CHAPTER 5

SOLIDARITY

Emulation—class solidarity overdetermined by other solidarities—religious aspect of insurgent mobilization—ethnicity as a correlate of class solidarity: Kol and Munda rebellions—tribal and inter-tribal alliances in the Santal insurrection—the notion of ‘five exempted castes’ discussed—the role of Gwalas, Lohars and Doms in the hool—ethics of solidarity—coercion as an instrument of solidarity—visual threats—verbal threats: IPC and ATL—pressing—force as a unifying factor—the concept of betrayal—two types of collaborators: passive and active—official encouragement in favour of treachery—use of decoys—rebel violence against active collaborators—the slaying of Bhagna Majhi.

Insurgency, whatever its modality on any particular occasion, relies for its form and spirit on two closely related patterns of corporate behaviour, namely, emulation and solidarity. These are both exemplified in the annals of almost every peasant revolt. Froissart who saw the eponymous jacquerie in the Beauvais region swelling from ‘scarcely a hundred’ at the initial stage into a crowd of six thousand and eventually a hundred thousand,¹ reported a classic instance of such emulation. ‘When they [the peasants] were asked’, he wrote, ‘why they did these [violent] things, they replied that they did not know; it was because they saw others doing them and they copied them. They thought that by such means they could destroy all the nobles and gentry in the world, so that there would be no more of them.’² To rebel by seeing others engage in rebellion is what the Bhogta and the Ghasi of Tori pargana of Chota Nagpur did during the Kol insurrection of 1832 when, according to the local officials, they burst into an armed uprising ‘imitating the example of the Coles of Nagpore’. And among the Kol themselves resistance extended from one community to another in much the same way. For ‘in their immediate neighbourhood

examples were not wanting to convince them that in any attempt to recover usurped rights much might be gained in the struggle.³

It is precisely to this power of emulation that J. R. Ward, Special Commissioner, paid an indirect tribute when failing to explain the rapid spread of the hool from Bhagalpur to Birbhum district except in terms of the absurd conjecture that ‘the whole of the Sonthal population of Beerbhoom’ appeared to him ‘to have been more or less pressed into rebellion’, he went on to say: ‘I have failed to ascertain when & how communications had been made prior to Seedoo’s first Act [i.e. the assassination of Mahesh Daroga]. Indeed I cannot find that there was any other than the usual intercourse between the Bhagulpore Sonthals & their fellows of Beerbhoom till the former were in arms.’ And it is again the fear of such imitative defiance of authority that made him plead for an imposition of martial law three months after the outbreak lest the ‘good deal of restlessness & hesitation’ sensed among the Santals to the south of the Grand Trunk Road and ‘the lower castes of Bengallees especially those residing in that part of the Country which lies between the Damoodah & Pachate hills’, should turn into an open uprising.⁴ Emulation of this kind could, of course, inspire either crime or insurgency or as it often happened, both. In the latter case, the generalized violence could stimulate criminal activities—by following the example of their Bhagalpur brethren the Santals of Birbhum had apparently added to the local Magistrate’s labour, ‘murder, dacoity and highway robbery being very much on the increase and the files very heavy’⁵—and provide at the same time a context to invest some of these with new meanings generating, as we have already noticed, much ambiguity and critically influencing the course of an entire rebellion itself.⁶

From the insurgent’s point of view perhaps the most essential aspect of the phenomenon often described as contagion by his

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⁶ See Chapter 3, passim.
foes, is solidarity. This is an important signifier of consciousness in two ways. First, it represents the rebel’s consciousness of his own activity: solidarity is, in other words, a figure of his self-consciousness. Secondly, it separates his own consciousness of this activity completely and unequivocally from its cognition by his enemies. These last two are of course implacably opposed. What is regarded by one side as a symptom of disease, immorality and negation of reason is to the other a positive sign of health and spiritual rejuvenation based on the unquestionable right of the oppressed to resist.

Solidarity is thus a categorical imprint of peasant consciousness and there is hardly a rebellion that does not bear it. However, its quality varies from one event to another and from phase to phase within the same event depending on whether its content is a sense of belonging to the same class or any other affinity. Class solidarity and other solidarities are of course not mutually exclusive: their boundaries overlap in most cases, although the predominance of one or the other element would tend to determine the basic character of a movement. Some of the communist-led agrarian uprisings in India such as the Tebhaga movement of the sharecroppers of Bengal in 1946–7 or the Telengana insurrection of 1947–51—to name only two of the most outstanding events of this kind—were of course distinguished by the solidarity of the peasantry as a class or to be more precise, as a congeries of classes. But even here the sense of fighting together as a class or proximate classes was over-determined to some extent by other loyalties. The historian of the sharecroppers’ struggle has wondered how it all began without preparation or previous organizational work in the area: ‘There was no Kisan Sabha in the Duars: the movement began all too suddenly and spontaneously.’ It required only a minimal intervention on the part of the communists to come to life, take shape, spread all over the Duars and evoke a quick response among the labourers of the neighbouring tea plantations—all of which testified to a section of the rural poor acting as a class-for-itself and to their alliance with an utterly exploited proletariat.

However, there was more to this than class consciousness alone; otherwise it would not have erupted with such sponta-

7 S. Sen: 56.
neity. This apparent spontaneity was nothing but a measure of the displacement of class solidarity by ethnic solidarity. It was the militancy of the tribal peasantry—Santals and Oraons—which inaugurated 'the battle for Tebhaga' in that region of northern Bengal, and the plantation workers who fraternized with them were also mainly Santal and Oraon. This displacement was not of course radical enough to let ethnicity prevail over the class character of the event as a whole, but one can hardly overlook its importance if one is to understand some of the otherwise inexplicable aspects of this struggle such as its amazingly rapid extension, its untutored militancy and the promptness with which it armed itself—all distinctive features of the great tribal peasant revolts of the subcontinent. Ethnic solidarity played a part even in the Telengana insurrection, regarded by some as a considerable achievement of revolutionary organization and consciousness. It is clear from Sundarayya's authoritative account that the mobilization of the Koya in favour of that uprising as it spread to the Godavari river forest area, was to no mean extent helped by the support the communists received from the traditional tribal leaders.

Such coexistence of class solidarity and other affinities, as witnessed in the Tebhaga and Telengana struggles, was of course still more explicit in the politically less sophisticated agrarian uprisings of the period before 1900. The dye of a traditional culture was yet to wash off the peasant's consciousness, and its articulation in insurgent violence, directed as it was against the very foundations of that culture, was bound to generate some ambiguity. Many of these earlier instances, therefore, of what essentially was the peasants' resistance to their class enemies, lend themselves to misinterpretation as nothing but communal or racial protest based respectively on sectarian or ethnic attitudes. What is wrong with this type of explanation, often found in historical writings of a reactionary bent, is not that it emphasizes some of the communal or ethnic elements in such combinations of the rural masses, but that it underestimates or even ignores their class character. And yet another brand of historiography, inclined somewhat to the left, often errs in a contrary direction: eager to highlight the class character of insurgency, it tends to underestimate or even over-

look altogether the other affinities which help in the process of
its mobilization.

The duplex character\textsuperscript{10} of this phenomenon is demonstrated
again and again in many of the nineteenth-century conflicts
between Hindu landlords and Muslim peasantry. The solidarity
of the latter as members of a class or proximate classes was often
in such cases an expression of a religious brotherhood too. This
is why such basic institutions of Islam as the mosque, the con-
gregation and the priesthood had often a lot to do with this
genre of agrarian disturbances. The trial of the Wahabis who
had been the driving force behind Titu Mir’s historic rebellion
at Barasat in 1831 and then fought a protracted but losing war
for another fifty years against the Raj in the North-Western
Frontier Provinces, revealed how the humble masjids of rural
Bengal used to act as the nerve centres of propaganda and
recruitment for the jihad.\textsuperscript{11} And we have it on the authority of
James Wise, one of the most knowledgeable observers of
nineteenth-century Muslim society, that for the Ta’aiyuni, a
militant reformist sect of eastern Bengal, Friday, the day of
prayer, was also ‘a day for popular demonstrations and for
forming combinations against the zamindars’.\textsuperscript{12} At the other
end of the country, in Malabar, the increasing frequency of
Moplah peasant uprisings against the jenmi landlords (as many
as twenty-four outbreaks in eighteen years between 1836 and
1854) and the more and more explicitly communal character of
what was in its essence a militant movement of the rural poor,
corresponded to a phenomenal rise in the number of mosques
(from 637 in 1831 to 1,058 in 1851) and the emergence of the
hitherto inconspicuous Thangals (as the Moplah priests were
called) into positions of key local influence. The consequence of
this mediation by mosques and Thangals was to promote a
vertical alliance between the Moplah poor and their more
affluent co-religionists and help thus in modifying the class
antagonism of the peasantry by Islamic ideology.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} The term ‘duplex’ has been used here, after Cherry, to indicate ‘the simultaneous transmission of two messages over one line without frequency separation’.
See Cherry: 37.

\textsuperscript{11} This is amply documented in Khan (1961): Ch. III, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{12} O’Malley (1925): 46.

\textsuperscript{13} See Dhanagare for an excellent study of this question.
There were of course other cases when the rebel consciousness was not so obviously penetrated by religiosity. Even then one must examine the specific determinations of any given experience with the utmost care before attributing a purely secular character to peasant solidarity on such occasions. The historiography of the Pabna disturbances of 1873 provides us again with an interesting, if negative, example in this respect. Most of the landlords and the rural gentry economically dependent on them were, in this district, Hindu by faith and constituted only about 9 per cent of the population. Most of the other inhabitants were peasants, and nearly 70 per cent of them Musalmans.\textsuperscript{14} The events of 1873 thus shaped up as a convergence of the vertical and horizontal divisions of the rural society in a contest over the producers' surplus. Which of these two antagonisms—class or communal—prevailed and dictated its overall character? The former beyond any doubt. Clearly it was the anti-landlord aims and operations of the peasants' league that gave the movement its basic identity. The size and authority of the league, the impartiality with which it punished Hindu as well as Muslim dissenters,\textsuperscript{15} and the absence of any overtly anti-Hindu gestures of violence such as the desecration of temples, forcible conversion to Islam, etc.—all these give the lie to the inspired canard stigmatizing the bidroha as a communal upheaval.\textsuperscript{16} But the fact that it developed on the whole as a

\textsuperscript{14} Sen Gupta: 8, 9, 51. \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.: 52. \textsuperscript{16} Two somewhat spurious arguments put forward by Sen Gupta to demonstrate what he believes to be the secular character of the bidroha are easily dismissed. 'The fact that the two top leaders of the [tenants'] league... were caste Hindus' is regarded by him as conclusive evidence of the non-communal character of the agitation (Ibid.: 51–2). By the same token one can deny the anti-landlord character of the league and the movement too, for both these top leaders were also members of the local gentry who, as the author himself observes on the basis of sound contemporary evidence, were closely allied to the landlords and formed a fraction of the small (9 per cent of the population) local elite (Ibid.: 8). The social origin of those who constitute the mass of a rebel peasantry does not coincide in every instance with that of some of their leaders. Such incongruence is common to rural uprisings throughout the world in many historical periods. It is a function of décalage which is significant only in a negative sense, that is, as an index of the want of correspondence between the objective character of the mass action of the peasantry and the level of their consciousness. All sorts of historical quirks are possible in these circumstances—a member of the nobility heading an anti-feudal revolt, a Catholic priest leading raids on monasteries, etc. The other argument advanced by
class struggle does not necessarily mean that religiosity played no part in mobilizing the mass of the peasantry for it, as Sen Gupta’s account of the event seems to suggest. On the contrary, it is clear from his own reading of the evidence that the ‘spirit of combination... proceeded to develop quickly in the preponderantly Muhammedan district of Pabna because social alliance was easier among the Muslims than among the Hindus who were divided into innumerable varieties of castes, jealous and distrustful of each other’.\(^7\) Indeed it can hardly be doubted that this spirit of combination was influenced by Farazi sectarianism. The author underplays this factor by alleging that it had already declined in Pabna by 1873.\(^8\) This is difficult to accept in view of the fact that O’Malley writing for the District Gazetteer fifty years later in 1923 still found ‘the Farazi element... strong among the Muhammadans of Sirajganj’,\(^9\) the subdivision where the bidroha had in fact originated.\(^10\) Not to face up to the religious aspect of rebel solidarity and ascribe it to a phoney secularism is to falsify the intellectual history of the peasantry and eliminate, by a mere stroke of the pen, the discrepancy that is necessarily there at certain stages of the class struggle between the level of its objective articulation and that of the consciousness of its subjects.

Ethnicity, too, was a correlate of class solidarity in some of the nineteenth-century peasant rebellions. At one extreme it could be expressed, positively, as a ritual affirmation of the tribal identity of the peasantry involved in an uprising. Thus, for a whole year before the ulgulan Birsa led his followers on a pilgrimage to various ‘ancestral’ sites, collected the relics of what was believed to be their glorious past, and as the party stopped overnight at a particularly holy place called Naw

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\(^7\) Sen Gupta: 39.  \(^8\) Ibid.: 10, 51 (n. 105).  
Rattan, 'those sleeping on the middle floor heard a voice ask: "Are you ready?"' There was a reply: "Yes, we are ready.' This, the Mundas believed, indicated that 'the ancestors of the race had blessed Birsa's mission'. At the other end of the spectrum the function of ethnicity could be and often was to help an insurgent group define its identity negatively: not only was the diku to be excluded from it, but he was clearly marked out as the principal object of attack. Such indeed was the logic of the discrimination showed by the Kol rebels in their raids on villages where tribal and non-tribal households lived side by side: the former were invariably spared and the latter alone subjected to violence. As an officer who had witnessed it all was to write soon after the insurrection, 'Throughout the whole of this devastation not a single Cole's life was sacrificed nor a house belonging to them destroyed except by accident.'

Between these polar ends the expression of ethnic solidarity often assumed the form of armed collaboration among the various tribal peoples in rebel areas. Thus, the Dhagar Kols of Sonepur who were the first to rise in that region in 1832, were promptly reinforced by the Larka Kols of Singhbhum, a district still free from disturbances. And to leave no doubt about the authority of this fraternal act the Larkas were led on this occasion by some of their most outstanding chieftains such as Bindrai Manki and Sui Munda. As the insurrection progressed further the Kols were joined by most of the other tribal peasantry of Chota Nagpur and Palamau—the Bhogta and the Ghasi of Tori; the Ho, the Munda and the Oraon of various parts of Chota Nagpur; the Chero, the Kharwar and the Poliar of Palamau. The solidarity of these last named groups must be acknowledged as a particularly self-conscious act of collaboration. For the British colonial authorities had advised the native police officials as well as the landed gentry to arm contingents of tribal peasants within their own localities and use them against the Kols. It is on record that at least in one instance they even financed a local raja to the tune of five

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11 Singh: 77-81.
13 BC 1502 (58891): Dent & Wilkinson to Thomason (16 Nov. 1832).
14 Singh: 25.
15 J. C. Jha: 78-89.
hundred rupees—a considerable sum of money in those days—for this purpose. However, when the time came, the tribal recruits refused to open fire on the Kols, turned against the raja and slew a number of what was left of his by now exclusively non-tribal levy. The official campaign to mobilize the Chero, the Kharwar and the Poliar under darogas and ghatuwal, too, failed, and an allied force made up of the Kols and all the various peoples of Palamau launched a massive offensive in this region on 7 February 1832. ‘The attempt to use tribal people to oppose tribal insurgents had thus broken down.’

As mentioned above, one of the ethnic communities to swing into action in support of the Kols in 1832 was the Munda. Later on, in the last decade of the century, when the Mundas in their turn were in a state of revolt, the Kols reciprocated in terms of a militant solidarity. Nearly all of a force of two hundred of them sent under a police officer to apprehend Birsa Munda in August 1895 ‘went over in a body to the side of Birsa’ and foiled this particular attempt to take him prisoner. A week after this incident when the authorities eventually caught up with the rebel leader at his home and put him under arrest, the Kols who served as menials (dhanger) in the neighbouring villages withdrew their labour in protest. And as the resentment against Birsa’s arrest set in motion a vast and potentially explosive mass of the rural population, all heading towards and converging on his village, Chalkad, the government made it a point to try and ensure that the Kols were not allowed to link up with the Mundas lest such a conjunction should spark off an uprising. The landed magnates of the area, namely, the Thakur of Sarjumdih and the Manki of Tarai as well as the Thakur of Kharsawan and the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum were officially directed to prevent the Kols within their respective estates and jurisdictions from joining the assembly at Chalkad.

Subsequently, when after his release from prison Birsa began to prepare for the ulgulan in earnest, the memory of collaboration between his people and the Kols in 1832 played the part of a hallowed tradition. His decision to shift the centre of his

26 BC 1362 (54223): GOB to Court of Directors (25 Sept. 1832); BC 1362 (54224): Neave to Lambert (4 Feb. 1832), Lambert to Judicial Department, GOB (6 Feb. 1832).
27 Singh: 55. 28 Ibid.: 63. 29 Ibid.: 64.
campaign from Chalkad to Dombari was apparently influenced by the association the latter had with the Kol rebellion. As a modern historian of the Birsaitte revolt has put it: 'The valleys of Icha Hurang, Lango Lor, Domba Ghat and the upland of Jikilata in popular imagination had once resounded with the triumphs (though illusory) of the powerful combination of the Mundas and Laraka Hos against the British [as] commemorated with pride in Munda folk songs.' Many of these songs helped to evoke the theme of solidarity and revolt at the Birsaitte meetings of 1898–9. At one such meeting held on Simbua hill in March 1898 the Mundas who were then getting ready for their own insurrection, sang thus about that other event of sixty-six years ago:

O where are they fighting, shouldering weapons like
the small ant?
O where are they shooting arrows, carrying their weapons
like the big ant?
O they fight at Bundu
O they shoot arrows at Tamar.

None of this, however, is meant to suggest that ethnic affinities alone constituted all that there was to rebel solidarity in the Kol and Birsaitte uprisings. In both cases the tribal insurgents were careful systematically to spare from violence many of the poorer classes of the non-tribal population with whom they had customary economic and social transactions in the rural communities where they lived as neighbours. Blacksmiths, cow-herds and potters had nothing to fear from the Kols even at the height of their insurrection. Apart from them some of the most oppressed among the non-tribal villagers such as bonded labourers and domestic servants helped the rebels actively against their masters. The local officials were quick to identify this as an expression of class solidarity cutting across ethnic divisions among the rural poor. 'The lower classes', wrote one of the British administrators, 'have evidently entered into a

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80 Ibid.: 82. 81 Ibid.: 84.
82 BC 1502 (58893): Master to Thomason (17 Jan. 1833). Also see 'Nagpur Trials' (nos 98, 85) as in Ch. 4, n. 182 above.
83 See, for instance, BC 1363 (54246): Russell to Braddon (18 Apr. 1832), para. 12.
combination with the Coles.” The Birsaite ulgulan, too, we are told, was distinguished by ‘the absence of an attack on or any bitterness of feeling against certain non-tribal elements socially and economically subordinate to the Mundas’, such as barbers, washermen, drummers, weavers, blacksmiths and carpenters.

It is clear that in both these instances ethnicity was only partially modified by class consciousness. The latter never emerged as the principal constituent of rebel solidarity. Although the tolerance shown by the insurgents towards some of the service castes amounted objectively to a horizontal alignment of the most exploited sections of the rural poor, it was primarily their concern to maintain a steady flow of economic and ritual services for their respective communities which motivated the Kols and the Mundas to protect these non-tribal groups so very useful to them. The sense of class was obviously encapsulated in the sense of race, a fact that is worth remembering about these two tribal peasant uprisings in order fully to grasp both their power and their limitations.

Except in one particular respect which, as we shall presently see, was to amount to a critical difference in quality, the mixture of tribalism and class consciousness in the Santal rebellion of 1855 was much the same as in those discussed above. Ethnic solidarity helped considerably in the initial mobilization for the hool by means of communal hunts, mass assemblies and meetings of the elders of the tribe. This was important enough to have been deposited in popular memory as an ancestral tradition. As the Mare Hapram Ko Reak Katha has it, an alarm spread through the Santal country on the eve of the uprising to the effect that Lag and Labin, the He-snake and the She-snake, had set out to devour all the people. The procedure adopted to ward off so painful an end was that the Santals of a number of villages would band together on an evening and visit a group of nearby hamlets. On arriving at the very last of these they would make an offering to Lag and Labin, invest two of the local bachelors with poita (sacred threads), initiate them to the words and music of some traditional songs particularly prescribed for this ceremony and hand over to them a pair of miniature ploughs which these

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84 BC 1362 (54225): Neave to Lambert (10 Feb. 1832).
85 Singh: 195.  **MHKRK: clxxvii.**
two, in their turn, were to pass on to some other villagers after
a similar nocturnal round terminating in an identical sequence
of serpent worship and the investiture and initiation of two
other bachelor youths. Powered and sanctified by a shot of
chiliasm the solidarity of the tribe for their coming struggle was
thus built up by the relay of a ritual procedure from one neigh-
bourhood to another.

Inter-tribal solidarity, too, featured prominently in this
uprising. The two tribal peoples whose involvement was offi-
cially acknowledged were the Bhuyan and the Mal, both men-
tioned in the Santal tradition as the aboriginal rulers of the
region. The collaboration of the Mal was particularly signif-
cant. For as Captain Sherwill’s survey for 1851 showed, the
Mal, ‘the Rajmahal Hill Tribe’ as he named them, constituted
nearly 29 per cent of the population of Damin-i-Koh in 38.5
per cent of its villages covering a little over 18 per cent of its
area regarded as habitable. By their participation they helped
in drawing the entire population into the hool. Qualitatively,
too, this enhanced the authority of the rebellion. For the two
tribes had not always been on the best of terms. In the course
of the previous twenty years the Mals were gradually pushed
out of the valleys which had been all theirs until the Santals
came in and colonized the land. As Sherwill observed in 1851,
‘The hill-men have, with a few exceptions, retired to the hills,
being either unwilling to be near the Sonthal, whom the hill-
men despise, or, courting that privacy they could not enjoy in
a cultivated plain, have yielded up the fertile plain to their
more industrious and energetic neighbours.’ Consequently,
their coexistence had not been always quite so peaceful in the
past, and this was indeed what made their solidarity in 1855 all
the more impressive.

Ibid.

Source: Sherwill: 69. The statistics from which these percentages have been
worked out are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population (%)</th>
<th>No. of villages (%)</th>
<th>Area in sq. miles (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>33,780 (28.9)</td>
<td>921 (38.5)</td>
<td>56 (18.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santal</td>
<td>83,265 (71.1)</td>
<td>1,473 (61.5)</td>
<td>254 (81.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117,045 (100)</td>
<td>2,394 (100)</td>
<td>310 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ibid.: 45.
There is a great deal of evidence to testify to this inter-tribal collaboration. Already within a fortnight of the uprising the Bhuyans were apprehended by the Bhagalpur police in large numbers for taking up arms and forming unlawful assemblies with the intent of committing riot and plunder. And the Mal came out on the side of the Santals on an even more massive scale. One of the very first rebel statements we have on record is that of a Santal wounded and captured by the troops on the seventh day of the insurrection, and he said that in his particular contingent ‘there were with us two or three thousand Pahareeahs and there were of us Sonthals, seven or eight thousand’. It is indeed remarkable how closely the ratio of Mal to Santal in the insurgent forces, as indicated here, corresponded to that in the population of Damin-i-Koh as a whole. Their collaboration was not perhaps altogether free from discord and there might have been some truth in a report about friction between them in the Company Bazar area in September 1855. By then the hool had already lost its momentum, and in view of their past relations it is not surprising that the Mal were keen to disengage themselves from their allies in a period of retreat and mass surrender. None of this however takes away from the extent or the quality of their participation. The point must indeed be made that even according to the authorities the Mal appear to have been motivated by more than greed for a share in the loot. They joined in the plunder of course, but helped in the organization of the rebellion as well.

J. R. Ward, Commissioner on Special Duty, wrote to the Government of Bengal about the capture of a Mal who had played an important part in supplying provisions for the Santals. And it is again to the same officer’s indignation at abetment on the part of the Mal that we owe an anecdote which has much to say about the spirit of their solidarity.

When Captn. Phillips 63 N.I. came up to Bewa...he was informed the Sonthals were then plundering at the other end of the Village,

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40 K. K. Datta: 92. Bhayan names often occur in the lists of prisoners. For one such list see JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Rose to Ward (12 Oct. 1855).
41 JP, 19 July 1855: Toogood to Grey (Enclosure, 14 July 1855).
42 See n. 38 above.
43 JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Lloyd to Military Department, GOI (15 Sept. 1855).
unaware of his arrival. Taking 75 men of his detachment he advanced quickly, & came up to a large pukka house on the doorsteps of which was sitting a man quietly smoking his hooka. Captn. Phillips asked him where the Sonthals were, & was told in reply that they had not come to the Village at all, but he had not got 100 yards further when some 40 or 50 Sonthals rushed from the identical house and attacked the party in the rear, wounding one sepoy. They however were easily repulsed, leaving 8 dead on the field . . . It is to be regretted that the man who misled Captn. Phillips was not also of the number, but he was arrested and sent in to me at Raneegunge. If ever a man deserved hanging it is this scoundrel; but how am I to deal with him? He declares he was not aware there was any one in the house, and if I venture to charge him with complicity in attempt at Murder or rebellion, I must prove the guilty knowledge, for the man is not a Sonthal, tho’ a mal, one of the five exempted castes.45

This identification of the Mal as ‘one of the five exempted castes’ was, of course, an error. In fact, the term ‘five exempted castes’ is itself somewhat suspect. It occurs time and again in the correspondence of the civilian and military officers operating in the region affected by the hool; but, curiously enough, it does not occur even once in any of the several recorded statements of the rebels themselves, although they acknowledge, positively, the collaboration of various non-Santal groups. One possible way of unravelling the paradox would perhaps be to read this phrase as a telescoping of two categorically different official perceptions.

It indicates, in the first place, how administrative sociology had anticipated Risley and the Anthropological Survey of India by decades in conceptualizing the rural classes in the sub-continent as simply an array of castes and with nearly the same unhappy consequence. The moment they heard of the uprising the colonial authorities labelled it as an exclusively tribal movement. The very first official reaction on record, a letter from the Magistrate of Bhagalpur written within forty-eight hours of the affray at Bhagnadihi, reads: ‘I write a line in a great hurry to let you know that the Sontals of this district aided by a large number from Singhbhum and other districts have risen to take possession of the country.’46 The language, breathless as it is,

46 Richardson to Grey (9 July 1855). This is classified as entry No. 1 in JP,
represents truly the government's view of the character of the insurrection. So when the initial panic subsided and it was noticed that the Santals were careful not to commit violence against the vast majority of the non-tribal population made up mostly of what Hunter was to identify later on as 'the intermediate semi-aboriginal classes between the Santal and the Hindu and indeed several of the very low castes of the Hindus themselves', a rough and ready explanation based on a schematic approach to Indian society was hastily pulled out of the topee. The insurgents, it was said in almost every communication on the subject from the Rajmahal front, would not hurt the 'castes' who 'were obedient to the Santals and helped them in several ways', as Datta's paraphrase of an official document put it. Secondly, the memory of the Kol rebellion of 1832 which never ceased to haunt the authorities during their campaigns against the Santals, may also have encouraged this notion to some extent, for the Kol had indeed spared some of those non-tribal peasant and artisan groups with whom they maintained a sort of jajmani relation in their villages. So the classic Hindu model was freely used to explain why a tribal uprising was so consistent in its want of hostility towards the mass of the non-tribal poor. It does not appear to have occurred to the authorities that a horizontal solidarity of all the exploited elements in the given rural society might have had something to do with this phenomenon.

The sociological assumptions in the official correspondence of the time were indeed quite clearly spelt out in an article published in the Calcutta Review soon after the hool. Written obviously by someone with access to the despatches received by the Government of Bengal—some of the passages read like direct quotations—it names the 'five exempted castes' as the Lohar (blacksmiths), the Kumar (potters), the Telee (oilmen), the Gwala (milkmens, cowherds) and the carpenters, 'for these were useful to the Sonthal Commissariat'. The apparent

19 July 1855—the very first recorded document on the Santal rebellion in that collection.


49 For some officially invoked parallelisms, see JP, 19 July 1855: Elliott to Grey (15 July 1855); and JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Minute by Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (19 Oct. 1855). 50 CR: 246.
plausibility of this identification derived from the fact that the local population belonging to these castes lived as artisans and specialists in what were predominantly Santal communities. Yet a close reading of the same official sources also shows how utterly inaccurate this identification was. For most of the reports filed with the Judicial Department of the Bengal Government about the arrest, summary trial and punishment of the insurgents in 1855–6 differentiated meticulously between the Santal and other prisoners as well as between various castes among the latter. These statements make it abundantly clear that almost every commissioner and commander had his own idea as to who constituted the 'exempted castes'.

The category was, in effect, made so elastic as to accommodate any social or ethnic group one wished to describe as 'exempted'. There are at least thirteen such 'exempted caste' names that can be picked out of this collection of records. These are: Bairagi, Bauri, Boya, Carpenter, Dhangar, Dom, Gwala, Hari, Jolaha, Kulwar, Kumar, Lohar and Telee.61 If one added the Mal to these, as did Ward, the total would amount nearly

to the entire non-Santal population of Damin-i-Koh minus the handful of the elite made up of zamindars and mahajans. The term 'five exempted castes' thus dissolves in the light of evidence. Far from providing an accurate description of the hool as a vast alliance of peasants and rural artisans of all ethnic groups it narrows down and falsifies our vision of this historic event. The only value it may be said to have is to illustrate how the official mind committed a priori to a perception of Indian society in caste categories fails to understand even the most explicit evidence about the class character of peasant activity and ends up with an erroneous identification of the actors—an epistemological legacy which colonialism was to bequeath to the discipline of social anthropology in the next century.

The term 'five exempted castes' misrepresents the mobilization for the hool not merely in a quantitative sense. It also stands for a perceptual error on the part of the authorities about the quality of that mobilization. The suggestion it conveys of the non-tribal peasantry standing by passively to watch the rebels carry fire and sword through the countryside might have been true to some extent of the Kol uprising but not of the Santal. In the latter case there was no section of the rural poor, tribal or otherwise, that can be said to have abstained from the mass violence of the hool or from active collaboration with its initiators and leaders, the Santals. They were all rebels. The ethnic distribution could of course vary widely between any two samples of them: it all depended on where they came from. As many as twenty-four out of sixty prisoners taken by a Captain Pester in a raid on two neighbouring villages, Ludna and Tulberiga, on 2 November 1855 were non-Santals 'all of whom', he said in his report, 'assisted the insurgents in every way in supplying them with the different articles they each manufacture'. As against this proportion of 40 per cent the non-tribal component was a mere 10 per cent in the group of twenty from two villages within the Nalhati thana, who were summarily sentenced by the Sessions Judge of Birbhum on 3 December 1855.

The want of uniformity in the composition of the rebel bands

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52 JP, 22 Nov. 1855: Bird to Military Department, GOI (6 Nov. 1855).
was matched by the uneven quality of their collaboration too. Reports came in from time to time about the Santals being given the cold shoulder by a local peasant or artisan community that had been consistently loyal until then. One such instance involving the Mal has already been noticed above.\textsuperscript{54} Again, the Kumars mentioned by Sido himself as one of the artisan groups (the other being the Telees) most friendly to the Santals and proved as such by their inclusion in almost every official list of rebel prisoners and convicts, were said to have withdrawn from the alliance in some parts of Birbhum in September 1855.\textsuperscript{55} The level of co-operation appears to have varied not merely between the local groups of the same caste or community, but also between some castes and others. The Gwala, the Lohar and the Dom emerge from the evidence as the most active non-tribal participants in the hool. The first of these are specified as one of the ‘five exempted castes’ in many despatches. A Bhagalpur police report for Doomka thana indicates that in September 1855 the Gwalas came out in support of the Santals in Belputtah and ‘towards the confines of Beerbhoom’.\textsuperscript{56} But the most spectacular information we have on their solidarity derives from a report sent in by Major-General Lloyd, Commanding the Dinapore Division and Sonthal Field Force, on the capture of Bechoo Raout. It merits being quoted \textit{in extenso}:

The day before yesterday on arrival at Hasdia I received information that only three or four days previously Kanoo Majhee with his Brothers and Followers had visited Bechoo Raout a gwallah the head of the village of Sooria Haut about 3 coss from my camp, that they had

\textsuperscript{54} See \textit{supra} 150.

\textsuperscript{55} For Sido’s statement, see JP, 8 Nov. 1855: ‘Examination of Sedoo Sonthal late Thacoor’. For some other evidence of Kumar participation see JP, 22 Nov. 1855: Ward to GOB (28 Oct. 1855); and ibid.: (8 Nov. 1855); ibid.: Bird to Military Department, GOI (6 Nov. 1855); ‘Statement of 22 convicts sentenced . . . dated 3rd Dec. 1855’ in BDR: 129. On the discord between Santals and Kumars J. R. Ward wrote from Suri, Birbhum, on 16 September 1855 to the Secretary, GOB: ‘There can be little doubt of the truth of the report that they [the Santals] are suffering much for want of proper food . . . and unfortunately for them the Insurgents have fallen out with the Koomars one of the 5 excepted classes and cannot procure cooking pots—which add greatly to their difficulties but for all that there is no sign of an inclination to submit.’ JP, 4 Oct. 1855.

been entertained and Housed by him, that Kanoo had created him a Soobah and as a Symbol of the rank conferred had bound a turban on his head, that the Rebel Sonthals had gone thence to plunder two villages some little distance to the south, returned with their plunder to Bechoo’s village . . . On receiving the above information I at once despatched a small party under Lieutt Briggs of the 40 N.I. to apprehend the gwallah which was effected; a number of arms were found in his Thakoor Buree as well as in his and the adjacent houses and very fortunately he himself happened at the moment of his seizure to be in the act of holding a kind of Court in the market place in the Exercise of his office as Soobah surrounded by a large concourse of people & assuming all the airs and consequence of a Ruler.57

A few days after his arrest Bechoo Raout was produced before a court martial at Camp Noni Hat, found guilty of ‘an overt act of rebellion against the State’, and sentenced ‘to be hanged by the neck till he be dead at such time and place as Major-General Lloyd Command may be pleased to direct’. The latter ordered the hanging to take place ‘in the nearer neighbourhood of his [Bechoo Raout’s] Village’. At the same court martial a death sentence, commuted eventually to seven years’ hard labour, was passed on Juttoo Rai, a peasant of the same village, who ‘opposed by force of arms a party of troops sent for the apprehension of Bechoo Raot gwallah’.58

The Lohar (blacksmiths), also referred to as Lohar Mistrees, figure, like the Gwala, in all enumeration of the so-called ‘exempted castes’. However, the records make it quite clear that the Santals were more dependent on them than on any other group of their allies. The reason obviously was that these metal workers on whose skill the Santals relied so much for the manufacture of their agricultural and domestic implements in times of peace, became even more valuable to them in a war requiring a steady supply of weapons for the tens of thousands of peasants who constituted their fauj. As one such combatant, who had fallen into enemy hands was to testify: ‘We had all swords; some of us had made new ones.’59 This was indeed where the Lohar came in. They moved around with the rebel forces as so many ubiquitous arsenals. ‘The Sonthals are very

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57 JP, 6 Dec. 1855: Lloyd to Grey (19 Nov. 1855).
58 Ibid.: ‘Extract Proceedings of a Court Martial assembled at Camp Noni Haut by order of Major General G. W. A. Lloyd . . . on 19th day of November 1855.’
59 JP, 19 July 1855: Toogood to Grey (Enclosure, 14 July 1855).
busy making arms at Bunbatee and other places. They are headed by Ram Manjee and Gooloo Manjee, and have smiths with them hard at work. This entry for 2 October 1855 in the Birbhum Collector’s diary indicates a feature of the mobile Santal warfare to which the authorities were, for understandable reasons, particularly sensitive. Some weeks later when an officer commanding a detachment of native infantry reported the arrest of three Lohar Mistrees, he claimed to have ‘witnesses to prove that these men made arms for the use of the Sonthals assembled at Subbonpore’. He also added that one of these had a thigh wound received during an attack on that officer’s own camp a few nights ago—a detail which illustrates how these artisans could also be trusted to act as auxiliaries in the guerilla army when the occasion arose.

In fact, neither the civilian nor the military authorities treated the blacksmiths as anything but insurgents. Two of them from the village of Geriapani, arrested together with their Santal neighbours, were, like the latter, summarily tried on 3 December 1855 for ‘illegally and riotously assembling with offensive weapons’ and sentenced to hard labour by the Sessions Judge of Birbhum. On the same day an officer returning with his regiment from a counter-insurgency operation near the Phuljhuri Hills ran into a party of twenty Lohar Mistrees migrating to Kumirabad with their families and their cattle. ‘They had their working tools with them and also a few arrow heads; I therefore think they must have been in some Sonthal assembly, employed [in] making weapons.’ Q.E.D., and the despatch ends by stating, ‘I seized all the cattle and intend selling them by auction’. Apparently thus in their hurry to put down the rebellion with the least possible delay and utmost severity the local magistrates and army captains seldom paused to distinguish between the Santal and the Lohar. Indeed the violence of the insurgent had blended so well with the artisan’s skill that at a higher level of the administration this was regarded as the most serious obstacle to disarming the Santals. ‘To

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disarm the Sonthals appears to me a measure which might follow submission, but I do not see how it is to be carried out till they are subdued’, wrote the Commissioner on Special Duty to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal: ‘The facilities too for procuring fresh arms are great. They have very clever workmen in the hills and plenty of material. There is scarcely a Sonthal female who is not covered with ornaments of different kinds, which bear evidence to the abundance of metal and the skill of the workmen.’

What a splendid, if unintentional, compliment this to the solidarity of the oppressed that had joined the skill of fashioning trinkets to the art of making an insurrection!

The alliance of the Dom, unlike that of the Lohar, would, however, bear no explanation in terms of any particular military or economic use this might have had for the Santals (apart from the obvious fact that strength lay in numbers). They, too, figure on the official lists of prisoners and convicts like the members of those other groups mentioned above. But in one striking (and little known) respect their collaboration was positively acknowledged by both the principal rebel leaders, Sido and Kanhu. They were convinced that in launching the insurrection they were acting on divine command. A god, claimed Sido, had descended from heaven in the shape of a cartwheel and ordered him to take up arms. It was a command written on a piece of paper that fell on his head. ‘I could not read’, he admitted, ‘but Chand & Shereee and a Dhome read it; they said, “The Thacoor has written to you to fight the Mahajens & then you will have justice”.’

Subsequently Kanhu, in his turn, was to mention a Dom as one of the three scribes who wrote out for him the parwanas he sent out to ‘the Burra Sahib at Calcutta’ and to the officials and principal landlords of Birbhum and Rajmahal. ‘These perwannahs’, he said, ‘were written by Lehra & Kritu of Suckrigulli & Soona Dhome.’ It is indeed a remarkable fact about this uprising that its supreme commanders should speak thus of the Dom primarily as a sort of rebel intelligentsia. Nothing could be a more complete inversion of their status in Hindu society as its most backward, oppressed

45 JP, 8 Nov. 1855: ‘Examination of Sedoo Sonthal late Thacoor’.
and polluted caste. It is this latter image of them which, *pace* Sido and Kanhu, is recorded in the *Reak Katha* as a part of the collective Santal memory of the events of 1855. According to a rumour that gained currency at the time of the rebellion the Dom, persecuted as untouchables, were fleeing *en masse* to the jungle where they ‘dressed up as Santals and lived in Santal houses’—a figure of imagination which poignantly represents the union of two of the most exploited sections of the rural population in a common resistance irrespective of ethnic differences.

Indeed what makes the hool stand apart from the rest of the series of tribal peasant rebellions of the nineteenth century—apart even from the Kol insurrection and the Birsaiti ulgulan—is precisely the fact that class solidarity triumphed over ethnicity here more decisively than in any of the others. The most handsome tribute ever paid to this distinction came from one of the commanders of the colonial army sent to put down the revolt. For Major-General Lloyd it was not enough to have a martial law to deal with the insurgents themselves; pleading for its extension to cover their allies too, he wrote to the Government of Bengal: ‘With all due deference to the opinions of superior authority I consider that the advantages of Martial Law would be much strengthened and increased if . . . its Exercise was not restricted only to those taken in the actual commission of any overt act of rebellion but the penalties it authorizes Extended to any against whom proof can be adduced of any recent covert acts of rebellion such as harbouring, aiding and abetting or sharing the booty of the Rebels. Of such there are very many Tribes, gwallahs &ca well known to be guilty of such acts and yet whom it would seldom be practicable to take in their *actual commission*.’ Written in the latter half of November 1855 when the insurrection had already passed its peak, this indicates the still formidable power of a rebel consciousness projected well beyond the sense of tribe and caste.

Solidarity produces an ethic: to rebel is good, not to rebel is bad. This follows directly from the communal character of rebellion: in so far as the latter is an expression of the will of the Many,

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67 *MHKRK*: *elxxii.*
rebelsolidarity functions both as an expression and an instrument of communal authority—as its standard as well as its sword. How the morality of Islam was identified in one instance with that of rebel solidarity, is illustrated in a planter's evidence before the Indigo Commission in 1860. The local peasants, he testified, had entered into a combination against his factory. A leading Muslim ryot who started having second thoughts about it all and wanted to withdraw, was unable to do so, because he, like the others, had pledged his support by kissing the Koran.69 Popular resistance inspired by a common faith was a feature of the anti-British mobilization in 1857–8 as well. 'The Mahommedan population is ever against us', wrote the Magistrate of Saharanpur: 'I am told that in this and the Moozuffurnuggur districts they are bound by oath not to give decisive evidence against each other.'70 But it was not religion alone that brought people together in that great struggle, for, as the loyalist press observed with some chagrin at the time, the Kurmis of Bareilly region, 'formerly the chief Hindoo population', not only refused to help the authorities with intelligence against Khan Bahadur Khan's rebel forces but even sheltered the latter from the government's counter-insurgency operations.71

It was precisely because it was a representation of popular conscience that solidarity such as this could stand up to much strain. Binay Chaudhuri has shown how the combination of the Pabna bidrohis in 1873 survived not only the severity of official repression but the many attempts made on behalf of the landlords to divide the movement by tempting ryots to settle with them by separate agreements. However, 'within a village the peasants seem to have been still bound by a kind of oath' not to do so, although the central organization of their union had for all practical purposes been put out of action by then. The Magistrate found out that even those among the tenantry who 'had nothing really to complain of' as individuals, 'were simply determined to refuse rents so long as the majority of ryots did so'. This was indeed a remarkable demonstration of solidarity, of what Chaudhuri describes as 'the strength of the peasants' convictions', especially in view of the fact that a considerable

69 RIC: para. 2213 quoted in Kling: 86.
70 FSUP: I 474.
71 FSUP: V 486.
number of them were 'not firmly committed to the rebel cause'. In other words politics had managed to triumph over economics so that differences concerning particular aspects of the rent question yielded to a general consensus born out of the peasants' awareness of themselves as a community opposed actively to the community of their oppressors, the zamindars.

Unity such as this depended for its strength on two types of communal sanctions—cultural and physical. The first of these was imposed usually as a threat to one's status within the community either by defilement or by social boycott. The leaders of the anti-survey movement in Khandesh were said to have summoned the Kunbis to a vast demonstration at Fyzpoor by orders issued to the village Mahars 'to defile the household of any person who refused to obey them, by throwing down bones at his threshold'. More often, however, the price of dissidence from a common action would be the denial of cooperation by fellow villagers. This could ruin a peasant economically as well as socially. The power of this particular form of sanction is brought out very clearly indeed by some of the articles of agreement in a Sama Patra executed by the inhabitants of Kallas in Poona district during the Deccan riots. It was resolved that no villager, male or female, should serve a Guzar, that is, a moneylender in any form whatsoever: 'Any person cultivating fields belonging to Guzars, or serving them, will be denied service by the village barber, washerman, carpenter, ironsmith, shoemaker and other Ballutas (village servants).'. To go against this decision could cost a villager his livelihood: if he was a Mahar he was to forfeit his customary share of bread and straw, a priest his traditional right to perform ritual worship for clients served by his ancestors and even the Mokadam Patel all his hereditary privileges. And the ultimate penalty of being put out of caste was held out against all dissidents: 'Any one acting to the contrary will neither be allowed to come to caste-dinners nor intermarry amongst his own society. Such a person should be considered an outcast[es].'

Rarely, however, would sanctions against breach of solidarity remain confined to a purely non-violent exercise in social boy-

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73 BC 2354 (146775): Mansfield & Wingate to Goldsmid (8 Jan. 1853), para. 18.
74 DRCR(C): 208–9.
cott. It was common for the latter to be accompanied by threats of physical violence, too. Two villagers from Akola who had come to Kallas to work for the Guzars there in the teeth of local opposition found this out soon enough. ‘The Patel and Kulkarnees are threatening to drive us away and to beat us in case we continue to serve the Guzars’, they explained: ‘We have also been warned that the community will put us out of caste.’

The threat of violence against the person or property of anyone suspected of undermining solidarity could be conveyed visually or verbally. The struggles of the tenant-cultivators of Tripura who formed themselves into a league in 1872–3 in order to resist rack-renting, provide us with a striking example of visual intimidation. ‘The unionists had a peculiar way of intimidating the minority into joining the union’, writes Sen Gupta. ‘If any ryot was bold enough to withstand the league, he received a solemn warning. A bundle of straw shaped like a torch was placed in front of his house, an action which signified that if he continued to hold out, his house would be burnt.’ One has merely to recall a well-known practice of the German rebels of 1525 to realize how close the Indian experience was in this respect to that of some other countries. It was customary for the insurgents then to plant a pole in front of the house of any peasant who vacillated in his support to the war against the castles and the abbeys.

The parallelism applies to verbal threats too. Here is an example of the sort of language often used during the peasant war in Germany to persuade a rural community to overcome its hesitation in joining forces with their brethren who had already taken up arms. ‘You should come to us, the [rebel] army’, said a notice served on the peasants of Hall at Ottendorf on the Kocher; ‘we shall be very pleased, if you agree to do so.

76 Ibid.: 211.
76 Sen Gupta: 110–11. The threat of arson was also used by the peasants of Sandip to dissuade people from offering hospitality to the amins (surveyors) during an anti-survey movement there in 1870. The threat was vividly formulated in the following line of a folk song: ‘Lal bolod lagai dium zeter barit amin ase’, meaning, ‘We shall set the red bulls on the houses of those with whom the surveyors lodge’ (Grierson: 257–9). ‘Lal bolod’, a red bull, was, of course, an euphemism for the incendiary’s torch. See Ray (1966): 414–15.
77 Zimmermann: II 100.
If not, we shall call on you in such a manner that we're afraid it may not do you any good.78 Join us, or else face the consequences: the structure of this message—an appeal for common action backed up by a threat—is identical to that of some of the communiques issued by the north Bengal insurgents to mobilize support for the dhing in 1783. And the menacing punchlines of these texts (which survive, alas, only in the official English rendering of what must have been vivid eighteenth-century Bengali prose) read so much like a paraphrase of the German circular quoted above that one realizes how central the notion of solidarity is to rebel consciousness even when its subjects vary widely in culture and age. As a local leader (sardar) of the dhing, a certain Israel Khan, stated in a parwana:

This is of consequence. We have all joined and assembled at Jarbana. You are our brothers. Do you join with all expedition. If you do not join us on our arrival you will repent it. When you join us we will consult what is best to be done. If you do not come we will burn your houses. You have warning.

Or, as the peasants of Kazirhat in Rangpur wrote to those of Pinjirah in Dinajpur:

We have made an insurrection... All Coochwanah (Rangpur) are coming forth. Do you do the same and join us. We have surrounded the Raja at Rangpur with the nazir's people. The rest is left to chance. Do you pay no more revenue. In this letter we give you information. If you come, it is well: if not you will repent it, after which you must not blame us.79

The universality of this figure of verbal threat within the Indian tradition of insurgency is affirmed by its recurrence in another peasant revolt at the very other end of the Bengal Presidency and among a very different kind of peasantry, namely, the Santals. Formulated in the same binary terms, that is a call for help followed by intimidation if the addressee failed to respond,

78 Ibid.: I 361.
79 Kaviraj: 40-1. Communications of this particular type appear to have been frequently used. As the *Report of the Rangpore Commission on the Causes of the Insurrection in Rangpore in the year 1789* put it: 'The insurgents then circulated letters to the various talooks ordering the ryots to assemble and join them, and threatening to burn their houses and destroy their crops in case of their refusal and delay.' MDS: 580.
it occurs in some of the *hukumnamahs* issued by the leaders of the hool. One of these summoning a certain Shobha Majhi of Monabari, for instance, says: '[At] the sight of Perwannah you all must be in attendance. If you do not attend, your head will be cut off.'

There is some superficial resemblance between this form of intimidation and that used in such anonymous letters as were addressed to their intended victims by the swadeshi dacoits of Bengal and the English smugglers and poachers of the eighteenth century. Yet it would be wrong to lose sight of some of the important differences between these two kinds of discourse which, for the purposes of our discussion here, we shall call 'insurgent peasant communication' and 'anonymous threatening letter'—IPC and ATL for short, respectively. E. P. Thompson who has studied the latter in much detail, has described it as 'a characteristic form of social protest in any society which has crossed a certain threshold of literacy, in which forms of collective organized defence are weak, and in which individuals who can be identified as the organizers of protest are liable to immediate victimization'. One can use this definition as the basis of a comparison between ATL and IPC and distinguish between them in at least two respects.

First, ATL is secret and private in form while IPC is open and public. This corresponds to a set of basic distinctions between crime and rebellion which we have already discussed above, and explains why the two types operate, on the whole, in separate domains in spite of some occasional overlaps. This is also why the specific character of IPC would be rather inadequately represented if we were to assign to it the term 'letter' with all its association of a private exchange of messages between individuals. For, the form of IPC is essentially that of the public notice, the circular, the parwana. As such it claims to speak in the name of the authority assumed and exercised by the rebels on a site left vacant by the old established order, a vacancy which testifies by itself to the presence of the rebellion and puts its participants beyond any liability to 'immediate victimization'. Far from being a symptom of weakness in 'collective organized defence', it is a public demonstration of the will of an

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60 *JP*, 6 Sept. 1855: 'Hukumnamah of Sree Kanoo Thakoor Sidoo Thakoor etc.'
61 *Hay et al.:* 255.
62 See Chapter 4 above.
armed mass of the peasantry to impose itself peremptorily and by force, if necessary, on vacillators and fence-sitters of all kinds. The strength of IPC is indicated by the form of a mandamus it invariably adopts and its liberal use of the imperatives while its corporate character is made explicit by the sign of the first person plural: ‘We have all joined and assembled at Jarbana’; ‘We have made an insurrection’.

However, these two types of discourse differ not merely in authorship. They represent rather different, almost contrasting, relationships between their authors and addressees. ATL is addressed only to enemies. Whether the grievance is ‘private’ or ‘social’, makes no difference in this respect.\(^{83}\) Thompson’s list of ATL recipients includes members of the gentry and the nobility, tradesmen, millers, mayors, magistrates, farmers, clergymen, excise officials, blacklegs, etc. The threats held out to them range from murder and mutilation to arson, wrecking of houses, maiming of stock, felling of trees, and so on—the destruction of life and property, in short.\(^{84}\) Clearly, the recipients are marked out as enemies and the function of ATL is to convey to them the authors’ intention to punish them in various ways. Even when the penalty is commuted for a sum of money, that is, imposed as a fine, it hardly alters the essentially punitive character of the communication. The addressee is offered no choice: he is a foe with whom scores must be settled one way or another. By contrast, the recipients of IPC stand in a non-antagonistic relation to their communicators. Indeed the parties are potential allies. The aim of IPC is to mobilize the still uncommitted members of the rural community for the rebel cause and not to chastise them. The threat of punishment is, of course, a part of the message, but unlike in the case of ATL—and this is a basic distinction between the two types—it is prefaced by a call for help. A rebel circular is not issued as a verdict on some wrong done and a resolution to bring the offender to book. On the contrary, its purpose is to win support by appealing to the

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\(^{83}\) This is how E. P. Thompson differentiates between the two major classes of grievances that inspired the ATL specimens examined by him (Thompson: 258). He mentions dismissed servants among authors of ATL generated by ‘private’ grievances. His list of ‘social’ grievances includes those relating to bread and corn prices, industrial and agricultural wages, smuggling, poaching, enclosures, etc. (Ibid.: 260).  
\(^{84}\) Ibid.: 259.
mutuality of interest between those who have already taken up arms and others who are yet to do so: 'You are our brothers. Do you join with all expedition'—as the Rangpur parwana says. Or, as the villagers of Kallas wrote to those of Akola mildly reproving the latter for not doing enough to promote the struggle against their common enemy, the moneylenders, during the Deccan riots of 1875:

After compliments. It is very wrong of your people to keep communication with persons who are deemed as excluded from the community of this village. Unanimity is very important at this time... It would be better if you should come to our village and get yourself informed of the whole matter for the information of your village people. Please do not hesitate to do so, as the time is very critical... For the good of all of us it is necessary that we should cooperate with each other. As we consider Kallas and Akola as one village, we have made the above suggestions to you... The villagers of Palasdeo are assisting us this time, and since we think you do not treat us similarly, we pray you to see us to-morrow... Please do not fail...85

Clearly the function of communiqués of this kind is to emphasize the need for unanimity, co-operation and common action, to plead for solidarity rather than to discipline opponents.

There is yet another instrument of solidarity which operates on a mixture of intimidation and persuasion in a manner even more explicit than it is the case with IPC. This is what is known as pressing—the form in which the insurgents use their presence in large numbers to win over to their side the recalcitrants and vacillators within their own community. The practice is almost universal. It has been noticed by Zimmermann in his history of the Peasant War in Germany, by Rudé in his account of the Swing in England, and so on.86 Everywhere it is a combination of the moral prestige of solidarity and elements of public authority accruing to the insurgents at such junctures which encourages them to put on these impressive shows of rebel power for the benefit of their less stout-hearted brethren.

85 'Substance of a Letter addressed to the Mokadam Patel and the Village Community of Akola by four persons of the village of Kallas on behalf of the whole community', in DRCR (C): 210.
86 For some of these instances see Zimmermann: I 354 and H & R: 107, 108, 111, 112, 113, 212.
Everywhere indeed they use it as 'an essential measure' of mobilization, that is, as Rudé said of the English agricultural labourers of 1830—'to muster a sufficiently imposing force'. Thus, when the peasants of Kazirhat, Kakina and Tepa rose in arms against Deby Sinha, 'they pressed all the villages round to join them [and] collected in a more formidable body'. Afterwards, as we gather from the Rangpur Collector's report on the dhing, 'they assembled in different bodies in different parts of the District. One body went into Cooch-Behar and obliged the ryots to join them; another went into Dinagepore by the western border through Boda; another went into the Pergunnahs of Andewah etc to the northward...there were few ryots but what willingly joined them and those who showed the least resistance were compelled to it.' Pressing also helped in the massive mobilization for the Kol insurrection of 1831–2. According to a correspondent of the Bengal Hurkaru, the rebels 'proceeded from village to village burning and massacring every respectable person and every foreigner, and forcing every Cole by the fear of instant death to join their standards'. The same method of inducement was used by the Santals as well. The Collector of Birbhum made some notes about this in his diary thus:

30 September 1855. Captain Terry reports that the Sonthals are in large numbers at a place about 14 miles north East of Rumpore Hath, that they have surrounded two large villages and insist upon the villagers joining them in plundering, burning etc.

2 October 1855...Since the 23rd July the Sonthals have occupied Juggutpore. Seedo joined on the 23rd Sept. since which day the villagers have been seized in order to help in plundering villages.

It has been said that 'the typical agent of propagation' of the Swing movement in England was 'the itinerant band which marched from farm to farm, swelling its number by "pressing" the labourers working in the fields or in their cottages at night'. In much the same way the Pabna bidroha of 1873 was propagated by roving bands of peasants who went the rounds of the villages blowing on their buffalo horns and calling on their

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87 H & R: 212.  88 MDS: 323, 325.  89 J. C. Jha: 179.
fellow ryots to join them. Those who agreed to do so were left in peace; those who did not, were harassed. On one occasion the unionists, wrote Nolan, defied an official ban to assemble in large numbers at Sallop and marched 'in a threatening manner to some villages which had not hitherto joined'. In the Uttarshahpur estates of Dacca, the following year, the peasants formed a union to resist a landlord who had just purchased that property and 'on many occasions even forced some of the other ryots to join the union against their will'.

Using force to generate solidarity: this apparent contradiction in terms makes pressing easily a most misunderstood figure of insurgency. The peasant's enemies tend altogether to ignore its unifying function: they look upon it as nothing but a sign of the coercive character of rebellion. Such an interpretation agrees with their view of the peasant as by 'nature' averse to turning against his superiors with whom he is supposed to be attached by a 'natural' bond of affection and loyalty, so that when he does in fact rebel, it is comfortable to explain so 'unnatural' an event as having occurred under duress. It is thus that landlords, administrators, officers out on anti-insurgency missions, informers, white settlers frightened by jacqueries—all go on talking exclusively about the peasants being 'forced', 'seized', 'compelled', in short, drafted against their will into the rebel contingents. This is a misrepresentation of the character of pressing because it is one-sided: what it fails to grasp is precisely the duality of this phenomenon and its inherent contradiction symptomatic of the want of uniformity in peasant consciousness. For no class or community is ever so monolithic as completely to rule out lags or disparities in its members' response to a rebellion. Some of its constituent groups or individuals are bound to rise to the call of an insurrection more readily than the others. They are also the ones most likely to use some of the public authority appropriated by force in order to mobilize their less militant brethren to the common cause. If this is true even of the most advanced revolutionary classes (e.g. the Russian proletariat on the eve of the October Revolution, as witness the disparity between Moscow and Petrograd workers and that between sections of the Petrograd

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88 Sen Gupta: 105.
workers themselves in their readiness for armed insurrection), it is all the more so of the loosely structured and not so class-conscious peasantry in a pre-industrial society.

Among the latter difference in the degree of militancy between their relatively advanced and backward sections determines the extent to which rebel solidarity is likely to be more or less voluntary. In the event of an uprising it is of course the radical elements who are the first to come forward. In the village, 'the centre and starting-point of all "Swing's" multi-form activities', says Rudé, 'a nucleus of militants initiated action and built up support, by persuasion or intimidation'. And between villages, too, the more militant ones would try, 'by persuasion or intimidation', to rally the others to the standard of the rebellion—Kazirhat calling on Pinjirah, 'We have made an insurrection . . . All Coochwanah are come forth. Do you do the same and join us . . . If you come, it is well; if not you will repent it . . . People are therefore sent to you.' Pressing, in this context, is primarily an instrument of solidarity, that is, of unification and not of punishment. 'One and all, one and all, we'll stand by one another', shouted the Sussex agricultural labourers as they moved from farm to farm in November 1830 pressing those who had not yet struck work. There, as in those other instances cited above, they were using their mass and militancy thus to resolve a contradiction among the people themselves, not between the people and their enemies.

However, in no peasant rebellion does the relation among the people remain non-antagonistic all the time. The peasantry produce not only rebels but also collaborators, informers, traitors. These latter personify the irreducible dregs of a backward consciousness which even the force of an insurrection cannot fully flush out. They stand for the servility, fear of change, fatalism and urge for self-preservation at any price which go with the petty proprietor's mentality everywhere. Peasants themselves, they turn against their class and community at the critical hour and act as the instruments of their own oppressors. And it is thus that a contradiction among the people themselves turns into a contradiction between the people and their enemies. The insurgents are remarkably quick to recognize this. In the

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Peasant War in Germany it was customary for them to mark out the houses of enemies as well as of enemy collaborators by the sign of the pole—a sign of equation, so to say. ‘Those who were not with them’, wrote Zimmermann, ‘were to be treated as traitors to the common cause and a pole was to be placed in front of their houses as if they were enemies.’ This transformation of attitude corresponds directly to the reversal of solidarity into betrayal, and as the Santal tradition of the hool suggests, the antinomy Solidarity/Betrayal constitutes a well-defined element of rebel consciousness:

Then there was yet another hearsay. According to this, any two women who had the same number of children, were to adopt each other as ritual friends. They were also to exchange gifts of clothing and interdine. No one knew why. Perhaps this was done to ensure solidarity through ritual kinship, so that no one might turn traitor in the event of an uprising and so that all messages could be kept secret.

Here, as in so many other domains of Indian culture, what is socially desirable, is helped by ritual to acquire a quasi-religious quality—a sort of ‘spiritualization of politics’, to use a Gandhian phrase, which makes any transgression reprehensible not only in terms of social morality, but the latter compounded by religiosity. Betrayal, thus, becomes a ‘sin’ meriting the severest sanction.

The chastisement of traitors, therefore, figures prominently in most of the peasant uprisings of our period. But who is a traitor? In effect, the notion of betrayal tends to acquire a certain degree of elasticity at the height of a peasant insurrection when the usual thresholds of tolerance are considerably lowered and all neutral markings erased between sharply polarized positions. Under such conditions the insurgents do not often care to discriminate between the various shades of dissidence, non-conformity and downright treachery. All who fail to co-operate with them one way or another, are lumped together as traitors. However, judging from the instances I have come across, betrayal appears in rebel perception to stand for two forms of collaboration with the enemy—passive and active. The former is almost always identified by the insurgents as a negative response on the part of those whose duty it is supposed to

be to participate in the common struggle together with the other members of the group. Indifference, vacillation, fence-sitting are all regarded as tantamount to hostility: the conflict is indeed so acute that anyone not actively in favour of the movement risks being classified as an enemy. The point was clearly made in a poster in Hindi, Urdu and Persian which appeared in Lucknow on the eve of the Mutiny ‘inviting Hindoo[s] and Mussulmans to unite and exterminate all Europeans—some of them as inflammable as language can make them—denouncing all who remain passive as born of the pigs of Europeans, born of crows, despised by the Gods, hated and spat at by all true sons of Mahabbeer Jee, and of Mahomed’. 99 What the hostile correspondent of the Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette saw in this ‘proclamation’ simply as rhetoric, was in fact a statement of the principle by which the rebels distinguished between allies and traitors.

Passive collaboration expresses itself either as a refusal to resist the enemy or as a refusal to join forces with the rebels. Not to oppose the enemy when such opposition is due, is regarded by the insurgents as withdrawal of co-operation from their ‘collective enterprise’ and therefore liable to punishment. Kanhu, the supreme commander of the hool, is known to have led a thousand men including his brothers, Bhairab and Chand, on a raid on two villages where Kowleah, the bandit turned a rebel chief, was captured by the troops and the villagers had done nothing to prevent this. The Santal fauj pillaged these villages and took away some thirty of their inhabitants as ‘prisoners’. The demi-official report of an action by the infantry which then set out in pursuit of the rebels but failed to make contact (although they found and released the captives left behind by the guerilla army in its haste to get away), testifies to the strictly punitive character of Kanhu’s operation. ‘I received intelligence from various quarters’, wrote the British officer in charge, ‘that the Soubah [i.e. Kanhu] had come to Pidra, a place 12 Cos from this. It appears that he marched yesterday with about 1000 followers to Londeeha near Kuturia, both of which villages he plundered, bound and carried off 30 or 40 of the Inhabitants as punishment for allowing Kowleah to be captured.’ 100

99 FSUP: II 7–8.
However, the more usual form of passive collaboration was non-conformity—that is, refusal by peasants as individuals or groups, to join in an uprising. Anyone identified as a traitor in these terms was liable to be subjected to violence in precisely the same manner as the enemy. That the insurgents made no fine distinctions between classificatory foes and real ones on such occasions was clear for all to see in the course of the jacqueries that broke out in the wake of the Mutiny. It was thus that the villagers of Gohand in Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh threatened other villages in the area with plunder if the latter failed to conform to their advice not to pay up any revenue due to the government.\(^{101}\) And in the Gaya region Kunwar Singh was said to be ‘burning all villages which do not join him’.\(^ {102}\) The following case history of an \textit{émeute} involving indigo growers in a Bengal village may help to elucidate the point further.

On May 11th, 1858, about 80 inhabitants of the village of Betai [Nadia district] attacked Mr. A. Hill’s cutcherry in that village, took several papers, wounded a Government peada and chowkeydar, then went to another quarter of the village and plundered there and severely wounded 6 men. \textit{This last attack was made, because the sufferers would not join them against the factory}.\(^ {103}\)

The punishment of dissidents was a part of the experience of the Pabna bidroha, too. One of the most violent incidents to mark its course was a punitive raid by the people of Nakalia, a militant village, on those of Sagtollah, a village which had held back from the movement. The attack, it has been suggested, ‘was an exceptional case where the league was misused for the purpose of intimidation’.\(^ {104}\) Misused by whom? By a couple of designing \textit{ijaradar}s perhaps who had something to gain by stirring up trouble, but not, as the knowledgeable Assistant Magistrate of Sirajganj wrote at the time, by ‘the ryots who executed the design because they [the Sagtollah villagers] would not join the league’.\(^ {105}\) In fact, there is good reason to believe that in acting as they did the Nakalia peasants were being true

\(^{101}\) FSUP: III 626. \(^{102}\) FSUP: IV 464. \(^{103}\) IRC: Appendix 11, Case no. 18 of 1858. Emphasis added. \(^{104}\) Sen Gupta: 56. \(^{105}\) JP(P): Nolan’s Diary (Entry for 2 July 1873).
to a well-established local convention. For some of the cases which came up for trial in connection with the bidroha arose from attacks alleged to have been made on the persons and properties of those who had sided with the zamindars against the unionists.\textsuperscript{106} It did not fail to register on their enemies that the peasants were prevented by no sectarian consideration in dealing with passive collaborators in their midst. ‘When a Hindu ryot of any village refuses to join the rebels’, wrote the \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, ‘his house is plundered. Should the recusant ryot be a Muhammadan, his house is plundered.’\textsuperscript{107} Indeed, it would seem that far from ‘misusing’ the strength they derived from their union it was precisely in applying it as a deterrent against passive collaborators that the Pabna ryots came to join a world-wide tradition of peasant insurgency. ‘At Betwar [Bettberg] in Ostheim’, wrote the historian of the German Peasant War, ‘some refused to join the rebels. Their houses were ransacked’; and in some other areas ‘those who did not join the people’s union \textit{[Volksbund]}, had to pay heavy fines’.\textsuperscript{108}

Active collaboration is also of two kinds in both of which it figures as a replication of peasant subalternity. In the first of these the replication appears as a persistence of the traditional political relationship between the peasant and his enemy—the relationship between servant and master. Since it is the object, in fact the fundamental object, of a rebellion to destroy this very relationship, any member of the insurgent community who chooses to continue in such subalternity is regarded as hostile towards the inversive process initiated by the struggle and hence as being on the enemy’s side. In the villages of Bengal in the nineteenth century a landlord’s authority found its most characteristic expression in his power to extract rent from his \textit{pra}ja. So when in the 1870s and 1880s rack-renting emerged as the focal issue of the anti-zamindari struggles in Lower Bengal and rent-strikes as their principal form, any ryot who persisted in paying rents was liable to be subjected to violence by the

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.: ‘Pubna Riot Case’. See, for instance, ‘remarks’ on cases arising from the complaints of Rohim Molla (Shernagur) and Bainjhaik (Barbala).

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, 25–26 June 1873, quoted in Sen Gupta: 52.

\textsuperscript{108} Zimmermann: I 278.
others as a collaborator. 'The defendants, 30 men, fell upon the house of the complainant [and] assaulted him in consequence of his having paid rents to the zamindars': thus reads the pithy summary of a case that came up before a sub-divisional court relating to an attack by the Pabna bidrohis on the property and person of Shabun Pramanick, a ryot of village Chachkea. 109 Again, in 1881, the peasants of Hoshainpur in Mymensingh 'made unions and maltreated all who sided with the landlord or paid any rent' \(^{110}\) without bothering to distinguish between the two acts of collaboration whatsoever.

The identification of collaborators in these terms represents the limit beyond which the rebels are unwilling to put up with the conditions of their subalternity. This is a critical threshold which acts as an index of the differentiated levels of consciousness at such times and sorts out the peasantry into relatively advanced and backward elements according to the degree of

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\(^{109}\) JP(P): 'Pubna Riot Case'.

their willingness to cross it. We have it on record that during a phase of the civil war in China in 1946 some peasants of a particular village which had been already liberated by the communists and gone through the Land Distribution Movement, were so frightened by a sudden turn in the war in favour of the Kuomintang 'that they secretly sent back to landlord families the property and clothing they had received in the distribution, or they began to pay a little rent for the use of expropriated land'. And the tradition of subalternity reasserted itself with a vengeance not only with regard to rent and property, but along the entire range of attitudes characteristic of the old feudal relations. 'The wife of one village chairman', wrote Hinton to whom we owe this information, 'even hired herself out as an unpaid servant in an ex-landlord's household in return for a promise of protection when the gentry again took power.'\(^{111}\) Collaboration feeds precisely on this tendency of the weaker elements of a rebel community to continue in their submission to landlordism and other forms of enemy authority even when time is ripe for \textit{fanshen}.

The other type of active collaboration involves a somewhat different order of subalternity. This expresses itself not in terms of a continuation of traditional forms of subservience antecedent to the rebellion, but in those contingent on it. Members of the rebel community who act as the enemy's agents are its most typical and notorious representatives. Active collaboration is thus sired by insurgency no less than is rebel solidarity itself and complements the latter both as its twin and its reverse. There is indeed a necessary connection between the two. The stronger the insurgents feel in their solidarity the more pressed their adversaries are to recruit collaborators from the rebel ranks. This is why spies, approvers and agents of various kinds figured so prominently in some of the most vigorous pacification campaigns under the Raj. The meticulously engineered plan to use Man Singh to apprehend his friend and confidant Tatya Tope, the great leader of the Mutiny, shows how cynical and indeed how effective the official promotion of perfidy could be.\(^ {112}\) How-

\(^{111}\) Hinton: 206.

\(^{112}\) For some details of this plan see FSUP: III 558–64 and S. N. Sen: 377–8. One has to read the shocked recollection of this event thirty years later by Lieutenant-General Showers, Political Resident in Mewas State of Rajputana at the time of
ever, in this respect, as in many others, the war waged by the colonial regime on the Santals in 1855 was a dress rehearsal of the other and bigger war of two years later. The impression this policy made at the time on the defeated and demoralized rebels is recorded thus in Jugia Sardar’s narrative of the terminal phase of the hool:

All of us male Santals, that is those already taken captive, were put in custody and removed, one by one, to Dhasnia Rajgram... At that time the European officers gave us all sorts of false assurance. ‘Why must you suffer?’ they said, ‘tell us the names of your Subahs and we’ll let you off straightaway’. So many of our people squeaked and the sahebs arrested the Subahs. Some of those captured thus were hanged on the spot; some others were sent to penal colonies.  

The official inducement to treachery in 1855 was of course much more elaborately worked out than this simple peasant imagined. It originated piecemeal out of the desperate need of the local civil and military authorities to cope with the thrust of a spreading insurrection and was eventually generalized as a part of the government’s strategy for the suppression of the rebellion. The many initiatives which were launched in this process added up to a search for three categories of active collaborators. First, there were the spies. The routine despatches from the area of the uprising offer us occasional glimpses of these sleuths at work—spies sent out on 1 October to find out what happened ‘at a grand meeting of the Santhal Chiefs... held yesterday at Raneebehal’, Sergeant Gillen’s spies watching whether the rebels would actually act up to ‘their intention to loot Raneegaon, Jehanabad, Jypore’ in Birbhum, spies reporting a large Santal force crossing the Grand Trunk Road, information received from a spy about Kanhu’s presence at an important meeting at Kumirabad on 27 October, verifying intelligence received from some spies about the setting up of a rebel camp at Chamoapara, and so on.

the Mutiny, to realize how unethical this policy appeared to be even in the eyes of some of the highest British officials in India. Showers: 146–7.

113 MHRKR: clxxxiii.

114 For these instances see JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Birbhum Collector’s Diary (1 Oct. 1855); JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Bidwell to GOB (Enclosure, 20 Oct. 1855); JP, 22 Nov. 1855: Ward to GOB (30 Oct. 1855); and Richardson to Burney (n.d.) in BDR: 123.
These informers were poor villagers themselves. 'A bill for Contingent expenses incurred by the Collr of Beerbloom in connection with the Sonthal Insurrection' exhibits a total payment of one rupee 'to Kenaram Mal and 25 other informers on account of their diet.' It is possible (though by no means certain) that ethnic solidarity proved firm enough to frustrate attempts made by the authorities to recruit informers from the rebel community itself, which would explain partly at least the poor quality of much of the intelligence they received and their failure to contain the hool by timely interception at an early stage. One wonders whether the obsessive reference to 'Santals spies' in official communications and the large number of prisoners accused of spying for the insurgents were not indeed a measure of the triumph of popular counter-intelligence over the operations of the army in the disturbed areas at the time.

There is no doubt in any case that such counter-intelligence was to prove a serious obstacle for the Raj in its efforts to suppress the uprisings inspired by the Mutiny two years later. The experience of the Magistrate of Saharanpur was fairly typical in this respect. He led a raid on the village of Manuckpur in order to arrest its headman, Umrao Singh, who 'had been very forward, calling himself Raja, and levying money from the

118 JP, 8 Nov. 1855.
119 Ibid.; JP, 4 Oct. 1855: 'Contingent Bill of the Office of Special Commissioner in the District of Beerbloom for the month of August 1855'.
120 There are many references to Santal 'spies' in the official records of the hool. Ward's letter to Grey of 25 September 1855 may be read as a representative sample of the counter-insurgency authorities' obsession in this respect and the summary manner of dealing with this problem. Three Santals 'who arrived as I was leaving Sooree', he reports, 'were headmen who had given up a few unserviceable bows and arrows to Mr. Lock six weeks ago, and had gone out promising in 4 days to bring other Chiefs to Sooree. They evidently had come as spies, and I immediately put them in irons.' (JP, 4 Oct. 1855). For some other examples see JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Richardson's Diary (26 Sept. 1855); JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Ward to GOB, para. 15 (13 Oct. 1855); JP, 20 Dec. 1855: Hawes to Parrott (11 Dec. 1855).
surrounding villages’. The government had declared a ‘large reward’ for his apprehension, and yet, wrote a very frustrated officer, ‘His intelligence was too good for us, and we found the village all but deserted’.118 There was obviously no one ready to sell the insurgent’s head to Spankie for a handful of silver.

The use of rebel prisoners as approvers to denounce other rebels, free or captive, constituted a second category of active collaboration encouraged by the government. It is thus that Gurucharan Das, a non-Santal, described as a Bairagi, earned a place for himself in official correspondence. He had joined in the uprising and was taken prisoner. ‘It might be desirable to make him an approver’, wrote Ward, the Special Commissioner, ‘though I will not recommend the measure unless I find very good grounds for so doing.”119 Whether the Bairagi finally came up to Ward’s expectation and ratted on fellow insurgents, we shall never know. But the same officer’s efforts to find yet another approver is more fully documented. A skirmish between the troops and the Santals on 15 September 1855 near Mahomed Bazar had resulted in the capture of a peasant family of four—Dhona Majhi, his wife Sona who had been shot through the knee during the fight, and their two young daughters, Soomee and Dilgee. Reporting the incident to the Government of Bengal, Ward wrote:

Dhona will, I think, confess. I have ordered him to be kept in solitary confinement and have given him to understand that in 24 hours I shall be prepared to give him some hope of pardon if he chooses to denounce his associates and their leaders.120

Dhona Majhi did not oblige. A month later, on 15 October he and his family were charged with ‘illegally and riotously assembling with offensive weapons for the purpose of plunder and committing a breach of the peace’, and the Sessions Court at Birbhum sentenced ‘Dhuna Manjhee Sonthal to 7 years’ imprisonment with labor and irons; Sona Manjhian Sonthalian to one year’s D0 and to pay a fine of Rs. 50 in lieu of labor—Soonee Manjhian and Dilgee Manjhian Sonthalian each to six months’ imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs. 25 in lieu of

118 FSUP: V 96.
labor'. After the case was reported to him the Lieutenant-Governor ordered Dhona to be separated from the rest of his family and transported to Chittagong jail, that is, as far east (within the Presidency) as possible from his tribal habitat. 121 In this exemplary punishment for a rebel who refused to buy his freedom by turning approver we have yet another instance of the solidarity of the Santals defying attempts to recruit collaborators within their community.

Neither of these forms of active collaboration was as valuable to the authorities as the services rendered by decoys. A few defections in rebel ranks had already by the middle of August 1855 set some of the local army commanders thinking in terms of the use they could make of these breakaway elements in order to apprehend any of the still unrepentant participants in the uprising. 'At Pakour', it was reported, '4 Head men amongst the rebels had given themselves up and promised to bring in others.' 122 And we know of a Captain Birch 'halting at Amrapara negotiating with some of the Sonthal for the delivery into his hands of the rebels'. 123 But it was only after Sido was betrayed and delivered into their hands without requiring any exertion at all on their part that the advantages of this particular stratagem became altogether obvious to the authorities. The incident was reported thus by Major Shuckburgh, commander of a regiment of native infantry, from Camp Gutiari on 20 August 1855:

On our road here yesterday about 3 miles from this a Sonthal Runjunnite Bhugun Manjee of the village Punderha Pergunnah Pusye voluntarily came to me and said he had never joined the Insurgent party and would assist in quelling the insurrection . . .

Shortly after our arrival in Camp a man came in to say that he had got the Head Chief Seedo Manjee bound in cords in a neighbouring village and if ordered to bring him in he would do so. It was done and the celebrated Robber Chief and Rebel is now a prisoner in Camp and will be sent to Bhaugulpore . . .

121 JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Ward to GOB (19 Oct. 1855); Thompson to Ward (15 Oct. 1855); Russell to Ward (25 Oct. 1855); Russell to Officiating Magistrate, Birbhum (ibid.); Russell to Officiating Magistrate, Chittagong (ibid.).

122 JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Lloyd to Military Department, GOI (9 Sept. 1855).

123 Ibid.
The name of the person who brought Seedoo into Camp was Naza Manjee he and the Manjee Bhugun (who joined us on the road) are gone to see if they cannot bring in the other chiefs Kanoo Chundae Byzoo Manjees and Thakoor.124

The practice of using decoys sprouted directly out of this act of treachery. For Major Shuckburgh goes on to say in the same despatch that he and W. J. Money, a civilian officer accompanying him, ‘both think that to advance further at present would be of little use and that it would be better to wait and give time for these Sonthals to capture their Chiefs themselves’.

The idea caught on. Vigorously advocated at the highest levels of the army as well as of the civilian administration, it was soon integrated into the general strategy of suppression of the hool. In its fully developed form this operated as a policy of securing the collaboration of decoys for a two-fold reward. First, it offered various sums of money for assistance rendered to the authorities in capturing the leaders of the insurrection. When Major-General Lloyd noticed that the rebels were ‘ill disposed and disinclined to surrender themselves’ and that this might have been due to the presence in that neighbourhood of their principal leaders, Kanhu, Bhairab and Chand, he felt that ‘perhaps a high reward offered for the capture of the three chiefs might induce their followers to give them up’.125 The reward originally declared by the government was very high indeed—5,000 rupees for the arrest of any of the ringleaders, ‘but as this was considered excessive it was reduced by the Special Commissioner’ to the still quite substantial sums of 500 rupees for the apprehension of Kanhu and 200 for that of each of his two younger brothers.126

The other reward for successful decoys was official pardon. Its terms were rigorously laid down. When the leader of a rebel force operating in the Telabuni area and some other majhis surrendered to the Magistrate of Birbhum in October 1855, the Special Commissioner warned the latter against leniency. These

124 JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Shuckburgh to Becher (20 Sept. 1855). ‘Runjunnite’ refers, presumably, to a follower of Runjit Parganait, a Santal chief who was to surrender later on. JP, 6 Dec. 1855: Lloyd to Grey (23 Nov. 1855). The personal names are all so wrongly spelt in this despatch as to be almost unrecognizable. Read ‘Mazea’ for ‘Naza’, ‘Chand’ for ‘Chundae’ and ‘Bhairab’ for ‘Byzoo’.

125 JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Lloyd to Military Department, GOI (9 Sept. 1855).

rebels were ‘not entitled to pardon on surrender’ unless they agreed to seize and deliver Kanhu, their commander, within a fortnight. ‘The leader must be given up Kanoo Manjee or Thakoor is certainly known to them—and you should insist on his being made over to you.’ Thus reads the stern instruction issued to the Magistrate concerned, and it goes on meticulously to specify the mechanics of betrayal as required by the government:

Of course it will be necessary for you to release some of the men who surrender, for the purpose of bringing Kanoo in but you will first have carefully examined them all and if nothing is said to those, whom you may intend to release for this purpose, till after examination, it will not be difficult hereafter from the account they gave of themselves, their residence &c. to trace them and punish their want of faith, if they do not hold to the conditions on which they were released which should be recorded, a time being fixed within which you will receive the leader Kanoo 15 days would be ample but you will judge for yourself taking the distance of his present residence into consideration.\(^{127}\)

The care for detail in this official advice on the use of perfidy as an instrument of pacification is indeed a measure of the distance the colonial government had traversed since the days of ‘liberal imperialism’. In 1832 Buddhu Bhagat, the leader of the Kol insurrection, was killed not by a traitor’s ruse but in a pitched battle (although it was an unequal encounter between tribal axes and bows and arrows on one side and the guns and sabres of the British colonial army on the other). Yet when a sum of one thousand rupees was distributed among a number of non-commissioned officers and privates as their reward for delivering Bhagat’s severed head to the authorities, the latter were revolted enough to put an end at once to ‘the practice of offering rewards for delivering the insurgent leaders dead or alive, as had been done in the case of Buddhu Bhagat’.\(^{128}\) A far cry that from the no-nonsense administration of a quarter of a century later when a Lieutenant-Governor’s first thoughts on hearing about the arrest of the leader of the hool were to ascertain ‘by whom the original information was given which led to it who the Baboo is who seems to have been immediately in-

instrumental in effecting it and whether he is considered to be deserving of reward for what he has done',\textsuperscript{129} and when an estate, the size of a small kingdom, was the prize awarded by the Raj to a collaborator for double-crossing his friend, a leader of the Mutiny and handing him over for summary trial and execution.\textsuperscript{130}

The official use of decoys was, in 1855, an extension of the military campaign itself as well as a partial recognition of its failure. Major-General Lloyd said this in almost so many words when he observed with some bitterness that large masses of the Santals 'evidently . . . acting under the orders of their Soubahs, Kanoo and his brothers' were still holding out as late as November that year. 'I have little hope of being able to seize these leaders by means of the Troops', he admits and goes on to affirm his dependence on collaborators thus: 'We are endeavouring to secure them by the aid of some of our Prisoners.'\textsuperscript{131} This however proved to be of little avail. When Kanhu was captured soon afterwards, this was achieved neither by force of arms nor by that of deception. (He and a few of his companions fell by sheer chance into the hands of some Ghatwals who made them over to the authorities.)\textsuperscript{132} In fact, nothing happened at all to confirm W. J. Money's prediction, made immediately after Sido's arrest on 19 August, that 'the other Chiefs may be captured in a fortnight or three weeks'.\textsuperscript{133}

To regard this simply as an error of judgement on an individual's part will be wrong. For the administration as a whole and even at the highest level appears to have grossly underestimated the strength of the hool which to many officials

\textsuperscript{129} JP, 6 Dec. 1855: Grey to Bird (5 Dec. 1855).

\textsuperscript{130} Major Meade who was primarily responsible for Man Singh's betrayal of his friend Tatyop Tope wrote thus about the price asked by the traitor for his services: 'I learnt . . . that Maun Singh would do as I wished, but that he was desirous of having Sir R. Hamilton's general assurance of consideration for such a service . . . and that his ambition was to have Shahabad, Powrie or some other portion of the Ancient Raj of Nuswa guaranteed to him in the event of his efforts to apprehend Tantia Topee being successful.' FSUP: III 561.

\textsuperscript{131} JP, 20 Dec. 1855: Lloyd to Grey (28 Nov. 1855).

\textsuperscript{132} JP, 20 Dec. 1855: Bird to GOB (9 Dec. 1855); Eden to GOB (12 Dec. 1855). The authorities trusted the Ghatwals to remain loyal during the hool as they had indeed been during Gangarain's insurrection in 1832. See JP, 15 Nov. 1855: Allen to Grey (31 Oct. 1855). Their trust was not misplaced.

\textsuperscript{133} JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Shuckburgh to Becher (20 Aug. 1855).
including the Lieutenant-Governor himself looked like a short-lived local disturbance.\textsuperscript{184} Barely a month had passed before the Santals appeared to them ‘in a great measure to have abandoned active opposition to the Troops sent against them’.\textsuperscript{185} It was this that led the government to issue, early in August 1855, a proclamation promising pardon for all who would surrender within ten days. Only the leaders of the uprising and those actually involved in acts of murder were not covered by this proclamation which also threatened at the same time to put down all further resistance with the utmost severity.\textsuperscript{186} The aim of this policy of carrots and sticks was, to quote the Lieutenant-Governor’s own words, ‘to give every opening to the misguided mass of the Sonthals to detach themselves from their more able instigators & leaders’\textsuperscript{187}—that is, to encourage defection and treachery in the insurgent ranks. The betrayal of a commander of the hool, coming as it did soon after the proclamation, was, therefore, seen by the authorities as a sign of its success as well as the beginning of the end of Santal resistance.

They had, however, reckoned without their host. For the rebel leaders, on their part, were quick to recognize in this policy a serious threat to the morale and solidarity of their ranks, and Sido’s arrest confirmed their worst fears. Kanhu, therefore, made it known that any positive response to the proclamation would be treated by his side as treachery and therefore liable to punishment. ‘He is aware of these proclamations and kills everybody who offers us assistance or even hints at surrendering’, wrote the same Money on 10 September considerably chastened already by the fact that with all his efforts to make it widely known at Mohanpur and in the neighbourhood of Noni Hat, ‘no one on the force of the proclamation has yet come in to surrender’.\textsuperscript{188} In the weeks that followed the same sort of concern was voiced by some other civilian officers too—even by those of Birbhum where the Santals were said to have been unwilling to fight the troops and about to surrender in

\textsuperscript{184} See the two minutes of 12 & 16 July 1855 by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in JP, 19 July 1855.
\textsuperscript{185} GOB to Bidwell (6 Aug. 1855) in BDR: 194.
\textsuperscript{186} BDR: 193 4.
\textsuperscript{187} JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Minute by Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (19 Oct. 1855).
\textsuperscript{188} JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Money to Bidwell (10 Sept. 1855).
response to the proclamation. In a letter written soon afterwards the Magistrate of that district mentioned some ‘recent reports’ from the daroga of Nungolea saying ‘that the copies of the Government Proclamation issued on the 18th Instant have been treated in the most contumacious manner by the rebels who attribute their circulation to fear and have no intention of yielding themselves’. An entry for 2 October in the Birbhum Collector’s diary confirms this. ‘When the sonthals got the Proclamation’, it reads, ‘they said they would rather be cut in pieces than give in... The Proclamation seems to have been received in all quarters with supreme contempt, many of the copies were torn up and thrown in the faces of those who brought them to the Sonthals.’

It was not long before local intelligence of this kind forced a reappraisal of this policy at the highest level of the administration. A spokesman for the Military Department of the Government of India was soon to observe that the number of insurgents to take advantage of the clemency offered by the proclamation was ‘quite insignificant’ indeed, and ‘by the latest reports the rebellion continues in as great force as ever’, a view corroborated by the Lieutenant-Governor’s own minute of 19 October acknowledging that ‘these [proclamations] though know[n] to be widely disseminated among them [the rebels] have hardly produced any effect & have indeed been generally treated by them as an evidence of the weakness of the Govt. & an encouraging token of the success of the rebellion’. When this admission of failure was followed up, three days later, by yet another of his minutes enclosing a draft proclamation of martial law, it was demonstrated beyond doubt that the solidarity of the rebels had triumphed over the official attempt to lure them into surrender and collaboration.

The history of the Mutiny, too, offers some striking examples of the power of solidarity. Maulvi Liaqat Ali’s rebel government in the Allahabad region collapsed on 16 June 1857 after his

139 GOB to Bidwell (6 Aug. 1855) in BDR: 134.
142 JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Atkinson to GOB (19 Oct. 1855).
143 JP, 8 Nov. 1855: Minute by Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (19 Oct. 1855).
144 Ibid.: Minute (22 Oct. 1855).
defeat in a battle with the British army the previous day. But all attempt made by the restored colonial authorities to gather incriminating evidence—‘to collect real facts and the names of culprits’—was systematically stonewalled by the local people. ‘The residents of this pargana’, complained the officials of Chail, ‘so combined that none was prepared to disclose the facts at the time of enquiry... There is no doubt that the residents of the villages... were accomplices of Liaqat Ali, the rebel, but they have all conspired to hide facts.’ It was decided as a measure of sheer desperation that the inhabitants of Chail pargana as well as of Allahabad city should be punished ‘with fines on account of suppression of facts’. 145 The Proceedings of the Government of the North-Western Provinces for 1859 contain a remarkably candid admission of the failure of the policy to induce betrayal by large pecuniary rewards. It reads:

... the Lieutenant-Governor deprecated the offer of large rewards for leading rebels. During the rebellion notwithstanding the enormous sums that were offered for offenders, there was, His Honour believed, not a single instance on record of one man having been brought to justice by these means. On the other hand, the offer of large rewards gave the proclaimed rebel an exaggerated notion of his own importance and tended to exalt him in the eyes of his followers and of all around him; while the futile offer was significant of the weakness of Government, or at all events that it did not possess the sympathy of its subjects. 146

One can hardly think of a better tribute than this to rebel solidarity!

The insurgents’ defence of their solidarity assumed its most dramatic expression in their violence against active collaborators of all kinds. In this respect the peasant rebels of India were no different from those of any other country. In eighteenth-century England, too, no one who informed against smugglers and poachers could feel altogether secure. 147 ‘The pressure against informing was great.’ A Sussex smuggler who was condemned to death ‘had often said that he did not think it a crime to kill an informer’, and another maintained, even as he was

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144 FSUP: V 551. 145 FSUP: III 609.
146 The instances and extracts in this paragraph are taken from Hay et al.: 144, 145, 166, 198 and Thompson (1975): 143.
being led to the tree from which he was to be hanged, that he 'was not guilty of the murder of which he was accused... though if he had he should not have thought it any crime to destroy such informing rogues'. Poachers, too, 'took measures against informers'. A farmer near Waltham Chase who had informed upon 'King John', the leader of the Blacks and his band of 'Hunters', had his fences destroyed, the gates to his fields thrown open and cattle driven into his standing corn. Such acts of reprisal were by no means the work of these rural 'criminals' alone. 'The informer faced not only direct retaliation by the smugglers but also the open wrath of the entire community.' A man was chased through the streets of Hastings 'for informing against several persons' and in Kent an excise officer and his sleuth were followed by a violent mob armed with missiles and shouting, 'Informers, they ought to be hanged. It is no sin to kill them.'

'No sin to kill them': that seems to have been how the peasant rebels of India, too, felt about spies and all other active collaborators. Even a gwala (cowherd and milkman), a member of one of the groups considered as firm allies, was killed by the Kols for having informed against them. Again, four men found spying for the British in Pasgawan during the very last phase of the great rebellion of 1857–8 had their noses chopped off and one of them was shot dead by insurgents acting on behalf of Khan Ali Khan. Sometimes an entire village was the object of popular wrath for co-operating with the enemy. Nizam Ali, a leader of the Bareilly region in this period, 'intended to make a Chupa [i.e. chhapa, an attack] on Ishurpoor and burn it in revenge for the assistance given by the inhabitants in arresting some rebels in Pootkunea'. The Santals, for their part, subjected collaborators to the utmost violence as well. One of these was so frightened when Kanhu 'sent him word that he will take vengeance on him for giving information', that he promptly sought asylum in the camp of a counter-insurgency official. The rebels also 'swore to revenge themselves upon the families of Doorga Manjee', apparently a collaborator.

148 'Nagpur Trials' (no. 85) in BC 1502 (58893): Master to Reid (22 Oct. 1832).
149 FSUP: II 513.
150 FSUP: V 498.
152 JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Lloyd to Military Department, GOI (9 Sept. 1855).
Harma Majhi of Seetasal who surrendered and 'was sent out to bring in other head men', brought upon himself the swift retribution meted out to decoys. He 'was attacked by the rebels, his village destroyed, and property plundered, he himself narrowly escaping—because he had set such a bad example'. Harma escaped with his life. Another traitor, Bhagna Majhi, did not. His story deserves to be told in some detail if only because it represents in one single episode of the hool all its drama of treachery, terror and counter-terror.

Bhagna Majhi, a Santal of a village called Pindeah in pargana Pusye, was recruited as an agent by the police daroga of Bousee some three weeks after the beginning of the insurrection and introduced by him to W. J. Money, the civilian officer mentioned above. 'I caused letters to be written to him', recalled Money, 'assuring him that [he] need fear no attacks and assuring him that I should be thankful to him for any assistance that he could render'. The assistance rendered proved to be as valuable to the authorities as it was spectacular. On 19 August Bhagna approached Major Shuckburgh as the latter was leading a regiment of native infantry not far from Gutiari and offered to 'assist in quelling the insurrection'. Later on that day he and an accomplice, Majea Majhi, brought Sido 'bound in cords' to the Major's camp. 'The celebrated Robber Chief and Rebel is now a Prisoner in Camp and will be sent immediately to Bhaugulpore', wrote Shuckburgh reporting this marvellous windfall in a despatch the following day. Meanwhile, encouraged by the ease with which they had taken their captive, the two traitors went off for yet another and hopefully larger haul—'to see if they cannot bring in the other chiefs', that is, Kanhu, Chand and Bhairab, too. But they had no such luck the second time. On the contrary, this one act of betrayal did more than anything else to make Bhagna and all other

188 Ward to Birbhum Collector (9 Sept. 1855) in BDR: 137. Also see JP, 27 Sept. 1855: 'Extract from a letter from Mr. Ward . . . 9th September 1855'.

184 The sources for the narratives in the next two paragraphs are as follows. JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Money to Bidwell (6 Sept. 1855); Lloyd to Military Department, GOI (9 Sept. 1855); Shuckburgh to Becher (20 Aug. 1855). JP, 8 Nov. 1855: 'Examination of Sedoo Sonthal late Thacoor' (17 Sept. 1855). JP, 20 Dec. 1855: 'Examination of Kanoo Sonthal'.

186 We have no information at all on the fate of Majea Majhi. He seems to have disappeared from the records and from history. Money's letter of 6 September 1855
collaborators the object of Kanhu’s implacable vengeance. ‘I had ordered that the man who had captured Seedoo should be killed’, he said in a statement after his own arrest; ‘the Gur-riapanee people brought news of this man then Doomun Darogah cut off the head of that man & others who had aided in his capture’. The details of this incident can be pieced together from some of the official correspondence which followed. It appears that on hearing of ‘the services that Bugna Manjee had rendered’ to the authorities, the rebel leaders decided to seize him. They ‘secured his son & kept him as a hostage until the arrival of his father’. It was not long before Bhagna was ‘inveigled’ into Kanhu’s camp and there ‘he was killed by a slow process of crimpling’ on Domon Daroga’s order.

This act of exemplary violence was matched by an equally cruel sequel for Domon himself. An inhabitant of Hatbanda in Lachnipur, he was alleged to have been active in a series of dacoities committed on the houses of some affluent dikus in 1854 under the leadership of Bir Singh, Parganait of Sasan.166 Like Kowleah, another member of the same gang of social bandits, he too emerged as a prominent figure in the hool, the title ‘Daroga’ indicating the relatively senior rank he had come to occupy in Kanhu’s fauj. ‘His name struck terror into the heart of every Sonthal, whether rebel or not, and his death will be a blow to the insurgents’, wrote Money after his murder, indicating, in spite of himself, that Domon must have been more of a menace to collaborators than to rebels if his death was indeed such a loss to the latter. In any case, the action which cost him his life was a punitive raid against a Santal collaborator called Bijnath Majhi, Bhagna’s son-in-law, who had been captured by Kanhu’s sipahis either for refusing to join in the in-

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166 K. K. Datta: 52.
surrection, that is, as a passive collaborator, or simply as an affine of a notorious traitor and hence classified as a traitor himself.187 Rescued by his friends, he was presented to W. J. Money who gave him leave to return home to his family when his house was attacked by a party led by Domon Daroga. ‘To my surprise’, wrote Money in his report on the incident, ‘on the following morning he [Bijnath Majhi] returned ... bringing with him the Head of Domun Darogah.’ Collaborator beheaded by rebel beheaded by collaborator—it is thus that the two sharp movements of an encounter between Solidarity and Betrayal closed on each other in a figure of perfect symmetry.

This is a figure of irony—a ‘representation by the opposite’.158 By feigning to demonstrate an identity of manner between a rebel’s destruction and a collaborator’s it helps on the whole to illuminate their mutual opposition. To regard this opposition as simply a difference of degrees in peasant consciousness would be to miss its specificity. For the contrast between rebel and collaborator is the function of a double displacement. A displacement occurs when a peasant revolts against anyone in the position of a master, and the peasant-servant set free from the traditional coupling of dominance and subordination by the force of this reversal is transformed into the peasant-rebel. This transformation affects not only the militant members of a community but also the relatively backward. When, therefore, any of the latter break away and collaborate with the enemy, a new displacement occurs: the peasant-rebel reverts to the peasant-servant. In other words, since rebellion stands for a positive rupture in the peasant’s relation with his master, it follows that collaboration, child of insurgency and its antithesis, makes sense only as a geometry of transformation, that is, as a displacement displaced.

It is the recognition of this double displacement which alone can help us adequately to understand both the general character and the particular bitterness of the rebel’s hostility towards

187 The source is open to interpretation either way. The relevant passage reads thus: ‘In the mean while Kanoos “Sephis” were scouring the countryside for recruits, killing all who refused to join Kanoos army. Two of these men came to seize Bijnath Manjee a son in law of Bugna Manjee’s and succeeded in detaining him some time.’ JP, 4 Oct. 1855: Money to Bidwell (6 Sept. 1855).

158 Freud: 73, 174.
the traitor. In its general character that hostility is an articulation of class consciousness. It shows that this consciousness has learnt to identify the peasant’s enemy not merely by the insignia of the latter’s authority. For the peasant-collaborator is as poor and powerless as the peasant-rebel himself. He does not command such resources as fields, cattle, granaries, women fattened by leisure, mansions, silks, jewellery, etc., all of which stand for the status of his overlord. When his house is pillaged, as during the Pabna bidroha, it is only a few items of cheap earthenware constituting all his domestic possessions which get smashed up. The insurgents regard him as a classificatory foe not because of his wealth or authority, but because he is the carrier of a corrupt consciousness in their own ranks. Rebel violence functions therefore as a defence of class consciousness against its perversion, as a necessary act of spiritual fratricide in which a brother must be sacrificed for the sake of solidarity. As such it represents the peasant-rebel’s war on alienation within his own class and against his alter ego. A radical if still immature consciousness, it operates, under the sign of Cain, as a class hatred laced with an element of self-hatred. It cannot afford to be sweet and forgiving.