One reason for this emphasis on youth was the understanding that the task of the present generation of revolutionaries was not to make the revolution but to prepare for it. Bhagat Singh looked upon himself as the precursor of the revolution. Revolution would be started only when the ideas of socialism and revolution had gained popularity. Then the masses would make the revolution. Only the youth had the intelligence, the sensibility, the freedom from domestic worries, and the sense of sacrifice and heroism to perform the former task. Hence the primacy of youth in the preparatory phase of the revolution.

Yet another factor made the revolutionary terrorists rely on the youth. The most important form of propaganda, they believed, was "propaganda by deed", or through terrorist and other heroic actions. Their actions did not constitute the revolution but such actions were immediately necessary to prepare for the revolution. Thus they faced a dialectical contradiction. Even before the revolution, which the masses would make, men were needed to perform revolutionary actions. In other words, to arouse the revolutionary tendencies of the masses, people with revolutionary consciousness and with capacity to sacrifice their lives were needed. As it were the lower middle class youth alone filled the bill. But the revolutionary consciousness was, to start with, purely nationalist. And these youth could, therefore, be used mainly for nationalist actions. This was another contradiction that the leaders of the HSRA faced. In theory they had become totally committed to socialism; in practice they could not go beyond nationalism.

IX

The revolutionary terrorists never succeeded in "taking off" politically. They got stuck at what they themselves saw as the first, preliminary step. They failed to get the support of the masses for their party as distinct from getting popularity as hero-figures devoid of distinct ideology and political personality. This is amply testified to by the perpetual and extreme poverty which engulfed them all the time. Nor did they succeed in organizing a single mass revolutionary action or even a minor
armed group action against the Government. Thus their few successful individual political or terrorist actions remained suspended in the air as it were, and, in terms of their own programme, were more or less failures. After all, they themselves viewed such actions as a means of moving the people on to the revolutionary path and of getting wider support and membership for mass revolt and armed struggle. In fact, they could not even find the ways and means of establishing contact with the masses. Consequently governmental action decimated their ranks and they failed to replenish them. Throughout 1930 not a single dramatic “action” could be organized. All the carefully prepared plans of Chandrashekhar Azad came to nothing. Internal squabbles began to divide the heroic band, squabbles which still find their echo in fierce controversy in the Hindi press. The party had to be dissolved and soon scattered into small, rapidly diminishing groups. Even the lion-hearted Chandrashekhar Azad, who had borne repeated blows of fortune with fortitude, began to lose hope, though he went on planning “actions” up to the end. The revolutionary terrorist movement in north India virtually came to an end with his death in February 1931.

The HSRA had failed in its other political aims also. It had come into existence primarily as a reaction to, and in opposition to, the dominant Gandhian leadership of the national movement. In the short period of its existence, it had frontally confronted this leadership and its ideology. One of the aims of their programme of “propaganda by deed” was to wean the masses and youth away from Gandhism. They claimed to be revolutionaries precisely in opposition to the non-revolutionary, compromising leadership of Gandhi. Yet, with all their great popularity in 1929, 1930 and 1931, they failed to provide an alternative leadership to Gandhi. Of course, they failed to achieve their aim of establishing revolutionary socialist hegemony over the national movement or to give it a revolutionary turn. By and large, the national movement remained stuck in the Gandhian grooves.

One of the aims of the HSRA was to popularize the idea of socialism and to spread socialist consciousness in the ranks of the nationalist youth. It does not seem the HSRA achieved much success. The vast majority of their admirers remained
unaware of the depth of their commitment to socialist ideology. This was, of course, partially due to the suppression by the Government of all their writings. Nor was there any other source except the Naujawan Bharat Sabha at Lahore, their own underground distribution of the *Philosophy of the Bomb* (though only once on 26 January 1930), and occasional publication of their messages in the *Tribune* and other papers through which their views could be spread. It was only in the Punjab that the HSRA and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha became, to some extent, carriers of socialist ideas. Their ideas, and the prestige of their sacrifices behind those ideas, could perhaps have become powerful instruments in the spread of a revolutionary socialist consciousness in the later years if the communist and socialist parties had so utilized them. But for some strange reasons, these parties failed to do so.

The immediate objective of the revolutionary terrorists was to spread revolutionary consciousness in the country. Bhagat Singh said to Shiv Varma just before facing the gallows, “At the time of my joining the revolutionary party I thought that if I could spread the slogan ‘Long Live Revolution’ to every corner of the country, I would have received the full value for my life. . . . I think no one’s life can be worth more.” And, undoubtedly, Bhagat Singh achieved this ambition. But the universal acceptance of this slogan and the great admiration that the self-sacrifices and struggles of the revolutionary terrorists aroused in the country cannot be said to have given the nationalist consciousness a revolutionary turn. Undoubtedly, the left movement in the country as well as the peasants’ and workers’ organizations and movements were to make this slogan a battle cry. But as commonly understood, this slogan soon came to symbolize merely the nationalist desire to achieve independence.

The great success of the revolutionary terrorists was in arousing the anti-imperialist consciousness. They succeeded in arousing the country and in winning the love and respect of their countrymen, but for the cause of nationalism. This was no mean success. But the fruits of their success were gathered by the traditional Congress leadership which they had denounced as bourgeois and middle class and which they had hoped to
replace, but which was actually and actively heading the anti-imperialist struggle. In other words, their great and real success came in a field and bore consequences which were very different from those they had desired. This led to an interesting historical paradox. While nearly ninety per cent of the revolutionary terrorists later gave their allegiance to Marxism or communism, their own youthful deeds and slogans became the inheritance of left Congressmen wedded to Gandhian leadership.

Basically, their failure can be expressed in a series of contradictions between their ideology and their work. While in theory they were committed to socialism, in practice they could not go beyond nationalism. While in theory they desired mass action and armed struggle, in practice they could not rise above terrorist or individual action. While in theory they wanted to base their movement on the masses—the peasants and workers—in practice they could only appeal to the urban lower middle class or petty bourgeois youth. While in theory they wanted to create and lead a mass movement, in practice they remained a small band of heroic youth. While in theory their small organization was to serve as a "foco", a cell around which would gather the rising revolutionary forces of the country, in practice they found it difficult and in the end impossible even to maintain the integrity of the original group itself.

Two other aspects of their failure may, however, be kept in view. Their failure was not merely that of not linking their practice with their theory; it was also that of not integrating nationalism and socialism at the theoretical and programmatic plane. In their programme, they hoped to accomplish at one stroke the nationalist as well as the socialist revolutions. Since the historical conditions were clearly not favourable to such a conjunction, in practice this meant keeping the socialist consciousness and the nationalist consciousness in two separate compartments with the result that either the former was subordinated to the latter or it got separated from the latter. This contradiction also took another form. While the leadership of the HSRA was rapidly advancing in its acceptance as well as grasp of socialist ideas, its rank and file remained disinterested in theory and functioned almost entirely at the level of revolutionary nationalist consciousness. 82

Reliance on the radical youth of the middle and lower middle
classes while talking of a revolution of the masses seems to be the historical dilemma of all political situations, programmes, and parties, where a revolutionary situation exists, where the starting of a revolution on howsoever tiny a scale appears to be the only way out of political stagnation, where the time and facilities (legal conditions, etc.) for propaganda and organization do not exist, and where, at the same time, revolutionary consciousness and personnel do not yet exist among the common people either due to political backwardness, official suppression, or prolonged subjection to non-revolutionary political influence. The leadership of the HSRA went wrong in not trying to rapidly change the situation and combine their activity with mass organization and mass revolt or armed action. They failed to develop organized armed action, on howsoever small a scale, against the Government, as distinct from its officials. And this was in spite of the fact that at the theoretical plane the revolutionary terrorists’ approach towards revolution was more correct, and from the beginning they planned to start an armed struggle which would rapidly lead to mass revolt, the overthrow of imperialism and establishment of a socialist republic. But they hardly got the time to put their ideas into practice. Nearly all of them were arrested or killed within a matter of two or three years and even within that period they were constantly hounded by a most stable and efficient administration. One of their major mistakes perhaps lay in thinking that revolution could be initiated by a handful of young men in a period when the bourgeois nationalist leadership yet retained vigour enough to fight against imperialism though by non-revolutionary means.

Another mistake of the revolutionary terrorists lay in the belief that propaganda by deed or by death by daring young men could lead to the creation of a revolutionary socialist movement. This was believing blindly in the spontaneous generation of political forces and even revolution. Only this belief could have made them send their most outstanding leader to take part in a “propaganda by death” deed. But where were the political forces—parties, groups, individuals—in the country which could take advantage of the sentiments released and aroused by their immense sacrifices? In fact, there did not exist even the political mechanism to explain to the people what they
were dying for. On the other hand, they seemed to believe that their sacrifices, accompanied by their death-defying statements, would affect people’s minds, educate them, and lead them to organize themselves. Consequently, their revolutionary thought hardly reached the people. To the people they appeared as simple heroic figures who defied death for their country. They merely generated a nationalist consciousness. The very bourgeois nationalist leadership which they had desired to replace through exposure of its pro-capitalist character harnessed their names and sacrifices to make popular their own brand of nationalism.

This is not to deny that propaganda by deed could be a powerful weapon of political education. But that would be so only when it became a part of an organized movement, peaceful or violent. It was not that the brilliant leadership of the HSRA was not to some extent aware of this elementary political fact. That was why Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan, Ram Krishan, Dhanwantri and Ehsan Ilahi devoted, at one stage or the other, the major part of their energies to the work of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. The only city where the great sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades created a political movement among the left was Lahore, and this mainly because the Sabha was there to build upon their struggle inside the jails. Similarly, Azad and Yashpal made desperate efforts in 1930 to create a political organization which could take their political message to the people. But such efforts were puny and often abortive and in no case matched the immense propaganda by deed.

In a way a profound personal and political tragedy was being enacted at that time. As the socialist ideological horizons of the leadership of the HSRA were being broadened, they could see the correct road ahead. But they were too close to their terrorist past. In fact, that past formed a part of their present for these young men had traversed decades in a few months. When they wanted to make a break, as in the case of the Assembly Bomb Case, they made it within the shell of the old way. Their very commitment to heroism prevented them from making a total break with terrorism. In the last stages, in the latter part of 1930 and 1931, they were mainly fighting to keep the glory of the heroic sacrifice of their comrades under
sentence shining as before. The vision of the coming revolution had receded in the face of the hard knock that the political reality had given them. In the end, one finds Bhagat Singh grappling with the problem of how to convey the correct understanding of politics to the young men outside, without appearing to have reconsidered his politics under the penalty of death. The socialist within him had finally overcome the terrorist. He now desperately tried to convey this change without abandoning the sense of heroic sacrifice which he had imbibed from terrorism.\textsuperscript{84} Outside, Chandrashekhar Azad waited socially for a martyr's death while he made desperate efforts, including virtually begging for the intervention of the non-revolutionary leaders, to save the lives of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru. By then he had realized what their lives were worth. For this exchange, he was even willing to suspend revolutionary action for the time being. At the same time, he sought to send two of the few remaining intellectual members, Yashpal and Surendra Pandey, to the Soviet Union to learn the art of mass organization and revolution-making. For he had realized, as others had done, that the way of the revolutionary terrorists had failed and that broad-based mass movements alone could pave the way to revolution.\textsuperscript{85} This realization was, of course, becoming a part of their consciousness for quite some time now.

X

In conclusion it can be said that the revolutionary terrorists succeeded in arriving at basic elements of a socialist understanding of society, the state, nationalism, imperialism, and revolution. Further and deeper understanding could only come out of the development of revolutionary theory in practice. On the other hand, the total mechanism of revolutionary political action, organization and the role of a revolutionary party escaped them. All the time, however, they kept intact their revolutionary consciousness.
NOTES


5 Yashpal, n. 2, p. 96.


8 See *Tribune*, 26 January 1930.


10 J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, pp. 247 and 391.

11 Interview with B.K. Sinha.


14 Interview with Sohan Singh Josh and P.C. Joshi.

15 J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, pp. 20, 208-09; J.N. Sanyal, n. 6, p. 12.

16 The continuity with the older generation of revolutionaries was always stressed by the younger revolutionaries. See, for example, Sukhdev’s letter in *Young India*, 23 April 1923, p. 82. Similarly Bhagat Singh constantly held up the image of Kartar Singh Sarabha before himself. Shachindranath Sanyal’s *Bandi Jiwan*, Part I, was a virtual textbook in their ideological and propaganda work. Similarly, the Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners made it a point to send a condolence message on the death of Shyamji Krishna Varma. *Tribune*, 8 April 1930.

17 According to Yashpal, Prof. Jai Chandra Vidyalankar and J.N. Sanyal were deliberately kept out as representing the older spirit and the participants in the meeting were determined to have a new aim for their movement and a new path for their organization. See Yashpal, n. 4, p. 145.

18 The important role of ideas in the movement was recognized early in 1925 by the leaders of the HRA. One of the qualifications laid down for a district organizer was: “He must have the capacity to grasp political, social, and economic problems of the present day with special reference to his motherland.” *The Constitution of the HRA*, in J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, p. 341.

19 Yashpal, n. 2, pp 148-49. Ajoy Ghosh is wrong in stating that Azad
did not care much for new ideas. He makes this mistake mainly because he was behind bars in the crucial years of Azad’s growth as a leader. What is true is that Azad accepted the superiority of some other comrades as ideologues and was fully conscious of his limitations in this respect.

21The Philosophy of the Bomb.
22Bhagat Singh’s and Dutt’s statement of 6 June, 1929.
23Bhagat Singh’s and Dutt’s letter to the Modern Review, Tribune, 24 December 1929; Manifesto; Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22.
24Bhagat Singh’s and Dutt’s letter, n. 23.
25Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22.
26Bhagat Singh’s and Dutt’s letter, n. 23.
27Bhagat Singh, quoted in N.K. Nigam, Badidan in Hindi (Delhi, n.d.), p. 41.
28The Philosophy of the Bomb, n. 21.
29J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, p. 338.
31Tribune, 10 April 1929.
32J.N. Sanyal, n. 6, pp 28-29.
33Proceedings of the HRA Council meeting, 1924.
34J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, p. 242.
35Yashpal, n. 2, p. 96; Ajoy Ghosh, n. 2, p. 36. As early as 1924, Lala Lajpat Rai publicly described Bhagat Singh as a Russian agent and complained that Bhagat Singh wanted to “make me into a Lenin.” V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 316.
36Many of them, including Bhagat Singh, might also have been influenced by the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case since they were present in Kanpur at the time.
37J.N. Sanyal, n. 6, p. 15.
38Ibid., p. 103.
40Ibid., pp. 237 and 306.
42V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 196.
43J.N. Sanyal, n. 6, p. 106.
48Quoted in V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 241. It is interesting that Bhagat Singh looks upon himself mainly as a propagator of the ideas of socialism rather than as a great freedom fighter.
49The Revolutionary, published by HRA, 1925.
The Philosophy of the Bomb.

Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22.


Also see Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22.

Tribune, 14 June 1929.

See the Tribune report of the case during 1929-30. See, for example, the Tribune of 6 October 1929.

See Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22; The Philosophy of the Bomb; and the Last Message of Bhagat Singh in Vaishampayan, n. 47.

Furthermore, in their 6 June statement, Bhagat Singh and Dutt referred to the “economic structure of exploiters of whom the Government happens to be the biggest in the country.”

The Philosophy of the Bomb.

Quoted in Gopal Thakur, n. 30, p. 39.

See Vaishampayan, n. 47, part 2-3, p. 304. Also see The Philosophy of the Bomb.

See Mahour, n. 45, p. 10; Yashral, n. 2, Vol. II. pp. 263-64.

Quoted in Gopal Thakur, n. 30, p. 39.

Rules, etc., of Naujawan Bharat Sabha, n. 52. p. 35. Also see J.N. Sanyal, n. 6, p. 25.


Quoted in Gopal Thakur, n. 30, p. 39.

The Manifesto; Bhagat Singh, quoted in Gopal Thakur, n. 30, p. 39.

Quoted in Gopal Thakur, n. 30, p. 39.

Constitution of the HRA, in J.C. Chatterjee, n. 4, p. 342. This seems to have been the result of Shachin Sanyal’s first hand experience of the effectiveness of labour as a political force. See S. Sanyal, n. 2, p. 237.

Home (Political) Proceedings, F. 130 and K.W. (1930), pp. 38ff. And these may be ascribed to the Kirti-Kisan component of the Sabha.

Ibid., K.W., p. 13.

Ibid., pp. 36ff.

Lalit Kumar Mukherjee’s Evidence in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Tribune, 7 December 1929.

Kailashpati’s evidence, n. 65, p. 299.

Bhagat Singh’s and Dutt’s Message to the Student’s Conference at Lahore, Tribune, 22 October 1929; Kailashpati’s Evidence, n. 65, p. 299.

Peaceful and Legitimate, an HSRA pamphlet, Copies of the Exhibits in Lahore Conspiracy Case (II), History of the Freedom Movement, Phase II, Region III, 6/3, Exhibit P.N. Also see Bhagat Singh, etc., n. 22.

Also see an eulogy to youth by Bhagat Singh, quoted in V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 323.


Quoted in V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 238.

See Mahour, n. 45, pp. 27-28; Yashpal, n. 2, Vol. II, p. 262; Inderpal’s and Madan Gopal’s Evidence in the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case; and Vaishampayan, n. 47.

The present writer would agree with Bhagat Singh when he wrote in February 1931 that already before his arrest in 1929 he had abandoned terrorism. See V. Sandhu, n. 2, p. 244.

Ibid.

Mahour, n. 45, p. 117; Nigam, n. 27, p. 104; A. Ghosh, n. 2, p. 31. Frank recognition of their failure and their willingness to choose the alternative path is, of course, a rare example of intellectual and political integrity in the history of revolutionary movements.
Indian National Movement and the Communal Problem

I

The colonization of the Indian economy, society and polity produced many-sided consequences. One was the initiation of the prolonged historical process of welding the Indian people into a nation. Another was the rise of a national, anti-imperialist movement as the central contradiction between imperialism and the interests of the Indian people developed.

The national movement was based on the phenomenon of the nation-in-the-making while it was itself a powerful factor contributing to this phenomenon. Its growing strength depended in part on the extent to which the people became conscious of their being part of a nation whose essential interests required a struggle for the overthrow of imperialism. This consciousness of nationhood—of being a people—did not, however, flow automatically from the objective reality. It had to be a hard, painstaking process in self-discovery in which the anti-imperialist struggle itself would play a crucial role.

But by its very nature, the process of the nation-in-the-

making was, and is, a highly differential process. Moreover, the formation of new social classes and strata and the impact of imperialism on the people also occurred in a differential manner leading to the emergence of a varied relationship between imperialism and the different sections of the Indian society. This resulted in the extremely uneven development, both in time and space, of national and anti-imperialist consciousness among different social classes and strata as well as people belonging to different religions, castes, linguistic areas, etc. One of the major tasks facing the leadership of the national movement was to impart a common national consciousness to the Indian people and to unite them in the common struggle against imperialism.

A major hurdle in this respect was the emergence almost simultaneously with nationalism of communalism. From the 1880s efforts were made to keep the Muslims from joining the broad national movement. The national movement on the other hand set out to unite people professing different religions and, in order to be able to do so, to fight against the divisive communal forces. Its basic strategy in this respect was to have momentous consequences.

II

The central element of this strategy may be described as trying to bring about unity from the top. The primary thrust was the effort to win over the middle and upper class Muslim leaders who were accepted as the leaders of Muslims. Once these leaders were won over, they were to bring the Muslim masses and middle classes into the national movement, thus to produce Hindu-Muslim unity, and to help exert pressure on imperialism to grant political concessions.

A central feature of this strategy was the notion of giving 'protection' and providing 'safeguards' to the interests of the middle and upper class Muslims. Though in theory this protection was to be given to the rights of the religious minority, in the negotiations among leaders it seldom referred to the religious, cultural, or social rights of the minority. Instead, it
constantly hovered around the question of providing guarantees of jobs to the middle class Muslims and a share in the political and administrative power to the Muslim middle and upper classes. For example, the demand was for reserving majority of seats in the Muslim majority provinces for the Muslims and not for adult franchise which would automatically guarantee a larger number of Muslim legislators in these provinces. The question of protecting the economic rights of the Muslim peasants and workers did not arise at any stage, for even the communalists realized that these rights were not separate from the rights of the Hindu peasants and workers.

The efforts to bring about national unity from the top began almost with the founding of the Indian National Congress. At its fourth session at Allahabad in 1888, the Congress passed a resolution stating “no subject shall be passed for discussion by the Subjects Committee or allowed to be discussed at any Congress by the President thereof, to the introduction of which the Hindu or Mahommedan delegates as a body object, unanimously or nearly unanimously.” At its next session at Poona in 1889, the Congress framed its demands for the reform of the Legislative Councils, including the demand for the reservation of seats for the religious minorities in proportion to their share in the total population. The positive aspect of the early moderate nationalist leaders’ approach lay in their simultaneous, scientific effort in the political and ideological fields to make the people aware of their emerging unity, of their common interests in the confrontation with imperialism, and of the need for unity in this confrontation.

Lokmanya Tilak, once he awoke to the need for Hindu-Muslim unity, also followed a similar strategy. He became a major architect of the Lucknow Pact which represented an effort to unite the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League in order to be able to put pressure on the colonial authorities to grant constitutional reforms. The agreement as well as the joint political initiative that followed were not seen as part of the preparation for a mass struggle against imperialism, for neither the leaders of the Muslim League nor the ‘Moderate’ Congressmen could be expected to participate in, or even desire, such a struggle.

Mahatma Gandhi’s unity with the leaders of the Khilafat was the most successful effort at Hindu-Muslim unity in the
course of the national struggle. It was moreover not devoid of the mass element. It was inspired by the motive of bringing the Muslim masses and lower middle classes into the mass non-cooperation movement; and to a certain extent it actually succeeded in doing so. In this respect it was qualitatively different from the premises as well as the consequences of the later effort at Hindú-Muslim unity.

At the same time, the basic aspect of the Gandhian strategy also lay in the promotion of an agreement with the middle and upper class Muslim leaders. It was also found useful and necessary to bring the Muslim Uleman (traditional scholars and divines) into politics to provide religious sanction for the anti-imperialist movement. Above all, for bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity an issue, i.e., the Khilafat, was chosen which had nothing to do with the life of the common people or with the impact of imperialism on their lives. The Khilafat was a popular movement, because of its religious connotation, without being a people’s movement.

Moreover, since the Muslim masses and lower middle classes were brought into the anti-imperialist movement through an agreement with the top leaders and on a religious question, they came into it with their existing consciousness intact. They joined the movement as a matter of religiosity and not for the protection and advancement of their democratic and economic rights. What is even more important, the very terms of this agreement prevented Gandhi and the nationalist leadership from using this opportunity to impart a modern, secular, democratic, and anti-imperialist political consciousness or understanding of social forces to the Muslim masses who participated in the Non-Cooperation-cum-Khilafat Movement. The movement did not even bring before them the aspect of the clash of their economic and social interests with imperialism as had been done earlier by the moderate and extremist nationalists or was being done by Mahatma Gandhi in his non-cooperation agitation. The result was that the mass of Muslims who took active part in the Khilafat Movement remained unacquainted with modern anti-imperialist ideology or the modern principles of political organization such as secularism and democracy. Instead, the intrusion of religious outlook into politics or political problems was legitimised and perpetuated. When the Khilafat Movement
was withdrawn, hardly any nationalist residue was left. At the most a handful sturdy secular nationalists like Maulāna Abul Kalam Azad emerged.

Apart from the Khilafat issue, the Congress adopted some other steps to win over the Muslim leaders. It incorporated in its constitution, adopted at its Nagpur session, 1920, the Resolution of 1888 quoted above. The Working Committee of the Congress went further in 1921 and recommended the principle of reservation of seats for Muslims on the pattern of the Lucknow Pact in all its bodies up to the All-India Congress Committee. Later it advised the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee to extend the principle to the Sikhs also.

Faced with a recrudescence of communalism and communal riots in 1922, the Congress remedy was to form a high level committee first of two leaders, the Congress President, V.J. Patel, and Hakim Ajmal Khan and later of four leaders, including these two and Madan Mohan Malaviya and a Muslim leader to be nominated by Hakim Ajmal Khan, to formulate “a scheme for the settlement of Hindu-Muslim differences”. In 1923, the AICC, meeting at Gaya, asked Dr. Ansari to get a scheme for a National Pact prepared to be circulated for assessing opinion “among leading representatives and influential persons of different communities...”. Thus, the communal problem was to be settled through a scheme or pact between the leaders without bringing in or even educating the people at all. The latter were seen as unfit to discuss or decide such an important matter.

The efforts of C.R. Das in 1923 were equally directed at arriving at a Pact at the top level to provide ‘safeguards’ to the ‘Muslim interests,’ i.e., the interests of the upper and middle class Muslims. Similarly, Motilal Nehru tried to solve the communal problem by negotiating with leaders like the Raja of Mahmudabad.

In fact all the serious Congress efforts at bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity were in the nature of negotiations among the top leaders of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalism and the Congress. Quite often, the Congress assumed the role of an intermediary between the different communal leaders instead of acting as the advance-guard and active organizer of the forces of secular nationalism.
Even the communal riots were met with a similar strategy. Hardly any effort was made to organize a mass political and ideological struggle against the organizers of the riots and the outlook which enabled them to flourish. Even the limited mass mobilization technique of the Non-Cooperation Movement was not attempted. Instead, the political effort was almost entirely confined to settling the immediate communal dispute which might have been used to create a riot in the particular locality. Even this was to be done by bringing the ‘Hindu’ and the ‘Muslim’ leaders together in the liberal style for the signing of a local or national pact. Gandhi’s momentous fast in 1924 on the communal question could produce nothing more than a surface agreement at the top between the leaders of different ‘communities’.

The ridiculousness, inefficacy, and even viciousness of this approach were revealed when unity at the top was sought to be promoted by encouraging the attendance of the ‘Hindu’ leaders at the Muslim League sessions and the ‘Muslim’ leaders at the Hindu Mahasabha sessions. In practice, this meant that they were compelled to listen politely to communal speeches and even abuses from the opposite communalists, letting the iron enter their souls.

III

This unity-from-the-top approach towards the communal issue had certain inherent weaknesses.

Since the top communal or national leaders were accepted as the spokesmen of the Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs, their entire politics and ideology came to be accepted as ‘representing’ the Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs and their interests and behaviour. This willy-nilly led to the recognition and even indirect acceptance of the concept of religious communities in India. It began to be widely assumed that religious communities, such as Muslim community, Hindu community, and Sikh community, existed in real life, that such a community had common history, that its ‘members’ possessed common economic, political, social and cultural, as apart from religious,
interests and could therefore have, as Muslims or Hindus, a ‘common cause’, and that they in fact constituted a distinct ‘society’. The only major difference between the nationalists and the communalists was that the former wanted these communities to unite and fight together as communities against imperialism and the latter to shun and fight each other.¹ Both sides accepted the logic of communalism. The nationalists would then fight for the unity of the communities while the communalists would carry the logic further. The early Jinnah could do both.² Thus the basic communal way of looking at politics, that is, of seeing the basic task of Indian politics not as that of uniting and integrating the diverse Indian people but of uniting the distinctly formed communities and their leaders, was permitted to enter the heart of the Indian political process.

This also produced a few side effects. For example, the communalists were able to freely flit in and out of the National Congress simply by emphasising the Hindu interests at one time and national unity at another. And very secular Congressmen could be transformed into rank communalists in the twinkling of an eye.

This unity-from-the-top strategy contained another built-in mechanism to promote community-wise thinking among the political leaders involved in the Hindu-Muslim unity talks. The entire political position of many of these leaders was due to their being Muslim or Hindu leaders. It is this which made others recognize them as leaders. It is this which enabled them to play in the senior league along with the giants. Consequently, even the best of them found it difficult to rise from the position of a Nationalist Muslim or Nationalist Hindu to that of a simple nationalist. The latter position would suddenly reduce their political importance.

This constant negotiation with communal leaders also weakened the position of the anti-imperialist Muslims who were increasingly forced to think and act as Nationalist Muslims. Men like Abul Kalam Azad and Asaf Ali, i.e., simple nationalists, increasingly became a rarity.

The unity-from-the-top approach could have had one political or historical justification. It could be used as the entry point to the minds of the non-political masses for beginning a campaign for the clarification of the political, including the communal,
issues. Or if the general atmosphere of communal amity among communal leaders was immediately utilized to launch a powerful attack on the communal outlook and ideology. But nothing like this was done. The unity at the top was seen as the acme of political achievement as well as the end of political action in respect of national unity. An agreement between Malaviya and Jinnah or between Lala Lajpat Rai, Dr. Ansari, and Sardar Mahtab Singh or at an all-parties conference including all the communal leaders and parties was seen as the maximum programme.

IV

A basic weakness of the traditional national leadership’s approach to the communal problem arose from the nature of the anti-imperialist struggle which was neither continuous, nor consistently opposed to compromise with imperialism, nor did it involve the common people in continuous political activity. In fact its tendency to compromise with imperialism and to pull back the masses from struggle was a major factor in the repeated recrudescence and growth of communalism. After all, the basic common interests of the Indian people and, in fact, their very homogeneity arose largely from the needs of the anti-colonial struggle and economic and social development and from the common class interests. Their consciousness of common interests, consciousness that would override religious, caste, and linguistic divisions, could be developed and strengthened only through their common struggle against imperialism and for their class interests. The nationalist forces had precisely in this respect a distinct advantage over the communalists. The nationalist forces, whether represented by the Congress or by the left groups and parties inside or outside it, were objectively anti-imperialist and could therefore draw to themselves all anti-imperialist sentiments, movements, and people. On the other hand, precisely in their link with imperialism and their refusal to fight it militantly lay the weakness of the communal forces, especially after 1937 when the colonial authorities extended all-out support to the communalists. By
continuous mass confrontation with imperialism, it was certainly possible either to expose the communal forces or to draw them into the main anti-imperialist stream and thus to corrode their communalism as well as their influence over the masses.

A look at recent history provides interesting data in this respect. It is then seen that communalism receded whenever the anti-imperialist struggle was at high tide, while it surged forth when this struggle was at an ebb.

As the anti-imperialist movement picked up during the First World War with the rise of the Home Rule Leagues on the one hand and the armed struggle of the Ghadarites on the other, the pro-imperialist communal forces suffered a relative decline. The years from 1918 to 1922 were the halcyon days of both the anti-imperialist struggle and Hindu-Muslim unity. The influence of Muslim League and other communal groups was minimal. In fact, none of them possessed a mass base at the time even among the lower or middle classes. The communalists became active only after the anti-imperialist movement was called off. It was the frustration and discontent born out of the sudden petering out of the movement that created favourable ground for the rise of communal bitterness. The Government and the propertied classes could now succeed in giving a communal colour to the incipient and incoherent struggles of the masses to improve their lot. Moreover, it was the acceptance of parliamentary politics after 1922 that produced a horde of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' leaders both from within and without the Congress ranks. Even so, the afterglow of the Non-Cooperation Movement was strong enough to keep communalism confined to a handful of leaders with their social base narrowly confined to sections of middle and upper strata of society. The possibility of making a breakthrough on the communal front continued to exist through the 1920s in spite of the communal riots.

The rise of the left after 1926, the growth of trade unions and the youth movement, and the anti-Simon Commission protest movement once again enthused the masses and reduced communal tensions. The Second Civil Disobedience Movement swept the entire country. Unlike the earlier movement from 1920 to 1922, the people took part in it as Indians and not as Hindus or Muslims with their separate grievances. The communal parties and leaders were made to look for cover. In fact
many of them either joined the movement or at least supported it or went into virtual political retirement. Till 1931-32, the Muslims participated actively in the movement. In fact the national movement engulfed for the first time two new major areas with a Muslim majority—the North-Western Frontier Province and Kashmir. Similarly, the Mewatis (Muslims) began to struggle against the Maharaja of Alwar. Moreover, increasingly the Muslim as well as Hindu youths and workers, and in many places peasants, looked up to the Communists, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha of Bhagat Singh, and Nehru and Subhash Bose for a political lead.

The suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931 and the policy of negotiating with the colonial authorities once again enabled the communal leaders to appear on the scene. It was now that the colonial authorities declared communalism to be the major political issue which must be settled before constitutional advance could be made. They gave handpicked communal political leaders free run of the First Round Table Conference. Unfortunately, the Congress leadership looking for political advance via a compromise with imperialism readily, though unwillingly, fell into the trap.

The Civil Disobedience Movement was, however, soon resumed, and the communalists did not get an opportunity to grow till its defeat and withdrawal in 1933-34. Even so, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, the most openly communal organizations, remained quite weak till 1936. Within the League, the feudal, unashamedly communal, and pro-imperialist elements remained in a small minority till 1932; and a large number of Muslim League leaders were friendly to the Congress. Even in the period 1934-37, when the Congress fought elections to the central and provincial legislatures with the commitment to fight the official reforms and the Government of India Act of 1935 and the perspective of the resumption of the militant mass anti-imperialist struggle, the communal forces remained weak and could not grow. They were also afraid during this period of appearing to be anti-Congress lest they should be branded as pro-imperialist. No Congress-League or Hindu-Muslim bitterness marked the elections of 1937. Nor did the League do well in the 1937 elections either in seats or in votes or in territorial spread. It failed to get much support in the Muslim majority
provinces. It won only 108 of the total of 482 seats reserved for Muslims in the provincial assemblies. Of the 7,319,445 Muslim votes, only 321,722 voted for the League candidates. It thus failed to gain the support even of the Muslim lower and middle classes. In other words, the communal division did not yet play an important part in Indian politics.

It was only during and after 1937 when on the one hand, the Congress accepted office under the new Government of India Act of 1935, got reduced to a parliamentary party, gave up the perspective of mass anti-imperialist struggle except in the distant future, and even inside the legislatures pursued bourgeois-landlord politics rather than anti-imperialist, pro-worker, pro-peasant, and, in general, pro-people politics and, on the other, the growing left failed in practice—as distinct from theory—to pose an alternative to the strategy of the Congress right wing, that the communal forces were able to come into their own and to get ready for a leap forward.

However, the actual leap forward of the Muslim League as also of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh in the North occurred only after 1942 when the Quit India upsurge, during which, it is to be noted, there was no communal trouble in spite of the League's strong opposition to the movement, had been suppressed, the Congress leadership lay quiescent inside jails, the Communists had failed to become the spearhead of anti-imperialism and popular movements under a mistaken notion of how to support the international anti-Fascist War, and the Indian upper, middle, and lower middle classes had abandoned all politics in order to reap the war-time harvest of jobs, contracts, and high profits.

V

Another basic weakness in the nationalist approach to the communal problem was the failure to organize a consistent and principled fight against communalism in general and Hindu communalism in particular. This aspect had several dimensions.

The Muslims were a religious minority in India. The Muslim masses, middle classes, and intellectuals were constantly kept
aware of this fact by the imperialist writers, administrators and statesmen and the active communal leaders, both Hindu and Muslim. They lived in a situation where a small but vocal Hindu communal element was constantly preaching Hinduisation of the country and equating national liberation with this and other similar objectives. Consequently, they were afraid not only of being oppressed and suppressed but also of being gradually submerged.

In this situation, a secular and united nationalist movement could be built only on the basis of an active struggle against the communalism of the religious majority. On the other hand, any softness towards it was bound to arouse misgivings, however unreal, among the minority, thus enabling the Muslim communal leaders to find an opening among the Muslim masses and intellectuals.

The dominant Congress leadership of the national movement was undoubtedly secular and free of religious narrow-mindedness. It carried on active propaganda and even movements in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity. At many crucial moments, it refused to appease the Hindu communalists. At no stage, however, did it launch a frontal political and ideological attack on Hindu communalism.

The starting point of this attack had to be the recognition of the fact that communalisms of the majority and the minority would not assume the same shape or ideology; they were bound to be different in form even while being the same in content. Because of its very minority-character, the minority communalism assumes an openly sectional, narrow, undemocratic and divisive approach and it has to talk of ‘minority safeguards’ and the like. The majority communalists, on the other hand, know that the democratic principle of majority rule can give them the opportunity to implement their programme of cultural, religious, and social domination and the capacity to corner jobs and other economic opportunities for their middle and upper classes. This is all the more so if those classes are relatively more advanced. The majority communalists can, therefore, safely assume the nationalist garb and talk of the high principles of democracy, equality of opportunity, competition of merit, etc. While the Muslim communal nationalist had perforce to take up the position that he was a good nationalist but that at
the same time he wanted to safeguard ‘Muslim rights’, the Hindu communal nationalist need not take up openly communal positions for he could assume that ‘Hindu rights’ would be inevitably protected by the majority principle.  

The nationalist movement had therefore to refuse to accept such a simple point of demarcation between a nationalist and a communalist as adherence to national or sectional demands. Not all those who accepted nationalism were secular; many were harbouring to a lesser or greater degree communal thoughts and loyalties and were sometimes as much penetrated by communal loyalty as an openly communal Muslim. In other words, a Hindu communalist would not look like a Muslim separatist. He was more likely to be talking of national unity and mutual trust. But he might be as viciously communal. The nationalist leadership had therefore to probe deep into the ideology, psychology and the political approach of the Hindu communalists. It had to see the Hindu equivalent of the Muslim League not in the Hindu Mahasabha and thus preen itself on having kept Hindu communalism weak, but inside its own ranks where a large number of Hindu communalists of various hues and degrees were to be found. Without a struggle against this brand of Hindu communalism, masquerading as nationalism, it was not possible to fight against Muslim communalism, which, by the very nature of the case, would be outside the ranks of nationalism.

Instead of doing this, the Congress leadership permitted openly communal elements or those whose ideological and political make-up contained a large dose of communalism to join the Congress and even occupy positions of leadership in it from the local to the All-India plane, or otherwise to acquire and retain the reputation of being nationalists without any repudiation by the Congress or other nationalist leaders. Such communal nationalists, to coin a new phrase, often left the Congress and even opposed it politically. But soon after they would be re-admitted into the Congress leadership without any self-criticism or disavowal of their recent politics or recent or even current communal ideology. A few instances may be cited.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya freely sailed between the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. As late as 1934 he could
represent Hindu communalism at the Second Round Table Conference, and yet come back in 1932 to become the President-elect of the annual Congress session; and in May 1934, the AICC could ask him and Dr. Ansari to form a Congress Swarajist Parliamentary Board to fight the elections for the Central Legislature. In the Punjab, Gopi Chand Bhargava was one day a Hindu communal representative in the provincial assembly and the next day a Congress and Gandhian leader. Both in the Punjab and Bengal, many a Congress leader had no difficulty in simultaneously championing the ‘Hindu cause’ in respect of jobs or constitutional discussions or communal riots. After 1922 many of the nationalists openly took up communal causes and joined their respective communal organizations; yet they were soon adorning the Swarajist benches in the legislatures. In 1926, Motilal Nehru complained at the Gauhati Session of the Congress against his communal nationalist critics:

There has been a veritable rout of the Swarajists... But this was not because they were Swarajists, but because they were Nationalists... It was a fight between the forces of Nationalism and those of low order of communalism reinforced by wealth, wholesale corruption, terrorism, and falsehood. ‘Religion in danger’ was the cry of the opponents of the Congress, both Hindu and Muslim. I have been freely denounced as a beef-eater and destroyer of cows, the supporter of the prohibition of music before mosques, and the one man responsible for the stoppage of Ramlila processions in Allahabad.... Staying in Dak and Inspection bungalows, and eating food cooked in European style, was taken to confirm the lying propaganda.

Yet, very soon after, he and his communal critics were marching in step in the freedom struggle!

It is also important to note that the lead in organizing the Shuddhi and Sangthan movements was taken by leading Congressmen and other nationalists. Other Congressmen followed suit by taking active part in the organization of the Tablig and Tanzim Movements. The Congress leadership condemned neither. After a great deal of debate, it came out
only against the use of coercion in their activities.

Similarly, many nationalist newspapers functioned as whole-time nationalist and part-time communal organs. For example, the *Tribune* of Lahore had the widely accepted reputation of being a nationalist organ. But it also constantly agitated for greater Hindu share in Government jobs, assembly seats, etc., and openly adopted a 'pro-Hindu', that is, Hindu communal, attitude on communal riots, etc. This was also true of the *Leader* of Allahabad and the *Anrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta. Even the *Hindustan Times* was not willing to disown the Hindu Mahasabha in spite of its association with Mahatma Gandhi and G.D. Birla.

It was very difficult for the Muslims to distinguish between the two different roles of such newspapers and individuals or between the constantly interchangeable nationalist and communal phases in their lives. A rich crop of bitterness and the widespread belief in the hypocrisy of the nationalists were the inevitable results.

Many a Congress leader also combined in himself the roles of a nationalist leader and the propagator of his religion or at least of its reform. While in theory it could be maintained that there was nothing wrong in a person being a good Indian and a good Hindu or a good Muslim, in practice this could apply only to their personal lives. It was not possible nor therefore desirable to have such dual public roles in a multireligious country where communal elements were active with the full backing of the Government. This invariably spread confusion among the people which was freely utilized by the communal leaders.

It should also be noted that even apart from communal nationalist like Madan Mohan Malaviya, N.C. Kelkar, Aney, and the post-1922 Lajpat Rai, communal thinking had penetrated deep into the Congress ranks. Many among the front rank Congress leaders were suffering from communalism to a certain extent. This was to prove quite a disaster when some of them, for example K.M. Munshi, became Ministers in the provinces in 1937. Nor was the political behaviour of Sardar Patel in 1947 a sudden and momentary aberration. It had deep historical roots; and not only in his personal history.

One peculiar example of the penetration of communal ideology into the nationalist ranks was the wide prevalence of
the communal view of Indian history, particularly in its subtler forms. Many of the Congress leaders openly spoke and wrote of India having suffered under foreign rule for a thousand years, and of the sharp decline of Indian society and culture under ‘Muslim rule’. A panegyric view of ancient Indian society, polity, economy and culture was virtually considered a basic element of nationalist ideology. Nearly all the Congress leaders joined in the glorification of Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, and Guru Gobind Singh as national heroes who had ‘fought for freedom’ against ‘foreign rule’. Leaders and writers like Seth Govind Dass made into heroes every little Rajput or Bundela zamindar who had fought a battle against a Muslim Faujdar, Subedar or Chieftain. Similarly, many Congress leaders took up the cause of Hindi not so much against English as against Urdu and propagated it not on grounds of democracy and democratic culture but on openly communal grounds. Urdu was branded as a foreign language and as the language of the Muslims, while Hindi was praised as the language of Hindus.

The Congress and the national leadership also failed to organize a campaign against the social and cultural taboos, exclusiveness and narrowmindedness practised by the Hindus in their relations with the Muslims. True, this was not a causative factor in the rise of communalism because for centuries these had not been seen by the Muslims as forms of discrimination. There was no racial or superiority complex involved in them on either side. They were just a matter of religion. But it should not be forgotten that their form was entirely social. The result was that once communalism started burgeoning forth, though for other reasons, these taboos, etc., were used by the Muslim communalists to spread anti-Hindu feelings among the Muslim lower middle classes and to stoke the fires of communal hatred. It was essential at this stage to fight and overcome these social taboos, particularly their discriminatory aspects. The failure of such a struggle was particularly surprising because very similar struggles were being waged in the case of similar taboos and discriminations against the Harijans and women. In part at least, it may be suggested, this failure was due to the wide prevalence of socially reactionary ideologies in the nationalist ranks.
This soft policy towards the communal nationalists and the communal ideology became a major barrier in the national leadership’s efforts to solve the communal problem through negotiations at the top. There were perhaps many objective factors which would in any case have in the end led to the failure of this entire approach. The active support of the colonial authorities to the communal leaders and parties was one such factor. Another was the close link between the communalists and the vested social and economic interests. But whatever chances of success the approach had and, even more, whatever chances existed of using these negotiations to expose the Muslim communal leadership before the Muslims were marred by the failure of the Congress leadership to stand up firmly against the pressures from the Hindu communalists within and outside its own ranks. After all, the entire logic of negotiating on ‘communal safeguards’ lay in the recognition of the fact that a minority, however constituted, was bound to have some fears, however irrational and lacking in objective basis, of being oppressed and suppressed by the majority. Furthermore, the entire efficacy of this approach of negotiating at the top would lie in the adoption of a generous approach by the majority so that gradually the irrational fears may disappear in the light of real life experience. A leadership should not even try to negotiate on ‘communal safeguards’ if this generosity was not to be shown. It should then adopt a different approach. It was suicidal to follow this game and then not obey its rules. But this is precisely what the Congress leadership did under the pressure of Hindu communalism.

The entire history of Hindu-Muslim and Congress-League negotiations illustrates this criticism. For example, the nationalist leadership fully recognized that the separate electorate was playing havoc with the middle-class-voter-based politics of India, and that its replacement by joint electorate was absolutely essential for the healthy development of Indian politics. In fact, in the political conditions of the 1920s and 1930s no political sacrifice was too big to make to arrive at such a consummation. Yet several times when the Muslim communalists accepted joint electorate in return for other concessions, the Congress leaders failed to clinch the issue because they were not willing to override the Hindu communal opinion. Thus at least three such chances—
in 1927 in the course of discussions on the Nehru Committee Report, in 1931 at the Second Round Table Conference, and in 1932 at the All Parties Unity Conference—were missed. In fact, in 1932, the British Government was so perturbed by the likelihood of an agreement on the question of joint electorates that it announced its own Communal Award, accepting virtually all the demands of the Muslim communalists while retaining separate electorates. The only other safeguard that the Muslim communalists could now ask for was a separate polity; and they now started on that road through the intermediate stage of asking for a weak Centre.

Both the national leadership and the Hindu communalists now revealed another interesting characteristic: what they would not concede to the Muslim communalists, they would accept willy-nilly and without any struggle when decreed by the colonial authorities, thus letting the Muslim communalists stay and prosper in the lap of imperialism.

One more consequence of this failure of the national leadership to fight against Hindu communalism and Hindu communal nationalists within its own ranks may be pointed out. It was compelled to show similar 'liberalism' towards the Muslim and Sikh communalisms. Moreover, instead of promoting a sturdy, secular nationalism among its Muslim followers, it was compelled to rely on, and in fact even promote, Nationalist Muslims who gradually acquired a vested interest in this brand of nationalism. They were undoubtedly nationalists but their political importance also depended on the fact of their being Muslims and Muslim 'representatives'. Sturdy nationalists like Abul Kalam Azad rapidly became an anachronism in this situation. A permanent hostage was given to communalism in the country; and the Congress leadership dared not wage even a friendly struggle against communal nationalists, whether Hindu or Muslim. The secular principle was observed by letting the nationalist Muslims work freely in the Muslim League as the Hindu nationalists had been permitted to do in the Hindu Mahasabha.

Apart from the ideological factor, the failure of the Congress leadership to actively struggle against Hindu communalism was closely linked to its policy of parliamentarianism and its middle class social base. The colonial economy created, especially in
the 1930s, a situation of extremely poor economic opportunities and increasing unemployment for the middle and lower-middle class Indians who were compelled to compete with each other for the scarce opportunities and resources. Even those whose political views extended to the overthrow of imperialism in the long run had to look to their own maintenance in the short run. In the absence of a powerful anti-imperialist movement to inspire them, the middle classes found that communal and other sectional considerations could play an important role in their getting a share of the shrinking national cake. Consequently, not only the Muslim but also the Hindu middle classes were inclined towards communalism.

The Congress leadership could to a certain extent ignore the middle classes in the course of its anti-imperialist campaigns by relying on the masses and the momentary enthusiasm of all the people. But when it came to elections to the legislatures or the local bodies, the masses had no votes and reliance had to be placed on the communal minded lower middle and middle classes among whom the communal leaders, especially those who had the reputation of being simultaneously nationalists and the guardians of ‘Hindu interests’, had a great deal of prestige. The separate electorates made this dependence doubly binding on both the Hindu and the Muslim candidates. The penalty for opposing communal nationalists was paid by the Swarajists through their crushing defeat in the election of 1926 in the Punjab and U.P. and the general loss of ground in the country as a whole.

It was therefore not fortuitous that even sturdy nationalists were afraid of having a frontal confrontation with leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya or of overriding the Hindu communal opinion in the Hindu-Muslim unity conferences and constitutional discussions even when in private they totally disagreed with this opinion. Adult franchise and joint electorate alone were to free those who seek elections from this constrain. But the habits acquired over decades still persist. Moreover, the lower middle, middle, and upper classes, still living in the midst of economic backwardness, are even today prone to communal and other divisive appeals and ideologies, except in a few areas like Bengal where the left is strong.
Jawaharlal Nehru was one Congress leader who was able to see with great clarity the basic weaknesses of the Moderate-Tilakite-Gandhian strategy of solving the communal problem through an agreement at the top. His writings on the subject from 1934 to 1939 have a freshness of approach and contain deep insights. His was also one of the first efforts to apply the Marxist approach to the problem. He was able to clearly see that national unity should be a unity between the masses and not an artificially arranged marriage of convenience between the leaders.

During 1936-37, he used his recently acquired strategic position inside the Congress to block the efforts to arrive at a patchwork unity with the leaders of the Muslim League. To such efforts he counterposed the alternative political line of militant anti-imperialism, refusal to fall into the constitutional trap, politics based on the masses, and the direct winning over of the Muslim peasants and workers through direct political work among them on the basis of their class demands, thus not only bypassing the middle and upper class communal leaders but also exposing their pro-feudal and pro-capitalist bias. This was especially important because the colonial authorities and the communal leaders gave a communal colouring to most of the class and social contradictions in the country. To implement his political line, Nehru proposed the boycott of the Government of India Act, 1935, and refusal to form provincial ministries under it, direct affiliation of the workers’ and peasants’ organizations to the Congress, close cooperation with the Congress Socialists and the Communists, and a Muslim Mass Contact Programme.

But this programme never took off. It crashed even before it got off the ground. The only thing he could save from the debris was his pilot’s uniform and the badge of captaincy. The Congress assumed office in the provinces during his presidency of the Congress. The direct affiliation of peasants’ and workers’ organizations to the Congress was rejected out of hand by the Congress right. The Congress Ministries failed to
follow distinctly pro-peasant and pro-worker policies. On the other hand, in many provinces, for example, the Punjab and Bengal, the local Congress leadership adopted a pro-landlord and -moneylender stance. The Muslim Mass Contact Programme was never seriously undertaken, for it could not be undertaken without a radical agrarian programme and pro-labour and pro-artisan policies in the towns and cities.

Given the bourgeois outlook of the dominant Congress leadership, all this was inevitable. On the other hand, Nehru’s approach to the communal problem proved to be a complete failure because of its very impracticability. His radicalism blocked the path of negotiations and compromise at the top, which was in the end adopted with disastrous results in 1947, but which might conceivably have done less damage in 1937-39. At the same time, he and the left were either too weak inside the Congress or outside it to implement a mass line on the question or unwilling to go into the political wilderness in trying to do so. For example, Nehru rightly opposed the acceptance of the Muslim League claim that it was the sole representative of the Muslims but he failed to take active political and organizational steps to prevent such a claim from becoming a reality. He rightly said that the Congress should deal directly with the Muslim masses. But he failed to establish such direct contact. The Congress lost flexibility at the top without gaining any new ground among the Muslim masses. And this happened at a time when the Muslim League and the colonial authorities, having been thoroughly frightened by the Congress victory in the 1937 elections, by Nehru’s radical thunder and the rapid growth of the left, were manoeuvring furiously and brilliantly both at the top, by incorporating the nationalist Muslims of U.P., the Unionists of Punjab and the Krishak Praja Samiti of Bengal into the League, and at the lower levels by giving the League a radical and even anti-imperialist image. The result was that Nehru wounded the upper class Muslim communal tiger without pulling out its teeth. The price had to be paid within the period of a decade. The fact is that a political line which is not backed by concrete political action is at best irrelevant and at worst a disaster.
The reality of Indian politics was that there could be no solution, whether radical or conservative, to the communal problem within the framework of the existing nationalist politics. Only strong left-wing and mass-based politics could have provided this. Such politics did not, however, exist; and a short cut could not meet the situation.

Not all historical situations have an instant solution. To look for such instant solutions while ignoring the past and the present interconnections is to indulge in futile romanticism. Conditions and forces for a solution have to be got ready over a number of years and even decades. Moreover, nations and societies are sometimes placed in a situation in which their problems cannot be solved piecemeal, however hard may men of good-will desire to do so.

In India, the colonial economy and polity had created a situation in the 1930s where its social, economic, and political problems cried out for a simultaneous and radical change—a veritable revolution. Nehru had glimpses of the reality. Unfortunately, he and the left failed to grapple with the total situation.

The situation is, however, still with us, as the spate of communal, regional, linguistic and caste riots shows. The price of the failure to tackle the politics of colonial rule and underdevelopment at their roots was paid by the partition of the land into two in 1947. The unity of the Indian people in the phase of the failure of underdeveloped capitalism can be now maintained only by making a socialist revolution. In a rather profound sense, it can be said that the partition of 1947 was due to the failure of the Indian people in having failed to develop peasants’ and workers’ organizations and a powerful socialist movement. Let history not repeat itself!

NOTES

3The impact of this approach has been all pervasive. Today even some of the most secular persons readily talk of the Hindu or Sikh or
Muslim community existing, thinking, feeling, etc. In fact the very use of the term is unscientific and means partial, though unconscious, acceptance of the communal approach.

Thus Jinnah could claim in 1924 that his aim was "to organize the Muslim community, not with a view to quarrel with the Hindu community, but with a view to unite and cooperate with it for their motherland." He was sure that "once they had organized themselves they would join hands with the Hindu Mahasabha and declare to the world that Hindus and Mohammedans are brothers".

As W.C Smith has pointed out in his Modern Islam in India: "The Movement was a mighty effort of a people struggling to be free; and it showed that, when engaged in that struggle, the people, without being united in religion, were quite capable of being united in political ideals and in action. They worked, fought, and suffered together; with gladness."

In fact, one of the most surprising aspects of Indian political development was, and still is, that the Hindu communalists were not satisfied with this position but tried to create a minority-type psychology of fear among the Hindus, holding up before them the nightmare of Muslim domination unless they united separately as Hindus. To make the nightmare look plausible the prospects of Indian Muslims being aided by Afghanistan, Iran, and Arabia were seriously discussed.

This aspect was clearly visible to some of the political leaders of the 1920s and 1930s. For example, Chaudhary Khaliquzzaman, who was a Nationalist Muslim at the time, wrote in September 1934 to Dr. Ansari: "If Malviyaji and Aney can claim to be nationalists, I think every communalist Muslim who honestly fights for the rights of his community without making it a cloak for official favours and personal gain from the Government is a nationalist."

Gandhi's strategy had at its best brought in millions of Muslims as active participants in the Non-Cooperation Movement; Nehru's strategy, because of his inability to work out its implementation, achieved nothing. Under the Gandhian leadership, furious and continuous attempts were made to solve the communal problem through negotiations at the top; Nehru set the tradition, which was also followed after 1947, that if only we ignored communalism, abusing and ridiculing it occasionally, the spectre would somehow get exorcised.
Lord Dufferin and the Character of the Indian Nationalist Leadership

In his private correspondence, in the famous minute dated 6 November 1888, and in the St. Andrews Day Speech on 30 November 1888, Lord Dufferin repeatedly characterised the emerging Indian national leadership as representing "only an infinitesimal section of the people" and being "a microscopic minority". He also asserted that this leadership was indifferent and even hostile to the true interests of the masses. As proof of the first assertion, Dufferin took recourse to a bit of sociology. He declared that the Indian society was divided into classes and in fact sharply antagonistic classes. But he did not take recourse to such orthodox categories as zamindars, merchants, industrialists, British capitalists, bureaucrats, or even the castes, not to speak of Indians and foreigners. Instead, he discovered that the Indian society was horizontally divided between the educated 'Babus' and the uneducated masses.

As proof of the second assertion that the nationalist leaders, who were usually referred to as the Babu class or Babu agitators, were opposed to the interests of the masses, Dufferin referred to

the anti-popular attitude adopted by the Indian National Congress and other leading bodies of the nationalists, the Indian members of the Supreme Legislative Council, and the ‘Babu agitators’ in general towards recent tenancy legislation in Bengal, the imposition of the income tax, and the enhancement of the salt tax. He asserted that “the important Native Associations” had offered “strenuous resistance... to our recent land legislation.”

Regarding the income tax and the salt tax, he wrote:

The larger proportion of the product of taxation poured into our Exchequer is contributed by the masses, whereas the income tax falls on only some four hundred thousand individuals. If the voice of the ‘people’ of India was to determine the question, there is no doubt they would vote decoupling the income tax rather than a pie should be added to the price of salt; but all the Native Members of the Supreme Council, while accepting an increase of the salt duty, showed a strong dislike to the income tax... 

In addition, “the Congress itself has passed a resolution in favour of curtailing its incidence.”

Dufferin claimed that, if the nationalist demand for larger representation of Indians on the Legislative Councils was accepted, the Government would find it increasingly difficult to enact measures of popular welfare since the educated Indians would oppose such efforts. The reality was, he said, that while the Government was “always working in the interests of the great body of people” the educated ‘classes’ instinctively promoted “their own interests at the expense of those of the bulk of our subjects”. “For instance,” wrote Dufferin to Northbrook, “all our recent land legislation would have been carried with infinitely more difficulty, and against a heavier dead weight of opposition, if more natives had been present in Council.”

Dufferin’s views were often echoed by later officials and official writers. What is more surprising, there has been a tendency in recent times to uncritically accept them. I will try to examine the validity of Dufferin’s assertions in a two-fold manner: firstly in the light of contemporaneous nationalist political activities and attitudes; and secondly in the light of Dufferin’s own attitudes and policies. I have attempted the former at length in my study The Rise and Growth of Economic
Nationalism in India. The latter field is yet unexplored; the present attempt may be taken as a paltry introductory effort in the direction.

I

The strictures passed by Dufferin on the Indian nationalist leadership regarding its stand on agrarian legislation have hardly any basis in reality. We are not here concerned with the general attitude of the nationalists towards landlord-tenant question, though it may be pointed out that the advanced sections of the national leadership strongly protested against the rack-renting, evictions, and the general oppression of the tenant by the zamindars.12

Dufferin generally refers to the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. This piece of legislation was first mooted in 1879 and a Bill on the subject was introduced in 1883. The Bill was strongly criticised by the zamindars. It was subjected to drastic revision by a Select Committee before being enacted in 1885. Let us see what happened to the important pro-tenant provisions of the original Bill. (1) According to the Bill the right of occupancy was to be conferred on all settled ryots who had held land in the same village or estate; the Act limited this to land held in the same village. (2) The Bill made the right of occupancy heritable and freely transferable; the Act left the right to transfer to be regulated by local custom. (3) In regard to enhancement, the Bill provided that the rent paid by an occupancy ryot should not exceed 1/5th of the gross produce and that no enhancement could at once double the rent or take place except at the interval of 10 years. The rent of a non-occupancy ryot was not to exceed 5/16th of the gross produce. The Act removed all such restrictions on enhancement of rent. (4) The Bill laid down that in case of ejectment the non-occupancy ryot was to receive compensation. The Act deleted this provision.13 Thus the final Act of 1885 was very much an emasculated version of the original Bill. Moreover it failed to give any protection to the under-tenant of the occupancy ryot.

Now let us see what attitude was adopted by the Nationalists and Dufferin towards these provisions. Contrary to Dufferin's
repeated assertions, most of the nationalists in Bengal and outside supported the pro-tenant features of the different measures the Government put forward from 1880 to 1884. I have brought this out at length in my work cited above. Here I will merely summarise. The Indian Association, Surendranath Banerjea, and a large majority of the nationalist papers of Bengal actively championed the tenants' cause, often criticised the Government for not going far enough in protecting the tenants, demanded further strengthening of tenants' rights and condemned the zamindars' agitation against the official efforts to protect the tenant. For example, many of them felt that the restrictions on the landlord's right to enhance rent were not adequate and that the maximum limit of enhancement had been fixed too high. Some went to the extent of demanding a permanent settlement of rent between the zamindar and the ryot. Many of the nationalists demanded steps for the protection of the under-tenants of the occupancy ryots and for checking the spread of sub-infeudation. One such step suggested by them was that the right of occupancy should be conferred on the actual cultivator of the soil and not on the nominal owner of the right of occupancy.

As the pro-tenant features of the Bill of 1883 were gradually whittled down by the Select Committee and the Government of India, most of the nationalists of Bengal strongly censured the Government for making the changes.

The advanced party among the Bengal nationalists also organized at this time a mass campaign in favour of the ryots. The Indian Association and others organized during 1880, 1881, and 1885 a large number of mass meetings of the ryots, some of them attended by 10 to 20 thousand ryots. These meetings were addressed by Surendranath Banerjea, Anand Mohan Bose, Dwarkanath Ganguli and others.

Many prominent nationalist leaders and newspapers from other parts of the country—the Mahratta, the Indian Spectator, the Native Opinion, the Tribune, and the Kesari, to name some—also supported the Bill of 1883. Justice Ranade did not support the Bill as he believed that it would not solve the agrarian problem of Bengal—his opposition was not at all due to pro-zamindar leanings. He fully recognized the need to extend legislative protection to the weaker tenant against oppression by the stronger zamindar and justified the Government's
right to undertake such legislation.

As opposed to such widespread support for the Bill of 1883 in the ranks of the nationalists, only a small number of unimportant nationalist newspapers supported the zamindars' cause; and only one prominent nationalist paper, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, supported the demands of the intermediate tenants.

We thus discover that the evidence on the nationalist attitude towards Bengal tenancy legislation does not at all justify Dufferin's assertions; rather, it points to an opposite conclusion.

On the other hand, when we examine Dufferin's attitude towards the Bill of 1883, we suddenly discover that all that he said later about the nationalist approach was perhaps true of his own actions. It was Dufferin who protected the interests of the Bengal zamindars and actively opposed the mild pro-tenant features of the Bill which had been framed before his arrival in India. From the beginning he developed an acute antipathy to the Bill and its framers. In his letter, dated 23 December 1884, to the Secretary of State he condemned the Bill of 1883 as "unnecessarily violent and one-sided" and, speaking as an Irish landlord, put the blame squarely on "two Irishmen, who seem to have manipulated the Lieutenant-Governor unreservedly—a Mr McDonnell and a Mr O'Kinealy, the one Secretary to the Government of Bengal, and the other a Judge; both of them clever men, and both of them animated by the bitter anti-landlord spirit with which we are familiar." "My own Council," he added, "are disposed to be much more moderate, and are by no means moved by the acrid spirit which inspires Rivers Thompson's advisers."¹⁵ In fact, Dufferin was quite convinced that it was hardly necessary to "legislate for Bengal at once." "In Eastern Bengal," he wrote to the Secretary of State on 23 December 1884, "the tenants seem to be completely masters of the situation, and even the most violent anti-zamindar controversialists admit that in Bengal generally the tenants are by no means rack-rented."¹⁶ A week later he expressed the opinion that he would have liked to postpone a decision in the matter.¹⁷ Since that was found inexpedient, he began to put pressure on the Bengal Government to modify those provisions of the Bill "as seemed to me to be unreasonably severe on the land-owners."¹⁸
Dufferin opposed, and pressed for the amendment of, nearly every important pro-tenant provision of the Bill of 1885. Thus (1) he opposed the extension of the right of occupancy to settled ryots who had held land in the same estate on the ground that this provision “would unduly extend the operation of the occupation clauses of the Act.”19 (2) He objected to the right of occupancy being made transferable.20 (3) Regarding enhancement of rent, Dufferin first criticised those who believed that 1/5th of the gross produce as maximum limit of rent was too high.21 Later he denounced this limit as “completely discredited.”22 Regarding the new provision proposed in this respect by the Government of Bengal, viz., that the enhancement could not exceed two annas in the rupee in 15 years, Dufferin wrote: “I would bow to their decision, though I did not myself like the principle, which regulated the enhancement, nor was satisfied that either the money or the terms were just to the zamindars.”23 (4) As regards the payment of compensation to non-occupancy ryots in case of ejectment, Dufferin informed the Secretary of State on 6 January 1885: “We have kept compensation for disturbance out of the Bill in accordance with your recommendation.”24 (5) He also criticised the Bill for proposing to break all existing contracts by which the accrual of the occupancy right had been barred. In view of the fact that the occupancy ryots were “in many ways antagonistic to the interests of the landlords,” he wrote, “the zamindars who introduced these clauses into their leases appear to me to have taken a very justifiable and prudent precaution. . . .”25 In addition, there were, according to Dufferin, many other aspects of the Bill which “seem to me to bear with undue harshness on the landlord.” But, promised the Viceroy, “there will be no difficulty in alleviating their severity when the Government of India comes officially to deal with the measure.”26

It is to be noted that at no time did Dufferin press for a single pro-tenant change in the Bill, which was by no means a model one. In fact, Dufferin himself informed the Secretary of State on 17 March 1885 that “the alterations made in the Bill since it was last published in Vernacular. . . consisted almost entirely of concessions to the zamindars.”27 Nor did Dufferin fail to take credit for these changes. On 16 February 1885, he informed Queen Victoria:
Eventually the Bill fell into the hands of the Government of Bengal, in other words, of a weak Lt. Governor, who was manipulated by three or four violent Irishmen. As a consequence the Bill assumed a very unsatisfactory character, and if passed in its original state, would have done great wrong to the zamindars. On his arrival, Lord Dufferin employed himself in excising from the draft its most objectionable features, and it may now be considered a sufficiently moderate measure.\textsuperscript{28}

To his colleague, James Fergusson, the Governor of Bombay, he wrote, on 23 March 1885, even more frankly:

A good many (zamindars) have told me that it is not the present Bill that they mind, but the fear of what the Bengal Government may do hereafter, \textit{but I intend to keep a very strict watch on the Bengal Government}, as long as Rivers Thompson represents it. \ldots \textit{It was very lucky for the zamindars that I took up the Bill, for, otherwise, they would have had a very hard measure.}\textsuperscript{29}

One other curious aspect of Dufferin's accusation that the Indian national leadership was anti-peasant and pro-zamindar might be examined. Almost in the same breath in which this accusation is made, Dufferin also declares that the British regime was a friend of the zamindars and the aristocracy and should identify itself with them, that the zamindars and the aristocracy were the friends of the British regime, that the 'Babus' were driving out the zamindars and the aristocracy, and that the zamindars and the aristocracy were opposed to the National Congress.\textsuperscript{30} All of a sudden we seem to be floating in the sociological world of Alice in the Wonderland.

II

Dufferin also misrepresented the nationalist stand on the income tax and the salt tax. The nationalist did not by and
large oppose the imposition of the income tax; on the contrary, a vast majority of them actively supported it. 31 In fact, even before the imposition of the income tax in 1886, many of the nationalists were agitating for the extension of the existing licence tax to the salaried officials, European as well as Indian, and to the professional men, in other words precisely to the successful ones among "the educated babus". 32 Similarly they supported John Strachey's effort in 1880 to extend the licence tax to salaried and professional incomes. 33 Two of the leading nationalist newspapers of the day, the Amrita Bazar Patrika and the Hindu, actively agitated for the income tax. 34 At the very first session of the Indian National Congress a resolution was passed urging the Government to extend "the licence tax to those classes of the community, official and non-official, at present exempted from it." 35 The mover and the supporters of this resolution went further and asked for the imposition of an income tax. 36 When the income tax was finally imposed in 1886 it was supported by most of the powerful organs of nationalist opinion. 37 Some leaders did of course oppose it, but a majority of these did so not on the ground of the nature of the tax but because (a) they were opposed to any increase in taxation as such, since they believed that money so raised would be misused in military adventures or administrative extravagance, and (b) they felt that cotton duties which had been removed recently would provide a better source of revenue. But even these critics of the income tax supported its extension to the salaried and professional groups. 38 The income tax gained greater popularity after 1886. No important nationalist leader asked for its repeal or even criticised the economic reasoning behind it. This was brought out dramatically at the 1887 session of the National Congress. A delegate, V.R. Chakravarti Aiyangar, moved an amendment to Resolution VI asking for the abolition of the income tax. Immediately the delegates set upon him with cries of "No, No, withdraw," "It is the only tax that reaches the rich," "We don't want to relieve ourselves of taxation," "We won't have it," "Sit down," and "Shut up." Chakravarti Aiyangar was compelled to withdraw his amendment. 39

Dufferin tried to make capital out of the fact that the Indian National Congress as well as other nationalist spokesmen
objected to the low limit of exemption under the Income Tax Act of 1886. They wanted it raised from Rs. 500 a year to Rs. 1,000. But this demand, made on the ground that the tax fell on petty incomes and led to the harassment of the poor by the officials, does not obviously amount to favouring the rich or "the middle classes".\textsuperscript{40} It only reveals the nationalists' desire to protect the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, i.e., petty shop-keepers, artisans, and the clerical employees.

So far as the salt tax is concerned, the nationalists were opposed to it in an overwhelming majority. Up to 1882 they pressed for its reduction. Between 1882 and 1886 they asked for further reduction in it and warned against any attempt to raise it. When it was finally raised in 1888, the leading nationalist papers loudly protested against the step. They were soon joined in this protest by the Indian National Congress.

In fact, the attitude adopted by the vast majority of the nationalists towards the income tax and the salt tax was the very opposite of the one adopted by the British officials and businessmen, the supposed guardians of the Indian masses, and the Indian zamindars, aristocracy, and the upper classes in general, the supposed national leaders of the people. As has been pointed out earlier, the field of British economic and administrative policy and the pressures which led to its evolution is almost totally unexplored. But a few interesting points may be noted in this respect.

In 1879-80, John Strachey had proposed extension of the licence tax to the professional and salaried persons. As brought out above, the proposal had won the enthusiastic support of a majority of nationalist commentators. It was however withdrawn by the Finance Member himself as a result of opposition from the Englishmen in India.\textsuperscript{41}

When financial exigency compelled the Government of India to think in terms of imposing an income tax in 1885, Dufferin informed the Secretary of State, Randolph Churchill, that he regarded the rate of $3\frac{1}{8}$th per cent as excessive\textsuperscript{42}. And this after he had himself informed the Secretary of State only a week earlier that when income tax was imposed upon Europeans in India "it will be the sole exaction demanded from the classes affected."\textsuperscript{43} The Secretary of State fully endorsed this opinion:
"... a $3\frac{1}{8}$th per cent income tax would surely have raised a great outcry from classes who can command powerful support at home." In a letter to Northbrook, dated 7 September 1885, Dufferin claimed credit for having persuaded his colleagues in the Council "after a battle royal" to "agree to a far more moderate rate..." Dufferin also opposed the extension of income tax to the Bengal Zamindars with the purpose of appeasing them. On the other hand, quite a few of the nationalists criticised this exemption. When the Income Tax Bill was brought forth in January 1886, Dufferin gladly informed Northbrook that there had been no opposition to it except from the members of the Civil Service.

Interestingly enough, Dufferin himself 'discovered' Indian nationalist opposition to the income tax rather late. At the time of its imposition in 1886, he freely acknowledged Indian support to the measure. In a letter, dated 10 January 1886, he informed Northbrook that the Indian press had supported the Income Tax Bill. In another letter to Northbrook, dated 10 October 1886, he said: "I am bound to admit, however, that the native Members behaved very well in regard to the imposition of the income-tax." And in his speech in the Legislative Council on the Income Tax Bill, Dufferin cited Resolution VI of the first session of the Indian National Congress as an endorsement of the Bill by the advanced section of the Indian public opinion.

As regards the salt tax, we have already seen that Dufferin's statement that the Indian nationalists or the educated Indians supported the salt tax has hardly any basis in reality. But that apart, one can legitimately question the legitimacy of a ruler branding a group as anti-people just because it supported a measure of taxation which he himself had originally imposed! In fact, the tendency on the part of the educated Indians to oppose "every class of expenditure which is likely to increase taxation" was held up by Dufferin as one of the proofs of their unfitness to be represented on the Legislative Councils. Thus the educated Indians were offered the Hobson's choice: if they supported the salt tax they were anti-people; if they opposed it, they were irresponsible and lacking in 'governmental faculty'.

A brief history of the official approach towards the salt tax may not be out of place here. From the very beginning British-
Indian financial administrators looked upon the salt tax as the great financial reserve of the Indian fiscal system. The guiding lines of the official policy were succinctly stated by the Duke of Argyll in a despatch, dated 21 January 1869, from which the following has been extracted:

On all grounds of general principles, salt is a perfectly legitimate subject of taxation. It is impossible, in any country, to reach the masses of the population by direct taxes. If they are to contribute at all to the expenditure of the State, it must be through taxes levied upon some articles of universal consumption. If such taxes are fairly adjusted, a large revenue can be thus raised, not only with less consciousness on the part of the people, but with less real hardship upon them than in any other way whatever. There is no other article in India answering this description upon which any tax is levied...

I am of opinion, therefore, that the salt tax in India must continue to be regarded as a legitimate and important branch of the public revenue... it is one of the great advantages of indirect taxation that it is so mixed up with the other elements of price that it is paid without observation of the consumers.

This opinion was forcefully reiterated by Lytton in his Budget speech of 9 February 1878. Lytton approvingly quoted William Muir who had, while comparing the disadvantages of any attempt to impose direct taxes on the rich with the advantage of the collection of the salt tax from both the rich and the poor, said: "In the one case we stir up feelings in every class throughout the country; in the other case we peaceably realize what we require without affecting the contentment and tranquility of any class." Even E. Baring had declared the salt tax to be a financial reserve while reducing it in 1882 by 8 annas a maund. Dufferin himself told the Secretary of State on 24 January 1888 that the increase in the salt tax would not mean "any perceptible hardship" to the masses, "for, though we shall get a crore and a half the money will be contributed by so many millions of persons that no single individual will be sensible to the inconvenience." Nor did Dufferin forget to pat himself on the back for having secured the unanimous support of the Indian
and other "independent" members of the Council for the enhancement of the salt tax. Thus he wrote to the Secretary of State on 6 February 1888: "I flatter myself it is not every Viceroy who could have put on an Income Tax, and after two years again increased the taxation of the country to the amount of a million and a half with so small fuss being made about it." 58

It may also be pointed out in this context that Dufferin's Government could very well have raised the income tax in place of increasing the salt duty. In fact this is what many of the Indian nationalists wanted. 59 Some of them expressed themselves with vigour on this point. For example, the Maharratta of 22 January 1888 wrote: "There was the income tax; it could have been increased. But no! The Government would not do it, because the Anglo-Indian community would have raised a howl against it. The poor Hindu does not grumble and may therefore be taxed to any extent." The Kesari of 24 January 1888 wrote: "If the income tax be increased its burden will mostly fall upon the high European officers and traders, and the rates of exchange being already high, they will find it very crushing and will rise in rebellion. . . . Will a wise man like Lord Dufferin ever venture to have his fair reputation sullied by rousing such opposition?" 60 Nor is it that the choice was not discussed and debated by the officials in India and London. We find Dufferin thanking A. Lyall, member of the India Council, for supporting increase in the salt duty in preference to raise in the income tax. 61

III

One evidence that Dufferin offered to prove his charges against the nationalist leadership was the voting behaviour of the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council on the Bengal Rent Bill and salt tax 62 But here very clearly a sleight of hand is involved. The attention of the audience or the reader is directed towards the word 'native member' so that it may not turn to the word 'nominated'. But therein precisely lies the truth of the matter. At the time of the enactment of the
Bengal Tenancy Act, Kristodas Paul, Peary Mohan Mukerjea, Maharaja of Darbhanga, and Syed Amir Ali were all the nominees of the Government of India. In fact, the first three were deliberately nominated to represent the interests of the zamindars!

Similarly, Peary Mohan Mukerjea and Dinshaw Petit, who voted in favour of the official measure to enhance the salt tax, were officially nominated to represent the 'responsible classes'. In fact, at this time Dufferin went out of his way to praise Peary Mohan Mukerjea. "I am glad to say," he wrote to the Secretary of State on 30 January 1888, "that Peary Mohan Mukerjea, who is a very considerable leader of Native public opinion, pronounced himself strongly in favour of the enhancement of the Salt Tax. This will have a good effect and will probably give a tone to the newspapers." Many of the nationalists, on the other hand, condemned Peary Mohan Mukerjea and Dinshaw Petit for supporting the enhancement of the salt tax. They held up their behaviour as another proof of the nationalist assertion that the Legislative Councils were defective and should be reformed through the introduction of the popular element.

IV

But if their anti-people attitude was not the actual motive for the official cold shouldering of the nationalists, for denial of their demand for a larger popular element in the legislative councils, and for the adoption of a hostile attitude towards them, what were the real motives behind official attitude at least in so far as Dufferin was concerned? This is perhaps not the place to examine the causation of Dufferin's attitude towards the rising nationalist movement. But a few tentative suggestions might be offered.

Firstly, Dufferin clearly grasped that the growth of nationalism was inimical to the basic imperial interests of the ruling power in India. Thus, writing to the Secretary of State on 26 April 1886, he expressed the apprehension that the introduction of a larger Indian element in the legislative councils might
"prove an embarrassment rather than an assistance." "Upon all questions affecting Imperial interests they would instinctively oppose us," he asserted. Similarly, in a letter to Northbrook, dated 16 October 1886, he said: "... but if we take native opinion as it now exists, we should find it hostile to the annexation of Burmah, to the increase of the army, to the railways and fortifications on our North-West frontier, to our subsidies to the Ameer, and indeed to every class of expenditure which is likely to increase taxation without bringing in an obvious and immediate return." To the acclaimed mission of civilization Dufferin also added the care of foreign capital. British rule must continue unadulterated lest the interests of the large number of British investors in India are put in jeopardy. Perhaps a long quotation from Dufferin's Minute of 6 November 1888 won't be out of order:

To these obligations must also be added the duty of watching over the enormous commercial interests of the mother country, represented by a guaranteed capital of over two hundred and twenty millions of pounds sterling which, to the great benefit of India, has been either lent to the State or sunk in Indian railways and similar enterprises; for, however freely we may admit that India should be primarily governed in the interests of the Indian people, it would be criminal to ignore the responsibility of the Government towards those who have sunk large sums of money in the development of Indian resources on the faith of official guarantees, or who have invested their capital in the Indian funds at the invitation of the Imperial Indian authorities. The same considerations apply in almost equal force to that further vast amount of capital which is employed by private British enterprise in manufactures, in tea-planting, and in the indigo, jute, and similar industries, on the assumption that English Rule and English Justice will remain dominant in India.

Furthermore, Dufferin believed that the very despotism character of British rule in India prevented its giving constitutional concessions to the National Congress and 'educated classes'. "Now, though all my instincts are essentially liberal," he observed in a letter to the Secretary of State in 1888, "it is
quite evident that the Government of India cannot be conducted
on constitutional principles. It is and must be a benevolent
despoticism for many a long years to come.” Organizations like
the National Congress which “occupied themselves with political questions” could not be countenanced by the British Indian
administration for “their existence must always be out of harmony with so autocratic an administration as ours.” Even
earlier still, Dufferin had suggested that, whatever the nationalist
leaders might say publicly and in their programmes, they were
in fact Britain’s rivals for political power.  

According to Dufferin, the real threat from the nationalists
to British rule came from their tendency and capacity to
organize a mass agitational movement. While he was ostensibly
opposing the enlargement of the Councils on the ground of the
“babus” not properly representing the masses and was consequent.ly sneering at the ineffective minority, what really
chilled his heart was the spectre that they might any moment go
to the masses and start organizing and leading them. On 21
March 1886, he informed the Secretary of State that a new
development was taking place in nationalist politics, “namely,
the organization of mass meetings of the ryots in various districts
of Bengal.” This development, he warned, was ominous: “I
cannot help asking myself how long an autocratic Government
like that of India . . . will be able to stand the strain implied by
the importation en bloc from England, or rather Ireland, of the
perfected machinery of modern democratic agitation.”
Further, “Day after day, hundreds of sharp-witted babus pour forth
their indignation against their English oppressors in very
pungent and effective diatribes.” Thus the “babus” were an
evil, it would seem, not because they opposed the interests of
the people but because they agitated against the “English
oppressors”, for “the time must come when their increasing
and uncontradicted denunciation of British administration will
not fail to engender a widespread feeling of hostility to our
rule.” Dufferin pursued the theme in another letter to the
Secretary of State, dated 26 April 1886. The organized system of
popular agitation was assuming, he complained, “more distinct
and definite proportion”. Surendranath Banerjea and others
were possessed by “the instinctive desire . . . to ape the tactics
and organization of the Irish Revolutionists.” They were
attempting to organize "monster meetings" of the riots. One of these meetings was attended by 10,000 persons "who listened all day long with most earnest attention to a number of speeches delivered by Mr. Banerjea and his friends." The danger, warned Dufferin, was even more serious than this. The Bengali babu was perhaps not so very dangerous on his home ground, but he was beginning to extend his activities to Central and Northern India. Dufferin repeated at this stage his recurring warning that "India is not a country in which the machinery of European democratic agitation can be applied with impunity." He suggested to the Home authorities "to give and with a good grace whatever it may be possible or desirable to accord." *At the same time he advised them 'to forbid mass meetings and incendiary speechifying.'*\(^72\)

Interesting light on the official attitude towards the nationalist movement is shed by a letter, dated 10 June 1888, from A. Colvin, Lieutenant-Governor of N.W.P. and Oudh, to the Viceroy which the latter sent to the Secretary of State as an enclosure to his letter, dated 29 June 1888.\(^73\) Colvin suggested that a clear distinction should be drawn between what the leaders of the Congress said about their aims in their public addresses and what these aims were understood to be by the masses. He would oppose the Congress if enquiries revealed that the masses regarded the Congress movement "as hostile to English authority in India," that Congress missionaries preached "contempt of local authorities, holding them up as oppressive and unsympathetic," and that as a result of the spread of discontent and disaffection "the masses became a source of increased anxiety to Indian authorities." Colvin was at pains to drive home this point. The Congress as a 3-day wonder, as it was later called, was not to be frowned upon. "It is not, you will understand ... the periodical meetings of the Congress which gives me concern." Nor were the publicly expressed demands of the Congress a cause of worry. Danger lay in the activities of "those who are admittedly engaged in daily educating the people in their grievances and their wrongs, with a view to securing their support, and who, to that end, are holding up to their contempt all local authorities as the source and origin and instruments of the abuses which they try to explain to them ...". Colvin would not therefore interfere with the annual
meetings of the Congress but would "forbid the further circulation among the people of pamphlets or publications" which produced discontent.

The same letter to the Secretary of State contained as another enclosure a circular by the Government of N.W.P. and Oudh to selected officers asking them to answer several queries regarding the Congress movement in the province. Two of the questions were: (a) "Is the movement used as a centre in which discontent and disaffection are actively engendered or mainly as a machinery for the promotion of academic debate?" and (b) "Is attention attracted to it, mainly among the upper classes, whether in towns or villages, or is it occupying also the minds of the middle and lower classes, urban or agricultural?"

Lastly, Dufferin was inclined to accommodate the very moderate elements among the nationalists, in other words, precisely those who rigidly confined their demands within a narrow constitutional and socio-economic framework, especially as they could help strengthen the weakened internal political base of British rule in India. But he was afraid that these moderate elements were not a viable political force. They would not be able to stand straight in the face of the 'extremist' onslaught and might therefore merely serve as an opening wedge for the nationalists. In fact, the chief motive behind Dufferin's St. Andrews Day Speech of 30 November 1888 was to enable these moderate men to stand up to the extremist pressure. Writing to the Secretary of State on 3 December 1888, Dufferin explained that between the "'bastard' disloyalty" of the Bengali extremists and the zamindars, talukdars and 'responsible' persons, stood the third group of "a considerable mass of irresolute opinion." By strongly condemning "such of the Congress demands and proceedings as are extravagant and reprehensible," he hoped to be able to influence this third force.

V

It can therefore be said in conclusion that Dufferin's assertions regarding the character of the early Indian national leadership are not justified when examined either in the light of early nationalist political activities and attitudes or in the context of his own attitudes and policies. His views in the matter seem to
have been formed more out of prejudice and exigencies of an imperialistic administration which was faced with a growing challenge to its oft proclaimed paternalism and to the myth of its beneficent character. In fact, Dufferin had enough public facts at hand to have known better than to assert what he did.

NOTES

1Dufferin to Northbrook, 16 October 1886, Dufferin Papers (hereafter referred to as D.P.); Dufferin’s Minute, enclosure to Home (Public) Despatch to Secretary of State. No. 67, dated 6 November 1888 (hereafter referred to as Dufferin’s minute of 6 November 1888); Dufferin, Speeches, 1884-88.

2Dufferin’s Minute of 6 November 1888.

3Dufferin to Secretary of State, 20 March 1887, D.P. The Secretary of State, Lord Cross, put the point even more cruelly in his letter to Dufferin, dated 8 Sept. 1886: “But there are two distinct classes in India—first the masses, and next the ‘educated natives’.” D.P.

4Dufferin’s Minute of 6 Nov. 1888.

5Ibid.

6Ibid.

7Ibid.

8Dufferin to Secretary of State, 26 April 1886, D.P.; Dufferin to Northbrook, 16 Oct. 1886, D.P. Also see Secretary of State to Dufferin, 8 Sept. 1886, D.P., and Secretary of State to Dufferin, 14 April 1887, D.P.

9Dufferin’s Minute of 6 Nov. 1888.

1016 Oct. 1886, D.P. Also Dufferin to Secretary of State, 26 April 1886, D.P.


12See my The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India, New Delhi, 1965.


14Also see my article ‘Two Notes on the Agrarian Policy of Indian Nationalists, 1880-1905’, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. I, No. 4.

15D.P. The theme of the Irish ‘villain’ occurs again and again in Dufferin’s correspondence. In his letter to the Secretary of State, dated 30 Nov. 1885, he refers to pro-tenant Bengal officials as “Wild Irishmen”. Ibid.; also see his letter to James Fergusson, 23 March 1885, D.P.; and letter to Queen Victoria, 16 Feb. 1885, D.P.

16D.P.

17Dufferin to Secretary of State, 30 Dec. 1884, D.P.

18Ibid.
Dufferin to Secretary of State, 23 Dec. 1884, D.P. Also see his letter to Secretary of State, 6 Jan. 1885, D.P.

Dufferin to Secretary of State, 23 Dec. 1884, D.P. Also see his letter to Secretary of State, 6 Jan. 1885, D.P. It is to be noted that earlier the Government had claimed this provision to be a big step forward.

Dufferin to Secretary of State, 6 Jan. 1885, D.P.

Dufferin to S.C. Bayley, 29 Jan. 1885, D.P.

Ibid. Earlier Bayley had informed Dufferin on 27 Jan. 1885: “Our Bill narrows the grounds of enhancement, but gives much greater facilities for applying them.” D.P.

D.P.

Dufferin to Secretary of State, 23 Dec. 1884, D.P.

Ibid.

D.P. Dufferin gives in this letter a long list of the pro-zamindar changes in the Bill. The Secretary of State, in turn, confirmed this in his Legislative Despatch No. 24, dated 23 June 1885.

D.P.

(Emphasis added). D.P.

See, for example, Dufferin to Northbrook, 30 July 1885, D.P.; Dufferin to Secretary of State, 7 Aug. 1885, D.P.; Dufferin to Secretary of State, 1 Feb. 1887, D.P.; Dufferin to Secretary of State, 17 Sept. 1888, D.P.; Dufferin’s Minute of 6 Nov. 1888; Dufferin to Secretary of State, 3 Dec. 1888, D.P. The Secretary of State too warned the Viceroy against “some danger of forfeiting the goodwill and confidence of all the respectable classes, as it is with such people that I would identify the policy of Her Majesty’s Government”. 11 Oct. 1888, D.P.

See my The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 10 Jan. 1878, 2 Jan. 1880, 5 March 1880, 29 Dec. 1881; Hindu, 19 Dec. 1884. Also Bengalee, 17 January 1880, Indu Prakash, 3 March 1884; Swadesamitran, 11 Dec. 1884; and many other nationalist papers.

Resolution VI.


See The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India.

Ibid.


See, for details, The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India. The correctness of the nationalist demand in this respect was fully acknowledged later by the authorities. Thus Edward Law, the Finance Member, observed in 1903: “As regards the raising of the limit of exemption of the income tax, we believe that the tax on incomes under a thousand rupees is, in the main, paid by petty traders, by clerks in commercial and Government offices, and by pensioners, who, small as is the present impost, feel it to be a severe blow . . . Moreover, we have reason to fear that it is in the lower categories of incomes that
hardship is perhaps felt in the matter of inquisitorial proceeding on the part of assessors, who, possibly, sometimes fix assessments at unjustifiably high rates . . . .” Financial Statement, 1903-04, para 89.

41P. Banerjea, A History of Indian Taxation, Cal., 1930, p. 70, and Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 March 1880.

42Letter, dated 14 Aug. 1885, D.P.
43Letter, dated 7 Aug. 1885, D.P.
44Letter to Dufferin, dated 8 Sept. 1885, D.P.
45D.P. In contrast, the Hindu of 7, 9, and 12 January 1886 criticised the lack of progression in the Income Tax Act of 1886. It wanted graduated taxation. It also asserted that a rate of 2½ per cent was too low for those earning high incomes, (Voice of India, Jan. 1886). Also Bangabasi, 9 Jan. (Report Native Press Bengal, 16 Jan. 1886).

46Dufferin to Secretary of State, 22 Dec. 1885, D.P.

48Letter, dated 3 Feb. 1886, D.P. Also see letter from J. A. Godley, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, to D. Mackenzie Wallace, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, dated 9 Oct. 1885. D.P.

49D.P.
50Ibid.
52Letter to Northbrook, dated 16 Oct. 1886, D.P.
56Financial Statement of 1882-83, para 192.

57D.P. In contrast, see the theoretical exposition of the nationalist position by G.V. Joshi in his brilliant article “The Burmah Deficit and the Enhancement of the Salt Duties” which appeared in the Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha in April 1888. See his Writings and Speeches, pp. 137-90.

58D.P.

61Letter, dated 27 Feb. 1888, D.P. Cf. Dufferin to Secretary of State
12 Jan. 1888: "Formerly a Viceroy could save a considerable sum attached to the appointment... but now during the time that I am in Calcutta, thanks to the fall in silver and to the income tax, my expenditure exceeds my income by from £250 to £300 a month, which is very serious and very hard. In fact I am receiving more than £2,000 a year less than even my immediate predecessor, Lord Ripon." D.P.

62See above.

63D.P. Publicly he was even more profuse in the praise. In the Legislative Council he said: "But I cannot help expressing my satisfaction at hearing from our hon'ble colleague Raja Peary Mohan Mukherji that the recent increase which we have made in the salt-duty has met with his approval. Representing so fully as he does the views of the intelligent and educated Native community of India, that expression of opinion on his part is very valuable." *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Governor-General*, 1886, Vol. XXVII, p. 26.

64For detailed treatment of this aspect, see *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*. G V. Joshi, for example, wrote in the *Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*: "... the debate was discreditable to the Legislative Chamber which, sitting as the guardian of the nation's sacred interests, showed no respect for its own independence, and was afraid to speak out against the Executive Government; that it was more discreditable to the native members, who ought to have known their duty better; and that, above all, it was most discreditable to the system which permits of such trifling on the part of an irresponsible Government with the actualities of a hard position. In fact, this debate supplies to our mind one argument the more in support of the demand of the National Congress of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, for the reconstruction of the Legislative Councils on an elective basis." Op. cit., p. 144.

65D.P.

66Ibid.

67Emphasis added.

68Letter, dated 17 Aug. 1888, D.P.

69"It must always be remembered, however, that though common sense and a certain knowledge of affairs and of the world may limit the programme of the leaders to what they think they have a chance of getting the ideal in the minds of the major part of their followers is an India in which the British Army shall ward off invasion from without and preserve them from tyranny and give them free scope to administer their democratic affairs untrammelled by the interference of white men, except perhaps in the person of a Viceroy and a limited number of high officials." Letter to the Secretary of State, dated 26 Apr. 1886, D.P.

70He had a similar objection to the Indian press: "... how far an absolutely free and uncontrolled Press, for the most part conducted by extremely clever and perfectly unscrupulous men, is compatible with our existing regime or any modification of it that is possible." This was the crux of the matter.

71D.P.

72(Emphasis added). Ibid.
(Emphasis added). Ibid.

"Personally I should feel it both a relief and an assistance if in the settlement of many Indian administrative questions affecting the interests of Her Majesty's subjects, I could rely to a larger extent than at present upon the experience and counsels of Indian coadjutors. Amongst the natives I have met, there are a considerable number who are both able and sensible, and upon whose loyal cooperation one could undoubtedly rely. The fact of their supporting the Government would popularise many of its acts which now have the appearance of being driven through the Legislature by brute force, and if they in turn had a native party behind them, the Government of India would cease to stand up, as it does now, an isolated rock in the middle of a tempestuous sea." Dufferin to Secretary of State, 26 April 1886, D.P.

"But my fear is that the moderate men have already lost, as always happens in such cases, a great deal of their original influence, and that they will be eventually overpowered and dominated by the more violent and extravagant section of their fellow countrymen. Were this to be the case, the introduction of a larger native element into our Legislative Councils would prove an embarrassment rather than an assistance." After having pointed out the danger of Indian members hindering all legislation which would benefit "the uneducated and unrepresented masses", Dufferin further remarked: "Moreover it is very doubtful even if they wished to assist the Government, whether moderate Native Members would have sufficient backbone to withstand the attacks of the Press, of which they are horribly afraid." D.P. Also see Dufferin's letter to Northbrook, dated 16 October 1886, D.P.

D.P.
IN SPITE OF THE WIDE IMPACT OF Lenin’s thought on the socialist movements in Europe, North America, and Australia, it is in the colonial and semi-colonial world of Afro-Asia that it has led to the most revolutionary consequences since the days of October Revolution. Moreover, Leninism was the main form in which Marxist ideas were adopted and absorbed by the people of the colonial world. Undoubtedly, the writings of Marx and Engels contained some of the basic ingredients of the Marxist approach to the national and colonial question; and other revolutionaries, for example, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi-minh, Kim Il-sung, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, have enriched it further. But the ideas of Marx and Engels on the subject were rather patchy and had been developed in the earlier period of world capitalism. It was through the writings of Lenin that the broad outline of a theory of revolution was provided to the people of the colonies and semi-colonies.

Even though the national liberation movements in the colonial

countries had been initiated in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it was during World War I that the basis for the growth of powerful nationalist movements was laid in most of these countries. The colonial people now looked for new doctrines and ideologies to wage a successful struggle against imperialism. Lenin applied Marxist ideas to an analysis of the new, monopoly stage of capitalism—imperialism—and to the peculiar conditions of nationalist struggles in the colonies. His analysis helped the colonial people to understand the social forces which could help them overthrow imperialism. It helped them to link their struggle to the wider world revolutionary process. Lenin gave the colonial people confidence in their own cause, the analytical framework needed to understand their situation and to change it, in his theory of the state and of imperialism the capacity to see and understand their enemies and to grasp the central role of political power in society, and in the concept of a revolutionary communist party the instrument to bring their revolution to fruition.

II

Lenin, as other Marxists, paid so much attention to the theory of national liberation struggles because of the high place assigned to social knowledge in the Marxist view of social change. Marxism holds that just as knowledge of nature enables us to control and change it, similarly it is possible to study, understand and change society. Social development has not been and is not a mere jumble of stray happenings. Like laws of nature there are laws or tendencies of social development which when grasped in their inter-connections can be used to consciously direct this development. All their life Marx and Engels grappled with the laws of human development, particularly for the epoch of capitalism. Lenin, basing himself on this approach, struggled to evolve an understanding of the process of revolution in a backward capitalist country in the era of modern imperialism and later of the process of world revolution. As a by-product of this effort he also helped evolve an understanding of the laws of social development in the
colonial and semi-colonial countries.

We may at this stage direct attention to a basic aspect of Lenin's approach, which, on the one hand, is exemplified in his theory of colonial revolutions and, on the other, enabled him to arrive at this theory, making a sharp departure from the viewpoint of his contemporaries. This aspect is his emphasis on a basic constituent of Marxist method—the need to study any event or situation concretely and in its specific historical context. For Marxists, he repeatedly pointed out, there are no fixed formulae or 'general statements' apart from their historical context. And an important aspect of this historical specificity is the knowledge of a country's peculiarities and historical development. "Marxist theory absolutely requires", he wrote in 1914, "that every social question be examined within definite historical limits, and—if it refers to a particular country (e.g. the national programme for a given country)—that due account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others within the same historical epoch."

Lenin applied this approach to a concrete historical study of World War I just as he had done so earlier for many years in the analysis of the nature and character of the coming Russian revolution. So far as the approach to the national and colonial questions is concerned, he specifically urged in his polemics with Rosa Luxemburg in 1914 that an answer must be sought not by a priori reasoning but "by making a historical and economic study of national movements". He underlined this point even more strongly once life made him assume the leadership of the international socialist movement. He repeatedly warned the colonial people not to rely on the experience of other countries, but, while learning from the common struggle of the Russian and other peoples, to constantly evaluate their own experience and thus find answers to the peculiar problems of their revolutions. In the Preliminary Draft of the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions presented to the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, Lenin laid down that the Communist Party "must base its policy on the national question too, not on abstract and formal principles, but, firstly on an exact appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions . . . ." In his Report to the Congress on the work of the Commission on the National
and Colonial Questions, Lenin was even more explicit: "In this age of imperialism, it is particularly important for the proletariat and the Communist International to establish concrete economic facts and to proceed from concrete realities, not from abstract postulates, in the solution of all colonial and national questions."\(^8\) Nothing sheds better light on this aspect of Lenin's approach than the fact that he, the leader of one of the greatest achievements in human history, the October Revolution, and of its successful defence against imperialist intervention, cautioned the people of the Soviet republics of the Caucasus against being overawed by the tactics through which this achievement had been made possible. In a letter written on 14 April 1921, Lenin told the communists of these republics that "the most important thing" for the successful fulfilment of their task was that they "be fully alive to the singularity of their position, of the position of their republics, as distinct from the position and conditions of the R.S.F.S.R.; that they appreciate the need not to copy our tactics, but thoughtfully to vary them in adaptation to the differing concrete conditions." The people of Russia had "to make the first breach in world capitalism" against heavy odds and very adverse international circumstances. But the communists of the Caucasus had now the opportunity of "building the new with greater caution and more methodically." In particular they must avoid copying Russian tactics and should "analyse the reasons for their peculiar features, the conditions that gave rise to them, and their results." In the end he exhorted them to "apply not the letter, but the spirit, the essence, the lessons of the experience of 1917-21."\(^9\)

This aspect of Lenin's approach, this emphasis on the concrete and the historical, is crucial to an understanding of Lenin's ideas on the colonial revolutions. This explains the continuous evolution of his own ideas on the subject and particularly the constant shift in his understanding of the role that colonial revolutions would play in the world revolution against imperialism as the international situation constantly changed. Even more it explains why his ideas on the colonial problems remained vague, very general, and in fact a skeletal structure, never reaching the state of finished theory. As a theoretician of the colonial revolution Lenin had certain advantages. His
grasp of the character of modern imperialism both in its economic and political aspects, his capacity to keep in the forefront the perspective of world revolution, his experience of preparing for and making both the bourgeois democratic and the socialist revolutions in a country half-European, half-Asian, his experience of the problems of the oppressed nationalities of the vast Tsarist Empire, all enabled him to see the problems of the colonial peoples as no other contemporary European could. But he was also aware that he was far away from the scene of the colonial revolutions, nor did he have the time to study their problems in any detail. He was therefore not willing to 'legislate' or 'decree' for the colonial peoples or prepare a blue-print for them to follow. We may say that Lenin opened the doors of revolution to the peoples of the colonies, but he also taught them that concrete application of his ideas was the task of the people actually engaged in revolution. The people of each country had to make their own revolutions in the particularity of their own situations. The wisdom of these injunctions has been borne out by the experience of the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions. Adherence or non-adherence to these injunctions goes a long way in explaining the varying fortunes that the thought of Lenin has met in different countries.

The attention paid by Lenin to the study of concrete situations and his insistence on the need to analyse and generalise on the basis of specific experience was highlighted at the Second Congress of the Communist International when Lenin first came in contact with Asian revolutionaries. Before them Lenin was all modesty. Knowing the utter shallowness of their understanding of Marxism, yet he treated them and their opinions with respect for they came from the colonial lands and were, therefore, repositories of direct knowledge concerning them. He readily agreed to make some changes in his own draft. For example, Lenin bent backwards in accommodating M.N. Roy and his ideas at the Congress, even though in this case his modesty led him to make a mistake in so far as he did not criticise these ideas publicly and he let some of them to remain as the supplementary Theses moved by Roy and accepted by the Congress.
III

Lenin’s involvement with the colonial question was many-sided and developed over a long period under the impact of concrete events and ideological controversies. From the very beginning Lenin demarcated himself from the contemporary socialists by paying serious attention to problems of the national liberation movements of the East. He was, of course, helped in the evolution of his thought on the subject by his experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905. His ideas on the question found their best summing up in the Preliminary Draft of the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions presented to the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920.\textsuperscript{12}

Lenin’s ideas on the national liberation movements may be discussed under several heads. But several of these are well known and may not be taken up here at length in spite of their undoubted importance. In fact, it is a measure of the success of Lenin’s thought that they are now so universally accepted, at least in words, that people have forgotten that once they were enveloped in the dust of controversy. Some of these aspects are: Lenin’s concrete economic and political exposure of colonialism, its class basis and its reactionary role in the colonies;\textsuperscript{13} his sympathy for the people of the colonies and recognition of and support to their demand for independence and right of self-determination; his active support to the national liberation struggles of the colonies and his role in solving democratically the problem of the oppressed nationalities in the Soviet Union. It is well known that he made the attitude towards the national and colonial question one of the basic tests a person must pass before he could call himself a socialist. “It is our right and duty to treat any Social Democrat of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda (in favour of freedom for the oppressed countries, B.C.) as a scoundrel and an imperialist.”\textsuperscript{14}

Some of Lenin’s socialist contemporaries such as Rosa Luxemburg, who were not social-imperialists, i.e., socialists in words and imperialists in deeds, agreed with him in principle in sympathising with the oppressed people of the colonies and demanding
their liberation, but they tended to ignore the existing national liberation movements or to take an attitude of indifference towards them. A major reason for this indifference was their tendency to see the colonial people as politically passive, incapable historically of playing an active role in their own liberation or in the emerging world revolution. The colonial movements were seen as historically insignificant. The very liberation of colonies they felt was to be in the main the work of successful socialist revolutions in the advanced, capitalist countries.  

Lenin differed radically from this approach. He opposed the attitude of indifference towards the colonial peoples' struggle, described such an attitude as "reactionary", and put forward the view that the people of the colonies were fully capable of liberating themselves (though they should be given full support by the workers of the imperialist countries), of making revolutions in their lands, and of playing an active and independent role in the world revolutionary process. He was, in fact, among the first European socialists to note that the people of the colonies have already, since the beginning of the twentieth century, embarked on the path of revolution. In fact, he regarded this as one of the important, distinguishing features of the new epoch of imperialism and world revolution.

It has been suggested by some scholars that this recognition of the revolutionary potentialities of the colonial peoples' movements was mainly 'tactical'. It is suggested that Lenin came to it after 1920 when the Soviet Union needed, for its survival, international allies in the East after the expectations of revolution in the East had been falsified. A simple chart of the historical sequence of the published articles embodying Lenin's views on the national liberation movements of the East would refute such a misconception. In fact, from the outset Lenin carried forward in this respect the traditions that Marx and Engels had set up in their writings on the Taiping Revolution, the Revolt of 1857, the Irish revolutionary movement, and other similar movements of the nationally oppressed peoples. It is not necessary to reproduce or discuss here the innumerable comments he made over the years regarding the active historical role of the peoples of the colonies. It will suffice to quote from a few of his writings to bring out and illustrate his views.
In 1908, in the well-known article ‘Inflammable Material in World Politics’, Lenin hailed the peoples of Asia for awakening from “deep slumber”, for rising up “against capital and the capitalist colonial system”, and declared that they were entering the “tormenting school” which will teach them “how to conduct civil war and how to carry the revolution to victory.” “The class-conscious European worker already has comrades in Asia, and their number will grow with every passing day and hour”. In 1912, writing on “Democracy and Narodism in China”, Lenin takes note of “the immense spiritual and revolutionary enthusiasm” of the Chinese people and “the deep-going revolutionary movement of the hundreds of millions” and declares that the Chinese people were “capable not only of bemoaning its age-long slavery and dreaming of liberty and equality, but of fighting the age-long oppressors of China.” In 1913, in the article “The Awakening of Asia”, Lenin took note of the spread of national liberation movement to Turkey, Persia, China, and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). In 1916, replying to Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘Junius’ Pamphlet, quoted above, Lenin asserted: “National wars waged by colonies and semi-colonies in the imperialist era are not only probable but inevitable. . . . The national liberation movements there are either already very strong, or are growing and maturing.” The nationalist movements of the East reached a new stage of militancy after the World War I and the Soviet Revolution, and Lenin confidently noted this advance. In a message dated 5 May 1922 to the Pravda on its tenth anniversary, he confidently predicted that the people of India, China and rest of Asia were “inexorably and with mounting momentum . . . approaching their 1905.” And Lenin’s vision was crystal clear when, in his last work written on 2 March 1923, he predicted:

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And it is precisely this majority that, during the past few years, has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest shadow of doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the

complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.\textsuperscript{22}

Lenin's grasp of the active role that the colonial people could play, and did play, in their own history as also in the world revolution not only was crucial in the conduct of the world revolution, i.e., its tactics, disposition of its forces, etc., and in giving the European people sorely needed faith in social revolution in periods when the revolutionary tide in their own lands was at an ebb, but has played an active, inspiring role in the colonial world. It is one of the factors which go to explain the popularity of Leninism among the colonial peoples.

IV

Once the active historical role of the colonial revolutions was recognized, the question arose as to what kind of revolutions were they to be; or what was the nature and character of the national liberation movements; or, in other words, wherein lay their historically progressive character? To start with, Lenin indentified the colonial question with the question of subject nationalities of Europe. In particular, the 'theoretical foundations of both were the same' for both represented a common stage in the process of historical development. Both were aspects of democratic struggle, of bourgeois democratic revolution, i.e., they were concerned with the establishment of bourgeois economic relations. The economic basis of both the movements lay in the fact that once the capitalist class comes into being in an oppressed nationality in Europe or in a colony or semi-colony, its interests require the creation of a nation state which in turn can be achieved only through a powerful national movement.\textsuperscript{23}

According to Lenin, the bourgeois national liberation movements had a very positive role to play in Asia; and this for several reasons. For one, he wrote in 1912, the bourgeoisie in Asia was still young, vigorous and rising. It was quite capable of fighting militantly for its own interests and therefore for democratic demands.\textsuperscript{24} Secondly, these revolutions had the historic task of introducing radical agrarian reforms, i.e., "the necessity
of destroying feudalism in all its forms and manifestations."  
Thirdly, they were arousing millions of popular masses to intense political activity and struggles. In particular, they developed the boldness and initiative of the peasantry which was the principal social support of these movements. And most of all these movements fight against the main enemy of the people of the world—imperialism. To see the positive aspects of colonial nationalism was, of course, not to ignore its class character. Lenin noted in 1913 that "the Asian revolutions have revealed the same spinelessness and baseness of liberalism (as in Europe, B.C.)...and the same sharp demarcation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of every stripe." He went on to say that "after the experience both of Europe and Asia, whoever now speaks of non-class politics and of non-class socialism simply deserves to be put in a cage and exhibited alongside of the Australian Kangaroo." Similarly, in the Preliminary Theses, Lenin emphasized that the policy on the national question must be based, among other things, "on a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of the toilers and exploited, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class." But we will have more to say on this subject a little later.

The entire concept of the progressive role of the bourgeois democratic national liberation movements is linked with Lenin's theory of development of revolution by stages. This means that in a backward capitalist or colonial country the process of revolution is to be clearly demarcated into two stages—the stage of bourgeois democratic or anti-colonial, anti-feudal revolution and the stage of socialist revolution.

According to Marxism, humanity passes in the course of its development through distinct historical eras or periods each of which is characterised by a distinct mode of production. These periods are clearly demarcated one from the other; for example, in Europe the eras of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism are separated from each other by decades and even centuries. The conceptual as well as the practical difficulty arises when in many backward capitalist countries, such as Germany in mid-nineteenth century and Russia in the beginning of the twentieth, the bourgeois democratic, anti-feudal revolution is delayed and comes on the historical agenda at a time when on a world-wide plane the
question of socialist revolution has taken the centre of the stage. This applies to the colonial revolutions to an even greater extent for here not only these two factors exist but a fresh one also in so far as the main enemy of both revolutions is the same—capitalism in its international, imperialist form. This necessity to operate on two historical planes in the same historical period, of organizing national struggle while not abandoning the social one, has posed many of the complex theoretical problems that Marxists have had to face during the twentieth century. Lenin made original contributions to the discussion of all of them. One of his most fruitful formulations was that of the two stages in the development of revolution in the countries which were yet to complete their bourgeois democratic revolution.

Originally, this concept was developed by Lenin in his Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution written in the midst of the Revolution of 1905 to explain the role of the proletariat in the bourgeois democratic revolution then under way. As applied to the colonial countries, the theory of stages of revolution means that the two stages of the revolution—the democratic and the socialist—must be kept distinct. The two stages are clearly demarcated by their separate historical content; each stage reflected a qualitative change in the social reality. The characteristic of the first stage or the bourgeois democratic stage is that only the democratic tasks which in the colonial situation meant “overthrowing foreign oppression” are accomplished. This character of the bourgeois democratic stage of the revolution remained even when the political leadership of the revolution was in the hands of workers and peasants. This stage just could not be skipped for it was a part of the objective historical reality. It was essential and inevitable due to concrete historical conditions and not because of lack of subjective desire on the part of the revolutionaries. In other words, even the subjectively most revolutionary leadership must first complete the historically given task. An example of just such a situation in an Asian setting was taken up by Lenin in 1912 in dealing with Sun Yat-sen in his article “Democracy and Narodism in China”. Lenin points out that a large number of progressive Chinese have become subjectively socialist because they have borrowed their ideas of liberation from Europe and America where “socialism is on the
order of the day". At the same time "the objective conditions of China, a backward, agricultural, semi-feudal country numbering nearly 500 million people, place on the order of the day only one definite, historically distinctive form of this oppression and exploitation, namely, feudalism." Consequently, "out of the subjective socialist ideas there emerges...a programme for the destruction of feudal exploitation only." In other words, in spite of his Narodism and subjective socialism Sun Yat-sen emerged as an advocate of "a purely capitalist, a maximum capitalist, agrarian programme." And the objective, historically given task being that of struggle against feudalism, whenever a party of the Chinese proletariat comes into being it would also "certainly carefully single out, defend and develop the revolutionary-democratic core of his political and agrarian programme." In other words, according to Lenin, the criterion of revolutionary quality of political work was not that of taking up the most advanced political tasks in the abstract, in this case socialist tasks in the stage of democratic revolution, but that of carrying out the tasks of the historically given stage of revolution in this case the democratic revolution, in a thorough-going, radical manner, releasing in the process the political energies of the submerged millions.

Some of Lenin's critics felt that the importance attached by Lenin to the bourgeois nationalist phase of the revolutionary movements would undermine the struggle for socialism, especially as it would make the workers tail behind bourgeois leadership. They asserted that imperialism being a world system, it was only by its overthrow by the world socialist revolution that oppressed nations could be liberated. Lenin replied that the bourgeois democratic stage had to be kept distinct and brought to completion precisely for the sake of the struggle for socialism. For one, there could be no socialist revolution without "an all-round, concrete revolutionary struggle for democracy," for only such a struggle brings the masses into the struggle for socialism. As pointed out above, Lenin was fully conscious of the tremendous revolutionary role that national liberation struggles could play in releasing popular, mass energy. On the other hand, he believed that "before feudalism, absolutism, and alien oppression were overthrown the development of the proletarian struggle for socialism was out of question."
An equally important constituent of the theory of revolution by stages was the concept of uninterrupted revolution. While the different stages of revolution were not to be confused with each other and were to follow each other in a historical sequence, each having distinct, non-overlapping functions to perform, this did not mean that they were to be necessarily separated from each other by a large span of time. Lenin wrote in 1921: "We have consummated the bourgeois democratic revolution as nobody had done before. We are advancing towards the socialist revolution consciously, firmly and unswervingly, knowing that it is not separated from the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a Chinese Wall." Earlier, in 1916, he had remarked: "The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie." Thus the socialist revolution could follow on the heels of the nationalist revolution depending on the correlation of political forces on the national as well as the international planes. Seen in this light, the bourgeois democratic or national revolution may serve as a preliminary step towards, or a prelude—though an essential one—to, the socialist revolution. Looked at another way, the very thorough completion of the democratic revolution and the barring of the road to its reversal required its passing into the socialist revolution. Thus, as Lenin put it in 1921, "the first develops into the second. The second, in passing, solves the problems of the first. The second consolidates the work of the first." Even earlier, in 1905, Lenin had placed this dual step by step but uninterrupted revolutionary programme before the Russian revolutionaries: "At the head of the whole people, and particularly of the peasantry—for complete freedom, for a consistent democratic revolution, for a republic! At the head of all the toilers and the exploited—for socialism!"

According to Lenin, the extent of the time-gap between the two stages of the revolution was not theoretically determined; it depended on the practice of the revolutionary classes and parties and on the manner of activity of the socialist revolutionaries in the first, democratic stage of the revolution. The basic questions here were: how thoroughly had the masses been
aroused in the struggle for democratic demands? To what extent had the peasantry been stirred up? Whether proletarian leadership of the revolutionary movement had been firmly established or not? Lenin's understanding of the uninterrupted character of the revolution by stages demarcated him sharply from the Mensheviks who would let the bourgeoisie lead the bourgeois democratic revolution and then wait for capitalism to develop and mature before the task of overthrowing it was begun. One of the tasks Lenin set before the revolutionaries of the backward countries was to shorten the transition between the two stages, even more to enable the first to grow into the second, a task which he successfully fulfilled in 1917. And, referring to the national liberation movements in the colonies and semi-colonies, he confidently predicted in 1922 that "in the coming decisive battles of the world revolution, this movement of the majority of the world's population, originally aimed at national liberation, will turn against capitalism and imperialism and will, perhaps, play a much more revolutionary role than we have been led to expect." Lenin's prediction has been amply fulfilled in Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. And in every case the first stage grew into the second, the revolution was uninterrupted; but this result was achieved in every case by the most thorough-going completion of the anti-imperialist bourgeois democratic tasks and by the all-sided revolutionary activity and organization of the masses which was brought into being in the course of the struggle to complete the first stage of the revolution. In this way Lenin's theory of stages of development of revolution played a crucial role in enabling the most backward victims of imperialism to make the most thorough-going revolutions of our time leading to the establishment of socialism in these countries ahead of the advanced capitalist countries. The clear demarcation between the two stages of the revolution in the colonies and semi-colonies enabled their revolutionaries to discover the principal contradiction operating in their countries—that between imperialism and the colonial people. It also enabled them to concentrate their fire against the principal enemy and thus to build a very wide political front, especially between the proletariat and the peasantry. On the other hand, the concept of the uninterrupted character of
the democratic revolution in our times enabled the proletariat and the peasantry to exercise the leadership function in the democratic revolution, to avoid falling into the Menshevik error of letting the bourgeoisie seize the reigns of power after completion of the first stage of revolution, and to boldly march to socialism after quickly completing ‘boldly and extensively’ the tasks of the democratic stage of the revolution.

V

One of the basic questions dealt with by Lenin was that of the attitude to be adopted by the communists (and the international communist movement) towards the bourgeoisie in the course of the bourgeois democratic national liberation movements. Tied up with this was the preliminary question of defining the role of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry in these movements.

Lenin started by pointing to the “clear distinction to be drawn between the two periods of capitalism.” The first is the period of its ascendancy when its struggle against feudalism and absolutism leads it to create mass national movements drawing in “all classes of the population into politics”, particularly the largest section of the population, the peasantry. The second is the period of its decline—“the eve of capitalism’s collapse”—when it faces the proletariat. Typical of this period “is the absence of mass bourgeois-democratic movements.”

Clearly the colonies and semi-colonies were currently in the first, historically progressive phase of capitalism. In these countries, on the one hand, capitalism had the buoyancy of a class on the rise and, on the other, it was oppressed by imperialism. Moreover, capitalism comes into conflict with imperialism in its efforts to create a nation-state in which it could best flourish. In several countries, the bourgeoisie was also in conflict with local feudal and medieval forces which acted as a barrier to capitalism and with which imperialism was allied. This led the colonial bourgeoisie to come closer to the people.
At the same time Lenin also noted the tendency of the colonial bourgeoisie in particular cases to vacillate and compromise with imperialism and feudalism, of some of its sections to even go over to imperialism, and to use nationalist slogans to deceive the workers.\textsuperscript{54} Lenin’s view of colonial bourgeoisie, therefore, stressed its vacillating role (with both positive and negative possibilities) rather than put a one-sided emphasis on its ‘in general’ radical or ‘in general’ reactionary character.\textsuperscript{55} The first emphasis would glorify the role of the bourgeoisie, make it ‘respectable’, and tend to make the proletariat tail behind it; while the second would lead to the total negation of the role of the bourgeoisie in the colonies, and produce the tendency to follow purely adventurous tactics in the national movement leading to the rapid isolation of the communist movement from the peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie.

The second important constituent of Lenin’s approach lay in his seeing the role of the peasantry as the heart of the bourgeois democratic revolution in the colonies and semi-colonies. The peasantry was seen not only as the chief force of this revolution but also as its chief social base or even as the typical representative of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{56} So far as communist work in the colonies was concerned, work among the peasants was to play an important role.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, the peasants were destined to play “a very big revolutionary role in the coming phases of the world revolution.”\textsuperscript{58} In the \textit{Preliminary Theses}, Lenin stressed the need “to give special support to the peasant movement” and urged the communists “to strive to lend the peasant movement the most revolutionary character.”\textsuperscript{59} He even believed that the time was ripe to try to implant peasants’ and other toiler’s Soviets in the colonies and semi-colonies.\textsuperscript{60} Lenin also worked towards the idea that in these countries the Communist Party should adjust its role (its membership, special tasks, etc.) to the level of the peasantry. In these countries, he wrote: “This is the crux of the matter. This needs thinking about and seeking concrete answers.”\textsuperscript{61}

Lenin was here making a major contribution to the theory and practice of revolution in the colonies and semi-colonies. Marx and Engels had, of course, seen some of the potentially revolutionary qualities of the peasantry when allied with a
national liberation movement. Similarly, others, in particular Mao Tse-tung, have gone ahead of Lenin in linking agrarian revolt with the national movement, in seeing national liberation struggle as a peasant war in a colonial setting, or in seeing bourgeois democratic revolution as being basically a peasant revolution. But the crucial linkage was made by Lenin and the basic step forward was taken by him. He had provided the foundation. He could not have done more. He was not a prophet or blue-print maker for other peoples' revolutions. He was a revolutionary thinker and leader who discerned and analysed the emerging reality of the colonial world on the basis of his grasp of Marxism and his experience of the Russian and world revolutionary process. Further deepening of his social ideas had to be and could have been done only by those who were actually engaged in making colonial revolutions.

Lenin firmly held the view over a long period of time that, in view of the progressive role of the bourgeoisie in the colonies and semi-colonies and because their revolutions were yet at the bourgeois democratic stage, the communists should support and participate in the existing bourgeois democratic liberation movements and should ally, howsoever temporarily, with all bourgeois elements taking active part in these movements. In other words, the national liberation movement should be seen as an anti-imperialist united front of all those who were willing to fight against imperialism.

This issue was decisively thrashed out at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 when Lenin's view as put forward in his *Preliminary Theses* was accepted and M.N. Roy's and Serrati's view that the workers and peasants must organize a separate liberation movement distinct from the bourgeois-led movement was defeated.

While Lenin's general formulation of support to the bourgeois democratic liberation movements was widely accepted—even M.N. Roy in the end accepted it, at least formally—very soon a major controversy arose which was to plague the communist movements in the colonial world for years after. This was the question of concrete tactics towards the existing national liberation movements with their varying class compositions,
programmes, and degrees of radicalism in relation to imperialism and feudalism. The question, in other words, was: which types of bourgeois nationalist leaderships were to be given active support and allied with.

The roots of this controversy go back to a change in the language of Lenin's "Preliminary Draft of the Theses on the National and Colonial Question". In the final version as it emerged out of the discussions in the Commission on the subject, wherever Lenin had mentioned support to "bourgeois democratic" movements, the words were changed to support for the "national revolutionary" movements.66

Why was this change made? What did the word 'revolutionary' here signify?

In presenting the Report of the Commission, Lenin made it clear that the purpose of the change was not to negate his entire understanding of the bourgeois democratic character of the national liberation movements or of the policy of supporting them or collaborating with them.67 In his speech before the Commission, Lenin had said, contesting Roy's views: "In Russia we supported the liberation movement of the liberals when it acted against tsarism. The Indian communists must support the bourgeois democratic movement, without merging with it." 68

The change was made to specify the types of bourgeois democratic movements with which the communists could ally. Lenin wanted to demarcate the reformist and the pro-imperialist sections and aspects of these movements from the revolutionary sections and aspects.69 In keeping with his understanding of the vacillating character of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations, including the colonial ones, he wanted to safeguard the proletariat from the evil consequences of such vacillations and even betrayals. He, therefore, urged the communists to support only those movements which were "genuinely revolutionary". On the other hand, he urged them to "combat the reformist bourgeoisie".70

Another important reason, which we may infer, as to why Lenin made the change from his Preliminary Theses was to oppose a mechanistic interpretation of the progressive role of the colonial bourgeoisie. That the colonial bourgeoisie was objectively and, therefore, potentially in contradiction with
imperialism should not be taken to mean that it, or all its sections, would in practice always and invariably fight against imperialism. The communists would ally with only those of its sections which actually fought against imperialism and which were, therefore, revolutionary. This distinction between a position in general and a position in practice was a part of the importance that Lenin assigned to political aspects of a problem, particularly in a period of revolution, as apart from its economic bearings.

We have still, of course, to understand more specifically what Lenin meant by the words “genuinely revolutionary”? And here we must keep in view, as was pointed out in Section I of this paper, that for Lenin a political position, as distinct from a position of principle, was never defined in general or in abstract but always concretely, within a definite historical setting. At the outset, in parenthesis, it may be pointed out that he had made a distinction between a revolutionary and a reformist bourgeois democratic national movement even earlier than 1920.\textsuperscript{71} This distinction was also inherent in his condemnation in 1913 of the liberal bourgeoisie in China as being on the verge of treachery and compromise with imperialism.\textsuperscript{72}

The use of the words “genuinely revolutionary” could not possibly mean that the colonial struggles were to lead directly to socialism or were to lose their bourgeois democratic character,\textsuperscript{73} or that the attitude that the bourgeoisie was likely to adopt towards the masses and on the social question after the overthrow of imperialism would determine its revolutionary or reactionary character in the anti-imperialist phase. Nor did it mean that the reference to revolutionary nationalists to be supported was not to the bourgeoisie but to the peasantry since the words revolutionary, reformist, and pro-imperialist could make sense only when applied to the former. The peasantry was a revolutionary class in the colonial setting (one on which a Communist Party could be based). The question of supporting it did not arise; it was to be a basic force of national revolution. It was to be joined with by the proletariat.

This aspect of Lenin’s thinking is best brought out in contrast with the ideas of M.N. Roy and Serrati (of Italy). With these two Lenin’s differences were not merely verbal or those merely needing further explanation, for both of them missed the
real meaning of the theory of development of revolution by stages. Presenting his case before the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions, Roy maintained that the Indian masses "are not fired with a national spirit. They are exclusively interested in problems of an economic and social nature." Consequently, they "have no interest whatsoever in bourgeois-nationalist slogans; only one slogan—'land to the tillers'—can interest them." Furthermore, "as far as the broad popular masses are concerned, the revolutionary movement in India has nothing in common with the national-liberation movement." He therefore urged the deletion of paragraph 11 of the Theses which asked the communists to support the bourgeois democratic liberation movements and said that "in India the Communist International should assist the creation and development of the communist movement alone, and the Communist Party of India should occupy itself exclusively with organizing the broad popular masses to fight for their own class-interests." 74

It may also be noted that Roy was quite clear in his mind as to who were the "revolutionary nationalists" in India. They were the people leading the Non-Cooperation Movement. 75 He did not argue in favour of supporting revolutionary nationalists as against the reformist nationalists or the pro-imperialist liberals. He distinctly argued against supporting the "revolutionary nationalists", though later, in the Supplementary Theses, he was compelled to accept the position after his contention had been rejected by Lenin and the Second Congress of the Comintern. 76

Speaking at the Plenary Session of the Congress, Serrati took a position similar to that of Roy, though from very different premises perhaps. Serrati held that "in general, no act of national liberation carried out by bourgeois democratic groups—even if the methods of insurrection are employed—is a revolutionary act." He opposed any support to or alliance with bourgeois democrats, not even with those "who are said to be revolutionary." 77 His position was also rejected by the Congress.
VI

We may now try to answer the question: What did Lenin mean when he used the words "revolutionary nationalists" in the final Theses?

Taking Lenin's thinking as a whole, and keeping in view that he was not 'decreeing' for a specific situation but dealing with an entire historical period in the history of the large number of colonial and semi-colonial countries, it can be said that in the widest sense the term revolutionary refers to the thoroughness and commitment with which the concrete, historical tasks of the bourgeois democratic stage of the revolution are struggled for. More specifically, and in the colonial situation, the words 'revolutionary nationalists' have two broad but clear connotations.

The first touchstone was that of attitude towards imperialism. Revolutionary nationalists were those who opposed and struggled against imperialism. In their countries imperialism was the main enemy; contradiction with imperialism was the principal contradiction. Therefore, the degree of revolutionary quality of a leadership was to be seen in relationship to this contradiction.

As Lenin put it in his Report on behalf of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions before the Plenary Session of the Comintern Congress, the section of the bourgeoisie that was not to be supported was the one which was pro-imperialist, which might have been 'implanted' by imperialism, and which might work "hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie, that is, joins forces with it against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes." This distinction, it should be again stressed, was based not on theory or principle but on "irrefutable" demonstration before the Commission. This anti-imperialist role of the colonial bourgeoisie was, in fact, the raison d'être of the policy of extending support to it. It was when the colonial bourgeoisie abandoned this that it became reactionary.

The second test of the revolutionary character of a national movement was the role of the masses and the extent of mass
activity in the movement. As pointed out earlier, one of the positive features Lenin had noted in the ascendant phase of capitalism was the politicalisation of the masses and their intense participation in mass movements. The extent to which a movement awakened the masses, mobilised them, brought them into politics, and released their latent energy through mass action against imperialism was a crucial test of the progressive and revolutionary character of a bourgeois national movement. On the other hand, when political decisions, even progressive ones, were taken behind the back of the people through negotiations at the top, the movement can be said to be reformist. This was the main reason for the high praise Lenin bestowed on Sun Yat-sen in 1913. "Revolutionary bourgeois democracy, represented by Sun Yat-sen," he wrote, "is correctly seeking ways and means of 'regenerating' China through maximum development of the initiative, resoluteness and boldness of the peasant masses in implementing political and agrarian reforms." A long quotation dealing with the Irish struggle for national liberation from his major work, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, written in 1914, makes the point quite clear:

Though, in principle, an enemy of federalism, Marx in this instance granted the possibility of federation, as well, *if only* the emancipation of Ireland was achieved in a revolutionary, not reformist way, through a movement of the mass of the people of Ireland supported by the working class of England. There can be no doubt that only such a solution of the historical problem would have been in the best interests of the proletariat and most conducive to rapid social progress.... Both the Irish people and the English proletariat proved weak. Only now, through the sordid deals between the English Liberals and the Irish bourgeoisie, is the Irish problem being solved....

In this respect, we have already dealt at length with the role that Lenin assigned to the mass activity of the peasants in the national liberation movement.

Lenin attached another condition for supporting the bourgeois leadership of the national liberation movements in connection with the role of the people. It must not oppose the
communist effort of "educating and organizing the peasantry and the broad mass of the exploited in a revolutionary spirit." In other words, the communists were not to appease the colonial bourgeoisie by keeping the peasant and mass movements under bourgeois control or within limits acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the communists under all circumstances must maintain their own separate existence, "the independence of the proletarian movement", never letting the independent political activity and organization of the workers and peasants be submerged under bourgeois activity and leadership.

Lenin's emphasis on the role of the masses and the independent organization of the communists had one clear meaning: a bourgeois democratic movement should be supported only if it enabled the proletariat and the communists to make preparations for, to open the way to, the next stage of the revolution.

The question as to what Lenin meant by the words "national revolutionaries" can be broached in another manner—by tracing his approach over the years to the national liberation movements of the East. This would make it obvious that only the use of the two criteria discussed above could have led him to describe many of them as 'revolutionary'.

In the article 'Inflammable Material in World Politics', written in 1912, Lenin hailed "the revolutionary movement in various European and Asian countries", and, more concretely, referred to the rise "of the revolutionary struggle in India," and the "revolutionary" movements in Persia and Turkey. In 1912, he again referred to "the revolutionary movement of Asian democrats" in Persia and pointed to "the international significance of the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people as one that brings liberation to Asia and undermines the domination of the European bourgeoisie." In 1913, the entire article 'Democracy and Narodism in China' was an analysis of the revolutionary movement in China under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. In particular the movement was praised because "it squarely poses the question of the conditions of the masses, of the mass struggle." In the same year, in the article 'The Awakening of Asia', he pointed to the spread of democratic revolution to the whole of Asia and took note of the significant new development—"the spread of the revolutionary democratic movement to the Dutch Indies." In 1915, in the
major article ‘Socialism and War’, Lenin noted that national liberation movements in China, Persia, India and other dependent countries were arousing hundreds of millions of people in the fight against foreign oppression (thus meeting both the criteria discussed above).

National movements developed in China and India after World War I, and Lenin’s evaluation of these movements is again instructive. Lenin was impressed by the sweep of the Non-Cooperation Movement in arousing mass consciousness and unleashing popular energy after the brutal massacre at Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In his Report to the First All-Russian Congress of Toiling Cossacks, he remarked that in India “an awakening of political consciousness and the revolutionary movement grew from day to day.” In June 1921, at the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Lenin wrote that the masses of Asia were “becoming an active factor of world politics and of the revolutionary destruction of imperialism,” and that “British India stands at the head of these countries” because in India “the maturing of the revolution” was being “accelerated”. M.N. Roy has in his Memoirs referred to his discussions with Lenin in 1920 regarding Gandhi. To quote him: “Lenin believed that, as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement, he was a revolutionary.” These remarks sum up pithily one of the main criterion Lenin used for evaluating the leadership of a bourgeois democratic liberation movement. This positive evaluation of Gandhi lasted only as long as the mass movement lasted. In February 1922 the mass movement in India was withdrawn; and this positive evaluation of the Gandhian leadership also disappeared. While no comment of Lenin on India of this period is available, the Theses on Eastern Question adopted by the Fourth Comintern Congress held in November 1922 may serve as a partial guide to Lenin’s thinking. The Theses after referring to the “tempestuous growth of the national revolutionary movement in India...” points to the “vacillations and hesitations” of the bourgeois nationalist leadership due to its increasing fears of agrarian revolt. This “timidity” (not betrayal or “reactionariness” it may be noted, B.C.) of the bourgeois leadership had put “obstacles in the way of organizing and rallying the masses, as the bankruptcy of the non-cooperation tactics in India shows.” In other words, the