In constructing a typology of popular movements under colonialism, it is convenient to start with a distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ forms of resistance. This distinction was first made in the field of African studies but is being applied now increasingly also to nineteenth century India.\textsuperscript{11} ‘Primary’ resistance refers to the opposition of pre-colonial, as yet largely unchanged, socio-political structures to foreign intrusion, headed by traditional elements (princes, tribal chiefs, zamindars, established religious leaders, etc.) and having in the main a ‘restorative’ aim.\textsuperscript{14} ‘Secondary’ resistance develops somewhat later, with deeper colonial penetration; it is characterized by new types of leadership and aims going beyond simple restoration of the past (in content, if not always in form).

Primary resistance need not take much of our time here, for by the 1870s this was clearly fast declining. Its predominance up to and including 1857 is equally obvious. Relatively few historians have followed up the pioneering work of S.B. Chaudhuri twenty-five years ago on ‘civil disturbances’,\textsuperscript{18} and so the role of popular initiative in such movements remains largely unexplored. A recent detailed study of popular resistance in Awadh in 1857-58 highlights the initial impetus coming from sepoys (i.e., peasants in uniform), the relatively late entry of talukdars when British rule had already collapsed, the big difference in numbers between regular talukdari retainers and the levies which fought a guerrilla war so doggedly under their leadership, and the fact that swords far exceeded firearms in the arms seizures made by the British.
but the fundamental features emphasized throughout remain religio-political 'restorative' aims and talukdari leadership (even what is, not too happily, styled 'talukdar-peasant symbiosis').

The decline in this type of resistance after 1857 was obviously connected with the major shift in British policy towards conciliation of princes and landed elements, typified by the abandonment of the doctrine of lapse and in the Awadh policy of 'sympathy' towards talukdars. In addition, traditional patterns of paternalism and deference were being eroded with the spread of the harsher logic of commercialization. As the 'lords of the land' became transformed into mere 'landlords' in a process analyzed recently by Metcalf, Awadh peasants who had loyally followed the talukdars in 1857 began, already from the 1880s, to consider them their principal oppressors. A third factor, deserving much greater attention than usually accorded to it, was the decline of the share of state revenue in the surplus from agriculture, benefiting zamindars as well as the upper stratum of raiyats (who consequently often in practice became small landlords) in ryotwari areas, and sharpening the contradictions between such groups and subordinate rural elements. From at least Mughal times down to the mid-19th century, the state had been the principal appropriator of the surplus from the countryside, with groups generically described as zamindars playing a significant but essentially subordinate role. Peasant resistance had consequently been directed in the main against state officials, and normally led by local zamindar elements with whom the upper stratum of the raiyats were often associated by paternalist traditions and often by clan or caste linkages. Rural rebellion in both Mughal and early colonial India consequently seems to have resembled the movements against tax-officials of the absolutist state in 17th century France, rather than late-medieval jacqueries, the Peasant War of 1525, or the anti-seigneurial explosion of 1789. Post-1857 moves to extend the Permanent Settlement (which had allegedly kept Bengal loyal) proved abortive, and periodic revenue reassessments led to occasional peasant unrest and to nationalist criticism till the 1920s, but land revenue still steadily fell behind agricultural prices. The share of land revenue in gross Government of India tax receipts fell from 43% in 1880 to 23% in 1920, while in Madras Presidency between 1860 and 1920, average assessment per acre
of cultivated land went up from Rs. 1.7 to Rs. 2.1 during a period in which grain prices rose by between 120 and 180%. After the shock of the successful Bardoli satyagraha of 1928, efforts to hike up land revenue virtually ceased, setting a pattern which post-1947 regimes have been unwilling or unable to reverse.

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

My first distinction requires some further discussion, since it will play a crucial role in the subsequent analysis, and since this is yet another cardinal feature of both pre-colonial and colonial rural society which I feel has been often not given its proper importance. The myth of the relatively undifferentiated and harmonious ‘village community’ persisted in both nationalist and Marxist circles much longer than warranted by the data. Both R.P. Dutt and S.J. Patel, for example, assumed landless agricultural labour to have been a marginal phenomenon in pre-colonial India, and attributed its obvious later importance to processes associated with colonialism: peasant differentiation through commercialization of agriculture and over-pressure on land as rural handicrafts were ruined while population increased. It is very clear now, however, that there did exist a fairly large class of often semi-servile agricultural labour even in the pre-colonial situation of a general land surplus, and that this was fundamentally connected with caste restrictions inhibiting some from working with their hands and others from becoming landholders. Irfan Habib in a recent article has drawn pointed attention to the way in which this fea-
ture set apart the medieval Indian peasantry from its counterpart in Europe or China, making many petty cultivators, exploited by jagirdars and zamindars, themselves also exploiters of low-caste or tribal labour. Cyclical’ or ‘multidirectional’ mobility within the peasantry, which one could have possibly expected in a land-surplus situation from the Chayanov model, were thus short-circuited even before the more recent over-pressure on land, with consequences inhibiting severely the unity of the rural poor. This was a fundamental feature of the agrarian scene whose political significance I intend to explore later.

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

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

Arnold has rightly criticized Hobsbawm’s over-facile acceptance of the colonial theory of self-contained ‘criminal tribes and castes’ as representing the Indian variant of social banditry. How artificial such administrative categories could become is indicated
by the fact that in Kheda district of Gujarat the Baraiya and the Patanvadiya castes, comprising no less than 37% of the population, were branded as ‘criminal’ in 1911.\textsuperscript{30} But certain communities rendered marginal by socio-economic or political developments could turn to professional dacoity more or less as a group, while food-gathering by primitive tribes could easily become ‘criminal’ in the eyes of immigrant peasant settlers or administrators of forests newly ‘reserved’ by the state.\textsuperscript{91} Traditions of banditry have in fact been remarkably strong in many parts of India right down to the present day. Dispossessed or otherwise down-and-out peasants and labourers would normally provide the main source of recruits for dacoit bands, though the outlaw leader could at times be a zamindar fallen on evil days, and illicit connections with local police or state officials have been and remain by no means uncommon. The typical peasant attitude to banditry is likely to be a varying compound of fear, admiration, and vicarious satisfaction in so far as the victims would normally be the better-off sections of the community. Crooke’s account of Northern Indian peasant religion and folklore refers to numerous cases of deification by “criminal and nomadic tribes of notorious robbers”—like Madhukar Shah of Sagar in Central Provinces, the UP Banjara cults of the thief Mana and the freebooter Mitthu Bhukiya, or the Bihar Dom reverence for the thief Gandeh.\textsuperscript{32} Two folk tales from Gujarat vividly reflect the complexities of the peasant-bandit relationship. The peasant named Lakha and his daughter are hailed in one story for heroically resisting the demands of Apa Devat, a notorious robber chief. But there is also the tale of Bhimo Jat and his three brothers who are forced to become outlaws after their land is seized by officers of the Thakur Sahib of Gondal for sheltering dacoits. “We give shelter to the dacoits and robbers, because otherwise they terrorise us and kidnap our children. You do not give us any protection. What else can we do?” Bhimo Jat, we are told, “plundered villagers for food. But he never harmed anyone, nor did he hold prisoners to ransom”. He died heroically fighting a whole army, and he “is still thought of with pride by the people of his village”.\textsuperscript{83} Such legends resemble very closely the history of more recent real life dacoits of the same region, like Aliya the Muslim peasant of Borsad in Kheda, who lost his land through mortgage to a Brahman lawyer, committed
35 murders and 55 dacoities between 1918 and 1923, had occasional links with a rich patidar headman who received his stolen goods and also at times with some policemen, but who still retained a social bandit-type reputation within his own community. Aliya was hanged in 1924, but "even today the Muslims of Borsad town worship at the grave of Aliya Pir".34

Social banditry of this type was an endemic feature of many pre-industrial societies, varying with the extent of economic distress but providing a kind of historical constant in a more long-term sense—"a protest,... [but] a modest and unrevolutionary protest",35 at best righting some individual wrongs, but not aiming at or connected with any structural change. Late colonial India, however, also saw numerous 'transformative' rebellions, particularly in tribal areas. Too much should not be made of this distinction between tribals and other sections of the rural poor, for apart from some isolated and really primitive food-gatherers, the adivasis were and are very much a part of Indian society as the lowest stratum of peasants subsisting through shifting cultivation, agricultural labourers, and, increasingly, 'coolies' recruited for work in distant plantations, mines and factories. But the characteristic tribal terrain with its hills and forests and undeveloped communications is obviously more suited to guerrilla resistance than more settled parts of the countryside. Tribal social organisation, while seldom entirely undifferentiated and often considerably influenced by shifts towards a caste pattern (the 'tribe-caste continuum'), still tends to retain a kind of unity lost in the fragmented structure of fully-developed caste Hindu society.

Tribal movements in the post-1857 phase tended to acquire two new features: a growing emphasis on the issue of forest rights, and a shift in the initiative for rebellion from traditional chiefs to prophets, who emphasized the need for internal socio-religious change to 'revitalize' the community and at times promised sudden, miraculous change of a 'millenarian' type.36 Colonial rule and its accompanying commercialization affected tribal societies adversely in a variety of ways. It strengthened already present tendencies towards penetration of tribal areas by outsiders from the plains (moneylenders, traders, landgrabbers, labour contractors, etc.), enforced novel conceptions of absolute private property and alienation through sale for indebtedness on groups with fairly
strong traditions of communal landholding (like the khuntkatti tenure in Chota Nagpur, for instance), ruthlessly exploited tribalas a reserve of cheap 'coolie' labour via the indenture system, and—more ambiguously—offered through missionary activity some education and possibility of social ascent combined with a wholesale assault on established cultural patterns. But the progressive tightening from the 1870s and '80s of colonial state control over forest areas for purposes of revenue and conservation provided perhaps the most deeply-felt grievance of all. The ban on shifting cultivation (jhum in Eastern India, podu in Andhra) was particularly disastrous for tribals and poor peasants in forest areas, for unlike settled plough-cultivation it did not require cattle or manure. For millennia (and by no means in India alone) the virgin forest had provided a variety of 'free goods' for the rural poor—timber for fuel, dwellings and tools, grazing facilities, edible roots and plants, fish and game—and Kosambi has emphasized the prodigality of sub-tropical nature as a possible explanation of the remarkable survival in our country of primitive food-gathering side by side with settled agriculture and urban civilization. Nor was the alienation one of a purely economic or material kind. The sudden clamping-down of restrictions on the use of or even entry into 'reserved' forests rudely disrupted deep-rooted and profoundly evocative cultural patterns.

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

Among the Santals, the Kharwar or Sapha Hor movement developed in the 1870s after the failure of the great 1855 rebellion. It concentrated in the main on preaching monotheism and inter-
nal social reform, but was turning towards agrarian issues before the arrest of its first leader Bhagirath. The Ulgulan (Great Tumult) of Birsa Munda (1899-1900) in the Ranchi region is too well-known (through the study by K. Suresh Singh) to require much discussion here. We may note, however, that Birsa emerged in the wake of the failure of the sardari larai of the early '90s led by tribal chiefs against the erosion of khuntkatti joint tenures (and after missionaries had also failed to provide redress). This son of a poor sharecropper of Chalked, having undergone some Christian and then Vaishnava influence and participated in a struggle to defend village waste lands against forest laws in 1893-94, claimed from 1895 onwards to be a prophet of a supreme monotheistic God, with miraculous healing powers as well as the power to turn guns and bullets to water. Fiery night meetings in the forest against “Thikadars and Jagirdars and Rajas and Hakims and Christians” led up to attacks on churches and police stations in December 1899-January 1900. These attacks were sufficiently widespread to cause a real panic in Ranchi and some concessions on the khuntkatti issue a few years later. Though Birsa was quickly captured and died in jail in June 1900, a Birsa sect has survived among the Mundas. This sect preaches monotheism and puritanical social reform in the expectation of a distant deliverance, but not immediate revolt to achieve a new world. The Tana Bhagat movement among the neighbouring Oraons also reveals this characteristic oscillation: beginning in 1914 as a sect calling for monotheism, abstention from meat, liquor and tribal dances, and a return to shifting cultivation, it briefly took on a more radical millenarian colour next year as rumours spread of the coming of a saviour variously identified with Birsa or a ‘German’ or ‘Kaiser Baba’, but lapsed back into relative quietism following repression and the end of the World War.

The forests and hills of south Rajasthan and northwest Gujarat were another centre of tribal unrest. In 1868, the Naikda tribe of Panch Mahal (Gujarat), attacked police stations in a bid to establish a dharmaraj. Here religious messianism seems to have merged with memories of the recent Rebellion, for an 1857 survivor, Rupsingh Gobar, led the attacks along with the messianic leader Joria. Some forty years later, a Hinduizing temperance and purification movement led by Govind Guru among the Bhils
of Banswara, Sunth and Dungarpur states (adjoining Mewar) and of Panch Mahal district in Gujarat suddenly flared up into a brief attempt to set up an independent Bhil raj in November 1913. Four thousand Bhils assembled on Mangad hill, and the British were able to disperse them only after considerable resistance in what seems to have been a kind of semi-symbolic battle, rather reminiscent of the last-ditch stand of the Birsaites on Sail Rakab hill a few years back.47

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

But the principal area of virtually endemic tribal rebellion lay in the forests and hills lying to the north of the Godavari, constituting under the British the Godavari and Vizagapatam Agency Tracts, extending northwards into Bastar, Malkangiri and Koraput, and inhabited by Koyas, Konda Doras and Kondhs largely dependent on shifting cultivation (podu). The epicentre was Chodavaram, the 'Rampa' country (so-called by the British after the family name of its traditional chief or mansabdar) along with the neighbouring Gudem region.49a The earlier revolts (1840,
1845, 1858, 1861, 1862) were led by subordinate hill-chiefs (muttadars) against their mansabdars superior, with whom the British had come to an arrangement in 1813, and who had utilized British protection to extort “a considerable revenue from taxes on fuel and grazing and other unauthorised cesses”. The biggest rising of all—that of 1879-80, which affected 5000 square miles—had its epicentre in Chodavaram and Rekapalle in Godavari, and extensions towards the Golkonda Hills of Vizagapatam, parts of Malkangiri, and Bastar. The rising is sufficiently well-documented to allow a more concrete analysis of the pattern of tribal grievances and resistance. In Chodavaram, oppression by the mansabdars (now taking the form of eviction of old muttadars, as well as the kalapappannu and poolary taxes on wood-cutting and grazing) remained a principal grievance, though the Madras official Sullivan noted a general impression that the British were fully behind the mansabdars and so had the ultimate responsibility for tribal woes. The immediate cause of the rising, however, was the recent extension of Madras abkari laws to the Rampa area, with the auction-purchaser of the toddy ijara imposing a heavy chigurupannu tax (to which the mansabdars promptly added modalupannu cess) on what had been not only an age-old free good (“It is never collected since creation”, complained a captured rebel) but “an absolute necessity of life to the hill-tribes during certain months of the year”. In neighbouring Rekapalle (transferred along with Bhadragaram from CP to Madras in 1875), the attempt to impose forest laws, which had not yet been enforced in Chodavaram, became the major issue. Once again an ancient tradition was being rudely violated through restrictions on podu which Sullivan considered “wholly unnecessary”. Tribals in both districts also complained about increasing penetration by Komati trader-moneylenders from the plains. Petty exactions by local police officials was another major grievance. The revolt which began in March 1879 with attacks on police stations developed into a guerrilla war which the British could suppress only in November 1880 after deploying six regiments of infantry, two companies of sappers and miners, and some cavalry. The rebels, noted an official report, had only a few matchlocks and muskets, but were accompanied by “a large rabble with sticks, bows and arrows”, and owed their success to “the large extent of dense jungles, and...
the thorough sympathy of the people... "59 There are no references to any millenarian dimension in this rising, possibly because (as with the Thadoe Kukis) the leadership came mainly from established muttadars.

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

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

In 1900 in Vizagapatam Agency, a Konda Dora named Koira Mallaya.

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

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

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

Movements of settled peasant communities in colonial India usually had more limited objectives and employed much less violent methods than tribal revolts—with one major exception: the Mappilas of Malabar, with their 32 recorded outbreaks between 1836 and 1919, culminating in the very major rebellion of 1921. The agrarian dimensions of Mappila unrest have been repeatedly emphasized ever since Logan in 1881 drew pointed attention to the ways in which British rule with its usual insistence on absolute proprietary rights had reestablished and vastly enhanced the posi-
tion of Namboodri and Nayar *jenmis* (many of whom had been driven out by Tipu Sultan) and correspondingly worsened the conditions of the largely Muslim leaseholders and cultivators. Sixty-two out of the 82 victims of Mappila attacks between 1836 and 1919 were upper-caste Hindus (22 Namboodris and 34 Nayars), about 58 of them were either *jenmis* or moneylenders (or both), and links with *jenmi*-tenant disputes are clear in 12 out of the 32 incidents. The vast majority of the activists were petty tenants or agricultural labourers, but they clearly enjoyed the sympathy of the entire Mappila community, being revered as *shahids* in a holy war. The agrarian grievances were hardly unique to the Mappilas; what makes these 'outrages' so remarkable were their highly localized nature and extremely distinctive form. The incidents were largely confined to two *talukas* of south Malabar (Ernad and Walavanad). The actual participants were relatively few (only 351 in all 32 cases). After murdering their chosen upper-caste Hindu targets, the assailants invariably attempted a kind of collective suicide instead of trying to abscond, frontally confronting the police and fighting till the end to achieve the status of *shahid* (no less than 319 out of 351 died fighting). Conrad Wood relates these peculiarities to the settlement pattern of Ernad and Walavanad (as distinct from north Malabar or the coastal area): scattered homesteads with very poor communications instead of nuclear villages, making collective mass resistance difficult, and leading to a situation in which the mosque was the one unifying social centre.

One might hazard a parallel here with the Mauges region of western France, the heart of the Vendee counter-revolution in 1793 with its dispersed settlements and priestly domination as contrasted to neighbouring Val Saumurois with agglomerated villages, greater urban-rural integration, and republican sympathies.

The recent study by Stephen Dale, however, emphasizes religious and cultural traditions rather than agrarian grievances alone, with some justice, perhaps, for there was no lack of oppressed Hindu peasants in Malabar, rack-rented and evicted by *jenmis*, whose protest at times took the form of banditry, but never the distinctive suicidal terrorism adopted by the Mappilas. Dale tries to trace the roots of Mappila militancy back to the bitter hostility to the infidel whites generated already in the 16th century by Portuguese seizure of the spice trade and forcible conversions—
a spirit reflected in Zaynal-Din’s *Tuhsat-al-Mujahidin* of the 1580s or in ballads honouring *shahids* in the anti-Portuguese struggle like *Kotturpalli Mala* (still popular today). There were even a few cases of suicidal attacks on Europeans and Nayar landlords already in the early 18th century, anticipating the characteristic pattern of the ‘outrages’ of the 19th century.\(^7\) The number of mosques in Malabar went up from 637 in 1831 to 1058 by 1851,\(^7\) and there were largescale conversions to Islam by untouchable Cherumars for whom this meant a definite rise in social status.\(^7\) The major ideological stimulus for Mappila outbreaks in the 1840s and early 50s came from the Tannal of Mambram mosque near Tirurangadi, Sayyid Fadl (exiled by the British in 1852), who preached that it was lawful to murder a Hindu *jenmi* evicting a Muslim tenant, and that the honorific plural should not be used when addressing Nayars.\(^7\) Mappila war songs contained vivid descriptions of the often frankly carnal pleasures of paradise awaiting *shahids*.\(^7\) The appeal of the Islamic conception of paradise to people deprived of most earthly pleasures by poverty should not be underestimated. This is indicated by the curious fact that a translation of the Koran seems to have been one source for the amazingly radical ideas of Menocchio, the 16th century Italian miller recently resurrected from Inquisition records by Carlo Ginzburg’s fascinating study.\(^7\)

Mappila rural terrorism, which probably did impose some checks on *jenmi* oppression, thus represented a kind of defensive millenarianism, promising heavenly pleasures to *shahids* and vengeance for specific acts of injustice, not a wholesale this-worldly transformation. But there is at least one reference to millenarianism of a more positive kind. The *Hal Illakkam* sect (literally, “frenzy-raising”) in Ernad in 1843 was preaching “that a ship would arrive with the necessary arms, provisions and money for 40,000 men” to liberate the country—an exact echo, strangely enough, of the Pacific ‘cargo-cults’ analyzed by Peter Worsley.\(^7\) And in 1921 rumours that British rule was collapsing before the Non-Cooperation—Khilafat onslaught set off a wholesale mass rebellion among the Mappilas of Malabar.

Food riots, social banditry, or millenarian rebellions remained very distant things for the new intelligentsia which by the late-19th century was emerging as the bearer of both patriotic ideology and of various types of more ‘sectional’ awareness emphasizing com-
munal, caste or regional affinities. Nationalist journals like the *Bengalee* wrote one or two articles sympathizing with Birsa Munda—an after his revolt had been safely crushed—and the Congress in the 1890s passed a number of resolutions critical of the forest laws. But the prevalent attitude ranged from indifference to hostility, and there is at least one recorded instance in which food rioters sacked a Congress leader's house, no doubt because he was also a landlord and moneylender. The solitary exception is the strange case of Vasudeo Balwant Phadke in 1879, a Chitpavan clerk who dreamt of reestablishing a Hindu raj by forming a secret band financed through dacoities, but whose anticipation of revolutionary terrorism differed sharply from the later pattern in its recruitment of low-caste Ramoshis and Dhangars. The outcome was a kind of social banditry, which seems to have persisted for some years in this part of Maharashtra, even after Phadke himself had been captured.

Turning from tribals and Mappilas to movements like the Pabna disturbances or the Deccan riots of the 1870s, we enter a rather different world. The issues were not too dissimilar: defence or assertion of tenant rights against zamindari rent-extortion, abwabs, and eviction mainly in Permanent Settlement areas; moneylender oppression or revenue and canal water rate enhancements in raiyatwari regions; and exploitation by white indigo planters. But the initiative and the bulk of the support for these movements came from relatively better-off sections of the peasantry. Thus Pabna was a district with a lot of double-cropping and a flourishing trade in jute, where more than 50% of the cultivators had managed to win occupancy rights, and the movement there never touched on the grievances of subordinate korfa raiyats or the large seasonal immigrant force of agricultural labourers. The Maharashtra Deccan had witnessed some rich peasant development during the cotton boom of the 1860s. As in Pabna, unrest was sparked off by attempts to reverse a trend towards relative prosperity, through zamindar counter-offensive in the one case and moneylender exploitation in the other. In the raiyatwari areas, the raiyats paying revenue to the state and complaining of enhancements could at times be in reality small landlords and not actual cultivators. The movements of such groups were not necessarily always non-violent, but they had specific limited objectives, lacked
millenarian dimensions, and the rumours that at times stimulated them were, significantly enough, not of the imminent collapse of British rule but of some pro-peasant measures said to have been taken by the rulers. Middle class nationalist interest in and sympathy for such limited movements was considerably more in evidence than in the case of tribal revolts, though there remained numerous hesitations and ambivalences here till the coming of Gandhi, and even later.

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

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

The Deccan riots of May 1875, affecting 33 villages in 6 talukas of Ahmednagar district, were somewhat more violent than the Pabna disturbances, but hardly more radical. The sudden fall in prices as the cotton boom was succeeded by a slump, accompanied by revenue enhancements in certain areas, made repayment of debts very difficult for the richer or more enterprising peasants who, banking on the high prices, had borrowed heavily from sowcars during the 1860s. The target of the riots was therefore the sowcar, but an official report noted "the absence of serious crime... [as]...a very remarkable feature in the outbreak", with the peasants interested only in seizure and destruction of debt-bonds. The villagers were often led by their headmen (patels), and it seems that official enquiries connected with the preparation of a gazetteer had led to rumours that "Government was enquiring into the ryots, circumstances, and that Her Majesty had ordered the sowcars to give up their lands". Significantly enough, only immigrant Marwari sowcars were attacked, and not indigenous elements who had turned to trade or moneylending (like the khots of Ratnagiri).
In Bengal, too, the rich peasant or *jotedar*-turned-moneylender was seldom attacked, unlike the Marwari or Bengali usurers among Santals or the Sahas among East Bengal Muslims. A successful member of the broad community of landholding peasants, however exploitative, would be envied, admired and often looked up to for favours and leadership.

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

In the Kamrup and Darrang districts of Assam, a revenue-hike of 50-70% in 1893 was met by *raij mels*—mass assemblies of villagers, led by the rural elite of Brahmans, Gossains and Doloihs, which enforced non-payment of revenue through the weapon of social boycott or ostracism of those who broke the popular consensus. There was also some looting of bazaars, and two cases of police firing, at Rangiya and Patharaghat. Urban nationalist support was confined to resolutions of the Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha and speeches on the floor of legislative councils. The intervention of Tilak and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha he had recently captured
during the Maharashtra Deccan famine of 1896-97 was more substantial, and seriously alarmed the government. Agents were sent into the countryside to hold meetings and distribute pamphlets educating the peasant about his right to demand revenue remissions under the Famine Code in a year of scarcity, and some short-lived no-revenue combinations were started in Thana, Kolaba and Ratnagiri. The basic autonomy of the peasant movement was revealed, however, both by the looting of grain-shops (which middle-class nationalists of course had never advocated)\textsuperscript{100} and the continuation of popular resistance well after the urban agitators had withdrawn and Tilak had been jailed on a different issue. Instances of distress of movable property for non-payment of revenue in the Central Division of Bombay Presidency went up from an annual average of 26 during 1892-97 to 2269 in 1898-99.\textsuperscript{101} In Gujarat, still a backwater so far as urban Congress nationalism was concerned, a powerful no-revenue campaign was organised during the famine of 1899-1900 when the government refused adequate remissions, with village leaders maintaining solidarity through caste boycott of those paying revenue. The kunbi-patidar peasants of Kheda had enjoyed a period of prosperity in the late 19th century from expanding markets for tobacco and dairy produce. But this was rudely disrupted by plague and famine. The peasants here also had a well-established tradition of hijrat: collective migration to escape excessive tax burdens, which was specifically mentioned and justified even by the basic text of the influential Swaminarayan religious sect.\textsuperscript{102} Tilak has been occasionally hailed for anticipating Gandhi through his 1896-97 no-revenue campaign; the honour properly belongs much more to the peasantry whose traditional armoury included most of the weapons (collective non-payment, social boycott, migration) to be used under the Mahatma’s leadership from the 1920s.

The second major example of a pre-Gandhian linkage between nationalism and agrarian unrest was provided by the Punjab in 1907, with the movements of Chenab canal colonists against bureaucratic control by white colonization officers, Bari Doab peasants against an increase in the canal tax, and Rawalpindi protests against a land-revenue hike. The prosperous Sikh and Muslim canal colonists (land had been given in large blocs to peasant immigrants, ex-soldiers, and urban investors, and the estates at
times exceeded 2500 acres) were certainly quite capable of organising an independent agitation. Though Lajpat Rai was deported in May 1907 for allegedly inciting the peasants, his autobiography reveals him to have been rather unenthusiastic about the matter. He did address a couple of meetings of Chenab colonists at Lyallpur, but only with considerable hesitation. The more radical Ajit Singh, however, did carry on an active no-revenue campaign, and frightened Lajpat by his seditious talk.

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

Peasant resistance to white indigo planters forms a rather special category. The racial aspect here had aroused considerable middle-class sympathy already in the Bengal ‘Blue Mutiny’ of 1859-60. Planters in Champaran at first had a somewhat easier time, for unlike Central Bengal this was an outlying region and a mutually profitable arrangement had been reached with the local zamindars, with Europeans becoming tenure-holding thikadars in the Permanent Settlement hierarchy. But there was already some resistance in 1867-68, winning a reduction on the land compulsorily put under indigo from 5-6 to 3 kathas per bigha (the tinkathia system). Tensions sharpened after c 1900 following the decline of the indigo demand in face of German synthetic dye competition. Planters
sought compensation through rent-enhancements (*sharahbeshi*) and lump-sum payments (*tawan*) in return for releasing peasants from the obligation to grow indigo. There was a major movement in the Motihari-Bettiah region in 1905-08, affecting 400 square miles and involving the murder of a white factory manager and 57 criminal cases. The resistance over the next decade took the forms of petitions, cases and efforts to get the support of Bihar Congress leaders and journalists, and it was as a part of this ongoing confrontation that Raj Kumar Shukla contacted Gandhi at the Lucknow Congress in 1916. While many sections of rural society had their grievances about the planters, the initiative for organizing what Jacques Pouchepadass has described as “upward pressure from the rural masses themselves” came from the peasant upper crust which resented “the lost opportunity of doing business which the indigo obligation represented” as prices of foodgrains and sugar-cane rose with a growing export trade from Champaran. Raj Kumar Shukla himself had 20 bighas of land in a district with an average holding of 3½ bighas, plus a small moneylending business. Poorer sections, both in 1905-08 and in 1917, were rallied also through religious and caste sanctions, with threats of social boycott and peasants taking oaths before village shrines, non-compliance carrying the penalties of beef for Hindus and pork for Muslims.

Thus a recurrent feature of most popular movements was the reliance on traditional community consciousness and sanctions based on it, whether tribal, caste or religious. It is noteworthy that tribals uprooted from their native earth and clan linkages apparently also lost much of their militancy. Despite atrocious, semi-servile conditions, Assam tea coolies recruited in large part from tribal areas failed to develop organized protest movements—as distinct from sporadic cases of violence—till a fairly late date. The strength of traditional ties is evident even among social groups connected with the genuinely new capitalist sector of the economy. With the exception of the Parsis, whose relative weight within the Indian bourgeoisie has declined over time, business groups in our country have been marked on the whole not by any unequivocally ‘modern’ ideology, but rather by the strength of institutions of joint family and caste—elements which according to some historians actually go some way towards explaining the remarkable
Marwari success-story. In the Surat protests against the salt duty in 1844, revised weights and measures in 1848, income tax in 1860, and a license tax in 1878, (which judging by most of the issues must have had a strong merchant component) the main weapon was the closing of shops (hartal) organised by caste and community leaders, and government officials were sometimes threatened with social boycott. The importance of traditional forms in the early labour movement is indicated by the existence, at least in Bengali, of a purely indigenous synonym for the strike (dharma-ghat), unlike much of the remaining vocabulary of the working-class and socialist movement. The term indicates both early and spontaneous origins (in fact, probably a carry-over from peasant no-rent movements, which were described as dharmaghat by the Derozian Pyarichand Mitra in 1846), and a connection with some kind of religious vow. During a strike at the Kharagpur railway workshop in September 1906, the leaders are said to have brought the workers out “under the penalty, in the case of Hindus, of being made to eat cow’s meat, and in the case of Muhammadans, pig’s flesh”. Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently emphasized the importance of ‘community-consciousness’, as distinct from a unified and clear recognition of class, among jute mill workers in and around Calcutta in the 1890s. Muslim workers demanded holidays for Id or Muharram, Hindus for Rathajatra, and there were occasional fratricidal riots over issues like cow slaughter.

It is true that communal or caste divisions did not prevent united action against employers, and as in peasant movements, the initiative in early strikes came almost entirely from the workers themselves. Late 19th century middle class interest in industrial or plantation labour as embodied in the efforts of Sasipada Banerji, Dwarakanath Ganguli, or N.M. Lokhande did not go beyond philanthropy. Swadeshi barristers like A.C. Banerji and A.K. Ghosh who led strikes and helped to start unions in Bengal during 1905-08 seem to have done so usually after workers had gone on strike and sought their help. Though some organizational work in Bombay city by Extremists through jobbers did precede the great protest strike following Tilak’s transportation in July 1908, the main initiative again probably came from mill-hands, for Tilak’s speeches in the factory area had been remarkably free of class war tones. The Bombay strike, along with hartals in Cal-
cutta on 16 October 1905, protest strikes in Rawalpindi after the deportation of Lajpat Rai, and in the Tuticorin-Tinnevelly area in February-March 1908 following the arrest of Subramaniya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai, revealed that the Indian working class was not incapable of political strikes. But the oscillation between united class action and caste or communal conflicts was never entirely overcome, even the great Girni Kamgar strike in Bombay in 1928 being followed within a few months by a communal riot.

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

So far as caste is concerned, I feel the crucial problem lies in the combination, in varying proportions, of two contradictory aspects in the caste-class relationship. Caste has often had a congruence with class sufficiently strong to enable the articulation of genuine socio-economic demands through the language and forms of caste. But this is combined with an asymmetry in detail which tends to blur class lines and foster various forms of sectional or 'false' consciousness. Thus, throughout the country, landlords tended to come from the upper castes, peasant landholders to belong to what
are now usually called the ‘intermediate’ castes, while the poorest peasants and landless labourers would comprise the lowest castes and the untouchables. But there have always been exceptions, and the system has been flexible enough to permit upward mobility through ‘Sanskritization’ in response to economic or other changes. One or two concrete examples might indicate the complexities. In the Rae Bareli district of the United Provinces in the early 20th century, the bulk of the landed proprietors were Rajputs or Brahmans, but these castes also held 13% and 14.5% respectively of tenant land, which they usually enjoyed on specially favoured, lower rent conditions. Such terms (combined with, and often related to, kinship connections with landlords) would naturally encourage loyalties towards the zamindar patron rather than combinations with fellow-tenants of lower castes paying higher rents. Conversely, Ahirs and Kurmis were predominantly tenants, but they did hold 1000 and 15,600 acres respectively as proprietors also.\textsuperscript{123} David Hardiman’s micro-study of Kheda district in Gujarat highlights yet another complexity. In patidar-dominated Charotar, the Baraiyas were mostly poor peasants or labourers, but there were neighbouring areas where most substantial peasants were Baraiyas. The caste-class link was strong at the village level, much less so for the district as a whole, but “peasants tended to perceive their interests at that level, as at the village level, in terms of caste rather than class”.\textsuperscript{123}

As sociologists have often pointed out, the kind of ‘modernization’ we have had so far in our country has c.n the whole strengthened rather than weakened fragmentation and conflicts along caste lines.\textsuperscript{124} Improved communications facilitated wider, ‘horizontal’ combinations (while weakening local ‘vertical’ ties of jajmani dependence); English education provided a new ladder to social promotion for small but growing minorities; colonial economic exploitation involved a process of differentiation which benefited some Indians at the expense of others; and Census attempts from 1901 to classify castes on the basis of recognized social precedence led to a flood of claims and counter-claims as jati leaders jostled for pre-eminence, organized caste associations, and invented mythological caste ‘histories’. Successful leading members of a jati found it useful to mobilize support from caste-brethren in their usually quite parochial and selfish struggle for social recog-
nition, jobs, and, increasingly, political status. This process was greatly stimulated by the gradual introduction of electoral politics from the 1880s onwards. As for the poorer members of a jati, patronage links with more successful fellow-members seemed often the only road for survival in an increasingly competitive, harsh, and alien world. It must be added that jatis low down the social scale tend to be particularly jealous of their superiority vis-a-vis groups still lower down, leading to the world of Indian toilers becoming fragmented to an unusual extent. Movements inspired by broader ideologies, either national or class, could render such things secondary; but traditional barriers subsumed in a flood of mass enthusiasm could recur with the return to ‘normalcy’, making ideologies take second place to considerations of factional and caste politics.

The phenomenon of ‘caste movements’, which became an increasingly important part of the Indian social and political scene from about the turn of the century onwards, has been sought to be interpreted in at least three ways. They have been accepted, more or less at their face value, as modern expressions of the upward mobility through Sanskritization of particular jatis as a whole; denigrated, predictably, by the ‘Cambridge school’ as mere factional manoeuvres of patron-client linkages whose claims to represent their caste were as flimsy and unacceptable as nationalist efforts to speak for the whole country; and considered, as notably by Gail Omvedt in her study of the Maharashtra non-Brahman movement, as distorted but important expressions of class tensions which might at times go radically beyond the Sanskritization model of mere ‘positional mobility’. The variations in approach are perhaps not unnatural, for caste movements have differed considerably in composition and objectives alike. Among lower castes, for example, the Chamars of Jaunpur investigated by Bernard Cohn with their cult of Siva Narayana and imitation of Brahmanical forms, or the mercantile upper stratum of the Shanar untouchable caste of toddy tappers and agricultural labourers in south Tamilnad who began calling themseves Nadars and asserting temple-entry rights, fit in fairly well into a frame of analysis which emphasizes Sanskritizing claims to higher ritual status, accompanied or followed by more ‘secular’ demands for better job opportunities. The real benefits in such movements remain confined
in the main to an upper crust within the jati: the emergence of prosperous Nadar merchants has hardly improved the lot of the Shanar toddy-tappers of Tirunelveli. The Mahar movement of Maharashtra began in the 1890s with similar claims to Kshatriya origin, but under Ambedker’s leadership, it developed from the 1920s into a real attack on the caste system, with militant temple-entry campaigns, public burning of Manusmriti, some connections with the Bombay labour movement, and eventually conversion to Buddhism. The Ezhava awakening in Kerala started under the religious leader Sri Naryana Guru and his SNDP-Yogam (1902-03), attacking upper caste domination and demanding temple-entry; some of its leaders, like C. Kesavan and K. Ayyappan, turned towards atheism in the 1930s, and inspired many to take the road towards the Communist Party.

A similar diversity characterized movements among intermediate or upper castes. The Kayasthas with their lead in English education and countrywide linkages through the professions were, not unnaturally, the first caste movement to develop all-India pretensions, with a conference in Lucknow attended by delegates from Bengal, Bihar, UP, and Bombay as early as 1887. The change they were primarily interested in was correspondingly modest—recognition of ‘twice-born’ status. Sanskritizing efforts and claims to better job opportunities were the principal staples also of the Mahishiya movement in Midnapur, consisting of a section of the Kaivartas claiming a new nomenclature and higher status under the leadership of some zamindars and a few Calcutta-based lawyers and traders. For the Goala or Yadavs of Patna, Monghyr, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur villages challenging upper caste domination in the 1920s, however, demands for educational opportunities and higher ritual status were accompanied by movements “not to do begari for zamindars... pari passu with taking the sacred thread they have been proposing to refuse menial and other services hitherto rendered to their landlords”. In Madras Presidency, the Justice Party challenge to Brahman domination of the professions (3% of the population, but 70% of the graduates between 1870-1918) was essentially the movement of a counter-elit among non-Brahman caste Hindus (Vellala, Reddi, Kamma, Nayar) led by prosperous landlords and merchants. The Dravidian or Tamil ideology did acquire, however, a much more radical
and populist dimension in the 1920s through E.V. Ramaswami
Nairkar's Self-Respect movement.\textsuperscript{132} A similar dualism emerges
from Gail Omvedt's analysis of the Non-Brahman movement in
Maharashtra spearheaded by Jyotiba Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj:
a moderate 'Sanskritizing' trend, interested only in Kshatriya
status and more jobs for the elite among the Maratha caste-cluster
(and as loyalist as their Justice counterparts in Madras); but also
a much more radical, anti-caste, and village-based movement
under leaders like Mukundrao Patil, claiming to speak for the
bahujan samaj against shetji-bhatji domination, and spreading its
message through vernacular tracts and folk tamashas.\textsuperscript{133} It is inter-
esting that both the Self-Respect and the Satyashodhak move-
ments attempted inversions of the Ramayana myth, glorifying
Ravana against Rama in Tamilnad and reviving an old peasant
cult of Bali-Raj slain by Sugrib and Rama in Maharashtra.

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

Once again, congruence and asymmetry coexisted in the class-
religious community relationship, simultaneously permitting ex-
pression of socio-economic grievances through a religious idiom,
and blurring class divisions. Thus the familiar Muslim peasantry-
Hindu landlord explanation of East Bengal communalism prob-
ably requires some qualification, for Muslim rent-receivers in
fact outnumbered upper-caste Hindus in the Rajshahi and Chitta-
gong divisions.\textsuperscript{134} But most big zamindars (and trader-money-
lenders) were Hindus, and Muslim peasants tended increasingly to
look up to the successful minority within their community as
leaders, developing connections with this upper crust-through
peasant sons becoming mullahs, for instance. A simple class-relig-
ion identity is clearly even less relevant in Bihar or the United
Provinces, though such relationships may well have been decisive
at the micro-level (e.g. Muslim artisans and Hindu merchants in towns, Hindu peasants and Muslim *talukdars* in parts of Awadh, a predominantly Hindu countryside vs towns partly dominated by Muslims, etc.).

Through a pioneering study of a mass of Bengali *puthi* literature, Rafiuddin Ahmed has recently established the existence of a strong sectional consciousness among rural Muslims nearly a generation before organized elite communalism became a significant force in Bengal. For the better understanding of mass nationalism and communalism alike, we urgently need more such studies of cheap vernacular tracts, akin to the broadsides and chapbooks which have been used to illuminate the world of popular culture in early modern Europe, though it is important to remember Carlo Ginzburg’s warning about the need to distinguish “culture produced by” from “culture imposed on the popular classes”. In the absence of such studies, a lot remains mysterious about manifestations of popular communalism like the cow-slaughter riots of the early 1890s or the massive Shahabad explosion of October 1917. Gaurakshini Sabhas fostered by some zamindars and lawyers had become active in many parts of Northern India from the 1880s. But really organized elite Hindu or Muslim communalism still lay in the future when riots ravaged large parts of eastern UP and Bihar and spread to Bombay in the summer of 1893. And in 1917 relations between Hindu and Muslim political leaders were unusually friendly in the wake of the Lucknow Pact. Again, unlike the anti-zamindar- *mahajan* outbursts in Comilla and Mymensingh in 1906-07, the beginnings of the Praja movement with the Kamar char conference in 1914 formulating rich peasant demands but under a specifically Muslim leadership, or the Calcutta riots of September 1918 where the principal targets were Burra Bazar Marwari businessmen, clear economic roots are much more difficult to trace for riots over cow-slaughter or on the music-before-mosque issue. What requires particular emphasis in the context of the present discussion is the extremely volatile nature of popular sentiments and movements. In Shahabad district in October 1917, for instance, the immediate issue was cow-protection, but crowds of up to 50,000 Hindu peasants attacking Muslim villages seem to have been influenced by widespread rumours that British rule was collapsing. Rioting crowds shouted ‘*Angrez ka raj uthh gaya*’ and
even 'German ki jay', and the area affected coincided with what had been Kunwar Singh's base in 1857-58.\textsuperscript{140} To take another example, Inder Narayan Dwivedi was a Sanatan Dharma Sabha activist and protege of Malaviya, who combined propagation of Hindi with Home Rule politics and the starting of Kisan Sabhas in 1917 in the Allahabad region.\textsuperscript{141} At both 'elite' and 'popular' levels, both Hindu revivalism and its rough Muslim counterpart, Pan-Islamism, could oscillate between expression of material discontent, communal frenzy, and anti-imperialist politics.

This may be the appropriate place to attempt a preliminary stock-taking of the significance and limits of popular movements in more general terms. The pre-First World War era is really in a way more suited than the Gandhian phase for such an evaluation, for the movements we have been considering so far were essentially 'spontaneous' and no more than marginally affected by intelligentsia ideologies, objectives or techniques. The limitations of such 'spontaneity' are fairly clear. Popular movements were directed usually against the immediate Indian oppressor rather than the distant white superior, and so were often not consciously or subjectively anti-imperialist. They tended to be fairly widely scattered in both space and time, and were extremely volatile, with class, caste and religious forms of articulation interpenetrating and passing over into each other with bewildering ease. All this makes it rather difficult to accept without some qualification the concept of 'peasant nationalism' as a coherent alternative to elite patriotic ideologies and movements. Popular initiative and autonomy were undoubted, even remarkable at times, but, unlike middle class nationalism which does have a certain continuity, at the level of ideology at least, from the formulation of the drain of wealth theory in the 1870s onwards, the movements we have been considering were clearly far more fragmented.

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

The forest policy, the *Abkari* policy, the Salt duty, the screwing up of land revenue by revision settlements, all make us odious...
We know pretty well what the educated natives want, but what the feelings are of the uneducated, I admit I don’t know.¹⁴²

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

The theoretical statement, grounded in Lenin and possibly Marx, that ‘subaltern’, particularly peasant, movements to become really effective require organisation and ideology coming in large part from outside and above, does have a certain validity: 20th century peasant wars have generally succeeded only under leaderships transcending purely peasant aims.¹⁴⁹ But a leap is
sometimes made from this general proposition to a quite different, more specific, and much more dubious one: that the Indian colonial middle class was able to supply this necessary ideology and organisation and thus, eventually, establish a full-scale ‘hegemony’.

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

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

National, regional, caste, and communal consciousness in fact interpenetrated and intermingled with each other as much, if not more, at the level of middle class thought and action as in popular
movements. Thus the specifically modern forms of nationalism and communalism emerged at about the same time (around the last quarter of the 19th century), had similar social roots, and were sometimes even combined, in varying proportions, within the same individuals. The same ambiguities are vividly reflected in the patriotic literature developing in regions like Bengal and Maharashtra from the 1860s onwards.

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

If moderate politics could be characterized without serious injustice as ineffective and 'mendicant', the Swadeshi period in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab did develop a whole new range of political techniques, many of them clearly anticipating Gandhian forms: boycott, Swadeshi enterprise, national schools, passive resistance. But in practice 'constructive Swadeshi' and forms of mass mobilization soon withered away, leaving mendicant 'agitation' and individual terrorism as opposite poles united on a common base of elite action: a shift from the one to the other was really much easier and socially less dangerous than a breakthrough towards genuine mass action. McLane has emphasized the elitist life style and consequent social inhibitions of the Moderate leadership, producing feelings of mingled contempt and fear of the 'lower
orders'. Pherozeeshah Mehta travelled in a special railway saloon, a Congress leader asked Gandhi to button his shirt for him during the 1901 session, Dinshaw Wacha recalled the blowing of 1857 rebels from British guns without the slightest sympathy in his *Shells from the Sands of Bombay*, and Surendranath Banerji during a temperance campaign in 1887 found the lower classes utterly alien..Extremist leaders despite their rhetoric were hardly very different in their way of life and attitudes, and the urban professional intelligentsia in general had close connections with propertied groups: a few industrialists in Bombay, commercial magnates like the Tandons of Allahabad, rent-receivers practically everywhere. Aurobindo even in his most radical mood shied away from any call for no-revenue or no-rent, the one really effective form of passive resistance in a peasant country, while the marked lack of enthusiasm among the bourgeoisie proper (as distinct from intellectuals with bourgeois aspirations) robbed boycott and Swadeshi of much of its force. Boycott of British goods in Swadeshi Bengal had to be attempted through student picketing of shops and social boycott of recalcitrant merchants, the collective trader vows which would characterize post-1920 boycotts being still significantly absent. The real spread of nationalist politics beyond the confines of the intelligentsia to business groups and peasants alike had to wait for the post-War era and Gandhi.
III

1917-1947

The vastly enhanced range of popular movements in the Gandhian era, combined with the fact that much more work has been done on these decades than on the earlier phase, make any attempt at even a relatively comprehensive study both impossible and somewhat unnecessary. Our discussion therefore will be confined to a number of broad problems relating to the varieties of popular movements and the forms of their interaction with middleclass leadership.

One may begin with possible explanations of the emergence from 1919 onwards of all-India mass politics—a qualitatively new phenomenon on the whole, though some qualifications may be necessary in terms of partial anticipations of it in a few regions in the 1905–08 period, and of the later ups and downs and uneven regional spread of Gandhian nationalism. The Cambridge interpretation—the Montford reforms by broadening the electorate forced politicians to cultivate a more democratic style—need not detain us very long. It may well explain certain types of politics and politicians, but the most substantial section of Indian politicians did after all boycott elections for some years, and the massive anti-imperialist upsurge of 1919–22 is surely much too big a thing to be explained by a paltry extension of voting rights to between one and three per cent of the adult population. Interpretations of Civil Disobedience and 1942 in terms of the possibility of further constitutional change appear equally trivial.

A basically economic explanation is more attractive and even acceptable—within limits. The First World War, the Depression,
and the Second World War all brought about very significant changes in the structure of colonial exploitation, stimulating political action by combining new grievances with growing strength so far as Indian business groups and labour were concerned, and leading to sharp fluctuations in prices which at various times affected adversely all sections of the peasantry. Following the pattern of much recent study of ‘long-term trends’ in European economic history, it may be tempting also to focus on demography and prices as the two key variables, since the behaviour of both did undergo radical changes after the First World War. Political historians so far have paid relatively little attention to the demographic ‘revolution’ of the 1920s, which, if Blyn’s findings are to be broadly accepted, led not only to stagnation but to actual decline in per capita foodgrains output in the ‘Greater Bengal’ region in the last decades of the colonial era.\textsuperscript{158} Stephen Henningham has recently argued that the acceleration of population growth in North Bihar from 1921 (1881—13.03 millions, 1921—13.82 millions, 1941—16.44 millions) sharpened conflicts over land, worsened conditions of the mass of tenants, and contributed to the conversion of what had been an isolated backwater to a centre of militant agrarian and political movements.\textsuperscript{188} As for prices, the post-war inflation, combined with the gap between industrial and agricultural prices, may be related to the distress and discontent among peasants, particularly poorer ones, in the early 1920s; the Depression obviously hit rich and middle peasants hard, stimulating no-revenue and no-rent movements from late-1930; and prices were shooting up again in conditions of wartime scarcity and profiteering on the eve of August 1942.

A closer examination using the tool of comparative analysis, however, compels certain qualifications. Demographic growth varied very sharply indeed from district to district, and a cursory glance at the United Provinces census data, for instance, reveals how difficult it is to establish any correlation between rapid increase in population and political and/or agrarian militancy. Among districts active in the Kisan Sabha and Non-Cooperation-Khilafat upsurge of the early 1920s, Gorakhpur, Hardoi, and Fyzabad returned a net growth in population for 1881-1931 above the provincial average of $+10.6\%\, (+37.2\%, +14.2\%, +11.4\%$ respectively). But Allahabad’s variation was only $+1.2\%$, and both
Pratapgarh with +7.0%, and Rae Bareli with +2.3%—the initial base of Baba Ramchandra’s Kisan Sabha—returned figures well below the average. Variations in population density may have been somewhat more relevant, with the ‘Indo-Gangetic central’ districts which were strongholds of the early Kisan Sabha, Non-Cooperation, and Civil Disobedience alike returning density figures considerably higher than the UP average, though even here density was higher still in some regions without organized peasant movements in the early 1920s, in the eastern-most part of the province, for instance.\textsuperscript{154} As for prices, the first pressures for no-revenue in Kheda in early 1930 during the Dandi march came several months before Gujarat was at all seriously affected by the Depression,\textsuperscript{155} and the scarcity, amounting to devastating famine in Bengal, was obviously far more acute in 1943, when there was no big upheaval, than in the preceding August. Much sharper price-rises (as well as much more intensive demographic growth) have not so far led to comparable all-India protest movements in post-colonial India. The basic assumption behind much economic determinism—that growing misery is a sufficient explanation for popular action—is in fact extremely dubious, and begs the whole complex question as to what kinds of socio-economic situations were most conducive to Gandhian—or non-Gandhian—mass movements.

All this does not imply, of course, that questions of socio-economic structures or conjunctures should or can be ignored. But, as George Lefebvre pointed out in his seminal article, “Revolutionary Crowds”, in 1931, the “true causal link” between social, economic, or political “causes” and the “event” or “effects” has to be sought in the formation of a specific “collective frame of mind”.\textsuperscript{168} And it is in terms of crucial shifts in collective mentalities that it is best to try to understand the phenomenon of Gandhi.

Judith Brown has tried to explain Gandhi’s “rise to power”\textsuperscript{166a} in terms of skilful political manipulation through “sub-contractors”, and it is perfectly true that the Mahatma combined a saintly idiom and apparent quixotry with meticulous and extremely able attention to organisational details. He was helped, somewhat fortuitously, also by certain aspects of his South African career, which gave him not only something of a world reputation
but also the possibility of contacts cutting across regions, communities and classes in a manner which was unthinkable for any other Indian politician of the early 20th century. But the basic fact remains that the impact of Gandhi, particularly during his early years after returning from South Africa, went very far beyond the rather limited ground covered by the organizational network he was gradually building up. The Rowlatt Satyagraha provides an excellent example. H.F. Owen’s study reveals the organizational preparation for it to have been quite remarkably patchy and limited. Signatories to the pledge circulated by Gandhi’s Satyagraha Sabha, for instance, numbered only 982 in mid-March, 1919—and of these all but 84 came from within Bombay Presidency. Gandhi did undertake a whirlwind countrywide tour, but he never had time to visit the Punjab—the province that was to be most affected. And yet Gandhi cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, for even that most ‘un-Gandhian’ inflammatory poster in Lahore in April 1919, Danda Akhbar, which called on “Hindu, Muhammadan and Sikh brethren [to] fight with bravery against the English monkeys—close offices and workshops...”, ended with the assertion: “This is the command of Mahatma Gandhi”. Throughout the Gandhian era, the most diverse things would be done in his name. The range, and often the radicalism, of popular actions was remarkable—but so was the irresistible tendency to keep on seeking shelter behind the Mahatma’s banner. Both aspects require explanation.

The two features in the Gandhian message which appear most crucial in this context were the implications of satyagraha, and Gandhi’s apparently rather obscurantist brand of populism. Ahimsa and satyagraha constituted for Gandhi himself a deeply-felt philosophy of life, but it was fully or sincerely accepted by a relatively small group of disciples. Its application—as a convenient method, rather than a creed—by a decisive section of the Indian political leadership is clearly related to its two-fold impact of drawing in the masses while at the same time keeping mass activity strictly pegged down to certain forms pre-determined by the leader. Indian politicians before Gandhi had tended to oscillate between Moderate mendicancy and individual terrorism basically because of their social inhibitions about uncontrolled mass movements; the satyagraha perspective of controlled mass participation
now offered a way out of the resultant impasse. The Gandhian model proved acceptable both to business groups, as well as to relatively better-off or locally dominant sections of the peasantry, all of whom stood to lose something if political struggle turned into uninhibited and violent social revolution.

The Gandhian social utopia, put forward most unambiguously in *Hind Swaraj* (1909), was a fullscale repudiation of modern industrial civilization. “India’s salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past 50 years or so” for “Railways, lawyers and doctors have impoverished the country....the so-called upper class have to learn to live consciously and religiously and deliberately the simple life of a peasant.” This was undoubtedly unrealistic and even obscurantist if considered as a final remedy for the ills of India or of the world; and it never had much appeal for sophisticated urban groups which by the 1930s and 1940s were turning increasingly to either frankly capitalist or socialist solutions, both based on industrialization. But it did represent a reaction to the deeply alienating effects of ‘modernization’, particularly under colonial conditions. For the artisan ruined by factory industries, the peasant to whom law courts were a disastrous trap and going to a city hospital often an expensive death-sentence, and (particularly, perhaps) for the rural or small town intelligentsia for whom Western education had brought few material benefits and who combined rural connections with a distance from actual work in the fields sufficient to permit idealization of alleged rural harmony, the anti-industrial theme had a real attraction, at least for some time. Gandhi’s social ideals were gradually sought to be concretized through programmes of *khadi*, village reconstruction, and (from the 1930s) Harijan welfare. None of these really solved problems in the sense of changing basic social or economic structures. However, tried out with sincerity and patience by devoted Gandhian constructive workers, they could improve to some limited extent the lot of the rural people and, above all, create and sustain stable political bases in the countryside. After the doldrums of the mid-1920s, the salt *satyagraha* of 1930 found its initial cadres and mass support mainly from such *asramas* and constructive work centres.

It must be added that the peasant appeal of Gandhi was greatly helped also by his political style: travelling third class, insisting on
the sanctity of manual and even menial work, speaking in simple Hindustani, wearing only loin-cloth from 1921 onwards, and using the imagery of Tulsidas’ *Ramayana* so deep-rooted in the popular religion of the North Indian Hindu rural masses. All this marked a sharp break with the style of most Moderate and Extremist politicians alike.

Yet it is fairly obvious that the tremendous breadth of Gandhian movements cannot be explained purely by what Gandhi as a personality actually thought, stood for, or did. What we confront again and again is the crucial role of rumour in a predominantly illiterate society going through a period of acute strains and tensions. From out of their misery and hope—and the years during and just after the War were marked by both, as vague reports filtered in of world-wide revolutionary changes—varied sections of the Indian people seem to have fashioned their own images of Gandhi, particularly in the earlier days when he was still to most people a distant, vaguely-glimpsed or heard-of tale of a holy man with miracle-working powers. Thus peasants could imagine that Gandhi would end zamindari exploitation, agricultural labourers of UP dream that “he would provide holdings for them”, and Assam coolies leave tea plantations *en masse* in May 1921 saying that they were obeying Gandhi’s orders.

A CID report on the *kisan* movement in Allahabad district in January 1921 makes the same point in vivid detail:

The currency which Mr. Gandhi’s name has acquired even in the remotest villages is astonishing. No one seems to know quite who or what he is, but it is an accepted fact that what he says is so, and what he orders must be done... the real power of his name is perhaps to be traced back to the idea that it was he who got *bedakhli* stopped in Pratapgarh... as a general rule, Gandhi is not thought of as being antagonistic to Government, but only to the zamindars... The process of image-building is fascinating, and deeply ambiguous. Peasants were giving to vague rumours about Gandhi a socially radical, anti-zamindar twist. But at the same time they were attributing their own achievements to him—for, if *bedakhli* (eviction) had been restricted in Pratapgarh, it was due to a peasant struggle under local leaders like Baba Ramchandra, and Gandhi or...
the Congress leadership had had little or nothing to do with it.\textsuperscript{166} If, as would happen repeatedly from 1922, the Mahatma categorically ordered a halt, the bulk of the masses would obey. The peasants still needed to be represented by a saviour from above—a crucial aspect which is perhaps sometimes underestimated. Though hardly a “sack of potatoes”, peasant society was deeply fragmented, and the \textit{Eighteenth Brumaire} of Marx may still have a lot to teach us. Incidentally, the historical necessity for something like a Gandhi-type leadership with strong religious overtones is indicated also by the emergence of a number of somewhat similar regional or local leaders in the early 1920s: Swami Viswananda and Swami Darshananda among Bengal and Bihar miners, Swami Vidyagnada in North Bihar, Baba Ramaehandara in eastern UP, Swami Kumarananda in Rajasthan, Ananda Swami in Maharashtra, Alluri Sitarama Raju in the ‘Rampa’-Gudem region of Andhra.

The interaction between the specific message and style of the Gandhian leadership and the largely autonomous popular images of Gandhi created complex and varied patterns which recent detailed research has made considerable progress in unravelling. The three themes which stand out are, first, the very considerable role of popular initiative in the unleashing of many of the Gandhian movements; second, the fact that even where a movement began from the top, there was usually a process of radicalization through rumour and the removal by arrest of the ‘official’ leaders; and third, the role of Gandhian organization as a repeated brake on mass pressures, leading to a peculiar dialectic, first explored by Gyan Pandey, between the strength of the Congress as a party and the extent of more elemental popular initiatives.

The one major exception to this pattern among all-India movements was the anti-War individual civil disobedience of 1940–41, initiated and tightly-controlled by Gandhi throughout—an exception which in a sense proves the rule, for this was also by far the weakest and least effective of all the Gandhian national campaigns. Even here, there is a strong possibility that Gandhi launched this peculiarly limited movement, individual courting of arrest through anti-war speeches, and that not on Sundays, Christmas or before 9 A.M., partly to forestall Socialist and Communist pressures for greater militancy.\textsuperscript{167} There was no ground-
swell in 1940–41, in sharp contrast to what would happen next year. A war which was still a distant affair brought, on the balance, gains rather than losses for substantial sections of the population, through a price-rise, not yet very sharp, which ended a decade of rural depression, a 31% increase in factory employment between 1939 and 1942, and opportunities for lucrative military contracts for businessmen.

Gandhi's first three campaigns on Indian soil were all clearly interventions in movements which had already started. At Champaran his role was limited to holding a public enquiry, while at Kheda the initiative for no-revenue came from local village leaders like Mohanlal Pandya of Kapadvanj taluka in November 1917. It was taken up by Gandhi only after a lot of hesitation on 22 March 1918, an unwise delay which weakened the case for remissions and made the eventual satyagraha a rather patchy affair, involving only 70 villages out of 559. While Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience were strategies planned by Gandhi, both were adopted after long periods of pressures from below. One need only recall Gandhi's very moderate stand at the Amritsar Congress of December 1919, and his resistance to the Purna Swaraj demand throughout 1928–29. As for the states peoples movements, the Gandhian leadership throughout the 1930s showed exceptional hesitation over extending support, probably because these tended to have considerable socially radical potentialities, given the context of near-total lack of political rights and rampant feudal oppression of the peasantry. Gandhi openly expressed his displeasure over the AICC resolution of October 1937 calling for solidarity with the Mysore agitation. Even after Haripura had declared the Purna Swaraj ideal to cover the states as much as British India, Gandhi indicated that he would be satisfied if princes reduced their privy purses and granted a measure of civil liberties and independent courts. Not even responsible government was demanded, far less integration or agrarian reform. The choice of Rajkot for the first personal intervention through satyagraha in March 1939 was also very significant: a tiny state surrounded by the firm Gandhian base of Gujarat, almost half its population lived in the capital, and so there was little danger of agrarian radicalism swamping a strictly non-violent satyagraha. Much more important movements in the late-1930s
—in the Orissan states, Hyderabad, and Travancore, for instance—got no encouragement from the Congress High Command, and Gandhi repeatedly tried to persuade local leaders there to call off the agitations.¹⁷²

Even at Champaran, the psychological impact of Gandhi’s intervention far surpassed his concrete activities or intentions. The Bettiah SDO reported on 29 April 1917 that Gandhi “is daily transfiguring the imaginations of masses of ignorant men with visions of an early millenium”.¹⁷³ A raiyat compared Gandhi to Rama, and declared before the enquiry committee that “tenants would not fear the Rakshasa—planters now that Gandhi was there”. Rumours spread that Gandhi had been sent by the Viceroy or the King to overrule all local officials and planters, and even that the British would leave Champaran soon.¹⁷⁴ The Rowlatt Satyagraha began with a fairly limited programme of volunteers courting arrest through public sale of prohibited works, plus an all-India hartal deliberately fixed for a Sunday; it developed into the biggest explosion of mass fury and violence since 1857.

Non-Cooperation-Khilafat again for long was meant to be largely confined to the ‘triple boycott’ of Councils, courts, and schools, followed up by Charkha and boycott of British goods; full-scale civil disobedience through no-revenue was repeatedly postponed, and then abandoned, on the very eve of its trial at Bardoli, following the Chauri Chaura incident. Yet apocalyptic rumours of the world turning upside down repeatedly transformed the movement into something very different, and particularly so in regions or among social strata where Gandhian organization was still weak or non-existent. To take a few random examples: forest administration in Palnad and Rayachoti talukas of Guntur and Cuddapah virtually collapsed in face of “large bands of men imbued with the idea that Gandhi Raj was either in being or about to be established and that the forest was theirs to work their will upon”;¹⁷⁵ there were jail breaks at places like Rajshahi and Trichinopoly, “based on the belief that Gandhi’s Swaraj was about to replace British rule”;¹⁷⁶ the Khilafat impact set off a massive millenarian revolt among the Mappilas, the bloody suppression of which left 2337 rebels killed, 1652 wounded, and no less than 45,404 prisoners, all mostly from just the two talukas of Ernad and Walavanad;¹⁷⁷ Santals attacked police in Jalpaiguri in February
1922, wearing Gandhi caps which they claimed made them immune from bullets; and in the Chaudagram sub-division of Tippera, "no taxes were being paid, and no agricultural rents collected either by Government or by private landlords" in the early months of 1922.178

A broadly similar pattern of radicalization can be seen also in Civil Disobedience. Though Gandhi initially had called only for a salt satyagraha, village officials began resigning their posts all along Gandhi's Dandi march route, and on 19 March 1930 peasants of Ras (in Borsad taluka of Kheda) demanded permission for starting immediate non-payment of revenue—a plea which Gandhi accepted with considerable reluctance.179 Even apart from the eminently non-Gandhian Chittagong Armoury Raid and Peshawar and Sholapur outbursts of April-May 1930, instances of popular peasant or tribal violence multiplied in face of intense repression and arrests of leaders, with crowds fighting back the police, as at Chechuahat in Midnapur in June, to cite one example among many.180 As agricultural prices crashed, there were mounting pressures also for no-rent, though the Working Committee had sanctioned non-payment of chaukidari taxes alone in permanently settled areas in May. The UP provincial leadership did hesitantly accept no-rent in October, the Bihar and Bengal PCCs never formally sanctioned it. The contrast between sanctioned forms of Gandhian agitation and the actual patterns imposed largely through grass-roots initiative is clearest perhaps in the 'forest satyagraha' in Central Provinces, Berar, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The Congress, while taking up tribal and poor peasant grievances about forest restrictions, did its best to restrict the movement to boycott of Forest Department auctions and peaceful mass violations of grazing and timber laws, with the forest produce being publicly sold on the pattern of illegally manufactured salt. But, as at Palnad and Rayachoti in 1921 but on a much larger scale, the actual forest movements often took on forms far more elemental and violent. The Kolis of Kanashi and Chankapur in Nasik district in October, for instance, "filled with stories that the British Raj had been replaced by Gandhi Raj", after a ceremonial banquet "started to shout Congress slogans... refused to disperse [and] hurled down stones in face of police firing".181 By late-1930 or early 1931, a process of simultaneous
decline and radicalization had set in: a weakening in forms of struggle associated with business groups or peasant upper strata (e.g. urban boycott, which merchants had started thinking involved too much of a financial sacrifice, or no-revenue in face of relentless British confiscation of property), accompanied by sporadic but fairly widespread tendencies towards less manageable forms (e.g. popular violence, no-rent, tribal outbursts). It was in this situation, as I have argued elsewhere, that pressures for a compromise mounted and led on to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.\textsuperscript{182}

In August 1942, the bulk of the Congress leadership, and particularly Gandhi, were in an unusually militant mood, probably in large part because they felt that Britain was losing the war.\textsuperscript{183} Yet despite strenuous efforts, the British failed to establish their case that the Congress before 9 August had really planned violent rebellion. Even the rather extreme secret circular of the Andhra PCC on 29 July 1942 had urged Congressmen to “be ready, organise at once, be alert, but by no means act... till Mahatmaji decides”. It still emphasized in the main the traditional Gandhian forms, with no-tax as “practically the last stage”, and mentioned disruption of communications (e.g. stopping trains “by pulling chains only”) as “not prohibited but not encouraged”.\textsuperscript{184} This was still a far cry from the massive and violent attack on communications and all symbols of state authority which occurred in many parts of India after 9 August—what Linlithgow privately described as “by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security”.\textsuperscript{185} Once again, the principal catalysts, apart from war privations aggravated by ham-handed administrative measures like wholesale destruction of boats in Bengal, were the removal of Congress leaders (on the January 1932 pre-emptive strike model, but going far beyond it) and widespread hopes of imminent British collapse. This time, these were no longer vague rumours, but the undisputed fact of the ignominious British collapse in Malaya and Burma, with evacuees left in the lurch by the British flight and trainloads of wounded soldiers helping to spread the mood of anger and hostility towards what to most Indians was an alien and meaningless war, and expectation of an apocalyptic end to white rule.

Unlike in 1919-22 and 1930-34, the radicalization process in
1942 was on the whole mainly at the level of anti-British militancy alone, with the very extent of anti-foreign sentiments, as in 1857, possibly reducing internal class tensions and social radicalism. "The characteristic feature of this movement was that private property was not attacked" recalls the '42 activist Govind Sahai, and the socialist illegal pamphlet Freedom Struggle Front rather apologetically argued that "the class war may have to come, but that is not yet, not till after the riddance of foreign exploitation". Though British authority virtually disappeared for some weeks over large parts of eastern UP and north Bihar, "there was only one attack on private property" in Azamgarh district (the estate of an absentee white zamindar), and, despite a strong and recent Kisan Sabha tradition in that area, Darbhanga raj officials noted with relief that rent-collection had remained unaffected. Middle-class nationalist ideology and organization may or may not have been indispensable in helping Indian peasants "to stand on their feet"; that it could also at times inhibit the articulation of class demands should not come as a surprise to anyone working within a Marxian framework.

Through a detailed comparative study of Agra, Rae Bareli, the Doab tahsil of Allahabad, and Bara Banki districts during Civil Disobedience, Gyan Pandey has established an important dualism about the role of Gandhian Congress organization. Organizational strength and discipline undoubtedly made particular movements more effective, but it also inhibited elemental popular radicalism which was on the whole more evident in Non-Cooperation than in Civil Disobedience, for then Gandhi's message had had a stronger component of apocalyptic novelty. The same point emerges from a comparison over provinces: regions like rural CP, Maharashtra or Karnataka, where Non-Cooperation had been relatively weak and Gandhian penetration was still rather new in 1930, tended to have more uninhibited movements during Civil Disobedience, than already-established Congress bases like Gujrat, coastal Andhra or Bihar. As compared to UP, the Bengal Congress in the early-1930s was organizationally weak and remarkably faction-ridden; the Civil Disobedience era in that province combined less organized striking power with considerably greater diversity of forms of popular initiative. In 1921-22, also, the most elemental and militant movements in Bengal were in re-
latively outlying parts of the province where Congress organizational penetration could not have gone very deep: the Jhargram sub-division of Midnapur, Rangpur, Chittagong hill regions (where reserved forests were invaded on a large scale), and Tippera.  

The Gandhian 'brakes' operated most obviously in the sudden halts which the leader imposed on the movements, as in the much-discussed retreats of February 1922 and March 1931. But equally significant perhaps was the choice of issues for agitation by the Gandhian leadership, its very revealing 'silences': salt, no-revenue, non-chaudikari tax, but seldom no-rent; forest restrictions imposed by the colonial state, not many other tribal grievances; the opposition, except in August 1942, to political strikes. Yet it is obvious that there was nothing per se 'violent' about no-rent or labour strikes; these could turn violent, but so could eminently acceptable forms like picketing of foreign goods.

It may be argued, with some justice, that any leadership, even an avowedly revolutionary one, has a necessarily restrictive aspect. It has to control spontaneity and sectional outbursts in the interests of long-term objectives and discipline. One may recall the role of Lenin and Trotsky in July 1917, or the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt rising in 1921. It does not make much sense either to demand of Gandhi a social-revolutionary perspective, and to condemn him for not behaving like Mao or Ho Chi-minh. But the argument often used to justify the Gandhian brakes and retreats — that these were necessary in the interests of overall anti-imperialist unity — fails to be entirely convincing once we raise the question as to the extent to which such methods were able in the end to realise the specific goals which Gandhian nationalism had set itself. That the Bardoli withdrawal caused a major setback was amply proved by the decline in nationalist tempo in the mid-1920s, marked by a disastrous slump in Congress membership (to 106,046 for 16 out of 20 provinces in March 1923, whereas UP alone had claimed 328,966 members in July 1921), internal quarrels and rapid growth of both Hindu and Muslim communalism. The plea, put forward later on by Nehru, that the movement in early 1922 was going to pieces anyway, makes very odd reading if compared to contemporary official estimates. The secret history compiled by the Bengal government, for instance, em-
phasized that by the first quarter of 1922 "the movement had got beyond the control of the leaders.... The spirit of violence and contempt of all authority which now began to show its head, was not of the leaders, but of masses".196 This would appear to be a confirmation of much of R.P. Dutt's interpretation. Similar reservations apply to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The concessions offered at the first Round Table Conference, and the very fact of Irwin meeting Gandhi on terms of equality, revealed that the movement was far from defeated. It is true that the consequences of the Truce were much more ambiguous than those of the unilateral Bardoli withdrawal, for the Delhi Agreement did enhance Congress prestige and infuriated many bureaucrats. Yet the studies by Pandey of UP, Hardiman of Gujarat, and Stoddart of Andhra all agree that the Truce had very adverse consequences so far as the Congress political base among the peasantry was concerned: "The Gandhi-Irwin pact broke the spirit of the Patidar peasants far more effectively than the lathis of the police".197

At a more general level, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Gandhian restraints inhibited the process of mobilization for the anti-imperialist cause of large sections of the poorer peasantry, tribals, and industrial workers. The Congress 'umbrella' was clearly tilted in favour of more propertied sections, for after all it was not always possible to please landlords and tenants, capitalists and workers, at the same time. Gandhian Congress mobilization, perhaps, was not "imperfect" so far as 'middle class' urban and rural propertied interests were concerned, for a broader range might well have proved socially dangerous; but it did limit the potential strength of the anti-imperialist movement—a much broader concept, it needs to be emphasized, than bourgeois nationalism. The consequences, in terms of the alienation of the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal, for instance, were too obvious to require much explication here. And if in the end India did win freedom basically under Gandhi's leadership, it must not be forgotten that this freedom left the Mahatma himself the most perplexed, isolated, and unhappy of men: for an yawning chasm separated his ideals of ahimsa, communal amity, Harijan upliftment, and peasant ram-rajya from the realities of 1947 and of post-independence India in general.

The Gandhian self-imposed limitations inevitably left a consi-
derable variety of movements outside the ambit of mainstream
nationalism. These may be classified into three broad types.
There were in the first place movements broadly continuing the
patterns of pre-Gandhian spontaneous popular unrest directed
against immediate oppressors, affected by Gandhi, if at all, only
through distant rumours and not through any organizational
linkages, and without much in the way of a leadership with all-
India awareness or perspective. Food riots in the form of looting
of village or small town hats remained an endemic, elementary
form of popular reaction to sharp price-rise or excessive differ-
entials between non-agricultural and agricultural prices. In
Bengal, for instance, hat looting became particularly common
during the 1918-19 price-rise, and again in the Depression year of
1931 when agricultural prices fell much more sharply than those
of industrial goods. Widespread hat looting preceded the August
1942 upheaval in parts of North Bihar, and the sharp wartime rise
in prices probably had something to do with the 92 dacoities re-
ported from Bihar in April 1941, which represented a 100% rise over
the average for the preceding three years. Food riots could occa-
sionally coincide with broader movements without be-
coming intrinsically a part of them. In January 1921, there were
35 cases of hat looting in the North Bihar districts of Muzaffarpur,
Bhagalpur, Monghyr and Purnea, with men who claimed to be
Gandhi’s disciples trying to enforce just prices. The Kisan Sabha
movement in Awadh led in the same month to agrarian riots
attacking both talukdars and banias, and Fursatganj bazaar in
Rae Bareli district was attacked on 6 January by a crowd of 6000
demanding that “all the shopkeepers should at once be ordered to
sell cloth at 4 annas per yard and flour at 8 seers per rupee”.
But hat looting could form part of communal riots, too, where traders
and rural consumers belonged to different religious groups—as
happened, for instance, in the riots in and around Dacca in May
1930.
Among tribal movements during the inter-war years, that led
by Alluri Sitarama Raju in the ‘Rampa’ region between August
1922 and May 1924 deserves special attention for its transitional,
intermediate position between ‘primitive rebellion’ and modern
nationalism. Developing in the wake of a Congress-inspired forest
satyagraha in neighbouring Guntur district, it was led by an out-
sider who had wandered among the tribals from 1915 claiming astrological and healing powers and had been marginally connected with Non-Cooperation activities. Sitarama Raju in a meeting with local officials during the rebellion "spoke highly of Mr. Gandhi", but considered "that violence is necessary". The tribals under his leadership showed remarkable discrimination between whites and Indians, allowing (at the Damarapalli ambush of 24 September 1922) an advance party of Indians to pass before shooting down the two British officers. Yet the grievances were very similar to those which had already inspired so many rebellions in the same region—moneylender exploitation, forest restrictions, use of unpaid tribal labour by officials—and Raju claimed that he was bullet-proof, and issued a proclamation announcing the imminent coming of Kalki-Avatar. The combination produced an extremely effective guerrilla struggle, with a stable band of about a hundred, and "supernumeraries all over the disturbed area who joined it whenever it was in their locality"—in other words, fish in water enjoying widespread popular support. It required the Malabar Special Police and the Assam Rifles nearly two years and Rs. 15 lakhs to suppress this guerrilla struggle.

Despite a new awareness of tribal problems reflected in Congress-organized forest satyagrahas, some Gandhian welfare activities, and certain links established with groups like the Tana Bhagats and Sapha Hors, the majority of tribal movements remained outside the ambit of mainstream nationalism. Congress interest even in forest grievances was limited and intermittent. There is no evidence of any nationalist involvement, for instance, in the forest movements of the Saoras in Ganjam agency in 1927 and during 1937-40, or in the Gond rising against forest restrictions in Adilabad district of Hyderabad state in 1940. With the development of a tribal educated middle class elite, the ground was prepared also for increasingly 'sectional' or 'separatist' tribal movements, particularly in the North-East and in Chotanagpur. These received considerable encouragement at times from missionaries, certain British officials, and some anthropologists, but, as in the not dissimilar cases of Muslim communal and Scheduled Caste movements, 'divide and rule' was greatly helped by Congress inhibitions about socially explosive issues.

The autonomous and powerful anti-landlord kisan movements
of the early 1920s, of which the Darbhanga Raj agitation under Swami Vidyanand in 1919-20 and the Awadh awakening under Baba Ramchandra in 1920-21 are the best-known, also have a transitional character. Despite occasional militant outbursts and participation by the rural poor, these seem to have been essentially movements of the upper stratum of the tenantry, predominantly Bhumihar Brahman in Bihar and Kurmis and other intermediate castes in UP, with fairly limited objectives (an end to amla extortion and threats to occupancy rights in the Darbhanga Raj; reduction in cesses and begar and resistance to be: takhli or eviction in Awadh). The Kisan Sabhas of the 1930s would also fight often for limited aims, but the essential difference would be the existence by then of an overall perspective of social transformation, brought by outsider intellectuals with a more or less socialist ideology, and crystallized in the demand for abolition of zamindari within a clear anti-imperialist framework. Baba Ramchandra in contrast began by urging “union between zamindar, kisan and majdoor”, though he later became bitterly disillusioned about Congress hesitation in espousing peasant causes and developed an admiration for Lenin and Russia. Swami Vidyanand got diverted to electoral politics in late-1920, and, through Malaviya’s protege Indra Narain Dwivedi, the UP liberals were able to retain a connection with a minority section of the kisan movement in that province. The majority, including Baba Ramchandra, passed under Congress control through the efforts of Jawaharlal and Gaurishankar Misra, but found its specific anti-talukdar demands largely swallowed up by Non-Cooperation. It is important to note that kisan movements with class demands seem to have flourished mainly in periods marked by a relative ebb-tide in nationalist agitation. Thus the Bihar Kisan Sabha, though formally founded in 1929, really got into its stride under Swami Sahajanand after the collapse of Civil Disobedience, from about 1934 onwards. In Bengal, too, there were interesting tenant and sharecropper movements in the mid-1920s which virtually disappeared in 1930, were resumed to some extent in the Truce period, and gathered strength from the mid-1930s.

With Kisan Sabhas and trade unions under Left leadership and Communist and CSP political activities among toilers, we enter a somewhat different world: a second brand of non-Gandhian
popular movements, characterised by a conscious, alternative and more radical type of anti-imperialism integrally bound up with a vision of socio-economic change. Though Comintern ideological influence and organizational assistance did have a certain role here, the main impetus came from within the national movement itself, as elements disillusioned by Gandhian compromises (or, particularly in Bengal, by the heroic blind alley of revolutionary terrorism) sought new roads to freedom and social transformation. The initial breakthrough was on the industrial labour front which unfortunately has so far attracted much less detailed or sophisticated research than the history of peasant movements. Labour history in our country, as well as the history of the Left political movements in general, tends to get reduced to a catalogue of strikes and unions, to collections of reminiscences about top leaders, or to endless and often rather sterile ideological controversies concerning the correctness or otherwise of a particular political ‘line’. A ‘history from below’ in this largely unexplored field would probably lead to a greater emphasis on the forms of consciousness and self-activity of the working class, without belittling of course the indispensable and often heroic role of pioneer labour organizers.

The initiative for the massive post-War labour upsurge came mainly from below, for in the early 1920s most trade unions were very far from being believers in unlimited class war. The general strike in Bombay textiles of January 1919, for instance, was basically spontaneous, and labour rallies repeatedly rejected the counsels of moderation offered by Home Rule League politicians like Kanji Dwarkadas and Umar Sobhani. The Jamshedpur Labour Association founded by S.N. Halder and Byomkesh Chakrabarti in course of the February 1920 Tata strike could provide only very compromising and inept guidance, and Subhas Bose’s intervention in 1928 was little better. After a conversation with him, G.D. Birla reported to Purshottamdas Thakurdas on 16 July 1929 that “I feel in a position to assure that Mr. Bose could be relied upon to help the Tata Iron and Steel Works whenever necessary provided properly handled”.

The Communist entry into the Bombay and Calcutta industrial area on a large scale in 1928-29 signified a qualitatively new stage, displacing to a considerable extent the jobbers whom previous trade union leaders had perforce used as intermediaries and en-
couraging within the Girni Kamgar Union an element of grassroots democratization through a structure of elected mill committees. The private correspondence of Governor Sykes of Bombay and Governor Stanley Jackson of Bengal vividly reflects the holy fear inspired among British rulers by this combination of labour militancy and revolutionary ideology, and a Yugantar terrorist who later became a communist leader has recalled how the sight of Lillusah workers on march flanked by armed police inspired in him the first vision of an alternative and more effective path to revolution. Despite the marked inhibitions of the nationalist leaders, workers' participation in anti-imperialist actions was by no means negligible at times. One may cite as stray examples the prominence of jute mill hands among volunteers courting arrest in Calcutta during the last phase of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat upsurge, the massive labour march to the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 demanding Purna Swaraj, and the widespread strikes in the early days of the Quit India movement, when the Tata Steel Plant, for instance, was closed down for thirteen days in a strike in which the sole labour slogan was that workers "will not resume work until a national government has been formed".

By the late-1930s, the Left had built up a number of countrywide organisations of trade unions, kisan sabhas, students, and intellectuals, and exercised a certain influence on the top nationalist leadership as a major pressure group within the Congress as well as through personal contacts and affinities with Nehru and Bose, but could still be out-generalled, as Tripuri and its sequel proved, by the Congress Right and Gandhi. The Left, however, did not yet really have the capacity to launch effective all-India political struggles on its own. 1942 broke up the always uneasy but still crucial alliance between Communists and Congress Socialists which had been the core of the pre-War Left alternative, and rehabilitated the prestige of Rightist Congress leaders who had been in serious danger of losing credibility among the masses during the period of Congress ministries. Yet the strike wave of 1946 far surpassed all previous records: 1629 stoppages, involving 1,941,948 workers and the loss of 12,717,762 man-days. In no previous year had strikes exceeded 1,000 or the workers involved 8 lakhs. As revealed by the massive explosions in Cal-
cutta on 21-23 November 1945 and 11-13 February 1946 on the INA trials issue, followed by the upsurge in Bombay during the RIN revolt, workers and urban masses in general were increasingly coming out into the streets on political issues. When taken in conjunction with the Tebhaga movement in the winter of 1946-47, the beginning of the Telengana armed struggle in July 1946, the Punnapra-Vayalar uprising in October 1946, and militant movements for democratisation and integration in many princely states, we are left with the impression of something like a countrywide upsurge. And for the first time since the rise of Gandhi, this was an upsurge that was not only independent of the Mahatma and the entire Congress leadership, but taking place against their repeated and explicit directives.

Yet the tragic paradox was that the same years saw unprecedented communal riots—Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, Punjab—which directly led up to the Partition. Communalism in both its ‘elite’ and ‘mass’ manifestations had kept pace with the development of mass nationalism. Its growth was particularly evident in the mid-1920s after the collapse of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat, under the Congress ministries of 1937-39 when for the first time the Muslim League attempted to develop into a mass party, and during the War when the League (and to some extent the Hindu Mahasabha) took advantage of the suppression of the Congress. With some exceptions (like the Satyashodhak movement in Maharashtra, brought under the nationalist wing in the 1930s through a new non-Brahman Congress provincial leadership), the Congress also failed to win over political organizations of lower castes, notably Ambedkar’s Mahar-based movement, or the elite Justice and more populist Self-Respect traditions in Tamilnad, despite Gandhi’s increasing insistence on Harijan welfare work. Political devolution (which the British insisted had to be by stages and through separate representation), increasing competition for jobs as spread of education coincided with shrinking of opportunities, and differential bourgeois growth all stimulated elite conflicts, and the Congress was not able in practice to implement programmes, sufficiently and consistently secular and radical, with which to undercut links along religious or caste lines between such elites and their clientele. The Gandhian Congress itself in fact at times tried to utilize and work through such vertical
linkages: as during the Khilafat alliance with the *ulema*, the continued alignment with the socially obscurantist but anti-League Deoband group, or Gandhi's close relations with Madanmohan Malaviya in the 1920s. Things changed somewhat in the late-1930s under the influence of Nehru and the Congress Left, but Muslim "mass contact" still remained largely on paper. Secular and radical rhetoric, seldom backed up by concrete measures, in the end merely alarmed Muslim vested interests without winning over the Muslim masses. Social inhibitions apart, there was the further basic fact of continual interpenetration, at both elite and mass levels, of forms of consciousness—national, regional, caste, communal, class—theoretically distinct but in practice at times almost impossible to disentangle. Thus, despite the adoption of numerous unimpeachable secular resolutions in the 1930s, Azad had to complain in 1937 that Congressmen in the Central Provinces could not join the League, but were often to be found active in the Hindu Mahasabha. In much of northern and central India, in fact, Congress-led rural populism was often deeply intermingled with Hinduism and the use of Hindi in tacit or open opposition to relatively more urbanized Muslims and upper-class Urdu culture. Baba Ramchandra, to take a second example, combined appeals for *kisan* solidarity with considerable use of a religious idiom and caste slogans, choosing Roor as base for the first *Kisan Sabha* possibly because of an alleged reference to it in Tulsidas, and being active also in a Kurmi *Kshatriya Sabha*. Swami Sahajanand, too began as a Bhumihar Brahman reformer and organizer, though he went far beyond it. Even the Left, one has to admit, has on the whole failed to confront the problems of caste oppression and religious bigotry with sufficient seriousness, with the result that economic or political militancy among workers or *kisans* has seldom been accompanied by any significant transformation in their cultural horizons. Kerala possibly represents a partial exception, for there the "advantages of backwardness" in the shape of particularly atrocious caste barriers and a late start in social reforms as compared to regions like Bengal made passage from such reform to radical politics remarkably uninterrupted.

As in the section dealing with the pre-Gandhian phase, it may be appropriate at this stage to formulate some tentative generaliza-
tions about the impact of popular initiatives, both inside and outside the Gandhian mainstream. Gyan Pandey has rightly argued that

...the belligerent UP peasant of the early 1930s advanced the nationalist movement by one significant step. It was his struggle that made the Congress leadership aware at last, though by no means fully, of the gravity and significance of the peasant question and led them to relate it to the concept of _swaraj_, making it somewhat more lucid and concrete than ever before.  

The shift in Congress attitudes epitomized by the Faizpur agrarian programme, the tenancy legislations in Congress-ruled states in 1937-39, and the eventual abolition of zamindaries after independence are all clearly related to the pressure of peasant movements. The emergence of organized labour in the 1920s similarly led to the incorporation of some worker demands in Congress manifestoes from the Karachi statement on fundamental rights onwards, and the quite remarkable change in the style and language of Congress programmatic declarations by the late-1930s as compared to earlier decades, their increasing use of a socialistic idiom, was certainly not due to the personal influence, however significant, of Jawaharlal Nehru alone Congress policy towards princely states also underwent a major revision, again under the pressure of a multitude of more or less radical states peoples’ movements. In the second place, specific popular pressures did lead at times to official concessions: good examples would be the Oudh Rent Act of 1921 in the wake of Baba Ramchandra’s movement, and the tacit abandonment of revenue enhancements following the Bardoli experience of 1928. At a more general level, it was the extension through popular pressures of Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India alike that really forced significant policy changes on the British. By late-1921, the sweep of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat, going far beyond programmes sanctioned by the leadership, forced Reading in secret telegrams to Montagu to suggest release of prisoners, a Round Table Conference, and an early revision of the newly-implemented Reform scheme—an anticipations of the 1930s which came to nothing because of Gandhi’s unilateral withdrawal after Chauri Chaura. Though Irwin had complacently assured Wedgewood Benn on 20 February 1930
that "the prospect of a salt campaign does not keep me awake at night". Civil Disobedience proved dangerous enough to lead to a swift abandonment of the Simon Report, the formal acceptance of responsible government in the centre at the first session of the Round Table Conference, and the opening of negotiations with Gandhi on a novel basis of equality. The August 1942 impact proved even more decisive: the British would never again risk such a confrontation, and the decision of the Labour Government to try for a negotiated settlement with the Congress (already anticipated in fact by the no means ultra-liberal Wavell) stands in very sharp contrast to the deliberately provocative policies that had led to the torpedoing of the Cripps initiative and to the Quit India movement itself.

I have argued elsewhere that popular pressures in 1945-47 played an extremely important role in determining the course of events that led up to the coming of freedom with Partition—a fact somewhat obscured by the tendency among historians so far to study top-level negotiations in isolation. The three decisive shifts in British policy—the tacit abandonment of INA trials and the Cabinet Mission announcement in the winter of 1945-46, the decision to allow Nehru to form a purely Congress Interim Government in September 1946, and Attlee’s speech of 20 February 1947 fixing a deadline for transfer of power—can all be related fairly directly to such pressures. Fear of popular ‘excesses’ and social upheaval, again, made Congress leaders cling to the path of negotiation and compromise, and eventually accept even Partition as the necessary price. A week after the Calcutta upsurge of 21-23 November 1945, New Delhi informed London that the INA trials policy would have to be modified, since “abstract justice must to some extent give way to expediency”. Wavell recognized the Calcutta disturbances as a “turning-point” in Congress leadership attitudes, causing “at least a temporary detente”. G.D. Birla on 6 December assured a London official: “There is no political leader including Jawaharlal who wants to see any crisis or violence... Popular impatience and the prevalent atmosphere are responsible for these strong speeches. Even leaders are often led. But I think unrestrained language will be heard less and less in the future”. Congress and League leaders showed rare unanimity in opposing the RIN utiny and the sympathetic general strike in Bombay, and the
provincial bosses of the two parties (S.K. Patil and Chundrigar) even “offered the help of volunteers to assist the police”. On 5 August 1946, to take a second example, Wavell received information that Patil was prepared to threaten resignation if the Working Committee rejected his plea that “the Congress must enter the Government to prevent chaos spreading in the country”—this was, it must be noted, before the Calcutta communal holocaust. The Director of the Intelligence made the underlying British logic crystal clear on 9 August:

...the labour situation is becoming increasingly dangerous...

Until a responsible Indian government is introduced at the Centre, there is little that can be done. The Communists are only part of a larger nettle which must be grasped. I am satisfied that a responsible government, if one can be achieved, will deal more decisively with labour than is at present possible.

A similar pattern was at work next year in the accession, followed in 1948 by integration, of princely states, managed in record time by Sardar Patel and V.P. Menon through a skilful combination of threats of mass pressure—for which the existence of powerful peoples movements was indispensable—and baits of limited accession and generous offers of privy purses and offices of Rajpramukhs.

Thus pressures from below were the necessary catalysts of decisive changes, and yet popular forces were largely denied the fruits of victory, since political independence was successfully detached from radical socio-economic change through a ‘peaceful’ transfer of power which also proved to be an unimaginably bloody communal holocaust and a tragic Partition. A history from below cannot avoid the problem of exploration of the roots of this ultimate failure.

At a somewhat superficial but not irrelevant level, the explanation can be offered in terms of superior leadership skills. The Congress leadership under Gandhi combined a rare ability to choose specific and very concrete and evocative issues and forms of agitation, with an awareness of the importance of limited but real gains through constructive work among the rural masses, and a capacity for the right gestures and accommodations, offering openings to the Left repeatedly at programmatic levels while seldom conceding the substance. The result was a very successful
process, in Gramscian terms, of *trasformismo*, bringing about "the gradual but continuous absorption... of the active elements produced by allied groups—and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile". The process was epitomized by the 'taming' of Nehru, thrust into the top leadership position by Gandhi in 1929 and again in 1936 in his most militant mood, given responsibility without decisive power in a predominantly conservative Working Committee, and gradually transformed from the flaming radical of the 1930s to a man with whom Indian capitalists could sometimes even more satisfactorily than with Gandhi himself, despite some socialist elements in his ideology which perhaps never entirely disappeared. The combination of populist and socialist rhetoric with much less radical practice would in fact become a major feature of the post-independence regime. It needs to be added that the British on their part also showed considerable flexibility, despite occasional bouts of bloody-minded obstinacy (as in 1919, Civil Disobedience, or 1939-42), offering concessions which were on the whole not too belated. A more rigid stance could certainly have pushed the bulk of the nationalist movement towards more militant strategies. And while Lancashire long remained pig-headed about its vanishing captive market, the private papers of Edward Benthall, the boss of Bird Company, reveal certain other sections of British business skilfully developing an accommodation with their Indian counterparts.

The popular pressures, in contrast, often tended to remain scattered potentially radical outbursts rather than develop into a coherent national alternative. The organised Left, typified above all in the Communist movement, never really solved the crucial problem which plagued it throughout, from the Second Comintern Congress of 1920—that of its relationship with the bourgeois-led nationalist mainstream. It tended to swing wildly and repeatedly between 'sectarian' and 'reformist' poles, an oscillation which a Comintern dominated by Stalin and Soviet foreign policy interests did little to prevent and much to encourage. The combination of broad multi-class objectives with retention of initiative and independence was seldom achieved here—in sharp contrast to the Chinese experience under Mao in the anti-Japanese war, or (a lesser-known but interesting example) the Bolsheviks themselves,
who retained up to the very eve of October 1917 a very modest 'bourgeois-democratic' minimum programme, but certainly never expected bourgeois parties like the Kadets to carry out this programme for them. In colonial India, too, substantial advances were made in regions like Kerala or Telengana by Communists taking over the initiative and leadership in the national struggle, as when P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K. Gopalan during the 1930s simultaneously built up the Congress, the CSP as legal cover, and the illegal CPI in Travancore and Malabar. But all too often united front came to mean a policy of waiting on bourgeois leaders and putting undeserved trust in their 'progressive' declarations—an attitude which in its turn repeatedly bred an equally disastrous relapse into ultra-left sectarianism.

Yet leadership successes and failures can provide only a small part of the answer. We need to consider at this point also the broad social composition and nature of the movements led by Gandhi and their radical would-be alternatives. It is in terms of this social composition that we must ultimately explain the basic fact that the participants in Gandhian movements on the whole accepted the brakes imposed by the leader without major disillusionment. As in the pre-Gandhian phase, a major part of the nationalist activists came from the urban or small town 'middle class' intelligentsia with considerable links with petty rentier interests, and much of the inhibition shown on agrarian questions by the national leadership can be related to this important social fact. A new element under Gandhi was the growing participation by specifically bourgeois groups, which the Thakurdas papers and other business collections now allow us to document with some precision. An important consequence was a marked hesitation to involve workers overmuch in the national struggle. It was probably not a coincidence that both Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience were launched after, and not during, peak points of labour unrest. Political strikes were sanctioned by the Gandhian leadership in August 1942—at a time, one might argue, when their radicalization was less likely due to the Communist attitude. Gandhi showed little sympathy for the strike wave of 1945-47, and in general the working class was the one significant element in Indian society to remain largely unaffected by Gandhian ideology, except
for the rather special case of Ahmedabad. The growth of the INTUC was a very late and largely post-independence phenomenon. More generally, business support for national movements was always limited by the constant fear of radical 'excesses', and bourgeois pressures for compromise settlements or greater moderation seem fairly well-documented, particularly for the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the formation and policies of the Congress ministries in 1937-39, and the 1945-47 period. Such fears have been a recurrent element in bourgeois behaviour in many other countries and times, and can be explained in terms of a fairly rational calculation of class interest. But Indian business groups fell short of the 'national bourgeois' stereotype also in their frequent preference for sectional over country-wide class interests: as when Birla patronized the Hindu Mahasabha and Malaviya against the Swarajists in the 1920s, or Muslim businessmen like Adamjee or Ispahani provided much of the sinews of war for the Pakistan movement. The assumptions that the Indian capitalist class "revealed a basic homogeneity in its economic and political relationship with imperialism" and that G.D. Birla can be taken to have been its typical representative in the 1930s and '40s, appear to involve a considerable over-simplification. The Tatas combined greater involvement with really modern industrialization and loyalty; Bombay mill owners often opposed the Congress, and South Indian capitalist groups also had little connection with the national movement till the formation of the Congress ministry in Madras.

The specific nature of the Gandhian rural base is a much more formidable problem. Categorization of the kind of peasant strata which responded most to Gandhi is rendered difficult both by great regional variations, as well as by the well-known complexities of applying theoretical schema of peasant stratification to data which is incomplete and arranged according to quite different principles. The Bolsheviks faced enormous difficulties in the 1920s in their efforts to translate Lenin's distinctions between rich, middle and poor peasants into politically operational categories, despite the accumulation of massive data and highly sophisticated methods of 'budget studies' and "dynamic studies" of households. The problems are probably even more intractable for pre-independence India. Thus, as Utsa Patnaik has pointed out in an
important paper, class categories often cut right across tenancy categories (due to considerable leasing-out by small landholders), and even her own 'labour exploitation ratio' (i.e. the ratio of use of outside labour to family labour) fails to provide a fully satisfactory test for the capitalist rich peasant, due to the importance in Indian conditions of pre-capitalist employer-labourer relations based on caste and bonded labour. Attempts to apply Hamza Alavi's 'middle peasant' thesis have also run into difficulties connected with the problem of distinguishing between the 'rich' and the 'middle' strata as revealed for instance by Hardiman's uncertainties in characterizing the Kheda patidars. Regional variations add to the complexities. Thus D.A. Low's 'dominant peasant' argument fits the patidars fairly well, but is difficult to apply to Arambagh. Rural prosperity also seems at times to have weakened the nationalist appeal—the peasant response to 1942 was relatively weak in Gujarat, almost non-existent in the Punjab with its extra income from military service, and less evident in western than in eastern U.P.

One may still hazard a few very tentative generalizations, relevant for our basic problem of explaining the effectiveness of Gandhian constraints. Gandhian peasant movements do seem to have been most effective where the rural scene was not too sharply polarized, and where there existed a fairly broad stratum of small holders preferably more or less homogeneous in caste composition: good examples would be the patidars of Kheda or Bardoli, the mahishyas of Tamluk and Contai, the Jat peasantry of districts like Meerut during Civil Disobedience, or, as Washbrook has argued, the coastal Andhra region as contrasted to the 'dry' districts of interior Tamilnadu where a less favourable ecology sharpened rural differences.

In the second place, while Gándhian bases were occasionally established in very backward pockets like Arambagh (where the extent of isolation and poverty could make the marginal improvements brought about through devoted constructive work all the more politically effective), most of the strongholds tended to be in regions marked not by maximum impoverishment, but by a threat to relative prosperity or social and economic advance. This applies not only to districts like Kheda, where a period of patidar upthrust was cut short by famine, plague, and price-
fluctuations in the early 20th century, but also perhaps to Rae Bareli, a district characterized in the 1920s by a combination of rapidly-increasing double-cropping, considerable well-irrigation and improvements in communications, a consequent spurt in grain, poppy and oilseeds exports, along with absence of occupancy rights and prevalence of bedakhli and nazrana by big talukdars which obviously threatened the incipient relative prosperity of Kurmi or Ahir cultivators. In Pratapgarh, too, the soil was fertile, irrigated land comprised 58% of the total cultivated area already by 1896, and the Kurmis (an “excellent class of cultivators” according to a Settlement Report) were building fine wells, which the talukdars, however, used as an excuse to impose additional nazrana. Although... “three-fifths of the district were held by fairly substantial tenants in holdings of 5 or more acres” rents were exceptionally high and rapidly increasing.

It may be argued, finally, that irrespective of the precise social composition of the movement in a particular area, the general thrust, ideology and style of Gandhian nationalism was geared objectively to the interests of landholding intermediate-caste peasant proprietors or tenants, and not to the subordinate stratum of tribal or low-caste agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, and poorest peasants. Harijan upliftment, however sincere, was confined in the main to humanitarian work and symbolic concessions like temple-entry or use of wells. The aim was a certain humanizing of existing structures of caste and class hierarchies in the countryside, not their overthrow. Even this was often severely restricted by the hostility of dominant village groups who were in every other respect Gandhi’s most loyal followers—as when Narhari Parikh’s move to start a school among Dubla semi-tribal bonded labour in Bardoli was blocked by fierce patidar opposition. When Parikh threatened a protest fast, “the Patidars told him that they did not care if he died”. During the Bardoli satyagraha of 1928, extensive use was made of the existing caste organizations, and Patel’s speeches and the Satyagraha Patrika repeatedly stressed traditional ties of dependence of Dublas and artisans on patidar peasant landholders, as well as those between peasants and Vania trader-moneylenders. The combination of ‘patronage’ and ‘exploitation’ which Jan Breman has found in another part of Surat in Anavil Brahman-Dubla relationships come in very
useful here.\textsuperscript{260} Ghanshyam Shah in his analysis of eight speeches made by Patel during the 1928 \textit{satyagraha} records 34 references to faith in God and 27 to loyalty to community or caste.\textsuperscript{261} Thus traditional religious and caste sentiments were at best subsumed, and never dissolved, in the nationalist tide—to reappear often with a vengeance later on, as the vicious anti-Harijan riots in Gandhi’s own Guj\text{\"{e}}rat has recently revealed.

For the peasant upper crust with something to lose in terms of both caste and class privilege, the Gandhian strategy of mass participation controlled and limited by \textit{ahimsa} had a natural appeal, for more uninhibited movements could well prove dangerous—as Kheda peasants were forcibly reminded of, when Baraiyas inspired by rumours of breakdown of British authority in the wake of the 1918 \textit{satyagraha} started looting rich Charotar villages.\textsuperscript{268} There was thus an objective basis for the alliance between urban bourgeois groups and the peasant upper stratum around the Gandhian programme of controlled mass action. An alliance not without its tensions, however: Indian folk tales, after all, are replete with images of \textit{bania} traders-cum-moneylenders as villainous oppressors of the peasantry, and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact seems to have been a definite case of sacrifice of peasant interests to business pressures for a truce. One may note in passing that the apparent radicalization of Gandhi in his last years was possibly connected with a certain detachment of the Mahatma from urban capitalist groups—which increasingly found Nehru with his vision of modernist industrialization more congenial, once it was realized that his socialism could definitely be ‘tamed’—and a corresponding shift to a more extreme rural populism. “If mills flourish \textit{khadi} must die”, declared Gandhi in a \textit{Harijan} article of 20 October 1946,\textsuperscript{283} denouncing Congress ministerial patronage to the Indian textile industry, and he also pressed for decontrol of food in the last weeks of his life, on the grounds that rationing and state procurement meant corruption and feeding the towns at the expense of the villages.\textsuperscript{284} Gandhi’s last days have a grandeur all their own, springing not only from the heroic fight against communalism ending in martyrdom, but also from his repeated attacks on Congress corruption, bureaucracy and greed for power, culminating in the startling proposal of 29 January 1948 to dissolve the Congress as a political party.\textsuperscript{285} Yet it remains important to
remember that the basic hostility to revolutionary change in property relations was never discarded—in April 1947, Gandhi had warned that neglect of constructive work could lead to “rivers of blood and a holocaust such as you cannot to-day envisage... the tide of Communism would overwhelm them”.

The alternative posed by him points towards Jayprakash Narayan and the more-or-less reactionary Janata brand of rich peasant-based populism, rather than any coherent perspective for the emancipation of toilers of town or countryside.

The Leftists, of course, did not share Gandhi’s inhibitions about class war. But the peasant movements led by them could not entirely escape the ambiguities imposed by regional differences, very complex agrarian relations, and, above all, the unusually sharp caste-rooted distinction between landholding peasants and the landless characteristic of the Indian rural scene. The Kisan Sabhas of the 1930s and early ’40s with their anti-big zamindar thrust and focus on issues like reduction in revenue, canal rates and debt and remunerative prices were primarily organizations of peasants with some, at times considerable, land, and not of agricultural labourers. Sahajanand in a late-1936 issue of the Kisan Bulletin visualized improvement in conditions of landless labour “by negotiating with the peasants, and by assisting their organized strike against zamindars and planters”—an interesting, though not unnatural, distinction.

The Election Manifesto of the CPI in 1945 gave an assurance that the Party “shall not touch the small zamindar or the rich peasant but shall open before them the prospect of becoming the best of the farmers and cattle-breeders, reputed members in their own village”. Even the Telengana armed struggle was directed mainly against high-caste Hindu and Muslim big deshmukhs and jagirdars, and the ceiling the Communists sought to impose in the liberated areas for redistribution of land was fixed at a fairly high level of 100 acres dry and 10 acres wet. It made perfectly good political sense for a long time to concentrate on all—in peasant unity against big landlords. But the problem was that partial gains like the abolition of zamindari and some limited redistribution through largely theoretical ceilings, carried out by post-1947 Congress governments mainly under pressure of peasant movements climax ed by Telengana, tended to make the peasant upper layer politically conservative
fairly quickly—as happened on a large scale in coastal Andhra and Telengana itself during the 1950s.

The Communist tradition in India, particularly in its more militant phases or segments, also includes considerable work among tribals, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and poor peasants: the Hajongs under Moni Singh in the late 1930s, the Worlis of Thana organised by Godavari Parulekar, the Tebhaga mobilization of Rajbansi sharecroppers, the last stand of the Telengana guerrillas in the predominantly tribal Godavari forests where Alluri Sitarama Raju had once fought, and—of course—Naxalbari and Srikakulam. The recurrent and as yet unsolved problem here has been the danger of isolation and alienation from the bulk of the peasantry, for a crucial feature of the Indian rural scene is that the most oppressed sections, adivasis and Harijans, are a minority, and their oppressors include not only landlords and big farmers but also small peasants who tend often to be extra conscious of their superiority over castes still lower than them in the social and economic scale. As for labour, its concrete achievements in the building up of a fairly strong countrywide trade union movement should not be under-estimated; if it has remained basically ‘economistic’ and confined to partial gains, so have most agrarian movements which nowadays it has become somewhat fashionable to romanticize. But politicization has certainly lagged far behind trade union militancy—even today, the centres of political influence of the communist parties do not have much relationship (outside Bengal) with an industrial map of the country. A few special cases like the Punnapra-Vayalar rising of October 1946 apart,\textsuperscript{270} the worker-peasant (or rural proletariat) alliance has remained more a theoretical ideal than reality. And proletarianization, whether before or after independence, has certainly not solved automatically the problems of caste and communal fragmentation.

A fuller explication of the limits of popular movements requires also a study of cultural dimensions. The study of the popular, and particularly peasant mind has hardly begun as yet,\textsuperscript{271} but a few tentative hints may be derived from extant studies of movements and from a very limited reading of folk-tale collections. The contradictory aspects of the function of rumour have already been mentioned, in particular the peasant tendency to look for a
saviour from above, producing the phenomenon of what Rude has termed the "involuntary leader"—such as Gandhi seems to have been for many during the years of his initial impact. A conviction that victory was near at hand, if not already achieved, seems also to have been necessary, at least for a real \textit{levée en masse} of the countryside. In eastern U.P. and Bihar in August 1942, peasants marched in their thousands on police stations, fired with the belief that white rule had collapsed; often their aims were no more than symbolical, to replace the British with the national flag. When the British presence massively reasserted itself, such mobilization quickly gave way to passivity or at best some clandestine assistance to fairly small bands of freedom-fighters.

Folk-tales certainly do not convey an impression of a conflict—free or harmonious countryside, nor of an entirely passive world of the poor. But they are full of ambiguities—thus if there are some cults of social bandits, numerous stories also emphasize the duty of respecting upper castes, particularly Brahmans. A very common theme is the defeat of the rich and powerful by the poor and weak, carried over often, as in other countries, to animal tales. But the poor man typically outmatches his oppressor not through any kind of joint action, but through an individual battle of wits, and often at great cost to himself. Thus Bhar Bitna, a dwarf with only one buffalo, manages to trick the rich Mahtaji with extensive lands repeatedly in a Bihari tale, and ends up living happily ever after having seized Mahtaji's land and wealth. The Punjabi folk-tale about the farmer and the moneylender is more pathetic, and perhaps more realistic. The moneylender stole the wish-fulfilling conch given to the poor farmer by Rama, but not knowing how to use it, struck a bargain with the peasant by which he would have double of whatever the former wished for. The peasant got out of the bania's clutches only by wishing to be blinded in one eye. Oppressors and forms of oppression may have changed somewhat with the times, but not perhaps the underlying realities so vividly revealed in such tales.
IV

Conclusion

Despite the crucial importance of popular movements and pressures from below throughout the late-colonial period, the leadership in the anti-imperialist struggle thus remained with relatively privileged groups in city and countryside alike. The resultant complex and contradictory pattern, epitomized by the nature of the August 1947 'transfer of power', can perhaps be best analyzed, I would like to suggest in conclusion, through Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution'.

Reacting against the once-common 'sectarian' tendency to see only compromise and betrayal in the Gandhian leadership and a false freedom in August 1947, a trend has developed in recent years to emphasize rather the positive aspects of that leadership. The national bourgeoisie, we are told, achieved through Gandhi a genuine 'hegemony' over the anti-imperialist movement. It is important in this context, however, to remember that Gramsci used the concept of hegemony in two quite distinct senses. There is the classic 'Jacobin' model of successful and thorough going bourgeois revolution based on mobilization of the peasantry and total destruction of feudalism, as well as the very different case of mid-19th century Italy, where fundamental agrarian change remained a revoluzione mancata as peasant aspirations were sacrificed through the formation of a bloc between Northern industrialists and Southern landlords, and fullscale capitalist transformation proved very difficult to achieve. In the second case, there was a much more partial or limited 'hegemony', confined mainly to the political level and achieved through the process of trasformismo
which Gramsci explicitly relates to his concept of passive revolution—‘passive’ not in the sense of popular forces being inactive or unimportant, but because attainment of political independence and unity was successfully detached by the leading bourgeois group (the Moderates headed by Cavour) from radical social change. A further consequence was the perpetuation and sharpening of regional disparities, the North flourishing at the cost of the South—modern Italy’s persistent questione meridionale. Historical parallels can never be exact, but some of the similarities do appear almost uncanny—and it is interesting that Gramsci in 1933 made a passing reference to Gandhism as a “naive theorization of the ‘passive revolution’ with religious overtones”.276

Analogies apart, the value of the ‘passive revolution’ concept lies in its theoretical comprehension of two types of relative failure. If popular forces failed to achieve an alternative hegemony, the dependent bourgeoisie of colonial India on the whole revealed in its behaviour at best the “modest egoism” which Marx had found typical of the pre-1848 German burgher estate, and not the world-transforming revolutionary zeal of the French bourgeoisie of 1789.277 The inhibiting factors here included relations of dependence and collaboration with foreign rule and British capital, close connections with pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the small producer through rent, usury and trade (which under colonial conditions often remained so much more profitable than productive investment in industry or agriculture), fear of an already fairly militant working class, as well as the lack of cultural hegemony in so far as there was little permeation of modern bourgeois values throughout society. ‘Modernism’ in our country was largely confined to a ‘middle class’ with little roots in production, while the mental world of the bulk of Indian traders, industrialists, or rich peasants remained bound to pre-modern caste and religious loyalties. There was thus no breakthrough from the ‘economic-corporative’ to the ‘hegemonic’ phase of bourgeois class development: a leap associated by Gramsci with the development of an “organic intelligentsia”. This, I presume, is the important point being made by Ranajit Guha when he defines as

*the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India* ... the study of this *historic failure of the nation to*
come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants. . . . \textsuperscript{278}

It would be interesting to speculate as to whether 'passive revolution' has continued in post-independence India, and whether the failure of the Left to build any alternative hegemony is related to the lack of the flexibility and sophistication necessary to counter a ruling class, skilled in moving to some extent with the times and an old hand at appropriating radical or populist slogans. But that would be going beyond the scope of this paper, and I have already presumed far too much on your time and patience.