

Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2'

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'Many miracles, were previous to this affair [the riot at Chauri Chaura], sedulously circulated by the designing crowd, and firmly believed by the ignorant crowd, of the Non-co-operation world of this district'.

—M. B. Dixit, Committing Magistrate,
Chauri Chaura Trials.

I

Gandhi visited the district of Gorakhpur in eastern UP on 8 February 1921, addressed a monster meeting variously estimated at between 1 lakh and 2.5 lakhs and returned the same evening to Banaras. He was accorded a tumultuous welcome in the district, but unlike in Champaran and Kheda he did not stay in Gorakhpur for any length

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of time to lead or influence a political movement of the peasantry. Gandhi, the person, was in this particular locality for less than a day, but the 'Mahatma' as an 'idea' was thought out and reworked in popular imagination in subsequent months. Even in the eyes of some local Congressmen this 'deification'—'unofficial canonization' as the *Pioneer* put it—assumed dangerously distended proportions by April-May 1921.

In following the career of the Mahatma in one limited area Over a short period, this essay seeks to place the relationship between Gandhi and the peasants in a perspective somewhat different from the view usually taken of this grand subject. We are not concerned with analysing the attributes of his charisma but with how this registered in peasant consciousness. We are also constrained by our primary documentation from looking at the image of Gandhi in Gorakhpur historically—at the ideas and beliefs about the Mahatma that percolated into the region before his visit and the transformations, if any, that image underwent as a result of his visit. Most of the rumours about the *Mahatma's spratap* (power/glory) were reported in the local press between February and May 1921. And as our sample of fifty fairly elaborate 'stories' spans this rather brief period, we cannot fully indicate what happens to the 'deified' image after the rioting at Chauri Chaura in early 1922 and the subsequent withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation movement. The aim of the present exercise is then the limited one of taking a close look at peasant perceptions of Gandhi by focusing on the trail of stories that marked his passage through the district. The location of the Mahatma image within existing patterns of popular beliefs and the way it informed direct action, often at variance with the standard interpretations of the Congress creed, are the two main issues discussed in this essay.

In a number of contemporary nationalist writings peasant perceptions of and beliefs about Gandhi figure as incidents of homage and offering. Touching instances of devotion and childlike manifestations of affection are highlighted in the narratives of his tour in northern India during the winter of 1920-2.² And if this spectacle of popular regard gets out of hand, it is read as a sign of the mule-like obstinacy (*hathagraha*) of simple, guileless *kisans*. The sight and sound of

² See Mahadev Desai, *Day-to-day with Gandhi* (Secretary's Diary), iii (Varanasi, 1965), pp. 143ff. and 262-6. For a condensed version of the same ideas, see D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, ii (Bombay, 1952), p. 78.

uncouth peasants invading the train carrying Gandhi, rending the sky with cries of **jai*' and demanding *darshan* at an unearthly hour, could be annoying and unnerving. But all was not yet lost because local Congress leaders could be counted on to restrain the militant exuberance of lathi-wielding, torch-bearing enthusiasts.³ A passage titled 'Boundless Love' from the tour diary of his secretary is representative of how peasant attitudes towards Gandhi have been written about in nationalist narratives:

It is impossible to put in language the exuberance of love which Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali experienced in Bihar. Our train on the B.N.W. Railway line stopped at all stations and there was not a single station which was not crowded with hundreds of people at that time. Even women, who never stir out of their homes, did not fail to present themselves so that they could see and hear him. A huge concourse of students would everywhere smother Gandhiji with their enthusiasm. If at some place a sister would take off her coral necklace and tell him, 'I give this specially for you to wear', at some other, *sanyasis* would come and leave their rosaries on his lap. If beautiful sheets or handspun and hand-woven cloth, many yards long, would be presented at one place, at some other place would turn up a loving villager from the woods, boastful of his trophy, saying, 'Maharaj (an address of reverence) this is my feat of strength. The tiger was a terror to our people; I am giving the skin to you'. At some places, guns normally used as fog-signals were fired in his honour. At some others, we came across railway officers who would not give the green flag, when our train came within their jurisdiction, in order to have and let others have Gandhiji's *darshan*. Not minding the fact that our 'Special' was certain to pass by them in terrific speed, people were seen at some places, standing along the railway lines in distant hope of having just a glimpse of Gandhiji or at least of making their loud shouts of 'Gandhi-Shaukat Ali-ki-jai' reach his ear. We have met with even policemen who had the courage to approach Gandhiji to salute him or touch his hand, and CID's [*sic*] also who would plaintively say, 'We have taken to this dirty work for the sake of the sinning flesh, but please do accept these five rupees'.⁴

Seeking *darshan* was obviously a fairly visible sign of popular reverence, and no wonder it occupies a prominent place in descriptions of Gandhi's tours. D. G. Tendulkar writes of the Mahatma's 'tour of mass conversions to the new creed' in 1921 as follows:

Remarkable scenes were witnessed. In a Bihar village when Gandhi and his party were stranded in the train, an old woman came seeking out Gandhi. 'Sire, I am now one hundred and four', she said, 'and my sight has grown dim. I have visited the various holy places. In my own home I have dedicated two temples. Just as we had Rama and Krishna as *avatars*,

³ See below, p. 21.

⁴ Desai, pp. 142-3.

so also Mahatma Gandhi has appeared as an *avatar*, I hear. Until I have seen him death will not appear'. This simple faith moved India's millions who greeted him everywhere with the cry, 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai'. Prostitutes of Barisal, the Marwari merchants of Calcutta, Oriya coolies, railway strikers, Santals eager to present khadi *chaddars*, all claimed his attention.

From Aliearh to Dibrugarh and then as far as Tinnevely he went from village to village, from town to town, sometimes speaking in temples and mosques. Wherever he went he had to endure the tyranny of love.⁵

Examples of such *darshan*-seeking scenes could be multiplied, and we shall come back to them in our account of Gandhi's passage through Gorakhpur. It is worth stressing here that the Gandhi-*darshari* motif in nationalist discourse reveals a specific attitude towards the subalterns—the *sadharan janta* or ordinary people as they are referred to in the nationalist Hindi press. To behold the Mahatma in person and become his devotees were the only roles assigned to them, while it was for the urban intelligentsia and full-time party activists to convert this groundswell of popular feeling into an organized movement. Thus it would appear that even in the relationship between peasant devotees and *their* Mahatma there was room for political mediation by the economically better off and socially more powerful followers.⁶

The idea of the artifacts of the 'mythopoeic imagination of childlike peasants' being mediated by political intermediaries occurs in anti-nationalist discourse as well. Referring to stories about the power of Gandhi current in Gorakhpur and other districts of eastern UP in the spring of 1921, *the Pioneer* wrote in an editorial:

Mr Gandhi is beginning to reap the penalty of having allowed himself to be unofficially canonized (as we should say in the West) by his adoring countrymen. We say 'reap the penalty', because it is inconceivable that a man of his transparent candour and scrupulous regard for truth should hear without chagrin the myths which are being associated with him as a worker of miracles. *The very simple people in the east and south of the United Provinces afford a fertile soil in which a belief in the powers of the 'Mahatmaji', who is after all little more than a name of power to them, may grow.* In the 'Swadesh', a paper published in Gorakhpur, four miracles were quoted last month as being popularly attributable to Mr Gandhi. Smoke was seen coming from wells and, when water was drunk, it had the fragrance of keora (*pandanus odoratissimus*) an aloe-like plant which is used in the manufacture of perfume; a copy of the Holy Quran was found in a room which had not been opened for a year; an Ahir who refused alms to a Sadhu begging in Mahatma Gandhi's name, had his gur

⁵ Tendulkar, p. 78.

« Cf. p. 19 below.

and two buffaloes destroyed by fire, and a sceptical Brahmin, who defied Mr Gandhi's authority, went mad and was only cured three days afterwards by the invocation of the saintly name! *All these events admit of an obvious explanation, but they are symptoms of an unhealthy nervous excitement such as often passed through the peasant classes of Europe in the Middle Ages, and to which the Indian villager is particularly prone.* Other rumours current in Ghazipur are that a man suffered the loss of his wife, sons and brothers because he had offended Gandhi, that the 'Mahatma' was seen in Calcutta and Multan on the same day, and that he restored two fallen trees. *In all these instances we see the mythopoetic imagination of the childlike peasant at work, and perhaps nobody is much the worse, but a case reported from Mirzapur would require sooner or later the attention of the police.* The story is told that a young ahirin who had been listening during the day to speeches took a grain of corn in her hands when playing with her companions in the evening, blew on it with an invocation of the name of Gandhi and, lo! the one grain became four. Crowds came to see her in the course of a few days and she quadrupled barley and gram and even common objects like pice. But it is reported that strange coins could not be multiplied. *While this is obviously a mere trick of mouth concealment, the agitator is proclaiming it as a miracle, and all the neurotic girls of the countryside will be emulating the achievement.*⁷

A fuller analysis of some of these stories is presented in another section of this essay. What is important to notice at this point is that while the *Pioneer* locates the *origin* of these stories in a popular imagination fired by 'nervous excitement', their *circulation* is attributed to 'agitators'. There is no room here for the 'deified' Mahatma inspiring popular attitudes and actions independent of elite manipulation and control.

Jacques Pouchepadass' sensitive study of Gandhi in Champaran can be read at one level as an elaboration of this theme.⁸ In an extended discussion of Gandhi's presence in this district in 1917, the 'obstinate quest for his *darshan*' is picked out as the initial point of departure. Pouchepadass notes that Gandhi was 'invariably met by throngs of raiyats at railway stations' and elsewhere, and this, combined with the influx of peasants from a large number of villages to Bettiah and Motihari to give evidence against the planters, enlarged the area of agitation in the district. 'The name of god was frequently used to denominate Gandhi' and the 'obstinate quest for his *darshan* gives further evidence about the deification of the Mahatma' in the

⁷ *Pioneer*, 23 April 1921, p. 1. Italics mine.

⁸ Jacques Pouchepadass, 'Local leaders and die intelligentsia in die Champaran satyagraha (1917): a study in peasant mobilization', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS) 8: 1974, esp. pp. 82-5.

district. The peasants' faith in Gandhi's power was indexed by 'fantastic rumours':

Those rumours . . . reported that Gandhi had been sent into Champaran by the Viceroy, or even the King, to redress all the grievances of the raiyats, and that his mandate overruled all the local officials and the courts. He was said to be about to abolish all the unpopular obligations which the planters imposed on their raiyats, so that there was no need to obey the word of any planter any more. A rumour was also in the air that the administration of Champaran was going to be made over to the Indians themselves, and that the British would be cleared out of the district within a few months.⁹

Not all of these however were the product of popular imagination. Pouchepadass is of the opinion that 'many of these rumours were very consciously spread by the local leaders, who took advantage of Gandhi's charismatic appeal to give additional impetus to the agitation But what matters is that the peasants believed them because Gandhi's name was associated with them'.¹⁰ This faith also broke the normal ties of deference in the countryside—the *hakims* and the *nilhe sahebs* held no terror for the peasants testifying before the Champaran Enquiry Committee. The implication of all this for direct political action by the peasants is unfortunately left unexplored. In fact a case is made out for the transference of Gandhi's charisma to the authorized local interpreters of his will. Pouchepadass warns against overrating Gandhi's 'personal ascendancy over the humbler classes':

When he is present, of course, only his own word counts. But once he is gone, the local leaders are apt to retain part of his prestige, and become the authorized interpreters of his will. It is a fact that from 1918 onwards, after Gandhi had left and the planters' influence had begun to fade away, the hold of die rural oligarchy grew more powerful than ever.¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3. It is interesting to note that most of these rumours can be classified under the motif 'redressal of wrongs done to the peasantry', a development of the popular idea that Gandhi had come to Champaran precisely for such a task. In war-time all rumours are concerned with war. Though not each and every one of the thirty rumours collected by J. Prasad after the great Bihar earthquake was about seismic upheaval, all of them were nevertheless concerned with disaster. See J. Prasad, 'The Psychology of Rumour: a study relating to the great Indian earthquake of 1934', *British Journal of Psychology*, 35:1 (July, 1935), p. 10 and *passim*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84; cf. Pandey: 'The belief in an "outside leader" can also be seen as an obverse of a belief in the break-down of the locally recognized structure of authority; and rumour fulfils the function of spreading such a notion as efficiently as die leader from die town'. See Gyan Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: die peasant movement in Awadh, 1919-22', in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi, 1982), p. 164.

¹¹ Pouchepadass, p. 85.

However, evidence from north Bihar and eastern UP suggests that no authorized version of the Mahatma could have been handed down to the peasants, either by 'local leaders' or by members of the District Congress Committees. The spate of *boat-looting* incidents in Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad in early 1921 in the name of Gandhi was clear proof of a distinctly independent interpretation of his message.¹² Blaming agent provocateurs for misleading 'the poor ignorant peasants'¹³ into committing these acts would, therefore, be to turn a blind eye to the polysemic nature of the Mahatma myths and rumours, as well as to miss out the stamp these carried of a many-sided response of the masses to current events and their cultural, moral and political concerns.

In existing literature the peasants of eastern UP and Bihar are often portrayed as more superstitious than those of some other regions such as western UP and Punjab. We have seen that according to the editor of the *Pioneer*, 'the very simple people of the east and south of the United Provinces afford[ed] a fertile soil in which a belief in the powers of the "Mahatmaji" . . . [might] grow'. In a recent piece of sociological writing the metaphor of 'fertile soil' seems to have been taken literally. In eastern UP, writes P. C. Joshi, summing up his experience of field work in the area, the 'very fertility of soil had minimized the role of human effort', as a result of which 'religion and magic permeated every sphere and occasion of life'.¹⁴ Whether rice growing areas dependent on monsoon rains are more superstitious than canal-fed wheat growing tracts is a question which need not detain us here. Instead I propose, very briefly, to sketch those features of the political history of Gorakhpur in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which throw some light on the specific response of the area to Gandhi's visit in February 1921.

II

The spread of Gaurakshini Sabhas (Cow Protection Leagues) in the 1890s and the subsequent growth of the Nagri movement, Hindi journalism and Hindu social reform in the 1910s appear to have been

¹² See *Bihar and Orissa Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 Feb: 1921, i, p. 279; Stephen Henningham, *Peasant Movements in Colonial India. North Bihar, 1917-42* (Canberra, 1982), pp. 98-9; Kapil Kumar, 'Peasants' Movement in Oudh, 1918-1922' (Ph.D. thesis, Meerut University, 1979), pp. 154-7.

¹³ J. Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Delhi, n.d.), p. 61.

¹⁴ P. C. Joshi, 'Fieldwork Experience: Relived and Reconsidered. The Agrarian Society of Uttar Pradesh', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 8:4 (July 1981), p. 470.

the important landmarks in the political history of Gorakhpur in the period up to 1919-20.¹⁵ These saw the involvement of a wide range of the district's population. Former *pargana* chiefs—rajās and ranis, members of the dominant landed lineages, schoolmasters, postmasters and *naib-taksildars*—middle-caste Ahir and Kurmi tenants—all 'rallied round the Cow' (although the last two did so with ideas quite different from the rest).¹⁶ The developments in the first twenty years of the present century relied on *rausa* and trader support but drew in the intelligentsia, religious preachers and sections of the rural population as well. Gorakhpur neither witnessed widespread agitation against the Rowlatt Acts, as had happened in the Punjab, nor did a Kisan Sabha movement of the Awadh type develop in this region.

The Gaurakshini Sabhas of Gorakhpur in their attempt at selective social reform anticipated the 'Sewa Samitis' and 'Hitkarini Sabhas'—Social Service Leagues—of the early twentieth century. A mammoth meeting of the Gorakhpur sabha held at Lar on 18 March 1893 laid down rules for different castes regarding the maximum number of *haratis* (members of the bridegroom's party) to be entertained at a wedding and the amount of money to be spent on the *tilak* ceremony—all in an effort to cut down 'foolish expenditure on marriages'. Observance of proper high-caste rituals was also stressed. Thus it was made obligatory for 'all *dwija* castes (i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas)... to recite the *gayatri mantra* at the three divisions of the day', and he who failed in this was to 'be expelled from the brotherhood'.¹⁷ Contributions 'for the protection of the Gao Mata' (Mother Cow) were also made compulsory for every Hindu household on pain of exclusion from caste. Rule 4 of the Lar sabha stated that 'each household [should] every day contribute from its food supply one *chutki* [handful], equivalent to one *paisa*, per member', and that 'the eating of food without setting apart the *chutki* [should] be an offence equal to that of eating a cow's flesh'. Women

¹⁵ On the cow-protection movement in eastern UP and Bihar see John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977), Pt iv; Sandria B. Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu" Community', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), pp. 597-625; Gyan Pandey, 'Rallying Round the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpur region, c. 1888-1917', in R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (Delhi, 1983).

¹⁶ Pandey, 'Rallying Round the Cow'.

¹⁷ 'Note on the Cow-protection Agitation in the Gorakhpur District', c. 1893, L/P&J/6/365, India Office Records. This document is also discussed in Freitag and Pandey.

were to be 'instructed as to the contribution of *chutki* in proper fashion with due regard to *pardah*'.¹⁸*

Again, the power of panchayats was brought to bear upon 'remorselessly [to] boycott' those who sold cows or bullocks to Muslims or butchers. It seems that these panchayats were of two kinds. In the 'Cow Courts' of Azamgarh 'whose proceedings . . . were a somewhat flattering imitation of the proceedings in the Magistrate's Courts' it was generally the zamindars who acted as judges.¹⁹ In certain other cases, as in that of a 'respectable Hindu farmer' of Sagri pargana of that district in June 1893, a less formal and more militant boycott was undertaken by the peasants themselves. To quote Gyan Pandey:

Villagers gathered at . . . [the house of Lakshman Paure], pulled down tiles from the roof, smashed his earthen vessels, stopped the irrigation of his sugarcane field, prohibited Kahars from carrying sweets which were needed for his daughter's entry into her bridegroom's house and slapped Lakshman, adding the threat that the house would be looted and he himself killed if he did not get the bullock back.²⁰

The 'Gandhi Panchayats' of the early 1920s organized by local volunteers meted out punishment similar to what Lakshman Paure of the village of Pande Kunda had received in 1893. However, in the spring of 1921 when all was charged with magic, any mental or physical affliction (*kasht*) suffered by persons found guilty of violating panchayat decisions adopted in Gorakhpur villages in the Mahatma's name was often perceived as evidence of Gandhi's extraordinary powers, indeed as something providential and supernatural rather than as a form of chastisement devised by a human agency.²¹

Hindi was officially adopted as the language of the courts of law in UP in 1900. Soon after, the *Nagri pracharini* (Hindi propagation) movement began to pick up momentum in Gorakhpur as well. In 1913 the local branch of the sabha agitated successfully for judicial forms to be printed in Hindi, and in September 1914 *Gyan Shakti*, a literary journal devoted to 'Hindi and Hindu *dharma prachar*', was published by a pro-government Sanskrit scholar with financial support

¹⁸ Rules 4 and 16. For analogous alms and subscriptions in the name of Gandhi, see pp. 46-7 below.

¹⁹ Offg. Commr. Banaras to Chief Sec., NWP & Oudh, 29 Sept. 1893, cited in McLane, p. 311.

²⁰ Pandey, 'Rallying Round the Cow'.

²¹ For a detailed discussion, see section VI below.

from the rajas of Padrauna, Tamkuhi and Majhauri, as well as some from the prominent rajas of Gorakhpur.²² In the following year Gauri Shankar Misra, who was later to be an important figure in the UP Kisan Sabha, brought out a new monthly—*Prabhakar*—from Gorakhpur. Its object was to 'serve the cause (*sewa*) of Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan'. However, the journal ceased publication within a year;²³ only *Gyan Shakti* remained, and even this closed down between August 1916 and June 1917. The full impact of Hindi journalism was not felt in Gorakhpur until 1919. In April and August of that year two important papers—the weekly *Swadesh* and the monthly *Kavi*—made their appearance.²⁴ These, especially Dasrath Dwivedi's *Swadesh*, were to exercise an important influence in spreading the message of Gandhi over the region.

In the 1910s movements and organizations of Hindi, Hindu culture and social reform—'nagri sabhas', 'pathshalas' (vernacular schools), 'gaushalas' (asylums for cattle), 'sewa samitis' (social service leagues) and 'sudharak sabhas' (reform associations) of various sorts provided the support and cover for nationalist activity in Gorakhpur. Each type of these socio-political movements served nationalism in its own way; but there was a considerable amount of overlapping in their functions and interests. In August 1919 a branch of the Bhartiya Sewa Samiti which had M. M. Malaviya for its head was established in Deoria.²⁵ A number of 'sudharak' and 'gram hitkarini sabhas' (village betterment societies) and subsidiary branches of the *sewa samitis* were established in the smaller towns and bigger villages of the region during 1919-20. The inspiration usually came from the local notables and pleaders at the tahsil and pargana headquarters, though sometimes appeals in the *Swadesh* for the setting up of community organizations also bore fruit. At these sabhas, heads of Hindu religious trusts (*mahants*) and celibates (*brahmchans*) from nearby *ashrams* or itinerant preachers (*pracharaks*) from neighbouring districts and from Banaras discoursed on the Hindu way of life and its rituals. *Yagya*

²² Arjun Tiwari, 'Poorvi Uttar Pradesh mein Hindi Patrakarita ka Udbhav aur vikas' (Ph.D. thesis, Gorakhpur University, 1978), pp. 37, 49-50; *Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals Published in U.P. during 1920 and 1921*, entry under *Gyan Shakti*.

²³ Tiwari, pp. 107-8.

²⁴ *Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals . . . U.P.*, 1920, 1921.

²⁵ See Note on 'The Sewa Samiti Movement in the United Provinces', by P. Biggane of the CID, dated 18 Dec. 1919, GAD File 604 of 1920, UP, State Archives, Lucknow.

(sacrifice) was performed; a Sanskrit pathshala and a gaushala endowed with financial support from traders, arrangements made for the orderly running of Ramlilas and *melas*, and panchayats set up for the arbitration of disputes.²⁶

Thus, the fourth annual convention of the Sanskrit Pathshala, 'supported by the zamindars and peasants' of *tappa* Belhar in Basti district, was the occasion for launching a 'Belhar tappa Hindu Sabha' for which more than 300 Hindus from some twenty-five neighbouring villages had gathered at *mauza* Kotiya on 23 October 1920. The proceedings started with the chanting of Vedic sacrificial mantras, and after deliberating on the progress of Sanskrit education in the locality, Pragyachakshu Dhan Raj Shastri discoursed on *samskar*, especially *upanayan samskar*. A Brahmachari from Ballia who for the past five months had been 'reciting continuously' from the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, etc. followed with a powerful speech on cow protection. It was resolved that only those who were prepared properly to look after the welfare of Brahmani bulls (*sand*) should get them branded; those unable to do so should, as an alternative, contribute to the sabha for other religious deeds on a scale ranging from Rs 1.5 to 5 according to their means. The 'most important and topical resolution' passed at this sabha was 'that in every village of Belhar tappa, a . . . panchayat consisting of five persons [should] be established and a big panchayat . . . set up for the tappa as a whole'.²⁷

The evolution of the Pipraich Sudharak Sabha at about the same time indicates how those who were active in the promotion of Hindu culture could also be promptly induced to espouse the cause of Non-Co-operation. Pipraich was the seat of an important market town owned by the pro-government Jawwad Ali Shah of Gorakhpur city. A railway town, it was an important centre of the grain and sugar trade which was mostly in the hands of Hindu traders.²⁸ A sudharak sabha was formed on 21 October 1920 at a meeting of 300 presided over by the local *raees*, Babu Munni Lai. The Sabha handled the arrangements for the Dussehra *mela* (fair) and the subsequent festivities of Bharat-milap (based on the story of the exiled Rama's

²⁶ Details of these activities are scattered through the 1920 volume of the *Swadesh*.

²⁷ Notice by Chandra Bah Visharad, B.A., in *Swadesh*, 14 Nov. 1920, p. 9. Unless stated otherwise, translations from the local Hindi journals are my own. *Tappa* is a grouping of villages, with the chief village as the seat of the dominant local landed lineage.

²⁸ See Statement of Bazar Collections at Pipraich, File I-A13-1917, Gkp. Collector's Rec. Room.

reunion with his brother, Bharat). After ten days of activity during the Dussehra fortnight, yet another meeting was held. Again presided over by the local *raees*, it was attended by 1,500 people including the *babus* of nearby Balua. However, on this occasion speakers from Gorakhpur town gave a different direction to the deliberations. The editor of *Swadesh* spoke on council boycott, and others on *sewa dharma* and commercial matters. A decision was taken unanimously to open a 'swatantra pathshala'—an independent school unaffiliated to the government—with the spinning of *khaddar* yarn specified as an important part of its curriculum.²⁹

Traditional Hindu religious discourses addressed to large congregations lasting several days at a time were also put to a similar use on some occasions:

In mauza Gointha, Post Office Dohrighat (Azamgarh) the discourse of Pt Ramanueraha Sharma, *dharmopadeshak*, went on for ten days. Many thousands turned up for these lectures. After the last lecture he organized a Vedic yagya and many indigents and Brahmins were feasted. He also established a Bharat Hitaishi Sabha to which both Hindus and Muslims have contributed 5 *punches* and 2 *sarpanches* each . . . Many cases have been settled [out of regular courts].³⁰

Caste sabhas could undergo interesting transformations as well. Thus on 12 December 1920 a Bhumihar Ramlila Mandal was established at Bhiti village in the Bansgaon tahsil of Gorakhpur; its 'object was to encourage unity and propagate satyagraha by revealing the [true] character of Sri Ramchandrajai'.³¹ Similarly, in a great many cases lower and middle-caste panchayats imposed novel dietary taboos as a part of the widespread movement of self-assertion which was also exemplified by acts such as the refusal of their women to work as housemaids or the withholding of *begar* (forced labour) both from the *sarkar* and the zamindar. A correspondent from Naugarh in Basti district wrote to the *Swadesh*:

The sweepers, washermen and barbers of this place met in panchayats of their various *biradaris* on 27 January 1921. They have decided that anyone who partakes of meat, fish and liquor would be punished by the *biradari*

²⁹ *Swadesh*, 31 Oct., 7 Nov., and 19 Dec. 1920. *Babus*: members of the dominant local lineage of a tappa.

³⁰ *Swadesh*, 11 Sept. 1919, p. 11. Ramanugraha Sharma, resident of Bhelia (Rasra), Ballia district had followed this procedure in Shahabad, Pipraich and Paina, near Barhaj in present day Deoria district. See *Swadesh*, 4 July 1920, p. 8, 1 Aug, pp. 10-11, 30 Oct. 1920, p. 7. *Punch*: member of a panchayat; *Sarpanch*: head of a panchayat.

³¹ *Swadesh*, 19 Dec. 1920, p. 8.

(brotherhood) and would have to donate Rs 51 to the gaushala. The Dhobis and Barbers have also decided not to wash the clothes and cut the hair of any of their patrons who partakes of meat, fish and liquor.³²

A widespread boycott of meat and liquor 'due to the efforts of a Bengali sadhu' was reported from Padrauna in Gorakhpur in early 1921, though caste panchayats played a role in this instance as well.³³

It must be emphasized that the very act of self-purification on the part of the ritually impure amounted, in some instances, to a reversal of the signs of subordination. 'All low caste Hindus, except those who are Bhagats or vegetarians by vow, almost without exception eat meat', observed a local ethnographer of Gorakhpur in the late nineteenth century.³⁴ For them, especially the sweepers, washermen and untouchable agricultural labourers, to give up meat in 1920 was not simply an instance of 'Sanskritization'. Thus at a sabha held in October 1920 the Chamars of Bareilly (central UP) had decided to forsake meat as well as liquor and other intoxicants; but they were also very forthright in their refusal to do begar for the district officials on tour. As they said in a petition addressed to the Governor on that occasion: 'We are ready to perform any legitimate services required of us appertaining to our profession but inhuman treatment, meted out to a Chamar every day, by petty servants of the thana and tahsil is nothing short of a festering sore'.³⁵

By early 1922 indications of a 'growing restlessness among the . . . [Chamars]. . . arising out of the general spirit of revolt' were reaching the police headquarters in the districts. The movement for 'self-reform' now revealed 'a tendency to forsake hereditary callings' as well.³⁶ The eight resolutions passed at a large meeting of the Chamars of Azamgarh in January 1922 followed the standard pattern of caste reform in their concern about the prevalence of child marriage and co-habitation out of wedlock, and in the interdictions they imposed on toddy, liquor and animal sacrifice. What is perhaps equally significant

³² *Swadesh*, 6 Feb. 1921, p. 8.

³³ *Idem*.

³⁴ Note by Ram Gharib Chaube on 'Eating Meat', William Crooke Papers, MS 131, Museum of Mankind, London.

³⁵ Extracted in Harcourt Butler to Chief Sec, UP, 26 Oct. 1920, GAD File 694 of 1920; *Swadesh*, 10 Oct. 1920, p. 1. For a discussion of the assertive nature of middle-caste movements in early twentieth century eastern UP, see Pandey, 'Rallying Round the Cow'. See also David Hardiman's essay on the Devi movement in the present volume.

³⁶ UP Police Abstracts of Intelligence (PAI), 1 April 1922.

is that members of this caste of leather workers also pledged themselves not to trade in hides and skins and to discourage young boys from taking up their ancestral profession.³⁷ In western and central UP, Chamars were refusing to skin carcasses and perform begar for the landlords and were 'allowing their women less liberty of movement',³⁸ an euphemism for the withdrawal of female labour from the homes of the upper castes.

III

Gorakhpur in 1920 was no stronghold of the Congress or the independent Kisan Sabhas. In fact the relative backwardness of the entire region comprising Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh districts was lamented repeatedly by the editor of the Congress weekly, *Swadesh*, and the main reason for this was thought to be the absence of an effective and dedicated leadership.³⁹ Political meetings in Gorakhpur city and in important market towns like Deoria and Barhaj Bazar picked up from July-August 1920, as the campaign for council elections by the rajas, rauts and *vakla* was sought to be countered by challenging the bona fides of 'oppressive landlords' and 'self-seeking pleaders'. Open letters appeared in the columns of *Swadesh* highlighting the oppression suffered by peasants in the bigger zarnindaris and challenging the presumption of the rajas to be the natural spokesmen of their *praja* (subjects). At a public meeting of the newly-formed Voters' Association in Deoria the representative of a landlord candidate was faced with the charge that his patron's command of English was inadequate for him to follow the proceedings of the legislative council.⁴⁰ But increasingly, the boycott of council elections and, after the Nagpur Congress (December 1920) the propagation of Non-Co-operation, was being written up and broadcast as a part of the spiritual biography of Mahatma Gandhi. In a powerful editorial, prominently displayed by *Swadesh* on the front page on 11 November and reprinted the next week, Dasrath Dwivedi appealed to the local electorate in bold typeface:

³⁷ Report of the Chamar conference held at Gopalpur village, thana Madhuban, district Azamgarh, *Swadesh*, 8 Jan. 1922, p. 6.

³⁸ PAI, 1 April 1922.

³⁹ See *Swadesh*, 18 April 1920, pp. 13-14, 23 May, p. 9, 15 Aug., p. 14.

⁴⁰ See *Swadesh*, 16 May, 6-June, 4 and 18 July 1920.

OH YOU VOTERS OF THE GORAKHPUR DIVISION! HAVE SOME SELF RESPECT. BEWARE OF THE OBSEQUIOUS STOOGES! BE SURE WHO IS YOUR GENUINE WELLWISHER! MAHATMA GANDHI, PT MOTILAL NEHRU, PT MALVIYAJI or those who are now running after you, begging for your votes? Think for yourself; what good have the latter done for you so far that you may now expect them to help remove your sorrows and sufferings from inside the Council. Now cast your eyes towards Mahatma Gandhi. This pure soul (*pavitra murti*) has sacrificed everything for you (*tan-man-dhan... arpan kar diya bat*). It is for your good that he has taken the vow of renunciation (*sanyas-vrat*), gone to jail and encountered many a difficulty and suffering. Despite being ill, he is at this moment wandering all over [the country] in the service of your cause. It is the *updes* of this same Mahatma Gandhi that you should not vote. And you should not vote, because approximately thirty thousand of your unarmed Punjabi brethren were fired upon in Amritsar, people were made to crawl on their bellies, and despite the hue and cry for justice you were shoed away like dogs (*tumhen dutkar diya gay a tha*). And no heed was paid whatsoever. Look out. Beware. DO NOT VOTE FOR ANYBODY.⁴¹

In this text, which may be regarded as representative of the local nationalist discourse on council boycott,⁴² the 'Punjab Wrongs' and the callous indifference of the British are no doubt mentioned as reasons for not voting; but it is hard to miss the person of a saintly Gandhi, resplendent in his suffering for the people and, in turn, requiring and even demanding their obedience to his injunctions. Perceived thus the boycott of elections and the rejection of loyalist candidates appear as a kind of religiously prescribed abstinence from the polling booth, analogous to the observance of proper Hindu rituals and self-purification which was being propagated by many of the nationalist religious preachers and taken up by certain low-caste panchayats as well. It was to such a region, which was not unaware of the peasant rioting in southern Awadh in January 1921 but had not yet developed any comparable peasant movement of its own, that Gandhi came on 8 February 1921.

The decision to invite Gandhi was taken at a public meeting held in Gorakhpur city on 17 October 1920. Maulvi Maqsood Ali Fyzabadi

⁴¹ *Swadesb*, 11 Nov. 1920, p. 1.

⁴² In all likelihood the Congress volunteers who were to tour the district for a fortnight, spreading 'Gandhiji's message of council boycott', would have taken the above editorial as their central text. It seems that voting was thin in Bansgaon tahsil and at Siswa Bazar, Bridgmanganj, Pipraich and Parwapar in Maharajganj and Padrauna tahsils. See *Swadesb*, 14 Nov. 1920, p. 12, 12 Dec. 1920, p. 12.

presided over it and Gauri Shankar Misra was the main speaker. The meeting resolved to support the cause of those arrested in connection with the Khilafat agitation, pronounced *asahyog* (Nori-Co-operation) to the *uchit* (proper) and decided to send a telegraphic invitation to Gandhi and the Ali brothers to visit Gorakhpur at an early date.⁴³ Gandhi was also approached by the Gorakhpur delegates (prominent amongst whom was Baba Raghav Das, successor to the spiritual *gaddi* (seat) of Anant Mahaprabhu and founder of the Paramhans Ashram, Barhaj) at the Nagpur Congress and he told them that he would visit the district sometime in late January or early February.⁴⁴ To the creed of *asahyog* that Raghav Das and Dasrath Dwivedi brought with them from Nagpur was added mounting excitement at the prospect of its author's advent. Propagation of the politics of Non-Co-operation in the Gorakhpur countryside in early 1921 had elements of a celebratory exordium, a preparing of the district for the Big Event. The peregrinations of Raghav Das and his brahmachari followers around their ashram in Barhaj, the 'melodious Gandhi-bhajans' sung by Changur Tripathi to a peasant assembly at Kuin nearby⁴⁵ and the 'poetical effusions' in the first issue of a rejuvenated *Kavi* magazine—'written with the set purpose of arousing in the masses and classes alike a yearning for the quick descent of Krishna, the Messiah'⁴⁶—are the few surviving fragments of this picture of enthusiasm and expectation in Gorakhpur at that time.

An index of this popular expectation was the increase in the number of rumours which assigned various imaginary dates to Gandhi's visit. By the first week of January the news of his arrival had 'spread like wild fire'. Dasrath Dwivedi, the editor of *Swadesb* was bombarded with hundreds of letters asking for the exact dates. To allay anxiety on this score the journal printed a column on its front page on 9 January assuring its readers that the date of Gandhi's arrival would be announced in the *Aaj* (Banaras), *Pratap* (Kanpur), *Bhavishya* (Prayag), *Vartman* (Kanpur); the *Leader* and *Independent* would also publish the news, while the *Swadesb* press would ensure that notices, posters and letters carried the word to all six tahsils of the district.

⁴³ *Swadesb*, 24 Oct. 1920: p. 11.

⁴⁴ Amodnath Tripathi, 'Poorvi Uttar Pradesh ke Jan-jeevan mein Baba Raghav Das ka Yogdaan' (Ph.D. thesis, Allahabad University, 1981), pp. 62-7,77; *Swadesb*, 2 Jan. 1921.

⁴⁵ Tripathi, p. 78; *Swadesb*, 6 Feb. 1921, p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals, U.P., 1921*, p. 33.

Meanwhile the District Congress Committee (DCC) geared itself into action. It had been decided to get a national school inaugurated by Gandhi, and the DCC was active on this front. Advance parties of lecturers (*vyakhyandata*) announcing his arrival were to be dispatched to the tahsil headquarters and to Barhalganj, Dhakwa and Gola in the densely populated southern tahsil of Bansgaon; to Rudarj5ur and Captainganj in the central tract of Hata; to the railway towns and marts of Deoria, Salempur, Majhauri, Lar, Bhatpar and Barhaj Bazar to the south-east, and to Padrauna in the north-east. Within the sparsely populated northern tahsil of Maharajganj, Pepeganj and Campierganj—seats of European zamindaris—and Siswa Bazar, the important entrepot of gur and rice, were to be the target points. At meetings held at these places, the visiting lecturers were to preach the doctrine of the Congress and ask for contributions to the National School Fund. In their turn the local residents were to ensure that people within a radius of ten miles attended these public discourses on the philosophy and advent of Gandhi.⁴⁷ The massive attendance at the Gorakhpur sabha on 8 February and the crowds that thronged the five stations on the fifty mile railway strip between Bhatni and Gorakhpur city suggest that the news had spread widely enough.

On 30 January the *Swadesh* announced that the probable date was now 8 February and requested the people of Gorakhpur to seek the Mahatma's darshan and bring their donations with them. It also wrote about the need for more Congress workers to come forward and help in supervising the arrangements.⁴⁸

An editorial which appeared in the columns of that newspaper on 6 February announcing the impending arrival is a significant text and is reproduced in Appendix I. Besides illustrating how the image of the distinguished visitor was projected in Gorakhpur by local Congressmen, it is also representative of nationalist understanding of the relationship between the subaltern masses, the elite leadership and Gandhi himself. Dasrath Dwivedi, the young author of this text, had been trained as a journalist on the staff of the *Pratap* in Kanpur and on Ganesh Vidyarathi's advice had come back to his home district in 1919 to start his own *Swadesh*.⁴⁹ The editorial, 'The Great Fortune of

⁴⁷ *Swadesh*, 9 Jan. 1921, p. 11; see also Appx II below.

⁴⁸ *Swadesh*, 30 Jan. 1921.

* The circulation of the paper in early 1921 was 3,500, though according to official estimates it dropped to 2,300 in the course of that year. See Tiwari, p. 558; *Statement of Newspapers etc., U.P., 1921*, entry under *Swadesh*.

Gorakhpur', was written by one who was obviously an ardent nationalist disappointed at the political stupor prevailing in the region, and who felt as if his dream of Gandhi bringing about a transformation was soon to be fulfilled. Addressed basically to lawyers and students whom it urges to cast off sloth, it is also significant in its attitude towards the common people:

Our plea is that the common people (*sadharan junta*) of Gorakhpur are only anxiously awaiting for the darshan of the Mahatma. The Mahatma will arrive, the public will have darshan and will be eternally grateful for it. There will be no end to the joy of the people when they are able to feast their eyes on the Mahatma.

But what about those who are openly co-operating with the government . . . don't they have some duty at this juncture... ? A voice from the heart says 'Of course!... *They should kneel before Mahatma Gandhi and pray to the Almighty for courage to enable them to row their boats out of the present whirlpool and into safety . . . For Mahatma Gandhi to appear [avteern: from avtar] before us in these difficult times is a tremendous boon, for us, our society and our country . . . Don't vacillate, arise now to serve the oppressed brothers of your district. Blow the shankh (conch-shell) of Swaraj . . . This movement is an elixir (amrit-bati) for you. Mahatma Gandhi is offering it to you.*⁵⁰

How the common people and the elite should respond to Gandhi's visit is thus clearly laid out. The task of the janta is to congregate in large numbers, 'feast their eyes on the Mahatma', count themselves lucky, and after such brief taste of bliss return to their inert and oppressed existence. So far as they are concerned the Mahatma is to be in Gorakhpur for no other purpose than to offer them darshan. They are not expected to proclaim the cause of *swaraj* on their own. The clarion call (written metaphorically, as *shankhmaad*, after the blast of conch-shells used for Hindu sacred rituals) of *swaraj* in villages requires only the power of elite lungs: for that rallying blast the 'oppressed brothers' of Gorakhpur must rely on the initiative of the elite followers of the Mahatma. The implication is that the peasants' pilgrimage to Gorakhpur and the mufassil stations will be useless from a nationalist perspective unless 'leaders' step in to channel the goodwill generated in the villages as a result of Gandhi's darshan. That such a journey, made often in defiance of landlord opposition, could in itself be a political act and that Gandhi's message might be decoded by the common villager on his own, without prompting by outsiders, were possibilities not entertained by Dasrath Dwivedi at

⁵⁰ 'Gorakhpur ka Ahobhagya', *Swadesh*, 6 Feb. 1921. Emphasis mine.

this time. Yet a perusal of local news published by him in subsequent months shows that these were the lines along which popular response to the Mahatma's visit expressed itself.

Apart from this the imagery, feeling and metaphors used by Dwivedi to convince educated waverers about the greatness of Gandhi and convert them to his cause are of interest in themselves. At this level there is no significant difference between the religiosity informing the peasants and the attitude Dwivedi wants the intelligentsia to adopt towards Gandhi; the language of belief seems to be the same in both instances with merely some variations in tone and accent. The italicized portions of the extract quoted above testify to the religious, indeed devotional nature of Dwivedi's writings. The boat and boatman imagery occurs frequently in rural and urban devotional songs. As Susan Wadley notes in her study of popular religion in a village in western UP, 'many . . . devotional songs use the whirlpool analogy for a crisis situation, along with other nautical imagery (the ocean of existence, boat, boatman, ferry across, the far side, etc.)'.⁵¹

Gandhi's visit to Gorakhpur was well organized and the gatherings of people on that occasion were truly phenomenal. An advance party of Gorakhpur Congressmen had been sent to Bhatni junction at the south-eastern edge of the district, and the train by which he travelled made its way very slowly through, stopping at every railway station where people had assembled for darshan. As Shyam Dhar Misra who led the reception party reported in *Swadesh*:

At Bhatni Gandhiji addressed (*updesh diya*) the local public and then the train started for Gorakhpur. There were not less than 15 to 20,000 people at Nunkhar, Deoria, Gauri Bazar, Chauri Chaura and Kusmhi [stations]. . . . At Deoria there were about 35-40,000 people. Mahatmaji was .very pleased to witness the scene at Kusmhi, as despite the fact that the station is in the middle of a jungle there were not less than 10,000 people even here. Some, overcome with their love, were seen to be crying. At Deoria people wanted to give *bhent* [donations] to Gandhiji, but he asked them to give these at Gorakhpur. But at Chauri Chaura one Marwari gentleman managed to hand something over to him. Then there was no stopping. A sheet was spread and currency notes and coins started raining. It was a sight Outside the Gorakhpur station the Mahatma was stood on a high carriage and people had a good darshan of him for a couple of minutes.⁵²

⁵¹ Susan Wadley, 'Power in Hindu Ideology and Practice', in K. David (ed.), *The New Wind: Changing Identities in South Asia* (The Hague: Paris, 1977), p. 144, n. 17.

⁵² *Swadesh*, 13 Feb. 1921, p. 3.

Among the peasants who had come all the way from their villages for Gandhi-darshan on this occasion, there were many who would again in a year's time—in February 1922—march past the Chauri Chaura railway station to the adjacent thana as participants in another fateful event. Indeed, at the trial of the peasant-rioters of Chauri Chaura, some of those who acted as witnesses for the prosecution found it necessary to try and offer an innocuous explanation of their presence among the crowd at the station on 8 February 1921. As Shankar Dayal Rae, a prosperous contractor of the locality, put it to the Sessions Judge in June 1922: 'I never before went to the station to meet any *rajnaitik* (political) leader—to Gorakhpur or Chaura—except that I went to pay my respects to Gandhiji when he passed through Chaura in the train.'⁵³ The devotion of the Gorakhpuri peasants to the Mahatma seems to have acquired a militant edge. According to Mahadev Desai's account of the return journey from Gorakhpur, darshan was now demanded almost as a right:

The train started from Gorakhpur at 8.30 p.m. at night. . . . It was a train that halted at every station Hordes and hordes of people began to rush upon our compartment. . . . At every station peasants with long long lathis and torches in their hands would come to us and raise cries loud enough to split the very drums of our ears. Of course, all of us in the compartment were making as many appeals for quiet as we possibly could. But whoever would care to listen to us? . . .

Many of these devotees do not even know how their 'Mahatma Gandhi' looks like. A few of them thrust themselves into our compartment, and began to bawl out, 'Who is Mahatma Gandhiji?' 'Who is Mahatma Gandhiji?' I got desperate and said T. They were satisfied, bowed down to me and left the compartment! What a difference between my pre-sumptuousness and these people's untainted love! But it was no use getting enchanted with that guileless love

Any sleep for Gandhiji in the midst of this uproar was out of question The people's *hathagraha* (mule-like obstinacy) was repeated at each and every station that came after Bhatni: At last even Gandhiji's endurance and tolerance was exhausted He began to entreat the people 'Please go away. Why do you harass us at this dark hour?' He was answered only by sky-rending shouts of victory to him! . . . That was the height of the people's love-mad insolence*

IV

If this was the way in which the peasants reacted to Gandhi, how was his message understood by them? Were there any ambiguities in what

⁵³ Evidence of Shankar Dayal Rae, Chauri Chaura Trials (Sessions Judge), p. 508.

⁵⁴ Desai, pp. 263-6.

Gandhi said or was believed to have said? If so, what implications did these have for peasant beliefs about Gandhi as revealed in the 'stories' about his power?

The main thrust of Gandhi's speeches at the 'massive gatherings of peasants' in Fyzabad and Gorakhpur was to condemn the recent acts of peasant violence and rioting in southern Awadh. As Mahadev Desai recounts in his diaries of this period:

Gandhiji had only one message to give them, viz. those big sticks [lathis] were not to be used for killing or injuring anybody. The same thing was preached at Fyzabad also. Gandhiji's utterances were devoted exclusively to the outbreaks of robbery, villainy and rioting that had taken place in the United Provinces.⁵⁵

This was indeed so, but a close reading of his speech at Gorakhpur suggests that it had enough ambiguity in it to cause semantic slides. After a laudatory poem written by the Hindi poet 'Trishul' and read by Dasrath Dwivedi, Gandhi started his speech to 'mammoth gathering of over 1.5 lakhs, which included a 'fairly large number of illiterates and rustics',⁵⁶ as follows:

This gathering is not the occasion for a long speech. This gathering shows that there is a commonality of purpose amongst us. The poem that was recited just now did not mention Mohammad Ali Now brother Shaikat Ali, Mohammad Ali and I are saying the same thing

After stressing the need for Hindu-Muslim unity, he warmed up to a condemnation of peasant violence in Awadh:

What happened in Fyzabad? What happened in Rae Bareilly? We should know these things. By doing what we have done with our own hands we have committed a wrong, a great wrong. By raising the *lakri* [i.e. lathi] we have done a bad thing. By looting haats and shops we have committed a wrong. We can't get swaraj by using the *lakri*. We cannot get swaraj by pitting our own devilishness (*shaitaniyat*) against the Satanic government. Our 30 crore *lakris* are no match against their aeroplanes and guns; even if they are, even then we shall not raise our *lakris*. The Quran says so. Brother Mohammad Ali tells me that [according to the Quran] as long as the raising of the stick is unnecessary we cannot do so

Our kisan brothers have committed a mistake. They have caused great anguish to my brother Jawahar Lai. If further difficulties [of this sort] are put in our way then you shall see that that very day it would become impossible for Gandhi to live in Hindustan. I shall have to do penance—this

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 267. For a detailed discussion of Gandhi's 'Instructions' to die peasants at Fyzabad, see Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism'.

⁵⁶ *Gyan Shakti*, Feb. 1921, p. 407.

is a peaceful struggle. Only after I retire to the Himalayas can it become a violent struggle. Our fight should be like the one put up by our Sikh brethren in Taran Taran They did not seek revenge against their oppressors This is our way, this the *asahyog dharma*, this is real *Brahmacharya*. This is *kshatriya dharma*. And today this is the dharma of the Musalmans. To go against it is to commit a sin

Right now we should forget about 'social boycott'. The time has not yet arrived for such actions. Nobody should prevent any brother from going to the burial ground, nobody is to prevent anybody from the use of the services of barbers or to have *chilum* [i.e. ganja] and liquor. In fact we want to rid everybody of *chilum* and booze (*daru*). If all of you give up [these things] today then we shall attain swaraj straightaway

[Congratulating Gorakhpur on its organization of this meeting Gandhi continued] The real result of your organizational abilities and your work would be seen when in Gorakhpur lawyers give up their practice, schools no longer remain sarkari [i.e. affiliated to the government], titles are given up, no drinkers, no whoremongers, no gamblers remain in your district. When every house has a *charkha* and all the *julahas* of Gorakhpur start weaving [hand-spun yarn] You should produce so much khaddar in Gorakhpur that you people don't have to go to Ahmedabad, to Bombay or Kanpur [for your cloth]

I would request you to be patient and listen to Maulana Mohammad Ali's speech and carry on donating money to the volunteers. Please refrain from being noisy. I want to tell you, if you follow my programme—I want to assure [you] if you do as I tell you, we shall get swaraj by the end of September. We could also get the Khilafat and the Punjab Wrongs undone by the sarkar. But this is the right [task] of only those who accept the things discussed at the Nagpur Congress. This is not the business of those who are not with us in our work From those who are not with us, but still come to our meetings, I expect that they will at least keep the peace—we can attain swaraj by end September if God grants us peace; if all of us Indians have the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-purification then 30 crore people can achieve just about anything.⁵⁸

The main constitutive elements—*baat* in the indigenous parlance—of Gandhi's message to the Gorakhpur kisans could be arranged as follows:

1. Hindu-Muslims unity or *ekta*.
2. What people should *not* do on their own: use lathis; loot bazaars and haats; enforce social boycott (*'naudhobi band'*).

⁵⁷ The words used were 'Koi kisi bhai ko kabristan jane se na roke, koi kisi ko hajjam, chilum aur daru se na roke'. *Chilum* is an earthen bowl for smoking tobacco, but is understood in popular parlance to refer to *ganja* smoking. It seems that Gandhi is here using the word *chilum* to refer to ganja, but this can also be understood to be an injunction against smoking as such.

⁵⁸ Translated from the verbatim report published in *Swadesh*, 13 Feb. 1921, p. 6.

3. What the Mahatma wants his true followers to do: stop gambling, ganja-smoking, drinking and whoring.
4. Lawyers should give up their practice; government schools should be boycotted; official rides should be given up.
5. People should take up spinning and weavers should accept hand-spun yarn.
6. Imminence of swaraj: its realization conditional on innate strength of numbers when matched with peace, grace of God, self-sacrifice and self-purification.

This sequential summary of Gandhi's speech is an attempt to reconstruct the way in which his utterances might have been discussed in the villages of Gorakhpur. It is reasonable to assume that such discussions would proceed by breaking up his message into its major ideological constituents.⁵⁹ If the practice, which is current even today, of communicating printed news in the countryside is any guide, then in all likelihood the main points of that speech summarized from the version published in *Swadesh* was conveyed to the illiterate peasants in the local dialect.

It will be seen that baat no. 4 does not greatly concern the peasants. No. 1 is very general and figures only marginally in the Gandhi 'stories'. Baat no. 5 is, in part, far too specific as an instruction addressed exclusively to weavers, while the advice in favour of spinning might have sounded rather too general, lacking as it did an infrastructure to make it feasible at this stage. It is the conflation of baats no. 3 and no. 6, and its contextualization within the existing ideas about 'power' and magic, which lay at the root of some of the 'stories' relating to the Mahatma in Gorakhpur. It seems that the complementarity of his negative advice with regard to popular militancy (baat no. 2) and the positive actions enjoined on the 'true followers' (baat no. 3)—the complementarity, so to say, of the do's and don'ts in these particular messages, was (*pace* Mahadev Desai) largely lost on his rustic audience. On the other hand baats no. 3 and 6 came to be associated in the popular mind as a linked set of spiritual commandments issued by a god-like personage. As such these were consistent with those legends about his 'divinity' which circulated at the time.

⁵⁹ For an example of one such breaking up of Gandhi's message to the peasants into main (*mukhya*) baats, see 'Kisanon ko Mahatma Gandhi ka amritmay sandesh', *Abhyudaya*, 18 Feb. 1931, p. 19. For an extended use of the term baat, and its use as an organizing principle in the narrative of Bhojpuri fables, see George A. Grierson, *Seven Grammars of the Dialects and Subdialects of the Bihari Language etc.*, Pt. II (Calcutta, 1884), pp. 102ff.

The enforcement of social boycott was not widespread yet; it was to pick up only from late 1921. Meanwhile, that is immediately in the wake of Gandhi's visit, people, acting on their own or through their panchayats and sabhas, were still involved in efforts at self-purification, extending and transforming his message on this theme. It is with the intervention of the supernatural in this process and the Mahatma's role in it that most of the Gorakhpur 'stories' are concerned. To these we now turn.

V

The feeling of devotion towards Gandhi in Gorakhpur was commented on in glowing terms in the nationalist press. Dasrath Dwivedi wrote in an editorial about the 'fantastic flow of *bhakti*' (devotion) caused by the Mahatma's visit. Mahavir Prasad Poddar, a Gorakhpuri merchant resident in Calcutta and a popular retailer of Swadeshi-sugar of yesteryears,⁶⁰ elaborated on this theme thus in the columns of the *Swadesh*:

It had not occurred to us in our wildest dreams that the same Gorakhpur which was politically dormant would suddenly wake up like this. A crowd of 2-2½ lakhs for the darshan of Gandhiji is no ordinary thing. It can probably be said that this is the biggest crowd that has ever gathered for the darshan of the Mahatma But let no one think that this vast multitude came like sheep, inspired by blind faith (*andhbhakti*) and went back empty handed. Those with eyes can see that the darshan of 'Gandhi Mahatam' (diis is the phrase used in villages) have not been in vain. The janta came with devotion (*bhakti*) in their hearts and returned with feelings and ideas (*bhav*). The name of Guru-Gandhi has now spread in all four corners of the district....

But roses have thorns as well A zamindar of the city had it proclaimed in his *ilaqa* that anyone going for Gandhi's darshan would be fined Rs 25 and receive twenty-five shoe-beatings to boot The people of this area wrung their hands in despair. A Ramlila procession goes in front of the house with so much fanfare and the children are locked up in the attic! . . . I know there are other creatures like the above-mentioned rees in this district.⁶¹

Here is a far better understanding of the impact of that visit than we have so far encountered in nationalist prose. The janta does not just have *bhakti*; seeing and hearing the Mahatma also inspires *bhav*, a word suggestive not merely of feelings and ideas but of urge to action as well.⁶² The laudatory poem read as a welcome address to Gandhi had ended on the note:

⁶⁰ *Swadesh*, 20 April 1919, p. 4. " *Swadesh*, 27 Feb. 1921.

⁶² I am grateful to Veena Das for diis suggestion.

*jaan dalega yahan aap ka aana ab to; log dekhenge ki badla hai
zamana abto...
aap aye hain yahan jaan hi aae samjho, goya Gorakh ne dhuni phir
hai ramai samjho.*⁶³

By February 1921 times had indeed changed, beyond the 'wildest dreams' of Poddar: a new life was already infused into a 'politically dormant' Gorakhpur—a regeneration brought about by, as it were, the powerful *tapasya* of Gorakhnath, the eponymous founder of the city. Gandhi's advent was perceived as a major event by the zamindars who had sought forcibly to prevent their peasants from seeking his darshan. It was for them an event which stood out of the flow of quotidian existence and as such threatened to bring about displacements in the local power structures. The analogy of eager children being denied the joy of participation in an important religious procession was apt, for it suggests in the landlords a cruel paternalism designed to prevent any subversion of the relationships of dominance and subordination which constituted the stuff of everyday life in the countryside. The enthusiasm Gandhi generated, the expectations he aroused and the attack he launched on British authority had all combined to initiate the very first moments of a process which, given other factors, could help the peasant to conceptualize the turning of his world upside down. This was an incipient political consciousness called upon, for the very first time, to reflect—albeit vaguely and intermittently—on the possibility of an inversion of many of those power relations deemed inviolable until then, such as British/Indian, landlord/peasant, high-caste/low-caste, etc. This process of conceptualization was set in train that spring in Gorakhpur by a clash between the ordinary and the extraordinary, between the habitual and the contingent—a clash triggered off directly by the Mahatma's visit.⁶⁴

VI

Stories about Gandhi's occult powers first appeared in the local press in late January 1921. An issue of *Swadesh* which announced his arrival in the district also carried a report under the heading: 'Gandhi in dream: Englishmen run away naked'. A loco-driver—presumably

⁶³ *Swadesh*, 13 Feb. 1921, p. 5. Your coming here will enliven this place; people will notice how times have changed; you coming vinnually brought back life to this place and Gorakhpur has bounced back to life and pride.

⁶⁴ The argument in this paragraph owes a lot to discussions with Bernard Cohn and Ranajit Guha.

an Anglo-Indian—who had dozed off while reading a newspaper at Kasganj railway station in Etah district woke up from a nightmare at 11 p.m. and ran towards a cluster of bungalows occupied by the English and some Indian railway officers shouting: 'Man, run, man! Gandhi is marching at the head of several strong Indians decimating the English'. This caused a panic and all the local white population emerged from their bedrooms in a state of undress and ran towards the station. The key to the armoury at the station was asked for, but could not be found as the officer-in-charge was away. English women were locked up in boxes and almirahs, and some Englishmen were heard saying, 'Man! The cries of "jai jai" are still reaching our ears. We shall not go back to our bungalows'. In the morning Indians who heard of this incident in the city had a good laugh at this example of English self-confidence (*atmik-bal*).⁶⁵ This story, first published in the Banaras daily *Aaj* and then in *Swadesh*, is illustrative of the wider tendency of the times to berate British power and boost Indian prowess by contrast.⁶⁶ The British emerge in tales of this kind as a weak-kneed race, mortally afraid of the non-violent Mahatma.

Other stories to appear in the press just prior to and immediately after his arrival were about a lawyer of Deoria who was cursed by a follower of Gandhi for going back on his promise to give up legal practice and had his house polluted with shit; about a high-caste woman who suffered the same polluting fate after she had denied a young boy a blanket to protect him from the cold when he wanted to go to the station at night to seek darshan; about a Kahar who tried to test the Mahatma's power with a foolish wish and came out the worse for it; and about a Pandit who sought to defy Gandhi by insisting on eating fish only to find it crawling with worms. These stories have the same sequential and structural characteristics as many others reported

⁶⁵ 'Swapn mein Mahatma Gandhi: Angrez nange bhage', writer Banwari Lai Sewak, *Swadesh*, 30 Jan. 1921 (extracted from *Aaj*).

⁶⁶ Thus Mohammad Ali addressing the Gorakhpur meeting on 8 February after Gandhi, concluded his speech with the following exhortation: 'We should only be afraid of Allah, and no one else. No Deputy Commissioner was sent saddled with his office from the house of God. No midwife ever said that the child-to-be-born would become a Commissioner, or a Viceroy. Even the Collector and Commissioner of Gorakhpur, even Sir Harcourt Butler must have emerged from their mothers' wombs as innocent babes, like the rest of us. Therefore [don't be afraid], have faith in Allah, keep the peace, all thirty crores work the charkha—you shall get swaraj in six month's time'. Reported in *Swadesh*, 13 Feb. 1921, p. 8.

from Gorakhpur. Taken together and classified according to their motifs, they may be said to fall into four fairly distinct groups:⁶⁷

- A. Testing the power of the Mahatma.
- B. Opposing the Mahatma.
- C. Opposing the Gandhian creed in general and with respect to dietary, drinking and smoking taboos.
- D. Boons granted and/or miracles performed in the form of recovery of things lost and regeneration of trees and wells.

A. Testing the Power of the Mahatma

1. Sikandar Sahu of *thana* Mansurganj, mauza Mahuawa (Dist. Basti) said on 15 February that he would believe in the Mahatmaji when the *karah* (boiling pan) full of cane-juice in his *karkhana* split into two. The *karah* split in two in the middle!⁶⁸
2. On 18 February a Kahar (domestic servant; palanquin bearer) from Basantpur said that he would be prepared to believe in Mahatmaji's authenticity (*sacha manoonga*) only when the thatched roof of his house was raised. The roof lifted ten cubits above the wall, and fell back to its original position only when he cried and folded his hands in surrender and submission.⁶⁹
3. On 15 March a cultivator in mauza Sohraghat (Azamgarh) said that he would believe in the Mahatmaji's authenticity (*sacha jaane*) if sesamum sprouted on 1.5 *bighas* of his field. Next day all the wheat in that field became sesamum. 'I have seen this with my own eyes at the house of Pt Brijwasi Vakil', wrote a correspondent. 'The ears look like that of wheat, but on rubbing with hand, grains of sesamum come out of them'.⁷⁰
4. Babu Bir Bahadur Sahi of mauza Reaon was getting his fields harvested on 15 March. In order to test the Mahatma's powers he wished for some sweets. Suddenly sweets fell on his body. Half of the sweets he distributed among the labourers and the rest he kept for himself.

⁶⁷ These stories, unless otherwise stated, are taken from *Swadesh*, 27 Feb., p. 11; 6 March, p. 9; 13 March, p. 5; 10 April, pp. 1,11; 17 April, p. 4; 24 April, pp. 11-2; 1 May, p. 7 and 8 May 1921, p. 2. I am aware that these stories can well be classified differently, and that a particular story can be grouped under more than one category. However, I have found the above classification useful for the purposes of the present discussion.

⁶⁸ These stories have been translated from the Hindi versions reported in *Swadesh*.

⁶⁹ 'These news items (*samachar*) have been sent in by Sri Sam Raj Chaudhuri of Rajpur. He maintains that all of these incidents are true'. *Swadesh*, 27 Feb. 1921, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Reported by Shyamnand Lai.

5. On 13 April a *karahi* was being set up as an offering to the Mahatma. The wife of one thakur saheb said that she would offer *karahi* to the Mahatmaji only if there were some miracles performed. Suddenly a dhoti hanging on a peg caught fire and was reduced to ashes, although there was no smell of burning whatsoever. 'I have seen this with my own eyes'.⁷¹
6. A reader of *Swadesh* from Barhaj wrote: 'Two chamars while digging were having a discussion about the *murti* (idol, image) that had emerged in Bhoore village (Saran). One of them . . . said . . . "only if a murti emerges at that site as well will I accept that the one at Bhoore is calling out for Gandhi". By a coincidence, while digging, a murti of Mahadev came out. On hearing the news people rushed for darshan, and *puja-paath* was done and offerings made. People are of the opinion that the cash offered should be sent to the National School [fund]'.⁷¹
7. A similar incident was reported to have happened at the well of Babu Shiv Pratap Singh of Gaura [adjacent to Barhaj]. But it was said that as soon as people rushed to get the murti out of the well, it disappeared.
8. A Brahman of mauza Rudrapur (Post Office Kamasi) had the habit of stealing grass. People tried their best to convince him that Mahatma Gandhi had forbidden such evil deeds. He replied, 'I shall believe in Gandhiji if when I go stealing grass at night someone catches me, or I fall ill, go mad, or start eating *gobar* (cow dung)'. Strange are the ways of God: all these things happened. While stealing grass he started shouting that someone was coming to catch him. He fainted. He ran a high fever. People got hold of him and took him to his house. Soon after he ran out and started eating *gobar*. When after three days his family members took the *manauti* [i.e. pledged to propitiate Gandhi if the patient recovered], he started feeling better. 'As a result of this people in the village and its neighbourhood have given up theft etc. completely'.⁷²
9. Shri Balram Das of the Gorakhpur School reported, 'On February 26th I had gone to the Rudrapur village in Maharajganj

⁷¹ Reported by Jaikumar Singh. For the practice of *karahi*-offering see p. 47 below.

⁷² Reported in Sarju Singh. *Manauti*: from *minnat*: taking of a vow; a promise to offer something (normally cash) in return for the fulfilment of a wish or the granting of a boon.

tahsil to give a lecture. Everybody agreed to follow the ways of Mahatma Gandhi. But one character did not give up his [old] habit and went to cut grass. On his return he went mad. He broke and smashed things around him. When he offered Rs 5 in the name of Mahatmaji he quietened down (*shanti hui*).¹³

Even a cursory reading of these 'stories' suggests that two obvious processes are at work here. First, the rumours are indicative of a considerable discussion about Gandhi in the villages of Gorakhpur in spring 1921. The recurring phrase, 'I shall believe in Mahatmaji only in the event of such an extraordinary happening', should be read as an index of a dialogue between sceptics and firm believers. It makes sense only in the context of such a discussion.

Secondly, this crucial phrase also suggests that what people thought of the Mahatma were projections of the existing patterns of popular beliefs about the 'worship of the worthies' in rural north India.⁷⁴ As William Crooke has observed, the deification of such 'worthies' was based among other things, on the purity of the life they had led and on 'approved thaumaturgic powers'.⁷⁵ The first of these conditions Gandhi amply satisfied by all those signs of saintliness which a god-fearing rural populace was prone to recognize in his appearance as well as in his public conduct. As for thaumaturgy, the stories mentioned above attribute to him magical and miraculous powers which, in the eyes of villagers nurtured on the lore of Salim Chishti and Sheikh Burhan, put him on a par with other mortals on whom peasant imagination had conferred godliness.

Turning to the stories themselves we find that they are developments of the basic idea of the genuineness of the Mahatma as revealed through various tests. In its simple version a test is set in the context of the immediate activity or environment of the person concerned, or there is the fulfilment of an expressed wish. The conditions are met and the story or the rumour connected with it goes no further. Examples of this are to be found in Nos. 1, 3 and 4, and to a lesser degree in No. 5 as well. In some of the other instances a further development takes place: the person who sets the test submits to the Mahatma's power. Thus the Kahar of Basantpur in No. 2 gets the roof of his hut back in position only after he makes amends for questioning the saint's authority by tearful repentance.

⁷³ *Swadesh*, 1 May 1921, p. 7.

⁷⁴ W. Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, i (London, 1896), pp. 183-96. We are not concerned with the deification of those 'who have died in a miraculous way', discussed by Crooke under this category. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

A clearer example of the power of rumours in spreading the name of Gandhi in villages and reorienting normal ritual actions towards nationalist goals is contained in story No. 6. Of the two Chamars, one evidently believed in the rumour from Saran district in Bihar. But the other made his acceptance conditional on an extraordinary occurrence taking place in the context of his immediate activity—digging. When as a result of coincidence⁷⁶ his spade brought out a murti from the ground, the Chamar (perhaps convinced of the power of the Mahatma) retired as the subject of the narrative. Now others, who also had heard this particular rumour (further proof of which had been unearthed in their own area), entered the scene and propitiated the image of Mahadev in the usual way by having darshan and making offerings of flowers and money. But it is significant that the money which would otherwise have gone towards the construction of a concrete platform at that site was earmarked as a contribution to the National School Fund, a project with which Gandhi was directly associated in Gorakhpur.⁷⁷

The story about finding a murti in Barhaj (No. 7) follows the line of popular interpretation adopted for the previous anecdote. That this particular rumour might have been spread deliberately by someone, and that the idol had 'disappeared' by the time people rushed to the scene, is immaterial for the purposes of the present discussion. What is important is that a series of 'extraordinary occurrences' in the villages of Gorakhpur were being read in a familiar way, that is according to the conventions of reading the episodes in a sacred text but with their religiosity overdetermined by an incipient political consciousness.

There is an element which story No. 2 shares with No. 5—where the *thakurain* makes her offering to the Mahatma conditional on the occurrence of a miracle and where this happens in the form of a dhoti bursting into flames. In both stories it is fear which imposes faith on non-believers. This penal motif recurs frequently in many religious ballads in eastern India. The doubting woman and the sceptical Kahar are persuaded to join the devotees—and do so ritually in the karahi episode—in the same way as a forceful display of an offended

⁷⁶ Phrases like 'by a coincidence', or 'strangely enough', which would otherwise qualify these miracles, occur very seldom in these stories. Besides, these should be read more as reflecting the viewpoint of the person reporting these occurrences to the press rather than as indicating a sceptical attitude on the part of the people as a whole.

⁷⁷ The fund was launched by the DCC in late 1920 so that Gandhi on his visit could open a National School at Gorakhpur.

godling's wrathful power breaks the resistance of a non-conformist in a *vratkatha* or *panchali*.

This motif is made explicit in No. 8 and its variation, No. 9, by the challenge to the Mahatma's power and the manner in which the latter is seen to triumph. The Brahman thief of Rudrapur village is representative not just of the ordinary village sceptic but of high-caste opposition to the Gandhian creed. His resistance questions by implication the conformism of the rest of the village (see the modified version in No. 9). But he pays for this by being subjected to physical and mental suffering. Only when his family relents on his behalf, joins the Mahatma's devotees by taking a vow in the latter's name and makes an offering does the man's condition improve. It is hard to miss the similarity between this and many other stories of opposition to the Gandhian creed, and between their predictable outcomes. (See Nos. 12, 21 and 23 below). The ending—'as a result of this particular occurrence people in the village and its neighbourhood have given up theft/drinking/gambling, etc'—announces in each instance the victory of the new moral authority which is made all the more resplendent by the fact of having been deified at the outset.

B. *Opposing the Mahatma*

This theme of personal suffering (*kasht*) and pollution recur in many other stories expressly concerned with incidents of direct opposition to Gandhi. Thus:

10. Pt Damodar Pandey from mauza Gayaghat, PO Uska Bazar (Dist. Basti) reported that a man in mauza Dumariya near his village had called Gandhi names, as a result of which his eyelids had got stuck...
11. In Unchava village, one mile from Chara Ghat, four seer of ghee belonging to Abhilakh Ahir had gone bad. The reason for this was that he had made some sarcastic remarks (*vyang vacban*) about Gandhiji.
12. Mauni Baba Ramugraha Das of mauza Benuakuti (Benuatikur?) had slandered Mahatmaji on several occasions. As a result of this his body began to stink of its own (*khud-ba-khud*). After some exertion in the right direction (*kuch yatn karne par*) things improved somewhat. Mauniji then made arrangements for a *lakshaad ahuti* (sacrifice).
13. Sri Murlidhar Gupt from Majhauri reported, 'When Mahatma Gandhi was going back on the night of 8 February from

Gorakhpur to Banaras there was a huge gathering at Salempur station to have his darshan. There was a lad of a Barai (betel-leaf grower) in that gathering as well. It is said that he had asked a Mishrain (wife of a Misr, a high caste Brahman) for a wrapper to come to the station. She, reprimanded him and refused to give him the blanket. The poor soul came shivering to the station, had darshan of the Mahatma and went back home. In the morning I heard a rumour in the village that she suffered the same fate as befell the household of Babu Bhagavan Prasad, wakil of Deoria [i.e. shit rained all over, see Nos. 17 & 18]. In the end, only when she kept a fast, not even touching water for a day and a night and did *aradhana* (ritual praying) of the Mahatma, did peace finally return to her.'

14. In qasba Hariharpur, tahsil Khalilabad (District Basti) a big raees was getting a *mandir* (temple) constructed after the wishes of his deceased father. Babu Gyan Pal Dev—the raees—had been against Gandhiji, and had threatened his praja with a fine of Rs 5 if anyone even talked of Gandhiji or became his follower. On 4 April at 11.30 p.m. a huge figure with four hands appeared on the scene and announced aloud before a large gathering, 'I am a follower of Siva. All of you should do puja to him. Babu sahab give up your wrong policies (*aniti ko chor do*). Speak the Truth. Follow the Dharma; forsake *adharna*' After this it assumed a diminutive form and disappeared. 'This is a factual and eye-witness account'.

In the first four stories (Nos. 10-13), physical ailment and pollution are seen as supernatural punishments meted out to those who opposed Gandhi or (as in No. 13) any of his devotees in word or deed. In No. 14 the idea of physical punishment is replaced by a divine warning which, since it was delivered in front of a crowd which included presumably his social inferiors, hurt the prestige of the anti-Gandhian raees of Hariharpur.

The story (No. 12) of the holy man of Banuatikur (Mauni Baba) who seems to have broken his vow of silence to criticize Gandhi, puts the usual image of religious preachers and peasant audiences in a slightly different light. It is generally believed that the manipulation of popular religious idiom by renouncers—babas, *sanyasis* and the like—was conducive to the spread of the nationalist message in the

countryside.⁷⁸ The peregrinations of *dharmopadeshak* Pandit Ramanugraha Sharma in eastern UP and western Bihar and the career of the *Ramayana-reciting* Baba Ramchandra in Awadh were clear examples of this process at work.⁷⁹ However, the rumour about the Mauni Baba's criticism of Gandhi and the afflictions it caused suggest that the word of the local sadhu was not always taken at its face value in the villages of Gorakhpur. His suffering was interpreted in Benuatikur and broadcast through rumour over a wide area as an obvious punishment for his anti-Gandhian stance. Apparently the holy man himself found this explanation convincing enough to repent and make amends in an appropriate manner. We do not know whether it was a local Congressman or the common people who first thought up this explanation. Even if the former did, the wide currency of this and similar stories structured around the theme of physical suffering caused by opposition to Gandhi and his creed indicates that in these we have a moment representative of a very general idea.

Nos. 13 and 14 provide additional insights into the widespread phenomenon of Gandhi-darshan. In the first of these the resolve of the true darshan-seeker enables him to withstand personal discomfort while bringing suffering and pollution to an opponent of Mahatmaji. Here fasting and puja add up to an act of penance; in other instances, to 'worship' the Mahatma would appear to be a part of the customary female ritual of *vrat* and *aradhana*, which were not necessarily linked with the notion of penance or *prayschit*.^{*0} The text of the story is also suggestive of the power and spread of rumour: the alleged pollution of the Mishrain's household as a divine retribution provoked by her anti-Gandhian attitude is identical to the terms of a

⁷⁸ The following description in a pro-government newspaper is illustrative of the crude view which projects the peasants as objects of their manipulation: 'The special correspondent of an Indian contemporary [newspaper] throws considerable light on the methods of certain politico-religious preachers professing to be followers of Mr Gandhi who have been carrying on active propaganda in the Rae Bareilly district. They settle in a village, . . . dress themselves in saffron-coloured clothes, and in the beginning of their career refuse to take food for many days. The village people think that their saviour has come. The disciple of the Mahatma next takes to preaching, and gathers round him a great following of persons . . .'. *Pioneer Mail*, 28 Jan. 1921.

⁷⁹ For Ramanugraha Sharma, see p. 12 above. For Baba Ramchandra and his use of the *Ramayana* and the religious cry 'Sita Ram' in mobilizing peasants in Awadh, see M. H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: the United Provinces, 1918-22* (Delhi, 1978); S. K. Mittal and Kapil Kumar, 'Baba Ramchandra and the Peasant Uprising in Oudh', *Social Scientist*, 10:71 (June 1978); Gyan Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism'.
*⁰ Seep. 46 below.

similar report received from Deoria twenty miles away a couple of days ago. (See Nos. 18 and 19 below).

The Mishrain from Salempur only rebuked the Barai lad for seeking darshan; there were landlords like Rai Kishore Chand (raees of Sarheri estate in northern Gorakhpur) and Babu Gyan Pal Dev (of Hariharpur in Basti) who sought to restrain their *praja* (tenants) in a more forthright fashion.⁸¹ The supernatural occurrence at a mandir in Khalilabad tahsil on 4 April, timed by our correspondent for 11.30 p.m. and attested as factual, once again shows how such phenomena lent themselves to very different interpretations. Both Jamuna Prasad Tripathi who contributed this story to *Swadesh* and Babu Gyan Pal Dev agreed that a *daitya* (ogre) had appeared on the scene, but while the former understood this as a divine rebuke for the landlord's anti-Gandhian actions the latter denied the charge in a rejoinder and claimed that the apparition was merely a signal for the promotion of the Siva cult. How the assembled peasants read this supernatural sign we do not know for certain, but it is unlikely that they would have failed to identify in it an element of divine rebuke to landlord oppression.

C. Opposing the Gandhian creed in general

15. A gentleman from Gorakhpur city wrote that a *mukhtar* of Alinagar *mohalla* had asked the women of the house to ply charkha. They said that they were not short of anything, so why should they ply the charkha? By a coincidence a trunk in the house caught fire in a strange way. 'The whole city was talking about this incident'.
16. There was a criminal case in mauza Bistauli. When the police arrived, both the accused and the aggrieved started telling lies. Someone, invoking the name of Mahatmaji (*Mahatmaji ka pratap hatla kar*), told them not to tell lies. As soon as the evidence was taken down, the culprit's daughter-in-law died.
17. 'Sri Tilakdhari Rai from Dhoki (Azamgarh) writes that it was decided on 18 February at a sabha in mauza Ghaziapur that no one was to let his cattle loose. Qadir chaukidar had also pledged (*pratigya*) not to let his cattle loose, but later he broke his pledge. People reminded him of his solemn promise. He replied, "I shall let my cattle astray, let's see what your

* One of the zamindars referred to on p. 25 was Rai Kishore Chand Raees, a resident of Gorakhpur town and member of the District Board.

panchayat and Gandhiji can do?" An hour later his leg started to swell up and pain. Even now the swelling has not stopped'.

18. 'A special correspondent writes from Deoria that Babu Bhagvan Prasad vakil is in a strange predicament; shit is to be found all over his house. Suddenly a murti that was kept in a trunk fell down from the roof of his house. Even when he left the house, the same predicament prevailed. The illiterates of the town are of the opinion that this is due to the fact that the vakil sahab had got into an argument with a speaker who was discoursing on Non-Co-operation'.
19. 'The wife of the famous vakil, Babu Bhagvan Prasad of Deoria has been in a strange predicament for the past few days. Wherever she sits, she sees a bit of *vishtha* (shit) kept at a distance from her. Sometimes she sees shit kept in a leaf-container (*dona*) for food. There is a murti in the house. When she keeps it back after puja it either disappears or is to be found on the roof, or falls down from there. If she serves *poori* (a type of fried bread) to someone, four of these become two; if she serves five then they are reduced to three.

But it is absolutely false that she has been cursed by a disciple of Gandhiji. People say that the vakil sahab had gone to the Calcutta [Congress] and had agreed there to give up his practice, but went back on his word. Subsequently a disciple (*shi'shya*) of Gandhiji cursed him. Now wherever the vakil sahab goes he encounters shit, and even his food, when served, is transformed into shit. All this is untrue. Vakil sahab is healthy, he does not see these things; neither did he go to Calcutta nor did he promise to give up his practice, and nobody has cursed him. Whatever his wife sees in the house, people say, is the work of a ghost (*bhoot-leela*).⁸²

20. 'On 11 April some people were gambling in the village of Parasia Ahir. I told them not to. People accepted my advice. Only one person did not listen to me and started abusing Gandhiji. The next day his goat was bitten by four of his own dogs, as a result of which he is now very unhappy and has accepted his *qusoora* (fault)'.⁸³

⁸² *Gyan Shakti*, Feb. 1921, p. 407.

⁸³ Reported by Kasinath Tiwari, *Swadeshb*, 1 May 1921, p. 7. Some other stories in which Gandhi is not directly mentioned have been gathered together in Appendix III and serialized as Nos. 42-50.

Opposing the Gandhian creed with respect to dietary, drinking and smoking taboos.

21. 'Rao Chokri Prasad writes, "The sons of a Tamoli (betel-leaf grower and seller) in the Tamoli neighbourhood of Lalchak near Bhatni station killed a goat and ate it up. Some people tried to dissuade them but they paid no heed. Later, all of them started vomiting and got very worried. In the end when they vowed in the name of Mahatmaji never to eat meat again their condition improved" '.
22. A Pandit of Rampur village, thana Mansurganj (Basti) was repeatedly told by many to give up his habit of eating fish, but he did not listen to anybody. He said—'I shall eat fish, let's see what the Mahatmaji can do.' When he sat down to eat [the fish] it was crawling with worms!
23. Babu Bhagirath Singh of Paisia, thana Naikot, district Gorakhpur wrote—'On 21 February the *riyaya* (peasants) of Babu Chandrika Prasad Singh promised to give up liquor as a result of his persuasion. But one Kalwar (of the caste of distillers) did not keep his solemn promise. As soon as he started for the liquor shop, brick-bats started to rain in his path. When he spoke the name of Gandhiji from the core of his heart the brick-bats stopped flying.'
24. On 22 February a sadhu came to Godhbal village, and began puffing at his ganja pipe. People tried to reason with him, but he started abusing Mahatmaji. In the morning his entire body was seen covered with shit.
25. Pandit Krishnanand Misr from Paharipur village, PO Rampur, District Azamgarh wrote: 'It was decided at a sabha in mauza Kamal Sagar that nobody was to partake of any kind of intoxicant. Later a couple of persons, hiding from general view, started rubbing *surti* (tobacco-leaf, chewing-tobacco) on their palms. Suddenly the leg of a calf fell near the house of a Chaturvedi sahab. As a result of this strange occurrence everybody has given up tobacco, *surti*, etc. [as well]'
26. A man in a sabha in mauza Majhwa had vowed not to smoke, but he took to smoking once again. Suddenly he was hemmed in by worms and insects from all sides. Because of this incident people in villages far away from Majhwa have also given up intoxicants.
27. In mauza Davani a Tambolin who used to smoke tobacco

dreamt that she was smoking and the pipe had got stuck to her mouth. She got afraid and has vowed not to smoke tobacco again.

In a sense these stories are variations on Nos. 10-13. The movement of the narrative as a sequence of personal suffering and/or pollution followed by repentance which, in its turn, generates a social impact, remains as of before. However, in the present series the punishments are seen to be meted out to those defying popular decisions taken in accordance with generally accepted tenets of the Mahatma. Nearly all rumours about the ill effects of breaking dietary and other taboos are indicative of a local elaboration of what was believed to be Gandhian ethics. Even Nos. 16-20 and No. 42 (in Appx III), not concerned with such taboos, suggest that an imbrication of popular attitudes and Gandhian ideas of self-purification was under way in the villages of Gorakhpur.

The story (No. 15) from the Alinagar ward of Gorakhpur city is the only one concerned with the refusal to ply charkha, while No. 20 about gambling refers to an activity specifically denounced by Gandhi on his visit there. Nos. 15 and 16 deal with truthfulness and attempts to regulate by a formal pledge the anti-social practice of letting one's cattle loose on other people's fields. The two variations of the story about the Deoria wakil and his wife (Nos. 18 and 19) draw on the familiar themes of pollution through human excreta and the breach of a solemn promise—that of Babu Bhagvan Prasad to give up his legal practice in accordance with the Non-Co-operation creed. It may be worth our while to pause for a closer look at these two versions.

The special correspondent of the *Swadesh* sought to distance himself from the popular interpretation of this story—'it is the opinion of the illiterates of the town'—without providing an alternative explanation. This mild disclaimer notwithstanding, he in effect gave currency to what had been thought up by the 'illiterates' of Deoria. The editor of the pro-government *Gyan Shakti* (whose pamphlet against Gandhi and Non-Co-operation was the standard text used by the district's loyalists),⁸⁴ provided a fuller account of the rumour, rebutting each and every ideological element of this popular story. In his account, which accepted the pollution of the house as a fact, it was the wife rather than the lawyer-husband who was the object of

⁸⁴ See for example the eleven-page pamphlet, *Hoshiyar ho jao* ('Beware'), written by Shiv Kumar Shastri and printed by him at the Gyan Shakti press for die Aman Sabha, Gorakhpur.

retribution. Any suggestion of the woman suffering for her husband's misdemeanour was rejected by the demonstration of all the rumours as being untrue, including the one about the lady having been cursed by a disciple of Gandhiji. The lawyer who, according to this report, had not broken any promise (made to the Congress), remained healthy in mind and body. Having taken the politics out of this rumour, the editor of *Gyan Shakti* offers an alternative explanation of this episode. The strange occurrence was not itself in doubt, it was just the reading of the signs which was problematic. In the popular version the rumour appears as a moment in the march of nationalist politics in the district. In the columns of the loyalist *Gyan Shakti* it loses that particular function: the empirical refutation put forward by the editor results in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi being replaced by the activity of apolitical spirits (*bhoot-leela*)!

However, it is the stories in the next series which are truly illustrative of the way Gandhi's message was being decoded and amplified in terms of the popularly accepted notions of pollution, with coincidence and temporal sequence being read as indicators of casuality. Gandhi did not press his Gorakhpur audiences to forsake fish and meat, yet Nos. 21-2 reproduced above and Nos. 43-6 in Appendix III suggest that a considerable amount of discussion, ending sometimes in a collective resolve (e.g. No. 46), was going on in the villages on the subject of vegetarianism. In these texts Gandhi's name is not explicitly associated with any *pratigya* (vow) to give up fish, meat, liquor or ganja. However, as in Nos. 21, 22 and 24, the image and 'power' of Gandhi are the essential turning points in the progress of the narrative: they imbue what precedes and follows with a particular set of meanings. The defiant phrase, 'I shall eat meat/fish, smoke ganja, drink toddy/liquor, let's see what Mahatmaji can do' is crucial to the construction and progress of these rumours. It suggests an interlocution between persons for and against abstinence and the use of Gandhi's name as a part of the argument. A calamity befalling a non-conformist, its social impact and his repentance are then connected in popular imagination with the unpracticability and undesirability of going against locally imposed decisions in these matters.

Again, the absence of the Mahatma from the texts supplied in Appendix III (see Nos. 43-6, 48) suggests that he has been so fully internalized in this kind of discourse as to require no mention. It would indeed be a narrowly empirical reading which would see in these rumours no trace whatsoever of the popularly accepted notions

of dietary taboos associated with the Mahatma in Gorakhpur. A comparison of the stories in which he figures explicitly (e.g. Nos. 21, 22) with those from which he is missing would suggest much affinity in the ordering of the two sets of texts. The sequence: interdiction-violation-consequence in Nos. 43, 46 and 48 is the same as in No. 21. In No. 44, the first step, interdiction, is absent (for no one warns Shankar Kandu against eating fish), but the follow-up—worms emerging from fried fish and the village giving up consumption of fish and fowl—is suggestive of the notice being taken of such evils as might result from transgressions of this kind, and of the tailoring of popular behaviour in accordance with them.

"Why this concern for dietary purity? We have no evidence to enable us fully to answer this question. However, some plausible explanations may perhaps be suggested. We have already seen that conforming to the drive for ritual purity in the 1910s, a movement in favour of giving up not only liquor but also meat and fish had picked up momentum in the towns and bazaars of Gorakhpur and Basti districts.⁸⁵ Religious preachers were not alone in their advocacy of vegetarianism. Even the low-caste panchayats of Dhobis, Bhangis and barbers were insisting on heavy fines as a penalty for breaking the newly-imposed dietary taboos within their respective communities. This particular emphasis on purity in the spring of 1921 may therefore be seen as an extension of the Gandhian idea of self-purification (through abstinence from ganja and liquor) to a context where the prohibition enlarged its scope to include meat and fish and could be regarded as indicative of religiosity and lower-caste self-assertion at the same time. It is worth recalling in this connection that caste panchayats in northern Basti had decreed in January 1921 that fines imposed at a standard rate of Rs 51 for each violation of this taboo would have to be donated to the gaushala (asylum for cows).⁸⁶

An example of this extension from one banned item to another is provided by the widening of the scope of interdiction against ganja to smoking and even chewing tobacco. It has been noticed above that Gandhi's injunction against smoking chilum, by which he meant ganja, could be regarded as applicable to smoking in general.⁸⁷ Nos. 25—27 of our stories show how this process was worked out in popular imagination. In No. 25 the ban on intoxicants (*maadak vastuven*) by which is generally meant liquor, toddy and ganja is already extended to surti—chewing tobacco. In that story divine

⁸⁵ See pp. 12-13 above.

^M *Idem* ^{»7} See n. 57 above.

retribution helps to reform not only the culprit, but also the entire village. In No. 26 the violation, and the punishment which follows, has an impact not only on the village concerned but far beyond it. The story from mauza Dewani (No. 27) about a tobacco-addict frightened out of her wits in a dream may perhaps be read as a measure of the way in which the interdiction against the use of tobacco in any form had already been internalized.

In some cases (Nos. 22, 23, 43, 44) transgressors of dietary rules suffer physical harm and pollution of various sorts. The notion of pollution is articulated in a multi-faceted way, and for good reasons. In popular Hinduism, as Lawrence Babb has argued recently...

. . . Pollution has certain physical embodiments. All body effluvia are polluting, especially faeces, urine, body saliva, menstrual flow and after-birth. Products of dead cattle, especially beef and leather, are highly polluting. Decaying things are polluting (a common rationale for considering liquor to be mildly polluting: 'It's a rotten thing'). Corpses, or anything having to do with death, are sources of extremely powerful pollution.⁸⁸

In our collection of stories the same polluting agents—worms (as an embodiment of the idea of decay) or human faeces—are often associated with rather different acts or items of food. Thus faeces is associated in No. 19 with a curse for breaking a solemn promise, in No. 24 it is the consequence for abusing Gandhi and not conforming to the local advice against smoking ganja, and in No. 45 it is seen as a proof of and punishment for animal slaughter. Worms as polluting agents are associated with fish (Nos. 22, 44), though the idea of a miracle—live worms emerging from fish that had been fried or roasted—is also present. However, in No. 26 worms figure as a kind of calamity, while the frying of fish in No. 48 leads to the burning of huts.

Punishments for wrongs done could be (as in No. 42 below) visited on persons other than the actual wrong-doer. Thus in No. 46 the spread of an epidemic is associated with violating the generally accepted taboo against eating fish in a village near Pipraich. The gratuitous suffering by a high-caste person for the sin committed by another—the defilement of a Chaturvedi's house because of an attempt at surti-eating by others (No. 25)—is a theme that is encountered in other contexts as well. Thus Kashi Nath Tiwari of mauza Asiya Ahir

⁸⁸ Lawrence A. Babb, *Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York, 1975), p. 48.

wrote to the *Swadesh* in early April that in his village 'one person had mixed water in milk, as a result of which the *dahi* (yoghurt) of several notable persons was infested with worms'. One can hardly miss here the echoes of a Brahmanical tradition going back to antiquity.⁸⁹

D. *Boons granted and/or miracles performed in the form of manauti and the recovery of things lost*

28. PanditJiwnandan Pathak from mauza Devkali, PO Bhagalpur wrote, 'As a result of manauti of Mahatmaji a vessel of a Musalman which had fallen into a well six months ago came up on its owri\.
29. In Naipura village (Azamgarh), the long-lost calf of Dalku Ahir returned to its peg as a result of the manauti of Mahatmaji. Dalku Ahir has contributed the one rupee of the manauti to the Swaraj Fund.
30. A gentleman from Ballia district wrote, 'In mauza Rustampur a *thaili* (purse) of a gwala-sadhu containing Rs 90 had disappeared from his hut. When he took manauti of Mahatmaji, he found it back in his hut, and the money was intact'.
31. A well-known zamindar of mauza Samogar (tahsil Deoria) had taken a *minnat* [manauti] of Bhagwatiji and offered a goat as a sacrifice. Many took the meat *zsprasad*. After some time the son of the zamindar found his hands stuck to his chest and his wife went mad. It was only when the zamindar vowed to contribute the price of the sacrificial goat to the National School Fund and feast Brahmans that both the son and the daughter-in-law began to feel well.

Boons granted and/or miracles performed in the form of regeneration of trees and wells

32. 'In mohalla Humayunpur, Gorakhpur city, two dead trees which had fallen in the garden of Babu Yugul Kishore, wakil, have planted themselves back! Many believe that this is due to the grace of Mahatmaji. This, because the person who cut the trees said that if the pratap (spiritual power) of Mahatmaji was

⁸⁹ *Swadesh*, 10 April 1921. The idea of die sins of the lower castes visiting the higher castes is represented in its classic form in the Ramayana story of a Brahman child's death caused by a Sudra's insistence on engaging in the purificatory rituals of *tapasya* in order to attain a high degree of spiritual merit. For a Sudra to do so was to commit a sin. So a Brahman had to pay for it.

- saccha* (genuine) the trees would stand up on their own! Thousands gather at this site everyday and *batashas* (a kind of sweetmeat), money and ornaments are offered by men and women alike. It is said that the proceeds will be donated to the Swarajya ashram and the Tilak Swaraj Fund'.⁹⁰
33. 'A frail mango tree had been bent by a storm. As a matter of fact its roots were not strong enough to withstand the weight of its branches . . . Because of the storm some of the roots were uprooted, but a part remained embedded in the ground. The tree dried up in a few days. People began cutting its branches and taking them home for fuel. As the weight of its branches was now reduced, the tree straightened up either on its own, or with the aid of some person. People proclaimed that [the] fallen tree [had] planted itself back. A crowd soon gathered, assuming the proportions of a *mela* (fair). They are now offering flowers, batashas and money to the tree. It is said that the tree has stood up because of the pratap of Gandhiji. The educated are laughing at the mela, and this particular exemplification of Indian beliefs'.⁹¹
 34. A respected person from Basti district reported to the *Swadesh* the following incidents: 'Two saplings have sprouted from the *khunta* (peg) of a Mahua tree in Chakdehi village, two miles from the Khalilabad station. This khunta had been fixed in the month of Kartik (October-November), and every day the bullocks of one Pandeji used to be tied to it. It is also rumoured that a Chamar had seen a sapling coming out of the peg on an earlier occasion, but his wife had plucked it out. Subsequently, the Chamar was rebuked by some people. He then prayed to the Mahatma: "Oh! Mahatmaji, if you are a true Mahatma, then let another sapling sprout". And so it happened. Now every day crowds of men and women are coming to the spot to see the peg'.
 35. 'In Basti town there lives a widow of Sri Raghubar Kasaudhan. She had a son who died three years ago. Her late husband had planted two mango trees; one was cut down some time back and the other dried up a year ago. Fifteen days ago it began sprouting fresh leaves. The old woman maintains that she had taken a manauti of Mahatmaji: "This tree is the only *nishani*

⁹⁰ *Batsha*: A light sweet-meat, in appearance like ratafia cakes.

⁹¹ *GyanShakti*, April 1921, p. 34.

- (sign) of my late husband, let this tree live". A large crowd gathers at this site as well'.
36. 'Last Saturday smoke started coming out of four or five wells in Gorakhpur city. People exclaimed that the water had caught fire: The whole city rushed to the spot. Some people drew water from one well: it had the fragrance of keora (*pandanus odoratissimus*). It is believed that this is also due to the 'pratap' of the Mahatma! Some money etc. has also been offered to the well'.⁹²
37. 'Some days ago a major fire broke out in a village near the Gorakhpur Civil Courts. The entire village was burnt down. There is a *nala* (open drain) nearby. People started digging a *chaunra* (*katcha* well) in the *nala* to get some wet clay and water, but water was not struck even after digging several cubits. It is said that in the end one person took the manauti of the Mahatma. After this such a huge jet of water gushed out that not only was the 16-17 cubit deep well filled up, but the two adjacent *garhas* (depressions) were also submerged. Since then thousands of men and women gather at the site. Flowers, batashas and money are offered, they bathe and wash their faces there and some even carry the water back to their homes'.⁹³
38. 'There is a big depression (*garha*) to the south of Bulandpur village [on the outskirts of Gorakhpur]. This *garha* is not less than twenty-three feet deep. The water level in Gorakhpur is around twenty-one feet. In some cases water is struck even before this depth is reached. An eleven cubit rope is normally used in these parts [to raise water from wells]. The present well from which water gushed out was dug in this deep depression. When water was struck it filled the *chaunra* to the brim. Now a *mela* is taking place here. When a *chaunra* is dug in a deep depression such an occurrence is only natural. The water level in Gorakhpur is eleven cubits; if you so desire you may, measure it. We have seen scores of such wells which, when dug in a depression have been filled with water to the brim. People are offering flowers, batashas and money at the [above mentioned] well. They say that even this is an example of the grace of Gandhiji. This well is now called "Gandhi Chaunra" . . . Does one require this kind of intelligence for the attainment of *swaraj*?⁹⁴

⁹² *Sivadesh*, 13 March 1921, p. 5.

" *Swadesh*, 10 April 1921, p. 11.

⁹⁴ *Gyan Shakti*, April 1921, p. 34.

39. 'The *bhakts* (devotees) have . . . offered Rs 23-8-12 in Mirzapur Bazaar where water had come out on its own. Sri Chedi Lai has arranged for this sum to be sent to the Gorakhpur Swaraj **Fund**'.
40. The water of a well in Bikramjit Bazaar, tappa Belwa (Basti) had a very foul smell. Two *mahajans* took a manauti of the Mahatmaji. By morning the water had become pure.
41. 'Plague was raging through Sonaura village. People were living in [outlying] huts. The water in a well at this place was so shallow on 27 April that even a small drinking vessel (*lota*) could not be fully submerged in it. Seeing this, one Misrji offered to distribute Rs 5 in the name of Gandhiji. Subsequently, water began to rise slowly. By the afternoon of 28 April the well had filled up to five cubits, the next day it was eleven cubits deep'.

Once again we have in these stories the suggestion that the Mahatma's image takes form within pre-existing patterns of popular belief, and ritual action corresponding to these. In Nos. 28-30, Gandhi is fitted into the widespread practice of taking a vow (*manauti*) addressed to a god, a local godling or a saint on condition of the removal of an affliction or the fulfilment of a wish. In No. 31 we have an interesting development of this idea. Here the sacrifice of a goat in accordance with a manauti to Bhagwatiji boomerangs—it brings physical and mental suffering to the high-caste household of the zamindar of Samogar. The penance required is not limited to the traditional feasting of Brahmans; it now includes the donation of an amount equivalent to the cost of the sacrificial goat to the National School Fund.

The rational, if politically insensitive, explanations offered by the anti-Congress *Gyan Shakti* with regard to the regeneration of trees and wells (see Nos. 33 and 38) indicate the material basis for belief in these miracles. On the other hand, a couple of stories (Nos. 49 and 50 in Appx III) not strictly connected with Gandhi point once again to the existing stereotype of 'strange occurrences' in which the Mahatma's name figures so very often. It is thus that the traditional offerings made at the appearance of an image (No. 6) or at the site of a miraculous tree (Nos. 32 and 33) or a well can so easily be transferred to a nationalist fund.

The stories connected with wells (Nos. 36-41) which underline their importance for irrigation and even more for supplies of drinking water, call for some additional comments. The two major themes

here are, first, the taking of a manauti by a banker or a high-caste person (usually a landlord) for the purification of drinking water (Nos. 40 and 41), and secondly, the more common offering of flowers, batasha and money to wells where water has appeared miraculously. Both these are readily understandable once it is realized that it was generally the bigger zamindars and bankers who invested in the expensive construction of pukka (masonry) wells. This was a highly ritualized activity in Gorakhpur and was described thus by a local ethnographer towards the end of the nineteenth century:

When a man intends to sink a well he enquires an auspicious moment from the Pandit to commence it. When that hour comes, he worships Gauri, Ganesh, Shesh Nag, earth, the *kudari* (spade), and the nine planets. After worshipping these deities the person himself begins to dig with the *kudari* five times, facing the direction the Pandit has prescribed. Then the labourers begin their work. When they have sunk, so far as to make water appear, an auspicious moment is obtained to put the *jamat* or wooden support on whom [*sic*] the brick structure of the well rests in the well. At the auspicious moment the person to whom the well belongs smears the *jamat* with red powder in five places and ties grass (*dub*) and thread (*raksha*) on it, and then it is lowered down in the well. On this occasion a fire sacrifice (*homa/hawan*) is performed and Brahmans are fed. When the well has been sunk, cow-dung, cow-milk, cow-urine, cow-ghee, Ganges water, leaves of tulsi plant and honey are put in it before its water is made use of. Then a fire sacrifice (*boma*) is performed and Brahmans are fed.⁹⁵

In Gorakhpur, according to the same informant, a mango tree was usually 'married' to a well.⁹⁶ Accounts from neighbouring Basti district suggest that the construction of a pukka well was both a communal and a ritual act. Neighbouring zamindars sent men, women and children to collect wood for the firing and baking of bricks, and the *sattu*, gur and liquor received by them were regarded 'in the light rather of a marriage feast than of remuneration'.⁹⁷ The 'marriage' of the well to an image (*jalotsarg*) was preceded by the carpenter spreading a *cbaddar* (sheet) on the wooden frame. Into this the members of the brotherhood would throw coins of various denomination ranging from one paisa to one rupee, depending on their means and liberality. It was a measure of the importance of ritual in the consecration of pukka wells in this region that the

⁹⁵ Note by Ram Gharib Chaube, *North Indian Notes and Queries*, 3:12 (March 1894), no. 437.

⁹⁶ *North Indian Notes and Queries*, 4:12 (March 1895), no. 437.

⁹⁷ *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North Western Provinces*, vi (Allahabad, 1881), p. 595.

'regular cost' of constructing a well, eight feet wide and nineteen feet deep, was reckoned to have been Rs 43 in the 1860s, while nearly twice as much was spent on ceremonial expenses.⁹⁸ As the settlement officer reported from Rasulpur Ghaus, Basti, 'On account of the expense the ceremony is often delayed one or two years, during which time the family of the builder makes no use of the water*'.⁹⁹

With this kind of worshipful attitude towards the construction of masonry wells, the offerings of flowers and money to those spots where water had appeared miraculously in the spring of 1921 and the transference of these offerings to a nationalist fund appear as an elaboration of existing ideas in a novel context. The practice of Gandhi manauti, of his vrat and aradhana (fast and worship), and of women begging alms in his name and making offerings of cooked food (*karahi charana*), as noticed in some of the earlier stories, can all be adduced as further instances of this process at work.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ The break-up was as follows:

	Rs	annas
Offering to family god	1	0
Given to Brahmans: 5 dhotees and 5 rupees	9	0
Given to head beldar, 1 dhoty and 1 rupee	1	12
Liquor for remaining beldars	0	4
Feast to Brahmans (5 to 20)	11	0
Given to Brahmans and workmen, 5 rupees and 5 dhotees	9	0
Marriage ceremony from 10 rupees to an unlimited amount	50	0
	82	0
Total:	125	0

See Report on Pegunnah Rassolpore Ghaus, Appx L, in *Gorakhpur-Bustee Settlement Report*, i (Allahabad, 1871), p. 48.

⁹⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰⁰ In a study of popular religion in a north Indian village it has been suggested that the relationship between the devotees (*bhaktis*) and the power-wielding deified beings moves along the grid of *Bhakti/Sewa: Krpa/Vardan*. Faith (*bhakti*) leads to the mercy (*krpa*) of the gods, while the *sewa* (service) of the devotees results in the granting of boon (*vardan*). On the other hand, the mercy of the gods leads to faith, and the accompanying boon results in further service (*sewa*) through the ritual of *vrat* (fast, *puja* and *bhakti*). Powerful deities have the ability not only to remove immediate distress, but are distinguished by their power to provide long-term shelter (*sharan*) and even *moksha* (salvation). See Wadley.

While the idea of boons and removal of distress is present in the stories collected above, the notion of the Mahatma providing *sharan* to his devotees seems to be absent, probably because Gandhi has not been constructed yet as a full-fledged deity in his own right. Rather, we have the suggestion that Gandhi, because of the fluidity of his 'powers', can stand in place of existing powerful beings and appropriate ritual actions connected with their worship, without upsetting the existing hierarchy of the divine and the deified.

The editor of *Swadesh* reported in April 1921 that 'news [had] been received from several places of women begging in the name of Gandhiji as they did for Devi Bhawani and offering karahi [to him]'. Women were also going round the threshing-floors, where the rabi crop had just been gathered, and asking for donations of grain, again to make offerings of karahi to the Mahatma.¹⁰¹ The contemporary significance of the karahi ritual is somewhat unclear, though it appears to have been associated with propitiation and the bringing of luck.¹⁰² What is significant, in any case, is that this was an extension of a practice related to the worship of Devi Bhawani and that begging at the threshing-floor put the peasants under a moral obligation to donate some grain in the name of the Mahatma at a time when a surplus was readily available at the very site where it was being processed. In fact a similar obligation was placed on peasants manufacturing gur at the *kolhuar* as well: to turn a beggar away from a place where so much raw sugar was being made was an undesirable act which would seldom go unpunished.¹⁰³ It is hardly surprising, then, that the refusal of an Ahir in Nanusakh village (Azamgarh) to offer some gur to a hungry sadhu who came begging to his kolhuar (on 1 March 1921) was rumoured to have resulted within half an hour in the gur and the two buffaloes of the Ahir being destroyed by fire.¹⁰⁴ The version of this story, as reported in the *Swadesh*, did not mention Gandhi, although the *Pioneer* suggested that the sadhu was asking for alms in the Mahatma's name. True or not, it is possible that the Lucknow journal was not alone in associating him with this particular episode.

¹⁰¹ *Swadesh*, 10 April 1921.

¹⁰² Prof. A. N. Pandeya (IIT, Delhi) informs me that the phrase '*karahi charana*' refers in his part of the district (Padrauna tahsil) to the practice of women offering cake-like cooked food, prepared at the site of the local godling (usually female) in the open under a tree. Devi Bhawani, according to Crooke, is a north Indian mother goddess.

¹⁰³ Grierson's account of the worship of Makkar or Makar Bir in Bihar by the workmen of the kolhuar is worth recalling in this context. 'Near the place where the cane is cut into slips the men make a round idol of the deity called *makar bir*. . . He is said to have been originally a Dom, who once came to a sugar manufactory in the olden time and asked for juice, which the people refused to give to him. Thereupon he jumped into the boiler and was boiled to death. His spirit became deified, and is now worshipped by the workmen . . .'. G. A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life* (1885: reprint, Delhi, 1975), pp. 55-6. The theme of suicide leading to the wrongdoer accepting his fault and then propitiating and worshipping the spirit of the deceased is a recurring one in Indian folklore. See Crooke, pp. 191-5.

¹⁰⁴ *Swadesh*, 13 March 1921, p. 5.

VII

Taken together, these stories indicate how ideas about Gandhi's pratap and the appreciation of his message derived from popular Hindu beliefs and practices and the material culture of the peasantry. Does not the fact of the reporting of these rumours in the local nationalist weekly suggest that these were actively spread by interested parties? It is true that such rumours enter our sources at the point where a correspondent communicates them to the *Swadesh*. But that need not be taken to mean that these did not exist prior to and independent of their publication. Their generalized circulation in the villages of Gorakhpur is also attested by their being reported and denied in the local anti-nationalist monthly, *Gyan Shakti*.

There can be no doubt that the reporting of these rumours in the local paper, *Swadesh*, must have added to their circulation and even to their authenticity. Lefebvre in his study of rural panic in revolutionary France observes how journalists imbued rumours 'with a new strength by putting . . . them into print'.¹⁰⁵ However, it seems unlikely that printing could have changed the character of these rumours to any significant degree; it merely increased their effectiveness as oral and unauthored speech.¹⁰⁶ People in the Gorakhpur countryside believed in these not out of any unquestioning trust in the weekly newspaper but because they accorded with existing beliefs about marvels and miracles, about right and wrong.

In Indian villages even printed texts often revert to their oral characteristics in the very process of communication. It has been noted that newspapers, pamphlets, etc. are made intelligible to the illiterate population in the countryside by reading aloud, paraphrasing the text in the rustic dialect and commenting on it.¹⁰⁷ In 'advanced cultural communities', Vachek notes, written texts are taken 'as a sign of the first order (i.e. the sign of an outside world)', the deciphering of which requires 'no detour by way of spoken language'.¹⁰⁸ It seems that one of the reasons for the reading aloud of newspapers in

¹⁰⁵ Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (London, 1973), p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ For the characterization of rumour as oral and unauthored speech, see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983), Ch.6.

¹⁰⁷ 'Language Problem in the Rural Development of Nordi India', in *Language in Social Groups: Essays by John J. Gumperz* (California, 1971), p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Josef Vachek, 'Some Remarks on Writing and Phonetic Transcriptions', in Eric Hamp et al. (eds.), *Readings in Linguistics*, ii (Chicago, 1966), p. 155. -

Indian villages is that even for a large part of the technically literate population printed texts can be deciphered only by a detour through the spoken language. In such readings, it seems reasonable to suggest, a story acquires its authentication from its motif and the name of its place of origin rather than from the authority of the correspondent. It then spreads by word of mouth, and derives its credibility from any association, real or imaginary, it might have with place-names familiar to the local population.¹⁰⁹

How did the local Congress leadership react to the spread of these stories? Maulvi Subhanullah, the DCC President, while recounting some of these to the Sessions Judge in June 1922, admitted that 'no attempt was made by the Congress or Khilafat to prevent [the] public from believing in them'.¹¹⁰ *Swadesh*, the newspaper which published these stories under the sanctimonious rubric *bhakton ki bhavnain*—'beliefs of the devotees'—adopted a double-edged policy in this regard.¹¹¹ On the one hand it published a note every now and then debunking some of the more fanciful stories and also let its satirist, Mannan Dwivedi, poke fun at them. On the other hand when attacked by the *Pioneer*, it came up with a spirited defence of its policy of printing these stories.

In March 1921 some people used the services of public criers to announce that 'Mahatmaji had emerged from fire [unhurt] and that Swaraj had been established'. They went so far as to swear by the truth of such statements. The editor of *Swadesh* promptly denounced this as an irresponsible act which had no sanction from the Mahatma. However, the same issue of the journal contained two columns of Gandhi stories under the heading 'strange happenings'. Elsewhere in the same issue Mannan Dwivedi, writing under the pen-name Shriyut Muchandar Nath, satirized some of these as follows:

It is true that a felled tree in the front of Babu Yugal Kishore's garden has wanted itself back and even sprouted leaves due to the grace of Mahatmaji. [See No. 32 above]. Every day lakhs of people come to see this [miracle],

¹⁰⁹ Thus in Satyajit Ray's film, *Ashani Sanket*, the foreign place-name Singapore is made meaningful to the peasants in a Bengal village by the suggestion that it is somewhere near Midnapore!

¹¹⁰ Evidence, Chauri Chaura Trials, p. 556.

¹¹¹ Dwivedi, when queried by the Court about these miracles, proffered little information, and in fact maintained that in his paper he had 'given a summary... of me teaching of Mahatma Gandhi that he [was] not a god'. An extract from *Navjivan* in which Gandhi disclaimed to be an avatar was printed by *Swadesh* on the front page of its issue of 4 September 1921. See Evidence, Chauri Chaura Trials, p. 569.

as a result of which crores of rupees are being collected. Therefore, due to the efforts of Babu Krishna Prasad, neither will postal rates go up nor will there be a deficit in the budget this year . . .

It was rumoured that a well in Gorakhpur was smelling of keora. [See No. 36]. Now it has been confirmed by the Khilafat Committee that Sri Shiv Mangal Gundi had emptied his karahs full of keora into the well, as it is said that he is going to perform the last rites for his Sundar Shringar Karyalay [a perfumery in the city] and is shortly to take up the running of a [nationalist] press.¹¹²

It is doubtful how many outside the city of Gorakhpur would have understood Mannan Dwivedi's allusions or allowed satire to get the better of belief. Even the editor of *Swadesh*, when pressed, could write an impassioned defence of the peasant's acceptance of these stories:

We do not consider . . . *Swadesh* to be the property (*mirds*) of its editor. Therefore, we consider it as part of our duty to report the thoughts and feelings current among the people (*janta*), whether right or wrong, in our paper It is possible that some people might doubt these strange happenings, but the *janta* does not consider them so [improbable]. And there is a reason for this. It is because Hinduism has placed faith and belief (*shraddha aur vishwas*) on a high footing. It is because of this that those who worship stone images have their prayers answered. It is because of this that people take a dip in the holy waters of Gangaji and think that their sins have been washed away. In every age and country, every now and then, such things have happened. Even in the time of the Buddha, Mohammad and Christ such miracles were supposed to have taken place. Then we see no reason why miracles (*chamatkar*) should not be associated with Mahatma Gandhi whose name is perhaps even better known in India than that of Ram and Sita. It has been said: '*Vishwaso [sic] phaldayakah*': faith yields fruit.

'jaki rahi bhavana jaisi,
prabhu moorat dekhi tin taisi'.¹¹³

The editor of *Swadesh*, who had himself sought to inculcate an attitude of devotion in the district towards the Mahatma,¹¹⁴ had thus no hesitation in printing rumours about the latter's pratap. It was only when these appeared to instigate dangerous beliefs and actions, such as those concerning demands for the abolition of zamindari, reduction of rents or enforcement of just price at the bazaars, that the journal came out with prompt disclaimers.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Swadesh*, 10 April 1921, p. 5.

¹¹³ 'Bhakton ki Bhavnain', editorial note, *Swadesh*, 1 May 1921. Whatever faith one has, the image of god appears accordingly.

¹¹⁴ Cf. pp. 17-18 above.

¹¹⁵ See *Swadesh*, 18 Sept. 1921, p. 8; 6 March 1921, p. 12.

VIII

Just as the Mahatma was associated in Gorakhpur with a variety of miraculous occurrences, so did his name lend itself as a label for all sorts of public meetings, pamphlets—and of course for that polysemic word Swaraj. Surveying the background to the Chauri Chaura riot, the judges of the Allahabad High Court found it 'remarkable... how this name of "Swaraj" was linked, in the minds of the peasantry of Gorakhpur, with the name of Mr Gandhi. Everywhere in the evidence and in statements made . . . by various accused persons', they found that 'it was "Gandhiji's Swaraj", or the "Mahatmaji's Swaraj" for which they [i.e. the peasants] were looking'.¹⁶ 'Announcements in Urdu' were sold by Lai Mohammad, one of the principal accused in the Chauri Chaura case, as 'Gandhi papers' which were to be preserved and produced 'when Gandhiji asked for . . . [them]'. The receipt for donations to the Khilafat fund, which bore a superficial resemblance to a one-rupee bank note, was referred to as a 'Gandhi note' by the peasants of Gorakhpur. The editor of *Gyan Shakti*, to whom we owe this information, alleged that villagers interpreted its non-acceptance (as legal tender?) as an act of opposition to the Mahatma.¹⁷ Whether peasants genuinely failed to recognize the difference (as officials in some Awadh districts implied),¹⁸ or whether this was just a conscious manipulation of an ambiguous printed paper to force non-believers into acceptance, we do not know for certain. What is clear, however, is that we have in the 'Gandhi note' an index of the popular tendency to look upon the Mahatma as an alternative source of authority. We have it on total testimony that peasant volunteers proceeding to a *sabba* at Dumri on the morning of 4 February 1922 (hours before the historic clash with the police was to occur at the Chaura thana a couple of miles away), claimed that they were 'going to hold a Gandhi Mahatma Sabha' which would bring about 'Gandhi Swaraj'.¹⁹

The popular notion of 'Gandhiji's Swaraj' in Gorakhpur appears to have taken shape quite independently of the district leadership of

¹⁶ Appeal No. 51 of 1923: King Emperor vs. Abdullah and others. Judgement of the Allahabad High Court, dated 30 April 1923, p. 9, High Court Archives, Allahabad. The evidence about Lai Mohammad in the next sentence comes from the testimony of Shikari before the Sessions Judge, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Gyan Shakti*, Feb. 1921, p. 404.

¹⁸ See for instance the official handbill 'Khabardar', issued by the Dy. Commr. of Rae Bareilly, encl. in Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, Pt II, File 120, NMML.

¹⁹ Evidence of Mindhai, cultivator of Mahadeva, and Birda, cultivator of Bale, Chauri Chaura Trials, pp. 512-13.

the Congress party. As the High Court judges observed, the local peasantry 'perceived of it [Swaraj] as a millenium in which taxation would be limited to the collection of small cash contributions or dues in kind from fields and threshing floors, and [in] which the cultivators would hold their lands at little more than nominal rents'.²⁰ During the course of the trial the district Congress and Khilafat leadership repeatedly denied having propagated any such ideas in the villages. In fact there is evidence that as early as March 1921 public proclamations about the advent of Swaraj were being made in the Gorakhpur countryside. These, as we have noted above, were denounced by the Congress paper *Swadesh*. The pro-landlord *Gyan Shakti* drew pointed attention to such occurrences as ominous signs which boded ill for all concerned:

One night people from all the villages [!] kept awake and roamed over five villages each. That night it was impossible to get any sleep. They were shouting 'Gandhiji ki jai'. They had *dhol, tasa, jhal, majiras* (kettledrums and cymbals) with them. The din thus caused was unbearable. People were shouting, this is the drum of swaraj (*swaraj ka danka*). Swaraj has been attained. The English had taken a bet with Gandhiji that they would grant Swaraj if Gandhiji could come out of fire [unhurt]. Gandhiji took hold of the tail of a calf and went through fire. Now Swaraj has been attained. It was also announced that now only four annas or eight annas a bigha would have to be paid in rent. We have also heard that some peasants are insisting that they will not pay more than eight annas a bigha as rent.

These rumours are signs of an impending clash between the peasants and the landlords. As a result of this both parties shall suffer. Sensible (*parhe-likhe*) peasants, landlords and the government should refute such rumours. Remember this! If ordinary people retain their belief in such rumours and persist in their quest for the chimerical then the attainment of Swaraj will become increasingly distant. Peasants are now refusing to obey their landlords, or work for them. This is not a good sign for the country.²¹

Quite clearly this was a miracle (Gandhi's passage through fire) consistent with the existing level of peasant consciousness and its foil in Utopian hopes for a world free of rents—a far cry these from

²⁰ Judgement, Allahabad High Court, p. 9.

²¹ 'Swaraj ka Danka: Char Anna Malguzari: Zamindaron ki Chinta', *Gyan Shakti*, April 1921, pp. 34-5. This rumour, which had originated in the villages of the south-eastern tahsil of Deoria, spread to the neighbouring district of north Bihar and underwent a transformation in the process. It was rumoured here that Gandhi Baba, a cow, a Brahman and an Englishman had been put to an ordeal by fire, and only the Englishman had got burned. People were to pass on this story to five other villages on pain of incurring the sin of killing five cows. Cited in Henningham, p. 100.

official Congress policy—which marked the irruption of Swaraj that night in Gorakhpur villages.¹²² However, as local-level volunteer activity entered a more militant phase in late 1921, the coming of Swaraj was perceived—contrary to anything the Congress stood for at that time—in terms of the direct supplanting of the authority of the police¹²³ (just as the earlier notion of divine punishment for opposition to the Gandhian creed was replaced by the idea that it was for the panchayats themselves to dispense justice in such cases). Thus Sarju Kahar, the personal servant of the murdered *thanedar* of Chaura, testified that 'two or four days before the affair [he] had heard that Gandhi Mahatma's Swaraj had been established, mat the Chaura thana would be abolished, and that the volunteers would set up their own thana'.¹²⁴ According to Harbans Kurmi of Mangapatti, Narayan, Baleshar and Chamru of his village said on their return from the riot that 'they had burnt and thrown away and Swaraj had come'.¹²⁵ Or as Phenku Chamar told the Sessions Judge in August 1922:

Bipat Kahar, Sarup Bhar and Mahadeo Bhuj were coming along calling out 'Gandhi Maharaj Gandhi Maharaj' from the north, the direction of Chaura, to [the] south, the direction of Barhampur. I asked why they were calling out 'Gandhi Maharaj' and they said the thana of Chaura had been burnt and razed to the ground [by them] and the Maharaj's swaraj had come.¹²⁶

IX

Corresponding to this dramatic change in the manifestation of 'Gandhiji's Swaraj', there was for the peasant volunteers of Chauri Chaura a transformation in the spirit of that ubiquitous cry, 'Gandhi Maharaj ki jai', as well. We have noticed how this cry had assumed an audacious overtone during Gandhi's return journey from Gorakhpur in February 1921.¹²⁷ Within a month, as the 'Swaraj ka danka' episode suggests, *xhejaikar* of Gandhi had become a militant avowal of the organized strength of peasant volunteers, a cry which mobilized

¹²² The belief in an impending Swaraj was no doubt related to Gandhi's utterances on this point, though its signs were far from Gandhian.

¹²³ See 'Some Instances of the highhanded medioids of Non-Cooperation Volunteers', encl. to Bihar Govt, letter dated, 5 Dec. 1921, Home Poll. File 327/1/1922, NAI.

¹²⁴ *Tajwiz Awwal*, Chauri Chaura Trials, p. 358.

¹²⁵ Chauri Chaura Trials, p. 525.

¹²⁶ Chauri Chaura Trials, p. 516.

¹²⁷ See pp. 19-20 above.

and struck terror in the hearts of waverers and enemies alike.¹²⁸ For the peasants of north India this had ceased in effect to be a Gandhian cry; it was now a cry with which an attack on a market or a thana was announced. 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' had, in this context, assumed the function of such traditional war cries as 'Jai Mahabir' or 'Bam Bam Mahadeo'. An interesting case of such a transformation is provided by the following intelligence report from Bara Banki:

The big Mahadeo Fair near Ramnagar passed off quietly, though the extensive substitution of Gandhi ki jai for the orthodox Bam Bam Mahadeo was noticeable even when there were no government officer[s] present.¹²⁹

The crowd of Badhiks (a so-called 'criminal tribe') that looted the Tinkonia Bazaar in Gorakhpur on 15 February 1921, did so to the cry of 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai'. In a small fair at Auraneshwarghat in Bara Banki a dispute with *halwais* (confectioners) on 22 February 1922 led to the upsetting and looting of sweetmeat and other stalls 'to the accompaniments of shouts of *Mahatma Gandhi kijai aur mitbai le leu*'.¹³⁰

Thus a 'jaikar' of adoration and adulation had become the rallying cry for direct action. While such action sought to justify itself by a reference to the Mahatma, the Gandhi of its rustic protagonists was not as he really was, but as they had thought him up. Though deriving their legitimacy from the supposed orders of Gandhi, peasant actions in such cases were framed in terms of what was popularly regarded to be just, fair and possible. As an official reply to the question of haat-looting in north Bihar in the winter of 1921 stated:

The evidence in the possession of the Government leaves no doubt that the haat-looting was directly connected with the state of excitement and unrest produced by the non-co-operation agitation. The persons who started the loot first of all asked the price of rice, or cloth or vegetables or whatever me particular article might be, and when the price was mentioned, alleged that Gandhi had given the order that the price should be so much, usually a quarter of the current market rate. When the shopkeepers refused to sell at lower prices, they were abused and beaten and then-shops were looted.¹³¹

¹²⁸ This transformation was similar to what the cry 'Sita Ram' had been undergoing in the villages of Awadh at about the same time. See Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism', pp. 169-70.

¹³⁰ *Idem*; King Emperor vs. Badloo Badhik and odiers, Trial no. 25 of 1921, Judgement by the Sessions Judge, Gorakhpur, 30 April 1921.

¹³¹ *Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council Debates*, 8 March 1921, i, p. 293. There was a rumour current in Gorakhpur villages as well, that wheat, rice and clodi would become cheaper because of the 'order of Mahatma Gandhi'. See *Gyan Shakti*, Feb. 1921, p. 405.

There was thus no single authorized version of the Mahatma to which the peasants of eastern UP and north Bihar may be said to have subscribed in 1921. Indeed their ideas about Gandhi's 'orders' and 'powers' were often at variance with those of the local Congress-Khilafat leadership and clashed with the basic tenets of Gandhism itself. The violence at Chauri Chaura was rooted in this paradox.

Appendix I

‘गोरखपुर का ऋहोभाग्य’

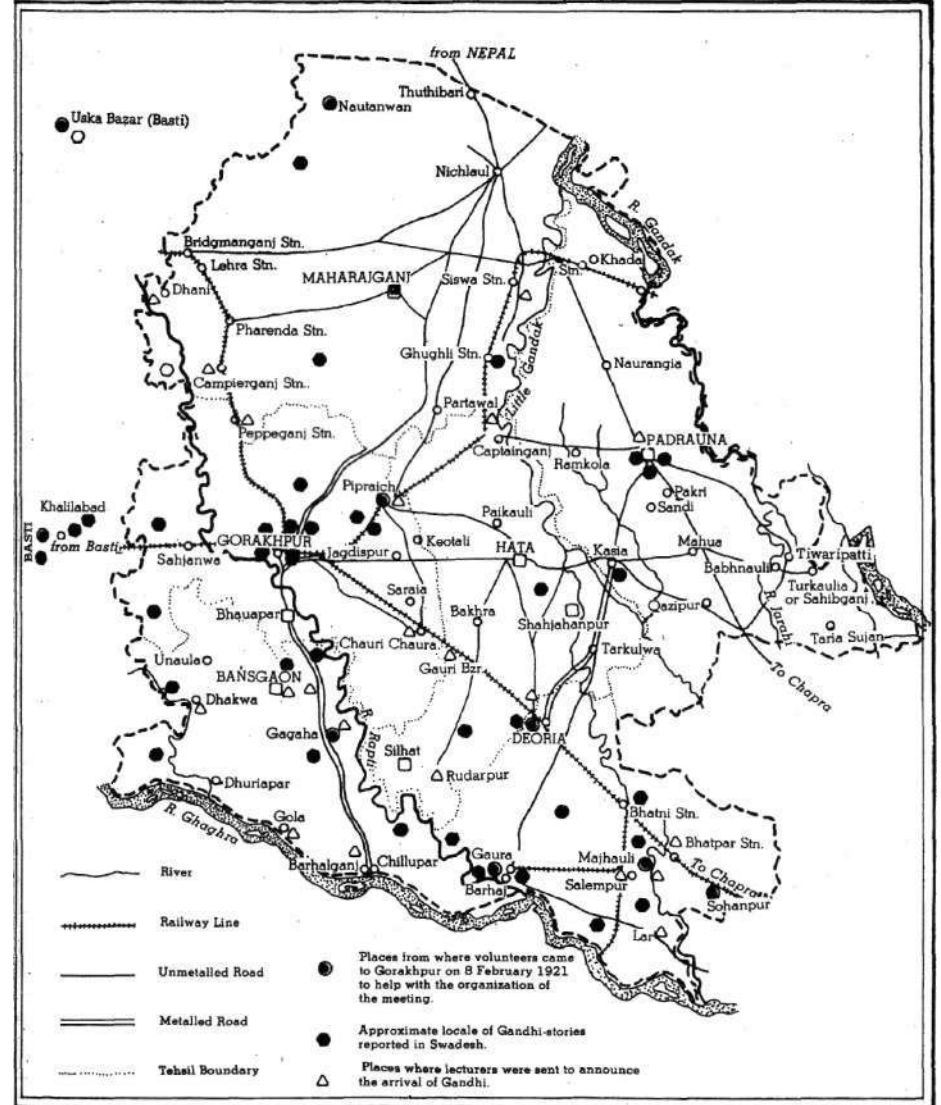
प्रार्थना यह है कि गोरखपुर की साधारण जनता तो केवल महात्मा जी के दर्शन को बेतरह उत्सुक है. महात्मा जी आयेंगे; अपना दर्शन देकर उसे कृतार्थ करेंगे. लोग भी अपने त्राता को, अपने सामने, भर आंख देखकर, फूले नहीं समायेंगे. परन्तु, हम पूछते हैं कि वे लोग, जो प्रत्यक्ष रूप से सरकार के साथ सहयोग कर रहे हैं . . . उनका भी ऐसे अवसर पर कुछ कर्त्तव्य है या नहीं? हृदय से आवाज उठती है “बेशक” . . . उनका कर्त्तव्यपथ निश्चित हो चुका है, वे कार्यक्षेत्र में आवें, अपने देश को गुलामी से छुटकारा दिलाने के लिए, अपनी मान-मर्यादा कायम करने के लिए और अपने को अपने देश पर न्यौछावर करने के लिए कसर कस कर तैयार हो जायें. महात्मा जी के सामने अपने घुटने टेक दें और जगदाधार जगत्रियन्ता से प्रार्थना करें कि वह उन्हें बल दे कि वो अपनी किरती को इस मझधार में से पार कर ले जावें. परन्तु अगर उनका हृदय डावाँडोल हो, उन्हें दुनिया की दुनियादारी अपनी ओर घसीट रही है और अगर उन्हें अपने उज्ज्वल भविष्य पर सन्देह है तो वे कृपा करके अपने हृदय पर हाथ रखकर अपने ही दिल से पूछें कि महात्मा गाँधी के प्रति उनके हृदय में कितना सम्मान है? और, अगर महात्मा गाँधी के प्रति उनके हृदय में कोई सम्मान है, तो . . . किसलिए? क्या इसलिए कि वो बहुत दुबले-पतले हैं? क्या इसलिए कि वे गाढ़े-गजी की वस्तुएँ व्यवहार में लाते हैं? नहीं, यह और इस प्रकार की कोई भी बात नहीं है. इस बात को समझने के लिए जरा महात्मा गाँधी के जीवन इतिहास की ओर नज़र दौड़ाइये, उसकी तह तक जाइये, गोते-पर-गोते लगाइये; आपको मालूम होगा कि महात्मा गाँधी का ऐसे कठिन अवसर पर हमारे बीच अवतीर्ण होना हमारे समाज और हमारे देश के लिए कितना कल्याणप्रद है. यही उपयुक्त अवसर है कि जबकि हम या तो दो बल्ले में पल्ले पार हो जायेंगे या बीच धारा में डूब कर डूबकियाँ लगाते रह जायेंगे. . . . अधिक कहना फजूल है. आगा-पीछा छोड़ो. अपने

जिले के पीड़ित भाइयों की सेवा करने के लिए उठ खड़े हो. गांव-गांव और घर-घर में स्वराज्य का शंख फूक दो . . . यह आन्दोलन तुम्हारे लिए अमृतबटी है. महात्मा गांधी तुम्हारे सामने इसे पेश कर रहे हैं. यह तुम्हारी सूझ-बूझ और दानिशमन्दी पर मुनहसर है कि तुम इसे ग्रहण करो या छोड़ दो. कम-से-कम महात्मा गांधी ने तो जो बीड़ा उठाया है उसे वो पूरा करके रहेंगे, पर कहीं ऐसा न हो कि विजय के समय तुम यह कहते नजर आओ कि—

जिन खोजा तिन पाइयाँ गहरे पानी पेंठ,
में बीरी दूँवन गई रही किनारे बेंठ.

—स्वदेश, 6 फरवरी 1921

Appendix II



Gorakhpur District, circa 1909

Notes to the Map

Legend

- f Places where lecturers were sent to announce the arrival of Gandhi.
- Places from where volunteers came to Gorakhpur on 8 February 1921 to help with the organization of the meeting.
- * Approximate locale of Gandhi-stories reported in *Swadesh*.

Note

This is a rough and tentative sketch map which makes no claim to be entirely accurate. Not all the unmetalled roads as they existed in 1921 have been shown. In a majority of cases it has been possible to locate the villages by checking place-names mentioned in *Swadesh* with the *Village Directory of the North-Western Provinces, xxi, Gorakhpur* (Allahabad, 1893), compiled by the Postmaster-General NWP. Where the village concerned does not appear in the district and tahsil maps, I have hypothetically situated it near the Post Office which served it. However, in spite of my best efforts I must inevitably have fallen into a degree of error in those instances where, for instance, the text does not mention either the tappa or the Post Office, especially if its name was identical with that of any other village or villages. However, it seems to me that even if the marking of villages from which a particular 'story' originated may not be cartographically accurate in all cases, a rough placement may be of some use in indicating the locale of a story and the territory generally traversed by a rumour. The geographical coverage of rumours outside Gorakhpur district has not been indicated, except by a rough marking for some of the places in Basti district.

Appendix III

*Some 'extraordinary occurrences' in Gorakhpur,
1921, other than those ostensibly related to
Mahatma Gandhi.*

Motif: Opposing the Gandhian creed

42. 'A Koiri of mauza Tandwa forcibly brought a woman to a village and kept her in his house. Far from reprimanding and punishing him the men of the village offered their congratulations. Consequently, the harvested crops of the villagers kept at a common threshing-floor caught fire and were reduced to ashes'.
43. 'Pandit Madho Shukl of Kakarahi village (tahsil Bansgaon) continued to eat meat despite the attempts by his family to dissuade him. One day a trunk kept between two others in the house caught fire. Seeing this his wife raised an alarm and people from the village rushed to the house. Now Panditji has promised not to touch meat again'.
44. 'In Sinhanjori village (PO Kasia) hundreds of live worms emerged out of the fish fried by Shankar Kandu. Seeing this the entire village has given up meat and fish [*rnans-machlif*].
45. 'In Kurabal village shit rained in the house of a Bari (caste of domestic servants) for a whole day, and he is now living in another's house. On enquiry he has confessed to his crime (*dosh*) of slaughtering a goat'.
46. 'A gentleman from mauza Patra (PO Pipraich) writes that people of the village had given up the practice of eating meat and fish. However, on the instigation of a *karinda* some people caught fish in a shallow ditch and ate it up. Since then an epidemic has spread here; ten people have been swallowed by **death** (*kaal ke graas ho gaye*)m five days'.
47. 'A Muslim toddy-tapper of Padrauna was told by a Master sahib to give up this practice. One day he fell down from the tree. As a result of this incident all the Muslims are giving up toddy-tapping'.

48. 'The building of the Punjab Sugar Mill, Ghughli was being constructed. On 4 March, a few of the *memars* (construction workers) went to the bazaar of the Mahant and despite the attempt by some people to prevent them, they bought fish and drank toddy. When they sat down at night to fry the fish their huts caught fire. They had to sleep out in the open, with dew falling on them. That very night it rained and hail fell as well. In the morning the news came that their homes had also caught fire. What could they do? Crying and repenting they went back to their respective homes'.

Motif: *Boons and Miracles*

49. 'In mauza Surdahi (PO Sahjanwa), a branch has come out at one end of a dead-and-cut pipal tree. Huge crowds are gathering at this sight'.
50. 'In Padrauna on 29 April, two new springs sprouted in a well three feet above the water level. Now the source of the spring has gone down because of the rise in the water level. For the past three days large crowds have been gathering at the site'.