciousness. Thus, throughout the country, landlords tended to come from the upper castes, peasant landholders to belong to what

are now usually called the 'intermediate' castes, while the poorest peasants and landless labourers would comprise the lowest castes and the untouchables. But there have always been exceptions, and the system has been flexible enough to permit upward mobility through 'Sanskritization' in response to economic or other changes. One or two concrete examples might indicate the complexities. In the Rae Bareilly district of the United Provinces in the early 20th century, the bulk of the landed proprietors were Rajputs or Brahmans, but these castes also held 13% and 14.5% respectively of tenant land, which they usually enjoyed on specially favoured, lower rent conditions. Such terms (combined with, and often related to, kinship connections with landlords) would naturally encourage loyalties towards the zamindar patron rather than combinations with fellow-tenants of lower castes paying higher rents. Conversely, Ahirs and Kurmis were predominantly tenants, but they did hold 1000 and 15,600 acres respectively as proprietors also." David Hardiman's micro-study of Kheda district in Gujarat highlights yet another complexity. In *patidar-dominated* Charotar, the Baraiyas were mostly poor peasants or labourers, but there were neighbouring areas where most substantial peasants were Baraiyas. The caste-class link was strong at the village level, much less so for the district as a whole, but "peasants tended to perceive their interests at that level, as at the village level, in terms of caste rather than class".<sup>123</sup>

As sociologists have often pointed out, the kind of 'modernization' we have had so far in our country has on the whole strengthened rather than weakened fragmentation and conflicts along caste lines.<sup>184</sup> Improved communications facilitated wider, 'horizontal' combinations (while weakening local 'vertical' ties of *jajmani* dependence); English education provided a new ladder to social promotion for small but growing minorities; colonial economic exploitation involved a process of differentiation which benefited some Indians at the expense of others; and Census attempts from 1901 to classify castes on the basis of recognized social precedence led to a flood of claims and counter-claims & *jati* leaders jostled for pre-eminence, organized caste associations, and invented mythological caste 'histories'. Successful leading members of a *jati* found it useful to mobilize support from caste-brethren in their usually quite parochial and selfish struggle for social recog-

... nition, jobs, and, increasingly, political status. This process was greatly stimulated by the gradual introduction of electoral politics from the 1880s onwards. As for the poorer members of a *jati*, patronage links with more successful fellow-members seemed often the only road for survival in an increasingly competitive, harsh, and alien world. It must be added that *jatis* low down the social scale tend to be particularly jealous of their superiority vis-a-vis groups still lower down, leading to the world of Indian toilers becoming fragmented to an unusual extent. Movements inspired by broader ideologies, either national or class, could render such things secondary; but traditional barriers subsumed in a flood of mass enthusiasm could recur with the return to 'normalcy', making ideologies take second place to considerations of factional and caste politics.

The phenomenon of 'caste movements', which became an increasingly important part of the Indian social and political scene from about the turn of the century onwards, has been sought to be interpreted in at least three ways. They have been accepted, more or less at their face value, as modern expressions of the upward mobility through Sanskritization of particular *jatis* as a whole; denigrated, predictably, by the 'Cambridge school' as mere factional manoeuvres of patron-client linkages whose claims to represent their caste were as flimsy and unacceptable as nationalist efforts to speak for the whole country; and considered, as notably by Gail Omvedt in her study of the Maharashtra non-Brahman movement, as distorted but important expressions of class tensions which might at times go radically beyond the Sanskritization model of mere 'positional mobility'. The variations in approach are perhaps not unnatural, for caste movements have differed considerably in composition and objectives alike. Among lower castes, for example, the Chamars of Jaunpur investigated by Bernard Cohn with their cult of Siva Narayana and imitation of Brahmanical forms,<sup>125</sup> or the mercantile upper stratum of the Shanar untouchable caste of toddy tappers and agricultural labourers in south Tamilnad who began calling themselves Nadars and asserting temple-entry rights,<sup>126</sup> fit in fairly well into a frame of analysis which emphasizes Sanskritizing claims to higher ritual status, accompanied or followed by more 'secular' demands for better job opportunities. The real benefits in such movements remain confined

i in the main to an upper crust within the *jati*: the emergence of prosperous Nadar merchants has hardly improved the lot of the Shanar toddy-tappers of Tirunelveli. The Mahar movement of Maharashtra began in the 1890s with similar claims to Kshatriya origin, but under Ambedker's leadership, it developed from the 1920s into a real attack on the caste system, with militant temple-entry campaigns, public burning of *Manusmriti*, some connections with the Bombay labour movement, and eventually conversion to Buddhism.<sup>187</sup> The Ezhava awakening in Kerala started under the religious leader Sri Naryana Guru and his SNDP-Yogam (1902-03), attacking upper caste domination and demanding temple-entry; some of its leaders, like C. Kesavanand K. Aiyappan, turned towards atheism in the 1930s, and inspired many to take the road towards the Communist Party.<sup>128</sup>

A similar diversity characterized movements among intermediate or upper castes. The Kayasthas with their lead in English education and countrywide linkages through the professions were, not unnaturally, the first caste movement to develop all-India pretensions, with a conference in Lucknow attended by delegates from Bengal, Bihar, UP, and Bombay as early as 1887. The change they were primarily interested in was correspondingly modest—recognition of 'twice-born' status.<sup>129</sup> Sanskritizing efforts and claims to better job opportunities were the principal staples also of the Mahishya movement in Midnapur, consisting of a section of the Kaivartas claiming a new nomenclature and higher status under the leadership of some zamindars and a few Calcutta-based lawyers and traders. For the Goala or Yadavs of Patna, Monghyr, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur villages challenging upper caste domination in the 1920s, however, demands for educational opportunities and higher ritual status were accompanied by movements "not to do *begari* for zamindars... pari passu with taking the sacred thread they have been proposing to refuse menial and other services hitherto rendered to their landlords".<sup>180</sup> In Madras Presidency, the Justice Party challenge to Brahman domination of the professions (3 % of the population, but 70% of the graduates between 1870-1918) was essentially the movement of a counter-elite among non-Brahman caste Hindus (Vellala, Reddi, Kamma, Nayar) led by prosperous landlords and merchants.<sup>131</sup> The Dravidian or Tamil ideology did acquire, however, a much more radical

and populist dimension in the 1920s through E.V. Ramaswami Naicker's Self-Respect movement.<sup>188</sup> A similar dualism emerges from Gail Omvedt's analysis of the Non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra spearheaded by Jyotiba Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj: a moderate 'Sanskritizing' trend, interested only in Kshatriya status and more jobs for the elite among the Maratha caste-cluster (and as loyalist as their Justice counterparts in Madras); but also a much more radical, anti-caste, and village-based movement under leaders like Mukundrao Patil, claiming to speak for the *bahujan samaj* against *shetk-bhatji* domination, and spreading its message through vernacular tracts and folk *tamashas*.<sup>m</sup> It is interesting that both the Self-Respect and the Satyashodhak movements attempted inversions of the *Ramayana* myth, glorifying Ravana against Rama in Tamilnad and reviving an old peasant cult of Bali-Raj slain by Sugrib and Rama in Maharashtra.

Reacting against communalist historiography, Indian nationalist and Marxist scholarship has tended to explain Hindu-Muslim conflicts either in terms of British divide-and-rule combined with elite squabbles, or through a somewhat simplistic economic, reductionism (e.g.. Muslim peasants facing Hindu gentry in East Bengal and Malabar, or Hindu traders in the Punjab). A better understanding of the more 'populist' brands of Muslim or Hindu communalism (which, unfortunately, did have a certain autonomous existence) may be reached perhaps through a pattern of analysis similar to the one suggested for caste problems.

Once again, congruence and asymmetry coexisted in the class-religious community relationship, simultaneously permitting expression of socio-economic grievances through a religious idiom, and blurring class divisions. Thus the familiar Muslim peasantry-Hindu landlord explanation of East Bengal communalism probably requires some qualification, for Muslim rent-receivers in fact outnumbered upper-caste Hindus in the Rajshahi and Chittagong divisions.<sup>184</sup> But most big zamindars (and trader-moneylenders) were Hindus, and Muslim peasants tended increasingly to look up to the successful minority within their community as leaders, developing connections with this upper crust-through-peasant sons becoming *mullahs*, for instance. A simple class-religion identity is clearly even less relevant in Bihar or the United Provinces, though such relationships may well have been decisive



### 32 Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India

at the micro-level (e.g. Muslim artisans and Hindu merchants in towns, Hindu peasants and Muslim *talukdars* in parts of Awadh, a predominantly Hindu countryside vs towns partly dominated by Muslims, etc).

Through a pioneering study of a mass of Bengali *pu*th literature, Rafiuddin Ahmed has recently established the existence of a strong sectional consciousness among rural Muslims nearly a generation before organized elite communalism became a significant force in Bengal.<sup>115</sup> For the better understanding of mass nationalism and communalism alike, we urgently need more such studies of cheap vernacular tracts, akin to the broadsides and chapbooks which have been used to illuminate the world of popular culture in early modern Europe,<sup>13</sup> though it is important to remember Carlo Ginzburg's warning about the need to distinguish "culture *produced by*" from "culture *imposed on* the popular classes".<sup>137</sup> In the absence of such studies, a lot remains mysterious about manifestations of popular communalism like the cow-slaughter riots of the early 1890s or the massive Shahabad explosion of October 1917. Gaurakshini Sabhas fostered by some zamindars and lawyers had become active in many parts of Northern India from the 1880s. But really organized elite Hindu or Muslim communalism still lay in the future when riots ravaged large parts of eastern UP and Bihar and spread to Bombay, in the summer of 1893. And in 1917 relations between Hindu and Muslim political leaders were unusually friendly in the wake of the Lucknow Pact. Again, unlike the anti-zamindar/Majdan outbursts in Comilla and Mymensingh in 1906-07, the beginnings of the Praja movement with the Kamarajar conference in 1914 formulating rich peasant demands but under a specifically Muslim leadership,<sup>188</sup> or the Calcutta riots of September 1918 where the principal targets were Burra Bazar Marwari businessmen,<sup>13\*</sup> clear economic roots are much more difficult to trace for riots over cow-slaughter or on the mosque-beforemosque issue. What requires particular emphasis in the context of the present discussion is the extremely volatile nature of popular sentiments and movements. In Shahabad district in October 1917, for instance, the immediate issue was cow-protection, but crowds of upto 50,000 Hindu peasants attacking Muslim villages seem to have been influenced by widespread rumours that British rule was collapsing. Rioting crowds shouted '*Angrez ka raj uthh gaye?*' and

c. 1870-1917

even '*German kija*' and the area affected coincided with what had been Kunwar Singh's base in 1857-58.<sup>140</sup> To take another \* example, Inder Narayan Dwivedi was a Sanatan Dharma Sabha activist and protege of Malaviya, who combined propagation of Hindi with Home Rule politics and the starting of Kisan Sabhas in 1917 in the Allahabad region.<sup>141</sup> At both 'elite' and 'popular' levels, both Hindu revivalism and its rough Muslim counterpart, Pan-Islamism, could oscillate between expression of material discontent, communal frenzy, and anti-imperialist politics.

This may be the appropriate place to attempt a preliminary stock-taking of the significance and limits of popular movements in more general terms. The pre-First World War era is really in a way more suited than the Gandhian phase for such an evaluation, for the movements we have been considering so far were essentially 'spontaneous' and no more than marginally affected by intelligentsia ideologies, objectives or techniques. The limitations of such 'spontaneity' are fairly clear. Popular movements were directed usually against the immediate Indian oppressor rather than the distant white superior, and so were often hot consciously or subjectively anti-imperialist. They tended to be fairly widely scattered in both space and time, and were extremely volatile, with class, caste and religious forms of articulation interpenetrating and passing over into each other with bewildering ease. All this makes it rather difficult to accept without some qualification the concept of 'peasant nationalism' as a coherent alternative to elite patriotic ideologies and movements. Popular initiative and autonomy were undoubted, even remarkable at times, but, unlike middle class nationalism which does have a certain continuity, at the level of ideology at least, from the formulation of the drain of wealth theory in the 1870s onwards, the movements we have been considering were clearly far more fragmented.

Yet despite such limitations and crudities, popular unrest did anticipate much of middle-class nationalism in terms of issues and forms of struggle, while its specific gains were at times not inconsiderable. Forest rights, the burdens of rent, usury and land revenue, planter exploitation, and labour grievances were all themes which were taken up by the mainstream of middle-class nationalism very much later, and that incompletely. In 1890, when Moderate Congress politics of "mendicancy" seemed to be the only kind of

Indian nationalism, a Bombay Governor was writing to the Viceroy:

The forest policy, the *Abkari* policy, the Salt duty, the screwing up of land revenue by revision settlements, all make us odious... We know pretty well what the educated natives want, but what the feelings are of the uneducated, I admit I don't know.<sup>14\*</sup>

Forty years later, Gandhi would forge an all-India movement precisely around the issues of salt and land revenue, excise and forest rights. The anticipations at the level of forms of struggle were equally remarkable; collective refusals of rent or revenue, accompanied at times by *hizrats*; social boycott; the *hartal* and the *dharmaghat*; as well as forms like food riots, social banditry, millenarian hopes, terroristic actions, and mass insurrection, which 'official' nationalism never accepted but which still contributed considerably at times to anti-imperialist movements. And popular outbreaks did bring certain definite gains: special administrative arrangements restricting *diku* encroachments in many tribal areas; the decline of indigo in Bengal after 1859-60; consolidation of occupancy rights for sections of the Bengal peasantry; anti-money-lender legislation in the Maharashtra Deccan and elsewhere; special regulations protecting *khuntkatti* tenure after Birsa Munda's rebellion; gradual relaxation of revenue pressures. The British, of course, did their best, at times successfully, to absorb such concessions into the overall colonial structure and use them to buttress it through methods of divide and rule, but a similar statement could be made about concessions given under middle class pressure like the successive homeopathic doses of Council reform. One might even argue that elite nationalism before Gandhi perhaps achieved less in terms of specific gains: for instance it took more than a generation to win the demand for simultaneous ICS examinations, and the countervailing excise against Indian textiles was lifted only in 1925 in the context of a Bombay labour strike.

The theoretical statement, grounded in Lenin and possibly Marx, that 'subaltern', particularly peasant, movements to become really effective require organisation and ideology coming in large part from outside and above, does have a certain validity: 20th century peasant wars have generally succeeded only under leadership transcending purely peasant aims.<sup>148</sup> But a leap is

sometimes made from this general proposition to a quite different, more specific, and much more dubious one: that the Indian colonial middle class was able to supply this necessary ideology and organisation and thus, eventually, establish a full-scale 'hegemony'.

Space does not permit more than a very brief discussion of the nature and limits of what may be schematically presented as the four main contributions of the 19th century middle class to Indian life: religious and social reform, patriotic literature, the economic critique of British rule, and modern political organisation culminating in the Indian National Congress. The obvious and basic contradiction here was between broadly bourgeois ideals and self-image as a *madhyabitta sreni* derived from a growing awareness of contemporary developments in the West, and a predominantly non-bourgeois social base in the professions dependent on English education combined with various types of rentier interests (zamindari or intermediate tenures in the Permanent Settlement areas, petty landlordism else where).<sup>1</sup> "The characteristic alienation of an 'enlightened', reforming intelligentsia from the masses was compounded here by the foreign medium of modern education.

While intelligentsia reform movements did emphasize a largely new and very valuable note of rationality, and make some contributions in specific fields like the women's question, they failed to really overcome the basic barriers fragmenting Indian society: caste and religion. Thus a concept of 'Muslim tyranny' during a 'medieval' dark age (from which British rule with its accompanying alleged 'renaissance' or 'awakening' had been a deliverance) is to be found in Rammohun and among Derozians almost as much as in Bankimchandra,<sup>148</sup> and the theoretically anti-caste Brahma movement confined its programme on that plane mainly to more or less symbolic actions.<sup>147</sup> In any case, 'reform' by the late 19th century was being largely swamped by numerous varieties of Hindu 'revival', and while nationalists like Tilak, Bipin Pal or Aurobindo felt that this could be an easy way to mobilize the masses, the partial alliance of Extremism with revivalism in the end sharpened Muslim alienation and also aroused lower-caste suspicions (e.g. in Madras and Maharashtra).

National, regional, caste, and communal consciousness in fact interpenetrated and intermingled with each other as much, if not more, at the level of middle class thought and action as in popular

movements. Thus the specifically modern forms of nationalism and communalism emerged at about the same time (around the last quarter of the 19th century), had similar social roots,<sup>147</sup> and were sometimes even combined, in varying proportions, within the same individuals. The same ambiguities are vividly reflected in the patriotic literature developing in regions like Bengal and Maharashtra from the 1860s onwards.

The systematic economic critique of British rule was by far the most solid achievement of the Moderate generation. Though what may for convenience be characterized as the drain of wealth ideology did have serious limitations,<sup>148</sup> it was still much less of a 'false consciousness' than movements which had sought a solution for the country's sorrows through social reform, revivalism, communal or caste alignments, or regional loyalties. One significant achievement of the Extremist phase was the popularization of this economic critique, and here it would be appropriate to mention the name of Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, whose *Deshar Katha* (four editions in 10,000 copies between 1904 and 1907) expounded in eloquent but simple Bengali the arguments of Dadabhai Naoroji and R.C. Dutt. But in its eagerness to slur over the tensions within Indian society, nationalist economic theory kept largely silent over exploitation by Indian landlords, moneylenders, traders, or industrialists, and hence had relatively little to offer in concrete terms to many subaltern groups—a theoretical limitation which would continue to have its counterpart in practice virtually throughout the history of the national movement.

If moderate politics could be characterized without serious injustice as ineffective and 'mendicant', the Swadeshi period in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab did develop a whole new range of political techniques, many of them clearly anticipating Gandhian forms: boycott, Swadeshi enterprise, national schools, passive resistance. But in practice 'constructive Swadeshi' and forms of mass mobilization soon withered away, leaving mendicant 'agitation' and individual terrorism as opposite poles united on a common base of elite action: a shift from the one, to the other was really much easier and socially less dangerous than a breakthrough **i** **towards genuine** mass action. McLane has emphasized the elitist **l** **life style and consequent** social inhibitions of the Moderate leadership, **producing feelings of** mingled contempt and fear of the 'lower

orders'. Pheroza Shah Mehta travelled in a special railway saloon, a Congress leader asked Gandhi to button his shirt for him during the 1901 session, Dinshaw Wacha recalled the blowing of 1857 rebels from British guns without the slightest sympathy in his *Shells from the Sands of Bombay*, and Surendranath Banerji during a temperance campaign in 1887 found the lower classes utterly alien.<sup>149</sup> Extremist leaders despite their rhetoric were hardly very different in their way of life and attitudes, and the urban professional intelligentsia in general had close connections with propertied groups: a few industrialists in Bombay, commercial magnates like the Tandon of Allahabad,<sup>150</sup> rent-receivers practically everywhere. Aurobindo even in his most radical mood shied away from any call for no-revenue or no-rent, the one really effective form of passive resistance in a peasant country, while the marked lack of enthusiasm among the bourgeoisie proper (as distinct from intellectuals with bourgeois aspirations) robbed boycott and Swadeshi of much of its force. Boycott of British goods in Swadeshi Bengal had to be attempted through student picketing of shops and social boycott of recalcitrant merchants, the collective trader vows which would characterize post-1920 boycotts being still significantly absent. The real spread of nationalist politics beyond the confines of the intelligentsia to business groups and peasants alike had to wait for the post-War era and Gandhi.