chapter three

Early Indian Responses: Reform and Rebellion

3.1. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORMS

The early policy of the East India Company was that of non-intervention in Indian social matters. Along with pragmatism that demanded continuation of existing systems, there was also a respect for traditional Indian culture that expressed itself in Warren Hastings's policy of Orientalism. It meant, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, an attempt to learn about Indian culture through a study of scriptures in Sanskrit and Persian languages, and to use that knowledge in matters of governance. The result of this endeavour was the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Calcutta Madrassa and the Sanskrit College at Banaras. Knowledge about the subject population, their social customs, manners and codes were regarded as a necessary prerequisite for developing permanent institutions of rule. Hastings's policy to govern the conquered in their own ways and resist Anglicisation thus reflected Orientalist ideological preferences and also political pragmatism.

Since the end of Hastings's tenure there was a gradual move towards cautious intervention in Indian social institutions. What contributed to this shift, as we have seen earlier, were several ideological influences in Britain, such as Evangelicalism, Utilitarianism and free trade thinking. While the Utilitarians began to talk of appropriate social engineering and authoritarian reformism, the Evangelists argued about the necessity of government intervention to liberate Indians from their religions that were full of superstitions, idolatry and tyranny of the priests. The free trade thinkers too wanted government intervention to free Indian economy from the shackles of tradition to ensure a free flow of trade. But the Company's government was still tentative about interfering for fear of adverse Indian reaction. It could not do so unless a section of the Indian society was prepared to support reform. Such a group that would support wide ranging social reforms in India was soon to

emerge through the introduction of English education, which became therefore the first and the most important area of intervention and innovation for the Company's state in India.

English education was introduced in India in the eighteenth century through the charity schools run in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay for the education of the European and Anglo-Indian children. The Company supported these schools in various ways, but did not take any direct responsibility for the education of the indigenous population until 1813. Charles Grant's advocacy of English education to be introduced in India fell on deaf ears before the Charter Act of 1793 for fear of political unrest. His major concern was however about the misrule of the Company officials. The real hegemony of the British, he thought, could be established in India through a display of the superior moral and ethical values of the West as manifested in its Christian heritage. Christian instruction was the best guarantee against rebellion, as it would rescue the natives from their polytheistic Hinduism and make them parts of the assimilative project of colonialism. [1] But the missionaries still remained banned from entering India for another twenty years. Despite the ban, the missionaries continued to use various ingenuous means to arrive in the country and work for the dissemination of Western education, which they believed, would lead to proseylitisation. Thus, while the Protestant missionaries started working from the Danish station in Madras from the early eighteenth century, the Srirampur Danish settlement near Calcutta became, towards the end of the century, the refuge of three Baptist missionaries: Dr William Carey, Ward and Joshua Marshman. Apart from running a printery and translating the Bible into local languages, they also ran schools for both boys and girls. Unless they directly offended the religious sensibilities of the local population, the Company's government tolerated such missionary activities, the number of which before 1813 was however very small.[2]

The real beginning of Western education in India can therefore be dated from the Charter Act of 1813, which not only allowed the missionaries to travel to India, but provided for the allocation of one hundred thousand rupees per year for two specific purposes: first, "the encouragement of the learned natives of India and the revival of and improvement of literature; secondly, the promotion of a knowledge of the sciences amongst the inhabitants of that country".[3] This was unprecedented in an age when publicly funded education was not in vogue even in England. The immediate concern of the Parliament in forcing the Company into this commitment was

once again the corruption and degeneracy of its officials in India; but beyond that, there was also an agenda for greater territorial control. The officials rampantly exploited the country as they viewed it as a temporary territorial possession, argued Charles Grant.4 So greater commitment to the development of the natives would provide a greater sense of security or in other words, a sense of duty to the people would lead to the development of a context for greater consolidation of power. But this decision did not immediately decide the nature of education to be provided for the Indians, as this specific clause 43 was rather vague in its language and was open to interpretation. In official thinking in India, the Orientalist thoughts were still powerful, having received strong support in a then recent Minute of Lord Minto, the governor general between 1806 and 1813. The new General Committee of Public Instruction was dominated by the Orienralists, who interpreted the clause to mean advancement of Indian classical literature and the sciences of the land. The programme they chalked out was for the establishment of a Sanskrit College in Calcutta, two more Oriental Colleges at Agra and Delhi and patronage for the *tols* and *madrassas* as institutions of indigenous learning.

In the meanwhile, however, public attention in India was steadily being drawn away from this tradition of indigenous classical learning. Christian missionaries and European individuals like David Hare, started opening schools in all parts of India, where English became the medium of instruction. And then the Calcutta School Book Society and later Calcutta School Society (started in 1819) began to promote vernacular schools for elementary education. The tide seemed to shift decisively in the other direction when Raja Rammohun Roy sent a memorandum to the governor general protesting against the founding of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. Roy represented a generation of Indians who believed that modernisation of India would come through English education and the dissemination of knowledge of the Western sciences. The balance finally tilted in favour of the Anglicists when William Bentinck, a Utilitarian reformist, took over as governor general in 1828 and Thomas Babington Macaulay was appointed the law member in his council in 1834. The latter was immediately appointed the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction. On 2 February 1835 he issued his famous Minute on Indian Education, which became the blueprint for the introduction of English education in India. Full of contempt for Oriental learning, Macaulay's Minute asserted that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native

literature of India and Arabia". What he advocated, therefore, for the Indians was an education in European literature and sciences, inculcated through the medium of English language. Such an education, he argued, would create "a class of persons between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect"..[5] Bentinck immediately endorsed his proposals in an executive order of 7 March 1835, and did not budge from this position despite loud protests from the Orientalists, Thus, as Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has put it, a new education system was introduced in India, in which the task of producing knowledge wa~ assigned to the metropolitan country, while its reproduction, replication and dissemination were left for the colonised people.[6] This was the beginning of the new modernisation project for India.

English education, as Gauri Viswanathan has argued, was present in India in various forms before 1835. But while previously English was studied in a classical fashion primarily as a language, the new shift was towards the study of literature as a medium of modern knowledge. English literature, it was believed, was an ideal representation of English identity, sanitised and abstracted from the more immediate history of exploitation and oppression. Moreover, it would inculcate an appropriate training in morality, ethics and correct behaviour, and thus incorporate a group of natives into the structure of colonial rule, which was the main political agenda of Anglicism.[7] The major feature of this new English education policy was therefore the theory of "downward filtration". It was not meant for the masses, but for "the rich, the learned, the men of business", as C.E. Trevalyan described them,[1] as they already had a literate tradition, had eagerness as well as means to learn and above all had sufficient leisure. Once these men were trained, they could act as teachers and through them elementary education would percolate downward through regional languages, at much less public expenditure. Thus the whole indigenous society would benefit from Western knowledge and superior moral and ethical ideals.

The reports of William Adam, recommending improvement of vernacular education through indigenous village schools were, therefore, ignored for being impractical and expensive. The same model-of promoting English education and higher education at the expense of classical and vernacular learning as well as elementary education—was extended also to the Bombay and Madras Presidencies. However, in the North-Western Provinces, Thomason, an enthusiastic civilian, experimented with vernacular elementary schools

and he was so successful that Lord Dalhousie later recommended its extension to Bengal and Bihar. In 1854, Charles Wood's Education Dispatch also signalled a similar shift away from the downward filtration policy, as it recommended the extension of vernacular elementary education, which was endorsed by Dalhousie's administration. However, even in this shifting focus towards elementary mass education it is not difficult to see a concern for the political economy of the empire that rested on the idea of division of labour. This policy proposed that while a relatively small group of highly educated Indians would be needed to man the subordinate positions in the administration, the wider population should also have "useful and practical knowledge" in order to become good workers, capable of developing the vast resources of the empire, and also become good consumers valuing the superior quality of British goods requiring a market. So while elementary and technical education was advocated for the masses, higher education was also given a further boost in 1857 through the creation of three universities in Cakutta, Bombay and Madras on the model of the University of London, which was found to be most suited to colonial conditions. Secondary schools, where the medium of instruction was still English, proliferated under the liberal grants-in-aid scheme, with missionary and private Indian initiatives. But these schools were required to charge fees, as free education, it was argued, would not be properly valued. [9] The scheme was replaced in 1859 by Secretary of State Stanley's idea of an education rate; and vernacular elementary education suffered most as a result.

The Indian Education Commission in 1882 tried unsuccessfully to resolve the problem of duality in the education system by seeking to readjust the balance between higher English literary education for a few and elementary and technical education for the masses. "It is desirable", its report said, "that the whole population of India should be literate... And to ensure such general literacy it recommended "special funds" to be set apart particularly for the education of backward communities".[10] Yet, such backward groups as the vast community of dalits or the untouchables, continued to be excluded from state schools, as their presence would drive away the higher caste pupils, who were meant to be the main target population for the colonial education system. This exclusion happened with the active support of the colonial bureaucracy, succumbing in the name of practicality to the pressures of the conservative sections of the Indian elite, many of whom had by now become grass-roots level functionaries of the empire.[11] British education policy thus endorsed

and supported differentiation in Indian society. By 1885 there was in India, according to B.T. McCully's calculation, "an English-educated class of about fifty-five thousand natives";'! but in 1881-82 out of a total population of more than 195 million, only a little more than 2 million had attended elementary schools.'! The impact of this differentiation on social and political development of India was indeed far-reaching.

ft was with various motives that English education was introduced in India and its continuous expansion sustained. For missionaries, it was supposed to open the gates for proselyrisation of the Indians. For Utilitarians it was the ultimate fulfillment of Britain's imperial mission; "imparting education to natives is our moral duty", said Lord Moira in 1815.14 On the other hand, East India Company from the beginning of the nineteenth century was seeking to reduce the cost of governing India by Indianising the subordinate positions in the administrative structure, particularly in the judicial and revenue branches. Manning the administration exclusively with Englishmen was no longer financially feasible, nor it was politicaJly expedient. A proper education in English—"the language spoken by the ruling class", as Macaulay defined it-was, therefore, a means to train them for such subordinate public services. However, speaking like the Englishmen was not enough, they had to think and behave like Englishmen as well. This pedagogic enterprise of imperialism, there-fore, was to inculcate a spirit of loyalty among its Indian subjects who would believe in its providential nature and its civilising mis-sion. Gauri Viswanathan has argued that the colonial education sys-tem deployed English literary studies in its curriculum as "an instrument for ensuring industriousness, efficiency, trustworthiness, and compliance in native subjects."15 But as a moral study it did not function as effectively in India as it did in England, firstly because there were not enough material rewards for liberal education in India. But more seriously because the educated Indians selectively adopted this knowledge and deployed it to interrogate colonial rule itself (see chapter 4.3). So the colonial regime could never abandon the policy of using direct force to uphold its hegemony, and main-tained for this purpose elaborate police and army establishments throughout the period. But its social control was certainly but-tressed, as K.N. Panikkar argues as well, "by an illusion created by ideological influences", which always remained the central concern of the imperiaJ educational enterprises.16 The Indians who were attracted to English education were predominantly Hindu upper-caste males from middle and lower income groups, who were

economically very hard-pressed due to changes of the time. For most of them, education had a functional utility: it was a means of survival in difficult times, a tool for achieving economic prosperity and getting power, rather than just a pathway to intellectual enlightenment. However, when that material expectation faltered, it was their knowledge which became their best weapon for confronting an authoritarian colonial state, a story we will return to in the next chapter.

Protagonists of English education like B.T. McCully argued long time ago that "English education brought the native youth in contact with a body of thought which openly questioned many of the fundamental assumptions upon which the fabric of traditional values rested".[17] More precisely, we may identify this new "body of thought" as post-Enlightenment rationalism, which came to define "modernity" for a select group of educated Indians. They began to look at their own society through a prism ideologically constructed by such concepts as reason, utility, progress and justice. In 1893 Rabindranath Tagore noted the emergence of a "public" in India, which was not yet matured, but keen to debate publicly—through their newspapers and voluntary associations-e-various issues affecting the well-being of their society. In other words, there was the rise of a civil society, though very limited it was, but articulate in defending its rights, while locating its identity in an Indian tradition.[18] But this tradition, it was also felt, needed reform, because within this specific colonial ideological context, all existing social practices and religious notions appeared to be signs of a decadent feudal society that had to be remodelled according to the values of a bourgeois social order. In other words, 'Enlightenment' seemed to be the "panacea" for all the evils and backwardness that Indians were being blamed for." for this new elite, striving to move forward in a new global order intellectually defined for them by colonialism, "science" now became "a universal sign of modernity and progress" and came to constitute, as Gyan Prakash has suggested, an authori tarive "language of reform".[20] Although the colonial state would not provide scientific education for the Indian masses, intellectuals like Rammohun Roy proposed for his countrymen an education system that would focus on Western sciences. In Calcutta, in 1825, a Society for Translating European Sciences was set up, followed by the establishment of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge in 1838. This movement, which saw the development of scientific education as the key to national improvement, reached a major milestone when the Bengali intellectual Mahendra Lal Sircar established in 1876 the

Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science. And if this discourse was first started by a small circle of enlightened Calcutta elite, it was soon universalised, as it spread to other provinces through the development of a new print culture. In north India, for example, the Banaras Debating Club founded in 1861, the Aligarh Scientific Society founded in 1864 by Sayyid Ahmed Khan and the Bihar Scientific Society started in 1868, contributed to this discourse on the power of science, which then began to pervade the new territories of Hindi literary movements and Hindu revivalist campaigns. [21]

However, the problem was to translate this scientific rationalist mentality of an elite into an effective social reform agenda affecting and involving the larger public. This new mentality had first become most conspicuous among the students of Henry Vivian Derozio, a 'Eurasian' teacher at the Hindu College in Calcutta, who developed among his pupils a spirit of free thinking. This controversial group, known as the Young Bengal, became notorious in their own times for their individual social rebellion, manifested through wining and dining in forbidden meat. But what was more important about them was that they posed an intellectual challenge to the religious and social orthodoxy of Hinduism. It was they who formed in 1838 the 'Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge', where they discussed various aspects of Western science, and stood for a number of social reforms, such as the prohibition of caste taboos, child marriage, *kulin* polygamy or the ban on widow remarriage. Yet, they could not usher in the desired age of reform. Their total faith in the British and in English education, their rationalism and scientism derived from the West set them apart from the masses of Indians and they never succeeded in organising any social movement in support of their proposed reforms. Their professed "atheism", which was so avowed at the initial phase, declined soon, and their social radicalism too showed signs of backsliding, as they grew older and became established in society. Thus, ultimately, as Sumit Sarkar concludes, the Young Bengal, the followers of Derozio, "left little distinctive or permanent impression on the plane of religion and philosophy" in nineteenth-century lndia. [22]

The challenge of the other Indian reformers of this period was to rediscover reason and science in their own civilisation, and to reposition the modernisation project within a cultural space defined by Indian tradition. These new intellectual stirrings created a reform mentality that did not reject Indian tradition, but sought to change certain 'unreasonable' aspects of Hindu society, which did not conform to their new 'rationalist' image of a glorious Indian past. *This*

provided legitimacy to the reform agenda of the Utilitarian reformers like William Bentinck. But since this mentality was still confined to a small circle of English educated elite, the reform programme could hardly be expected to succeed. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century a series of social reforms followed, being mainly reform from above through government fiat. And as expected, these reforms remained on paper in most cases, as there was never any attempt to develop a modern social consciousness from below. Lord Wellesley, for example, in 1803 banned the religious custom of child sacrifice at Sagar Island in the Bay of Bengal.[23] But although this ritual practice was stopped, the less visible social practice of female infanticide continued unabated in western and northern India, where landowning high-caste families, practising hypergamy, found it difficult to get suitable grooms for their daughters or pay high amounts of dowry and resorted to clandestine killing of female offsprings at the time of birth. The British authorities sometimes tried to persuade them, and after 1830 sought to coerce them to desist from the practice, with little tangible effect. The talks of -i legal ban were halted by the revolt of 1857, and were kept on hold until 1870, when finally the Female Infanticide Act was passed by the Viceroy's Council. But even after that the census authorities reported abject neglect of female children, resulting in high mortality that could not be detected or prevented by the law.[24]

The greatest achievement that Lord Bentinck is remembered for is the prohibition of sari or self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. It was a social practice prevalent in India from ancient times; but as a modern researcher confirms, it "has always been very much the exception rather than the rule in Hindu life".[25] During the Mughal period, it was practised only by the Rajput princely families in central India and Rajasthan and in the kingdom of Vijaynagara in south India. During the British period in the lare eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the practice was revived on a wider scale in areas, which experienced the highest rate of development under British administration, i.e., the capital city of Calcutta and districts around it. Here it became popular not only among the upper castes, but also among the peasant families of lower and intermediary castes, who achieved social mobility and then sought to legitimise their new status by imitating their caste superiors.[26] Apart from this sociological reason and the religious notion of an ideal wife who would follow her husband in life and in death, the ocher factor was the greed of the relatives, which the new prosperity of the families had possibly engendered. The practice had become

most widespread in those areas where the *dayabbaga* school of personal Hindu law was applicable. As compared to the *mitakshara* school, it allowed the widow relatively greater right to inherit her deceased husband's property. Although the Christian missionaries had first started attacking the institution, it was a strong abolitionist campaign under Raja Rammohun Roy that gave the movement its real momentum. Finally, Governor General Bentinck prohibited sari in 1829 by a government regulation, which could not be overturned by a Hindu petition from the anti-abolitionist Dharma Sabha to the Privy Council in 1830. But although the incidence of sari declined gradually after the regulation, the idea and the myth of sati persisted in popular culture, despite the modernist critique of the western-educated middle classes and the reformist zeal of the colonial administration. The idea was continually reaffirmed through epics, ballads and folktales, to reappear again in public life as late as in 1987 in the much publicised sari of Roop Kanwar at village Deorala in Rajasthan. [27]

Even more ineffective was the other reform movement of the mid-nineteenth century that sought to promote widow remarriage. Its main protagonist, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, like his predecessor Rammohun Roy, also looked to the colonial state for a piece of legislation. The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856, which legalised such marriages, could not however make this practice socially acceptable. On the contrary, as Lucy Carroll has argued, the legislation was intrinsically conservative in character, as on remarriage it disinherited the widow of her deceased husband's property, and thus endorsed the Brahmanical norm of rewarding only "the chaste, prayerful widow".[28] The movement ended in what Vidyasagar's biographer Asoke Sen has called an "unavoidable defeat".[29] He failed to see many widows remarried, as for that he needed social consent, which could not be generated by the power of the colonial state. As a result, not only the practice of widow remarriage remained rare and exceptional among the educated classes in Bengal, but in the next few decades the taboo came to be further universalised and it became a forbidden practice even among the lower orders."

The situation was no different in western India where as early as 1841 an anonymous Maharashtrian Brahman reformer had advocated remarriage of infant widows as a measure to control their sexuality and make their reproductive capacity socially useful. The movement to promote widow remarriage spread among the Western educated middle classes in the 1860s and the debate between the

reformers and their detractors also became harper and bitter. In 1866 Vishnushastri Pandit started a society for the encouragement of widow-remarriage, while hi opponents also formed a rival organisation. In 1870, the reformists suffered a set back when in a public debate in Poona, they were found to be at fault by Sankara-charya of Kavir Math and many of them accepted the ritual of penance. Although there were exceptional widows, like Pandita Ramabai, who made her mark in Maharashtrian public life (more on her in chapter 7.5), the movement for the remarriage of widows ended in a whimper, as by the end of the century only thirty-eight widows had been remarried and in those cases too, the couples were subjected to enormous social pressure and o tracism. And now, the prohibition on widow remarriage became even more wide-spread, as it became also a lower-caste social practice, despite non-Brahman social reformer jotirao Phule's spirited attacks on enforced celibate widowhood.[31]

In the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras Presidency, the reform movement in support of widow remarriage was started by Veerasa-lingam Panrulu, who founded in 1878 a Society for Social Reform for this purpose. The first widow remarriage in the region was offi-ciated by him in 1881 in his hometown Rajahmundry, in the face of stiff opposition. Gradually, support for the reform increased and in 1891 a Widow Remarriage Association was formed with the patron-age of the prominent citizens of the town.[32] But this enthusiasm not-withstanding, by this time only three such marriages had been arranged by the reformers.[33] The situation varied widely from re-gion to region, for in Haryana, where the practice of widow remar-riage was already in vogue at a large scale, the new act provided such marriages with legitimacy and further social acceptance." The colo-nial legislation for reform, in other words, had a very uneven impact on Indian society. In Bengal, Vidyasagar continued his reform move-ment, directing it against polygamy and later child marriage and finally secured an Age of Consent Act in 1860 chat fixed the age of con ent for the consummation of marriage at ten years for women. le was raised to twelve by another legislation in 1891 (more details in chapter 5.2); but as census statistics show, child marriage contin-ued to be a widely practiced social custom among all the castes, high and low alike, well into the twentieth century.[35]

Reform from above, more specifically through legislation, re-mained ineffective in other areas too, where it was directed against specific or organised religious or social practices. The British con-quest of the Deccan and central India by the beginning of the

nineteenth century created the reformist urge to establish pax Britannica in those unsettled territories. But that became a difficult proposition as the disbanding of armies by the Indian chiefs and the general contraction of job opportunities increased the rate of crime, particularly robbery, by roving armed gangs. To this was added the official distrust for the wandering monastic orders, which challenged the very British ideal of a settled tax-paying peasant community. Hence all these various peripatetic groups were stereotyped into a colonial construct, called *thugs,* who were believed to have been members of a "fraternity" traditionally involved in robbery and ritual killings in the name of religion. The campaign against *thugee* was initiated in the 1830s in assertion of the same humanitarian mission of British paramountcy championed by Lord Bentinck. The purpose of the campaign, as Radhika Singha has argued, was not to root it out through education or regeneration of the indigenous society; the "Thuggee" Act (XXX) of 1836 and the Thuggee Department were simply aiming at policing and prosecuting gangs seen as perpetrating a crime in the name of religion. But it proved to be a difficult ta k. In 1839, Sir William Sleeman, the architect of the campaign, claimed that thuggee as an organised system had been exterminated. In reality what happened was that he realised the difficulty of prosecuting various groups of peripatetic mendicants on charges of thuggee. He therefore preferred to try more flexible strategies for policing such communities.[36]

Legalistic reforms were even more ineffective against less visible or less organised social customs that remained parts of peoples' everyday culture for centuries. An ideal example of this was the abolition of slavery in 1843. Slavery had been abolished in Britain in 1820, and in India the colonial administrators continued to detect its existence in various forms. The agrarian relations in India were complex, marked by numerous structures of labour dependencies, many of which, viewed through the post-Enlightenment "lens of the freedom-unfreedom opposition";" looked like slavery in British eyes. The Charter Act of 1833, therefore, instructed the government of India to abolish slavery, and parliamentary pressure continued to mount until its legal abolition. But since the actual forms of bondage differed, particularly so far as agrestic slavery was concerned, the impact of the legal ban was also very limited. Caste, customs and debt kept the agricultural labourers bonded to their landlords in various ways and for a very long time to come.

It is interesting to note that women's status became the main focus of the reforming activities of the colonial state as well as of the

educated Indians. To a large extent it was the result of a comparative civilisational discourse of the colonial period. In other words, when civilisations were ranked, one of the major criteria was the position of women, and it was here that the Indians were increasingly under attack by the Western observers, from missionaries to civilians. To put it differently, Indian civilisation was despised because it assigned such a low status to women. This gender question was a key issue for James Mill condemning Indian civilisation in his *The History of British India*.38 So the Indian intelligentsia al o responded to this civilisational critique by advocating and supporting reforms to improve the status of women in Indian society. Such reforms, as we have seen, affected only a few women belonging to their own classes and that too in a very restricted way, as these women remained recipients of male patronage and never became involved in these reformist projects as conscious subjects of their own history. This early nineteenth-century public discourse on reform thus not only had limited impact on society as a whole, it also signified the patriarchal control of the educated Indian males over the private sphere or the domestic arena reserved for women.39 It is simplistic to suggest that the great reformers of the nineteenth century were not concerned about the welfare of women; but the reforms were not just for women, and we will return to this topic in a short while.

Another response of the educated Indian elite to such civilisational critiques was to reform Hinduism from within in the light of post-Enlightenment rationalism. This phenomenon is often celebrated in the older historiography as the "Bengal Renaissance" or the "Nineteenth Century Indian Renaissance". Although the use of the term "renaissance" is problematic, this cultural movement essentially involved attempts to discover rationalism in India's past and thus to reposition her religious and philosophical traditions within the critical terrain of reason. The movement was started in Bengal by Raja Rammohun Roy who is often described as the father of modem India. He was one of those upper-caste gentry whose power and position had been enhanced by the Permanent Settlement and other opportunities opened up by colonial rule. Rammohun imbibed rationalism from his early training in the eighteenth-century Perso-Arabic literature. Eventually, he studied Vedantic monism and after his migration to Calcutta in 1815 was exposed to Christian Unitarianism. Such intellectual influences motivated him to contest the missionary claim of superiority of Christianity; his answer was to reform Hinduism in the light of reason, by going back to its purist form as enshrined in the *Vedanta* texts. He condemned idolatry,

priestcraft and polytheism and translated the *Upanishads* into Bangla
to demonstrate that ancient Hindu scriptures themselves propagated
monotheism."

Roy's first organisation, Atmiya Sabha, founded in Calcutta in
1815, eventually took the shape of Brahmo Samaj in 1828. It emer-
ged as a major religious movement of the middle-class educated
Bengalis, based on the essential principle of monotheism. After
Roy's death in 1833, the leadership of the Brahmo movement was
taken over by Debendranath Tagore who provided the movement
with a berter organisational structure and ideological consistency.[41]
But the movement was actually taken out of the limited elite circles
of Calcutta literati into the district towns of east Bengal by Bijoy
Krishna Goswami and Keshub Chandra Sen in the 1860s. Goswami
bridged the gap between Brahmoism and the popular religious tradi-
tion of Vaishnavism, while Sen's specific focus was to reach larger
numbers of non-Westernised Bengalis in the eastern Gangetic plains
and to take the movement outside Bengal to other provinces of
India.[42]

If missionary activities had been one major contribution of Keshub
Sen to the Brahmo movement, the other contribution was a renewed
artenrion to social reforms. He brought in some amount of radical-
ism into the movement, by attacking caste system, by focusing on the
question of women's rights, by promoting widow remarriage and
inter-caste marriages, and by raising the issue of caste status of the
Brahmo preachers, a position hitherto reserved for the Brahmans
alone. But this radicalism also brought the first rift within the
Brahmo movement. BasicalJy, as Meredith Borthwick has shown, it
was a schism between Keshub's followers, for whom social progress
and reform were more important than anything else, and the follow-
ers of Debendranath, who preferred to maintain their identification
with Hindu sociery.? The former in 1866 established their Brahmo
Samaj of India, while the latter sought to retain their identity under
the rubric of Adi (original) Brahmo Samaj. These developments sig-
nified the perennial dilemmas of Indian modernisation, which con-
tinuously sought to be rooted in Indian traditions. This rift was, as it
became clear soon, more about an identity crisis than about any fun-
damental difference of ideology: while some of the Brahmos wanted
to define themselves as separate from the Hindus, others began to
seek a position within the great tradition of Hinduism.

The crisis deepened and the chasm expanded when the Brahmo
Marriage Act was passed in 1872; it legalised Brahmo marriages,
which allowed inter-caste and widow marriage, but only if the

contracting parties declared themselves to be non-Hindus. As a result, the act never became very popular. Sen himself later retreated from his radical position, condemned the act for promoting "Godless marriages?" and later came closer to the Hindu ascetic Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This gradually led to another rift in the Brahmo Samaj in 1878. When Sen arranged the marriage of his minor daughter with the Maharaja of Cooch Bihar, his followers parted company and formed the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. In 1881 Sen formed his Naba Bidhan (New Dispensation) and started moving towards a new universalist religion. But by this time successive ideological rifts and organisational divisions had weakened the Brahmo movement, confining it to a small elite group. And then it succumbed to a neo-Hindu aggressive campaign for "revivalism", rather than "reformism", as a bold assertion of Hindu identity vis-a-vis the West (more in chapter 5.2).

In western India, reformism began in the early nineteenth century in two different ways. One was the Orientalist method of exploring and translating ancient Sanskrit texts and rediscovering in them the glories of Indian civilisation. The most notable cholar-reformers involved in this project were K.T. Telang, V.N. Mandalik and above all, Professor R.G. Bhandarkar." The other trend was represented by the more direct method of social reform attacking such institutions as caste system or prohibition of widow remarriage. This was undertaken by a number of individuals like Mehtaji Durgaram Mancharam, Karsondas Mulji, or Dadoba Pandurang, who were involved in organisations like Manav Dharma Sabha, founded in 1844, or the Paramhansa Mandali, founded in 1849. The latter organisation followed the iconoclastic radical tradition of the Derozians in Bengal; but in order to avoid any frontal confrontation with the wider community, they operated like a secret society. Revelation of its membership in 1860, therefore, quickly led to its demise, leaving very little achievement to its credit.[46] However, in the meanwhile, Western education had made headway in Maharashtra and the Gujarat region, creating a critical core group looking for reform. In such a context, the two visits of the Bengali Brahmo missionary Keshub Chandra Sen to Bombay in 1864 and 1867 had a profound impact. Indeed, as a direct consequence of that, the Prarthana Samaj (Prayer Society} was founded in Bombay in 1867. Although its founder president was Atrnaram Pandurang, the real spirit behind it was Mahadev Gobind Ranade, who was ably assisted by Bhandarkar and N.G. Chandavarkar. K.T. Telang, who attended the samaj services regularly, never became a member. All the leading

personalities in this new organisation were Western educated Marathi Brahmans. As for its philosophy, like the Brahmo movement, the Prarthana Samaj also preached monotheism, denounced idolatry, priestly domination and caste distinctions. Later it developed a syncretism and connected itself to the Maharashtrian bhakti tradition."

The Prarthana Samaj maintained its distinction from the Brahmo movement of Bengal. The most notable distinction was in its cautious approach in contrast to the relatively *more* confrontational attitudes of the Bengali Brahmos. "The peculiar feature of the movement in [Bombay] Presidency", Ranade pointed out, was that its goal was "not to break with the past and cease all connection with our society"." The reforms it sought were to come gradually, not cataclysmically, wrecking the structure of the society. Modernisation, in other words, was to be accommodated within the cultural space of tradition, without signalling a sharp break. It was this gradualist approach, which made Prarthana Samaj relatively more acceptable co the larger society. Branches were opened in Poona, Surat, Ahmedabad, Karachi, Kirkee, Kolhapur and Sarara. Its activities also spread to south India where the movement was led by the Telugu reformer Veerasalingam Panrulu, By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were eighteen branches in the Madras Presidency.49 But on the other hand, this cautious approach also brought the Prarthana Samaj face to face with its first crisis. In 1875 Swami Dayanand Saraswati visited Gujarat and Maharashtra and offered the possibilities of a more radical and self-assertive religious movement. A group of Samaj members, under the leadership of S.P. Kelkar, felt attracted to the Swami's Aryan ideology, and broke away. Although the dissident group later came back to the fold of Prarrhana Samaj, this marked the beginning of a different kind of religious politics in western India, which was marked more by cultural chauvinism than reformism.

This rupture in the tradition of reform came through the religious movement starred by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who founded his Arya Samaj in 1875. Dayanand invoked the authority of the *Vedas* as the most authentic Indian religious texts, and sought to purge Hinduism of all its post-Vedic accretions. It is difficult to ignore the Western Orientalist touch in his discourse that tried to project Hinduism as a "religion of the book", like Christianity and Islam." But what is *more* important, in his aggressive response to the West, he fully appropriated the Western intellectual discourse of reason and science and deployed them against his adversaries. He claimed that

the Vedas alone contained "scientific truths", and therefore, the religion based on these texts was superior to Christianity and Islam.[51] On the authority of the Vedas, he attacked idolatry, polytheism, ritualistic religion dominated by the Brahman priests, condemned child marriage and stood for widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages and female education." Interestingly, these were the reforms that the Western reformers were advocating! He also denounced untouchabiliry, and repudiated caste system (for more on this see chapter 7.2); but at the same time, he upheld the fourfold varna division, thus retaining the core of the Indian social organisation.[53] His aggressive reformism failed to convince the orthodox Hindus, or even the Brahmos, and remained marginal in eastern and western India; but it received warm acceptance in Punjab and the North-Western Provinces. At the time of his death in 1883 there were Arya Samaj branches all over this region and it was from this time on that the movement became more and more popular and also more aggressive. The moderates among his disciples, who chose to focus on education and community work, were gradually marginalised after 1893, while a militant group under Pandit Guru Dutt and Pandit Lekh Ram launched a militant campaign for preaching the religion of the Vedas, attacking the Muslims and retrieving lost ground by initiating *suddhi* or reconversion of those who were lost to the three proselytising religions of Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. And then in the 1890s, the Arya Samaj became intensely involved in the cow-protection movement, thus moving decisively from reformism to revivalism, a topic that we will return to in chapter 5.

What needs to be focused here though are some of the special features of these social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century, which made such transformation possible. These movements, first of all, had remained confined to a narrow social space, as the reformist spirit appealed only to a small elite group, who were primarily the economic and cultural beneficiarie of colonial rule. In Bengal, the reform movement involved only a small number of Western educated elite who were known by the general term *bbadralok* (gentlefolk). These were the "new men" who had made money as junior partners of the English officers and free merchants, consolidated their position as small landholders under Permanent Settlement and later took advantage of English education to fill in the various new professions and subordinate administrative positions. Socially, they were mostly Hindus, and though caste was not a major criterion for membership, most of them belonged to the three higher castes, Brahman, Kayastha and Baidya.[54] The Brahmo

movement was almost exclusively patronised by these groups, and although it spread from Calcutta to district towns and to other provinces, it remained alienated from the masses. The reformers never even tried to take the reform to the people, as the language of reform, the chaste Sanskritised Bengali prose of Rammohun Roy for example, remained incomprehensible to the uneducated peasants and artisans.P Similarly in western India, the members of the Prarthana Samaj were the English educated Chirpavan and Saraswat Brahmans, some Gujarati merchants and a few members of the Parsi communiry.f In 1872 the Samaj had only sixty-eight members and about 150-200 sympathisers." And in Madras Presidency, where English education made much slower progress and caste domination of the Brahmans remained unshaken, the reform ideas took longer to appear. [58] Indeed, the general high caste character of the reform movements of the early nineteenth century explains to a large extent the relative silence on the caste question. Untouchabiliry as an issue of social reform had to wait until the beginning of the twentieth century and the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian public life after World War One (more on this in chapter 7.2). Lacking in a broad social base, the reformers of the early nineteenth century thus exhibited an intrinsic faith in the benevolent nature of colonial rule and relied more on legislation for imposing reform from above. There was very little or no attempt to create a reformist social consciousness at the grass-roots level, where religious revivalism later found a fertile ground.

Equally important is the colonial character of the reforms, as the Indian reformers' positions in a significant way mirrored the colonial mind and therefore also the ambivalence of the colonial policy planners. The dominant colonial assumption of the time was that religion was the basis of Indian society and this religion was encoded in the scriptures. This colonial perception assumed a total submission of the indigenous society to the dictates of the scriptures. Social evils were thought to be the results of distortion of scriptures by self-seeking people, in this case the cunning Brahman priests who had a monopoly over this textual knowledge. The civilising mission of the colonial state was thus seen to lie in giving back to the natives the truths of their own little read and even less understood *shastras*. Lara, Mani (1998) has argued that the whole debate over sari was grounded in scriptures: the colonial government decided to prohibit it only when it was convinced that the custom was not enjoined by the scriptures. As the colonial rulers gave supreme importance to scriptures, the Indian reformers too, as well as their detractors,

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referred to ancient religious texts to argue their respective cases. The brutality or the irrationality of the custom, or the plight of women, whom the reform was intended for, were lesser concerns in a debate, which was more on the definition of tradition. In Mani's words, "women are neither subjects nor objects but, rather, the ground of the discourse on *sati;* ... women themselves are marginal to the debate".59 The same thing can be said of the debate on widow remarriage.s? and later, on the prohibition of female infanticide.61 The scriptures, lately valorised by the Orientalists, thus provided legitimacy for social reforms and women were denied agency in their own emancipation (more discussion on the women's isses in chapter 7.5).

This brings us to the inner tensions of colonial modernity, as it is not proper to say that the Indian reformist discourses just reflected some colonial formulations. The early writings of Rammohun Roy are indeed full of "humanistic pleas" to ameliorate the conditions of Indian womanhood.62 He talked of scriptures when advocating the abolition of sari, as that was how he could sell his reform to a cautious colonial government and to a reticent Hindu society reluctant to accept change. But this traditionalism notwithstanding, his "clinching arguments", as Tapan Raychaudhuri has pointed out, "anticipate[d] the idiom and stances of contemporary feminism".63 Roy's rationalism was indeed pre-colonial. In his early writings in Persian he had taken a totally rational approach to religion that nearly amounted to a negation of religion itself. However, after his contact with Christianity and Western free-trade thinking in Calcutta, he became more moderate or perhaps more ambivalent. [64] One has to admit that a sharp tradition/modernisation dichotomy is not intellectually conducive to understanding the process of reform in nineteenth-century India. [65] The perceptible ambivalence in the position of the reformers was clearly the outcome of a colonial context. Against the claims of a totalising influence of the colonial discourses, one may point out that no hegemony is ever that absolute that it allows no space for autonomy. Although Indian modernisers looked towards the colonial state for support and direction and post-Enlightenment rationality shaped their visions, they could neither leave their tradition, nor forget their Indian identity. The Indian modernisation project therefore always felt a compulsion to construct a modernity that would be located within Indian cultural space. To summarise their position in Christophe jaffrelot's words, they "undertook to reform their society and its religious practices in order to adapt them to Western modernity while preserving the core

of Hindu tradition."[66] It was through this project that the cultural essence of Indian nationhood, its difference from the colonising West, were gradually imagined by the Indian intelligentsia. However, the inherent ambivalence or tensions within this cultural enterprise later made it appear weak and rendered it vulnerable to the more aggressive assertion of tradition in the late nineteenth century. This later cultural movements too, as we shall see, were involved in a complex intellectual project of interrogating and adjusting at the same time to the colonial constructs of Indian tradition.

3.2. PEASANT AND TRIBAL UPRISINGS

When the elites of the Indian society were busy in initiating religious and social reforms to change their society from within to answer the moralistic critiques of the West, the rural society was responding to the imposition of colonial rule in an entirely different way. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia, who were also the chief beneficiaries of colonial rule, the response of the traditional elite and the peasantry, who were losing out as a result of colonial impositions, was that of resistance and defiance, resulting in a series of unsuccessful attempts at restoring the old order. Not that peasant revolts were unknown in Mughal India; indeed, they became endemic in the first half of the eighteenth century as the rising revenue demands breached the Mughal compromise and affected the subsistence provisions of the peasants, and the Mughal provincial bureaucracy became ever more oppressive and rigorous in collecting it (chapter 1.1). The tendency became even more pervasive as the colonial regime established itself, enhanced its power and introduced a series of revenue experiments, the sole purpose of which was to maximize its revenue income. Resistance to colonial rule was therefore as old as the rule itself.

   In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the revenue reforms of the Company's government had fundamentally affected and altered the Indian rural society. To get an overview of this new structure we may follow the general model developed by Daniel Thorner and D.N. Dhanagare,[67] allowing of course, possibilities of variation in different regions. The first group in this model consisted of landlords holding proprietary rights over large estates, usually consisting of several villages. They were an absentee rentier class with little or no interest in land management or improvement of agriculture. The second group consisted of rich peasants, who could again be subdivided into two subgroups, i.e., the rich landowners and rich tenants. The first group held proprietary right in land, but

usually in the same village and took personal interest in cultivation, it not actually participated in it. The rich tenants, on the other hand, had substantial holdings, enjoyed security of occupancy rights and paid nominal rents to their landlords. The third group consisted of middle peasants, who could again be subdivided into: (a} landowners of medium-size holdings or self-sufficient peasants who cultivated with family labour and (b) tenants with substantial holdings paying higher rents than the other privileged tenants. The fourth group included the poor peasants, i.e., the landowners with small holdings not sufficient to maintain their families, tenants with small holdings with little or no tenurial security and the sharecroppers or tenants at will. The last or fifth group, according to Dhanagare, consisted of the landless labourers.

The structure described above is, however, an arbitrary classification based on production relationship and not all the categories could be seen in all the regions. More generally, it was a pyramidal agrarian society, with 65 to 70 per cent of the agricultural population being non-owners of land. These complexities of the agrarian social structure actually developed more fully in the late nineteenth century rather than in the pre-1857 phase. During the latter period, very broadly, to follow David Hardiman's taxonomy, the Indian agrarian society could be fitted into three categories: the rural magnates who were gradually building on their power as landlords, the rich peasants or peasant farmers and the poor peasants.[68] It is often argued that the rich or the middle peasantry, being more independent, were always potentially the more radical elements to iniriate and sustain peasant rebellions. But in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century India, the land reforms and the high revenue demands of the Company's government had so severely affected the entire rural population that all sections of the peasantry in different parts of the country participated in a series of violent protests. So here we will talk about "peasants"—rather than any finer divisions among them—who rose against the Company Raj and all chose who stood for it or beneficed from it.

During the first century of British rule there were, first of all, a series of uprisings which Kathleen Gough has called "restorative rebellions", as they were started by disaffected local rulers, Mughal officials or dispossessed zamindars. In most cases they were supported by the local peasants, whose primary goal was to reinstate the old order or restore the existing agrarian relations. One could mention in this regard the revolt of Raja Chait Singh and other zamindars of Awadh in 1778–81, followed by that of the deposed

nawab of Awadh, Vizier Ali in 1799.[69] The troubles here continued into the 1830s, particularly in the northern and southern parts of Awadh, causing problems for the revenue collectors. Then followed a rebellion of the Bundela Rajput chieftains in 1842, disrupting agriculture and endangering trade routes in the region for few years. In the south, in the Tirunelveli district of North Arcot and the ceded districts of Andhra, between 1799 and 1805 the Madras government faced stiff resistance from the local chiefs called the poligars. While the Company's government treated them as just zamindars holding military service tenures, in local peasant societies they were regarded as sovereigns inheriting power from the pre-Muslim Vijaynagara kingdom. So when they put up resistance to the Company's troops, they were openly supported by the local peasant societies and were even treated as folk heroes.[70] Also in the south, there was the revolt of Pazhassi Raja which rocked Malabar in 1796-1805, followed by the insurrection of Velu Thampi, the prime minister of the Travancore state, who commanded a large army of professional soldiers and peasant volunteers. All these armed rebellions were, however, put down eventually by the British army. In some cases the rebels were later reinstated with more lenient revenue terms. But more generally, they were suppressed with what Gough calls "exernplary savagery".[71]

The peasants themselves often on their own initiative offered resistance to British rule. The Rangpur rebellion of 1783 in the northern districts of Bengal is an ideal example of such opposition. In the early days of revenue farming system, the peasantry was oppressed by the revenue contractors and company officials, imposing high revenue demands and often collecting illegal cesses. The worst offenders were revenue contractors like Debi Singh or Gangagobinda Singh, who had unleashed a reign of terror in the villages of Rangpur and Dinajpur districts. The peasants initially sent a petition to the Company's government asking for redress. But when their appeal for justice went unheeded, they organised themselves, elected their own leader, raised a huge army, equipped themselves with primitive bows, arrows and swords and attacked the local *cutchery* (a court of law), looted grain stores and forcibly released prisoners. Both Hindu and Muslim peasants fought side by side and stopped paying revenue. The rebels sought to legitimise their movement by invoking what Sugara Bose has called "the symbols of the pre-colonial state system". They called their leader "nawab", started their own government and levied charges to meet the costs of their movement. On Debi Singh's appeal, the Company's government

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under Warren Hastings sent troops to put down the rebellion. Its brutal suppression was, however, followed by some reforms in the revenue farming system." Similarly in the south, the final overthrow of Tipu Sultan and reinstatement of the old ruling dynasty of Mysore brought in enhanced revenue demands that fell ultimately on the peasants. Rampant extortion by corrupt officials further aggravated their desperate situation, motivating them to rise in open rebellion in 1830-31 in the province of Nagar. Here too the rebels elected their own leaders, defied the authority of the Mysore rulers and ultimately bowed down to the advancing British troops.

In many of the peasant movements of this period, religion played an important role in providing a discursive field within which the peasants understood colonial rule and conceptualised resistance. In other words, their religion defined their ideology of protest. The earliest of these was the Sanyasi and Fakir rebellion, which rocked northern Bengal and adjacent areas of Bihar between 1763 and 1800. The Dasnami Sanyasis, known for their martial tradition, were involved in landholding, moncylencling and trade in raw silk, piecegoods, broad cloth, copper and spices. The Madari Fakirs, who traced their origin from the Sufi order initiated by Sha-i-Madar, enjoyed rent-free tenures and retained armed followers during the Mughal days. Both these groups of armed wandering monks were affected by the Company's high revenue demands, resumption of rent-free tenures, and commercial monopoly. And then, their ranks were inflated by the sufferers from the famine of 1769–70, a large number of aggrieved small zamindars, disbanded soldiers and the rural poor. The remarkable philosophical affinity between the two religious orders, their mutual relationship, organisational network and communication with the followers, facilitated mobilisation of the rebels.[73] However, what made the conflict inevitable was the Company-state's unwillingness to tolerate such wandering bands of armed monks, who would seriously challenge its cherished ideal of a settled peasant society in Bengal that would regularly pay revenue without resorting to resistance." Therefore, from the beginning of the 1760s until the middle of 1800s recurrent confrontations between the Sanyasi-Fakirs and the armed forces of the East India Company took place in a wide region of Bengal and Bihar and the number of participants rose up to fifty thousand at the height of insurgency, which 'however began to decline after 1800. But soon another movement developed in the Sherpur pargana of Mymensingh district in east Bengal, where Karim Shah and later his successor Tipu Shah started a new religious movement among the

Hinduised tribals like the Garos, Hajangs and Hadis. As the Company's rule consolidated itself in this region and the zamindari system became more firmly entrenched under the Permanent Settlement, the peasants' grievances rose against the illegal abwabs exacted by the zamindars and the new revenue settlement effected by the Deputy Collector Dunbar. In such circumstances, around 1.824 Tipu's *Pagalpanthi* sect held out a promise of a new regime and just rents. The new spirit gradually spread over the whole region and took the shape of an armed insurrection, which had to *be* crushed with the help of the army in 1833.[75]

Simultaneously in another part of Bengal a religious movement called Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya was developing under the leadership of Tiru Mir. Starring his career as a hired muscleman for the local zarnindars, he later went to Mecca, and was initiated by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi. He came back to preach Islam in a 250-square-mile area in the northern part of the district of 24 Parganas on both sides of the rivers Jumna and lchhamati. His followers came mainly from the poor Muslim peasants and weavers, who were organised into a community with distinctive dress and beard as markers of identity. As this self-assertion of the peasantry challenged the established relations of power, the local zamindars tried to curb them in various ways, by imposing, for example, a tax on beard. Tiru Mir and his followers defied the existing authority-as represented by the local zamindars, the indigo planters and the srate=-established their own regime, started collecting taxes and struck terror in the region. The government ultimately had to mobilise the army and artillery and on 16 November 1831 blew off Tiru's bamboo fortress to crush his movement. [76]

Around the same time, another religious movement called the Faraizi movement developed among the peasants of eastern Bengal, under the leadership of Haji Shariatullah. The Tariqah movement described above owed its origin to the school of the eighteenth century Sufi saint Shah Waliullah of Delhi and derived its inspiration from Shah Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareli, the followers of whom were commonly known in colonial parlance as 'Wahabis'.[n] The Faraizi movement, on the other hand, was indigenous in origin. It sought to purify Islam by purging all un-lslamic beliefs and practices and by signifying Koran as their sole spiritual guide. The importance of this movement lay in its social roots, as the rural Muslim poor of east Bengal united under this religious sect and revolted against landlords indigo planters and the British rulers. Although Hindu landlords felt the main brunt of their angst, Muslim landlords did not

feel safe either." When Shariatullah died in 1839, his son Dudu
Mian took over the leadership and mobilised the peasantry around
an egalitarian ideology. Land belonged to God, he declared, collect-
ing rent or levying taxes on it was therefore against divine law.[79] He
built a network of village organisations in the districts of Faridpur,
Bakarganj, Dacca, Pabna, Tippera, Jessore and Noakhali. He held
local courts as alternatives to British judicial institutions, and col-
lected truces to meet the expenses of his movement. Violent clashes
with the zamindars and planters occurred throughout the 1840s and
1850s. There was a temporary lull in the movement after Dudu
Mian's death in 1862, but then it was renewed again at a different
scale by his successor Naya Mian in the 1870s (see chapter 4.2 for
more details).

A similar peasant movement of the 1840s and 1850s where reli-
gion played an important role was the Moplah uprising in the Mala-
bar region of south India. The Moplahs (or Mappilas) were the
descendents of Arab traders who had settled in this region and had
married local Nair and Tiyar women. Later their ranks inflated
through conversion of lower caste Hindus like the Cherumars, a
slave caste whose emancipation under the Slavery Abolition Act of
1843 had put them in greater social problems. [80] Gradually the
Moplahs became dependent on agriculture and turned into a com-
munity of cultivating tenants, landless labourers, petty traders and
fishermen. When the British took over Malabar in 1792, they
sought to revamp the land relations by creating individual owner-
ship right in land. The traditional system stipulated an equal sharing
of the net produce of the land by the *janmi* (holder of [anmam ten-
ure), the *Kanamdar* or *Kanakkaran* (holder of *kanam* tenure) and
the cultivator. The British system upset this arrangement by recog-
nising the janmi as absolute owners of land, with right to evict ten-
ants, which did not exist earlier, and reduced other two categories to
the status of tenants and leaseholders. Apart from that, over-
assessment, a huge burden of illegal cesses and a pro-landlord atti-
tude of the judiciary and the police meant that the "peasantry in
Malabar", writes, K.N. Panik.kar, "lived and worked in conditions of
extreme penury entailed by the twin exactions of the lord and the
stare"."

A series of incidents therefore occurred in Malabar throughout
the nineteenth century, which registered the protest and resistance
of the rural poor to acts of oppression and exploitation. [82] But the
most important aspect of this agrarian relations was that the major-
ity of the janmi were high-caste Hindus and the peasants were the

Muslim Moplahs. Within this social matrix, the traditional Muslim intellectuals, like Umar Qazi of Veliamkode, Sayyid Alavi Tangal and his son Sayyid Fazal Pookkoya Tangal of Mamburam and Sayyid Sana-Ullah-Makti Tangal, played an important role in revitalising a popular ideological domain where religion and economic grievances intermingled to produce a mentality of open resistance. Mosques became the centres of mobilisation and the targets were the Hindu janmi, their temples and the British officials who came to their rescue. Three serious incidents occurred in Manjeri in August 1849, in Kulathur in August 1851-both in south Malabar-and in Mattannur in the north in January 1852. British armed forces were deployed to suppress the revolt. The repressive measures restored peace for about twenty years, but then the Moplahs rose again in 1870 and the events followed a similar trajectory (see chapter 4.2).

Some of the peasant rebellions in pre-1857 India were participated exclusively by the tribal population whose political autonomy and control over local resources were threatened by the establishment of British rule and the advent of its non-tribal agents. The Bhils, for example, were concentrated in the hill ranges of Khandesh in the previous Maratha territory. British occupation of this region in 1818 brought in the outsiders and accompanying dislocations in their community life. A general Bhil insurrection in 1819 was crushed by the British military forces and though some conciliatory measures were taken to pacify them, the situation remained unsettled until 1831 when the Ramoshi leader Umaji Raje of Purandhar was finally captured and executed. The Bhils' local rivals for power, the Kolis of Ahmadnagar district, also challenged the British in 1829, but were quickly subdued by a Large army contingent. The seeds of rebellion however persisted, to erupt again in 1844-46, when a local Koli leader successfully defied the British government for two years.[83] Another major tribal revolt, the Kol uprising of 1831-32, took place in Chota Nagpur and Singbhum region of Bihar and Orissa. In these areas, they used to enjoy independent power for centuries. But now British penetration and imposition of British law posed a threat to the power of the hereditary tribal chiefs. And the Raja of Chota Nagpur started evicting tribal peasants by farming out land to outsiders for higher rents. This settlement of non-tribals and constant transfer of land to merchants and moneylenders-generally referred to as the *sud* or outsiders-led to a popular uprising, as their plea for justice failed to move the authorities. The forms of rebellion consisted of attacks on the properties of the outsiders, but not their lives. Plunder and arson, in other words, were the chief modes of

peasant protest, while the rate of killings was negligible. But the rebellion "wiped off the Raj from Choto Nagpore in a matter of weeks"." The British army had to move in to quell the disturbances and restore order.

The most effective tribal movement of this period was, however, the Santhal *hool* (rebellion) of 1855-56. The Santhals lived scattered in various districts of Curtack, Dhalbhum, Manbhum, Barabhum, Chota Nagpur, Palamau, Hazaribagh, Midnapur, Bankura and Birbhum in eastern India. Driven from their homeland, they cleared the area around the Rajmahal Hills and called it *Damin-i-koh*. They were gradually driven to a desperate situation as tribal lands were leased out to non-Santhal zamindars and moneylenders. To this was added the oppression of the local police and the European officers engaged in railroad construction. This penetration of outsiders-called dikus by the Santhals-completely destroyed their familiar world, and forced them into action to take possession of their lost territory. In July 1855, when their ultimatum to the zamindars and the government went unheeded, several thousand Santhals, armed with bows and arrows, started an open insurrection "against the unholy trinity of their oppressors-the zamindars, the mahajans and the government". [85] The insurrection spread rapidly and in a wide region between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal the Company's rule virtually collapsed, spreading panic in government circles. At this stage the Santhal rebels were also being actively helped by the low caste non-tribal peasants. This invited brutal counter-insurgency measures; the army was mobilised and Santhal villages were burnt one after another with vengeance. According to one calculation, out of thirty to fifty thousand rebels, fifteen to twenty thousand were killed before the insurrection was finally suppressed. [16] Henceforth, the British government became more cautious about them and the Santhal inhabited areas were constituted into a separate administrative unit, called the Santhal Parganas, which recognised the distinctiveness .of their tribal culture and identity.

The peasant rebellions described above are only the more prominent ones in a long list of other similar movements that took place across the subcontinent. Any generalisation about their origins and nature is risky. Yet, in a very broad sense it can be said that the changing economic relations in the colonial period contributed to peasant grievances and their anguish found expression in these various rebellions. Indian peasant economy in pre-colonial period was based on a subsistence ethic. The peasants did not bother about how much was taken away from them; in an environment of scarcity they were

happy if they were left with enough provision for their basic needs. The pre-colonial Mughal compromise, as described earlier (chapter 1), broke down in the eighteenth century, as surplus extraction became more vigorous. This affected the peasants' subsistence provisions and resulted in recurrent peasant revolts; the colonial revenue system only strengthened that process. But there was more change than continuity in the colonial agrarian economy, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Colonial endeavour to draw Indian economy into the world capitalist system and attempts to develop capitalist agriculture had in many cases a devastating impact on agrarian relations. Creation of property right in land and consequently of a land market resulted in the replacement of customary production relationship with contract. With the growth of commercialisation, tribute was gradually replaced by profit as the dominant mode of surplus extraction; but the process of transformation was never complete. *As* tribute and profit continued to exist side by side, the net result was the breakdown of all familiar norms of agrarian relations.

The colonial rule resulted in what Ranajit Guha has called the "revitalization of landlordism ".[87] Due to the changes in property relations, the peasants lost their occupancy right and were turned into tenants-at-will, which meant a great transformation in their status. Not until 1859 the British government looked at the tenancy issue and did anything to protect their rights. The high land revenue demand of the state could therefore easily be passed on to the peasants; the corrupt practices and the harsh attitudes of the revenue officials added to their miseries. The landlords' power to oppress the peasants was greatly expanded by British law. Their military power was not actually curbed and continued to be exerted through the zarnindar-daroga nexus, while the new courts and the lengthy judicial processes added further to their coercive authority. The landlords came to be looked at as agents of oppression, protected by the state; grievances against the landlord therefore turned easily against the British as well. The landlords were more interested in extraction rather than in capitalist enterprise, as they too were under constant pressure of the sunset laws and the burden of high revenue demand of the state. The development of land market resulted in a growing rate of land alienation and what accentuated the process was the new credit nexus. The high Land revenue demand increased the peasants' need for credit and that enhanced the power of the moneylenders and merchants over the rural society. Growing indebtedness led to eviction from land, which passed on to the

hands of the non-cultivating classes. In the words of Ranajit Guha, the landlords, moneylenders and the state thus came to constitute "a composite apparatus of dominance over the peasant". [811]

The tribal peasants had some special reasons to be aggrieved. They lived at the periphery of the settled Hindu peasant societies and enjoyed autonomy of culture, which was based on an egalitarian ethos. Over the period, their gradual Hinduisarion had been bringing them under the oppression of the ritual hierarchy; and then the extension of the British land revenue system fully destroyed the autonomy of the tribal world. They were drawn into the larger economic nexus, as the tribal lands passed into the hands of the non-tribal oppressive agents-the zamindars and the moneylenders. And the new forest regulations appeared as encroachments on their natural rights. The imposition of British rule, in other words, resulted in the loss of their autonomous domains of power, freedom and culture. The destruction of their imagined golden past by the intruding outsiders-the suds and dikus-led obviously to violent outbursts.

These peasant and tribal uprisings of the early colonial period have been looked at in different ways. The British administration considered them as problems of law and order; the rebels were portrayed as primitive savages resisting civilisation. The nationalists later on tried to appropriate the peasant and tribal histories for the purposes of anti-colonial struggle and projected them as the pre-history of modem nationalism. Eric Stokes, the historian, would call them "primary resistance, that is, a traditional society's act of violent defiance, from which usually follows the imposition of colonial rule in response"." Others like D.N. Dhanagare would regard the peasant rebellions as "pre-political", because of their lack of organisation, programme and ideology.[90] Ranajit Guha, on the other hand, has argued that "there was nothing in the militant movements of ... [the] rural masses that was not political"."

The rebellions that we have described previously were not apolitical acts; they constituted political action that demonstrated, although in different ways, the political consciousness of the peasantry. As Ranajit Guha (1994) has shown, they exhibited, first of all, a clear awareness of the relations of power in rural society and a determination to overturn that structure of authority. The rebels were quite conscious of the political sources of oppression, and this was dernoustrared in their targets of attack-the zamindars' houses, their grain stocks, the moneylenders, the merchants and ultimately the state machinery of the British, which came forward to protect these local agents of oppression. A clear identification of the enemies was

matched by an equally clear marking of the friends. What we often find in these peasant rebellions is a redefinition of the relationship of the oppressed to the language, culture and religion of the dominant classes, although the protests took myriad forms. The rebellions were political action, different from crime, because they were open and public. The Santhals gave ample warning in advance; the Rang-pur leaders imposed a levy for insurrection on the peasantry. There were public conferences, assemblies, and planning which definitely spoke of a programme. There were grand ceremonies of rebel mar-ches. The public character was reinforced by drawing on the corpo-rate labour activity, as the Santhals characterised the rebel actions as their traditional hunting activity; but now hunting had acquired a new political meaning.

As for the leadership of these peasant rebellions, it came from the ranks of the rebels themselves. Since the leaders belonged to the same cultural world of the peasants and tribals whom they led, they could provide more effective leadership. The mobilisation took place along community lines, an exception being the Rangpur upris-ing. The colonial rural societies experienced varying degrees of ten-sion between class, caste, ethnic and religious groups, which were articulated in a violent condition of oppression and poverty in the countryside. Religion in many cases provided the bond of unity among the poorer classes and the leaders were the holy men who promised a new milJennium to be achieved through supernatural means. [92] In pre-capitalist societies, where class-consciousness was ill developed and class ideology absent, religion provided an ideology for rebellion. The holy leaders referred to the loss of a moral world and thus expressed the anxieties of the peasants in religious idioms. Religion thus provided legitimacy to their movements. In such revo-lutionary messianism, the charismatic leaders were thought to be endowed with magical power; their empowering was thus an act of God. The rebellion was therefore divinely ordained and legitimised through reference to a higher authority. This provided both an ide-ology as well as motivation for peasant action. These peasant rebel-lions also differed from modern nationalism. The spread of the rebellion depended on the rebels' own perception of space and eth-nic boundary; it was most effective within the geographical area within which that community lived and worked. The Santhals' bat-tle, for example, was for their 'fatherland'; but sometimes ethnic ties extended across the territorial boundaries, as in Kol insurrection we find the Kols of different regions rose in revolt simultaneously. The rebels' own perception of time played a significant role as well.

There is often an evocation of history in the conception of a "Golden Age" in a distant past.[93] An urge for the restoration of that imagined golden past provided an ideology for peasant action, the Faraizi and Santhal rebellions being prime examples of that.

Apart from the more organised movements described earlier, violent armed rebellions, social banditry or general "lawlessness" were endemic in the first century of British rule in India. Indeed, the boundary between revolt and collaboration was quite thin, as apparent collaborators often nurtured sense of disaffection and hatred for the alien rulers. The Calcutta bhadralok, for example, who had reposed their faith in the British empire and therefore were zealously critical of the peasant rebels, also raised the issue that the loyal Santhals had not taken up arms against the king without any reason.[94] And like the peasantry, the lower classes of the urban society were equally articulate in their protest. Grain riots and resistance against the monopolistic activities of the grain dealers and interventionist British officials took place in western Hindustan and Delhi in 1833-38. There were rice riots in Vellore and southern India between 1806 and 1858 against threats of conversion to Christianity. The decline of handicraft industry as a result of free trade imperialism resulted in urban revolts by artisan groups in Calcutta in 1789, in Surat in the 1790s and 1800s and in Rohilkhand and Banaras between 1809 and 1818. These revolts were not always directly anti-colonial movements, but were all related to the policies and conditions of colonial rule.[95] However, the most powerful and potentially the most dangerous act of resistance to Company's rule in India was the revolt of 1857.

3.3. THE REVOLT OF 1857

The year 1857 witnessed armed revolts in parts of central and northern India, as a result of which effective British rule nearly collapsed in these regions until the spring of 1858, when order was restored again by the advancing imperial forces. The revolt witnessed an extraordinary amount of violence unleashed on both sides. *As* British rule had "meticulous! onsrructed a monopoly of violence", it was retorted with an equal amount of counter-violence of their subjects. If the British counter-insurgency measures included public execution of the rebels, blowing them off from cannons and indiscriminately burning native vilJages, the rebels also massacred white civilians-women and children included-without mercy. The Kanpur massacre of 27 June 1857 was in this sense an act of "transgression[n] in being the indigenous violence of the colonised breaking

that monopoly of violence of the colonisers. [96] The revolt ended the rule of the East India Company, as after its pacification in 1858 by an act of parliament the Indian empire was taken over by the British Crown. The revolt, for long mistaken to be a mere mutiny of the Indian sepoys in the Bengal army, was indeed joined by an aggrieved rural society of north India. Its causes, therefore, need to be searched for not only in the disaffection of the army, but in a long drawn process of fundamental social and economic change that upset the peasant communities during the first century of the Company's rule.

The Company's government while raising a standing army since mid-eighteenth century respected the traditions and customs of the indigenous communities and a high caste identity of the army was deliberately encouraged. This was particularly true of the Bengal army, which had a predominantly high caste character, mainly consisting of Brahmans, Rajputs and Bhumihars, whose caste rules, dietary and travel restrictions were scrupulously respected by the army admirusrration, under instructions from Warren Hastings. However, from the 1820s things began to change, as army reforms were initiated to introduce a more universalised military culture. As the reforms in the 1820s and 1830s sought to establish a tighter control over the army administration and began to curtail some of the caste privileges and pecuniary benefits, there were acts of resistance, which continued into the 1840s (for details on the army, see chapter 2.4). These incidents prepared the backdrop for the mutiny of 1857, the early signals of which could be detected in late January when rumours started circulating among the sepoys in Oum Oum near Calcutta that the cartridges of the new Enfield rifle, lately introduced to replace the old 'Brown Bess' musket, had been greased with cow and pig fat. Since the cartridges had to be bitten off before loading, it confirmed the sepoys' old suspicion about a conspiracy to destroy their religion and caste and convert them Christianity. The cartridge rumour, which was not entirely devoid of truth, spread like wildfire in various army cantonments across the country. Although the production of those cartridges was stopped immediately and various concessions were offered to allay their fears, the trust that had been breached could never be restored. On 29 March in Barackpur near Calcutta, a sepoy with the name of Mangal Pande fired at a European officer and his comrades refused to arrest him when ordered by their European superiors. They were soon apprehended, court martialled and hanged in early April, but the disaffection of the sepoys could not be contained. In the following days, incidents of disobedience, incendiarism and arson were reported from the

army cantonments in Ambala, Lucknow and Mcerut, until finally, the Meerut sepoys started the revolt on 10 May. They rescued their arrested comrades who had previously refused to accept the new cartridge, killed their European officers and proceeded to Delhi, where on 11 May they proclaimed the ageing Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar the Emperor of Hindustan.'7 From Delhi the uprising soon spread to other army centres in the North-Western Provinces and Awadh and soon took the shape of a civil rebellion, as disgruntled rural population lent a helping hand. On 19 June Lord Canning, the despondent governor general, wrote: "In Rohilcund and the Doab from Delhi to Cawnpore and Allahabad the country is not only in rebellion against us, but is utterly lawless"."

The mutiny mainly affected the Bengal army; the Madras and the Bombay regiments remained quiet, while the Punjabi and Gurkha soldiers actually helped to suppress the rebellion. It should, however, be remembered that maximum number of Indian sepoys were in the Bengal regiment and if we look at total numbers, almost half of the Indian sepoys of the East India Company had rebelled." The composition of the Bengal army was much to blame, as it had minimal British military presence, which later was considered to be a capital error. Moreover, the high-caste background of the sepoys in the Bengal army, mostly recruited from Awadb, gave them a homogeneous character. They were nurturing for a long time a number of grievances: their religious beliefs had lately come into conflict with their new service conditions; their salary level dropped; they suffered discrimination in matters of promotion and pension. To make matters worse, in 1856 a set of new service rules were introduced, which abolished their extra allowance for service outside their own regions. Service abroad was considered to be prejudicial to their caste rules, but expansion of the British empire made that unavoidable. Their refusal to serve in Burma, Sind or Afghanistan met with reprisals and dismissal.

To the discontent with service conditions was added a constant fear that the British were determined to convert them into Christianity. The presence of missionaries, the rumours about mixing cow and pig bone dust with flour and finally the controversy about the cartridge for Enfield rifles-all fitted nicely into a conspiracy theory. The annexation of Awadh in 1856 had a special adverse effect on the morale of the Bengal army, as about seventy-five thousand of them were recruited from this region. Sir James Outram had already cautioned Dalhousie that "every agricultural family in Oudh, perhaps without exception, ... sends one of its members into the

British army".100 The annexation of Awadh shook the loyalty of these sepoys, as it was for them an ultimate proof of untrustworthiness of the British. Moreover, as sepoys were peasants in uniform, they were anxious about the declining conditions of the peasantry due to the summary settlements in Awadh. The revolt was preceded by about fourteen thousand petitions from the sepoys about the hardships relating to the revenue system.'?' In other words, it was not just because of the "cartridge" that the sepoys threw in their gauntlet and rose in open rebellion against the British.

It is much more difficult to explain the civjlian revolt that accompanied the mutiny. As colonial rule had a differential impact on Indian society, the latter's responses were also widely variegated. First of all, regions and people who were beneficiaries of colonial rule did not revolt. Bengal and Punjab remained peaceful; the entire south India remained unaffected too. On the other hand, those who revolted had two elements among them-the feudal elements and the big landlords on the one end and the peasantry on the other. Different classes had different grievances and the nature of.grievances also varied from region to region. So far as the feudal elements were concerned, their major grievance was against the annexations under Lord Dalhousie's 'Doctrine of Lapse' which derecognised the adopted sons of the deceased princes as legal heirs and their kingdoms were annexed. In this way, Satara (1848), Nagpur, Sambalpur and Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852) and jhansi (1853) were taken over in quick succession. This amounted to British interference in the traditional system of inheritance and created a group of disgruntled feudal lords who had every reason to join the ranks of the rebels. Finally, in February 1856 Awadh was annexed and the king was deported to Calcutta. The annexation did not merely affect the nawab and his family, but the entire aristocracy attached to the royal court. These deposed princes in many cases offered leadership to the rebels in their respective regions and thus provided legitimacy to the revolt. Thus, Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II, assumed leadership in Kanpur, Begum Hazrat Mahal took control over Lucknow, Khan Bahadur Khan in Rohilkhand, and Rani Lakshmibai appeared as the leader of the sepoys in Jhansi, although earlier she was prepared to accept British hegemony if her adopted son was recognised as the legitimate heir to the throne. In other areas of central India, where there was no such dispossession, like Indore, Gwalior, Saugar or parts of Rajasthan, where the sepoys rebelled, the princes remained loyal to the British.

The other elements of rural society that joined the ranks of the rebels were the landed magnates or the taluqdars. The annexation of

Awadh was followed by a summary settlement in 1856, which led to the dispossession of a number of powerful taluqdars. The settlement was made with the actual occupiers of the land or village coparcenaries to the disregard of all other proprietary rights, in the same way as it was done a little while ago in the North-Western Provinces. The prime motive was to gain popularity among the agricultural population and get rid of the unwanted middlemen who stood between the peasants and the government. As a result, in Awadh the taluqdars lost about half of their estates; they were disarmed and their forts demolished, resulting in a considerable loss of status and power in local society. In the eyes of law they were now no different from the humblest of their renanrs.l''' Awadh, therefore, became the hotbed of discontent of the landed aristocrats and so was the North-Western Provinces, where coo many taluqdars had lately been dispossessed. As the revolt started, these taluqdars quickly moved into the villages they had recently lost, and significantly, they faced no resistance from their erstwhile tenants. Bound by ties of kinship and feudal loyalty, as Thomas Metcalf has argued, the villagers were happy to acknowledge the claims of their lords and joined hands against their common enemy, the British.'?'

The peasants joined the rebellion because they too were hard hit by the inordinately high revenue demands of the state. In Awadh for example, the revenue assessment overall was reduced, but there were pockets of over-a sessmenr, and here the taluqdars' losses resulted in a "talukdar-peasant complementarity" of inrerests.P' The same situation existed in the North-Western Provinces too, where Mahalwari Settlement had been made with the village mulguzars. These village proprietors who were the supposed beneficiaries of the new land revenue system, were not satisfied either, because of high land revenue demand. It was the owner-cultivators, rather than the rent-receiving landlords, who felt the burden of over-assessment more severely than others and increased public sales of landed rights were the index of this extraordinary pressure, which became a major cause of the revolt. Where agriculture was insecure, high revenue demands inevitably drove the pea ants into debt and eventually, dispossession, the new civil courts and the legal system contributing to this process.l''' In 185 3 in the North-Western Provinces alone, 110,000 acres of land were sold in auction and therefore, when the revolt started, the baniya and the mahajan and their properties became the natural targets of attack by the rioting peasants. "Thus the sale of land", as S.B. Chaudhuri summarises the situation, "not merely uprooted the ordinary people from their small holdings but

also destroyed the gentry of the country, and both the orders being the victims of the operations of British civil law were united in the revolutionary epoch of 1857-58 in a common effort to recover what they had lost".'06

The story was not perhaps that straightforward, as Eric Stokes (1980) has drawn our attention to the complexities of the situation. It should be remembered, first of all that not all taluqdars suffered under the British revenue system. In many areas the proprietary rights circulated among the traditional landed castes and often new landed magnates emerged from the declining castes· in some cases official positions gave advantage to local men in public land sales. These successful taluqdars, whom Stokes has called "the new magnates", could adjust well to the current situation both in Awadh and in the North-Western Provinces, and not only did they not revolt, but they exerted a sobering influence on their respective communities. Not all peasants suffered equally either. Those in the fertile and irrigated areas could more easily withstand the burden of over-assessment than those in the backward regions. In the latter areas again, it was more a ense of relative rather than absolute deprivation, which was the main cause of resentment. While some groups of peasanrs reeled under pressure, they could not take it easily that their caste brethren were prospering in the neighbouring canal tracts with profitable cash crop agriculture.

It was again in the backward regions that the peasants were seemingly more vulnerable to the pressures of the moneylenders or mahajans and were more likely to lose possession of their land. Yet, it is doubtful whether there was any direct correlation between indebtedness and revolt; in fact, Stokes has argued about an inverse relationship between the two. Dry lands with high revenue assessments were hardly attractive to the outside banias or mahajans. They took possession of land only where there was expansion of cash cropping. In such cases very little actual physical dispos ession took place, as the motive was more political, i.e., to take control of the peasant producers, rather than the land itself. Therefore, the backward and "thirsty" tracts with high revenue demands, where the intrusion of the mahajans was the lightest, became most prone to outbreak of violence during the revolt. Also where caste brotherhoods or *bhaicbaras* were powerful, the pressure of the mahajans was better resisted. And here social homogeneity and collective power became crucial factors in promoting rebelliousness among the peasantry. Community ties among the Gujars or jars, Rajpurs or Sayyids, became major factors in determining the effectiveness of

the peasant rebellion. Perhaps, the only common trait that pervaded all the layers of rural society was a suspicion of British rule, allegedly threatening their religion. The social reforms of the earlier period indirectly created this environment and the Christian missionaries directly contributed to it. The Hindus and the Muslims were equally affected and therefore, Hindu–Muslim unity was all along maintained during the revolt. No single causal explanation can be provided for this widespread outbreak of violent protest among the agrarian population of north India. What Eric Stokes has established, writes C.A. Bayly, is that: "The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was not one movement, ... it was many".[107]

Another contentious issue about the revolt of 1857 is its nature and the debate over it started almost instantaneously as it happened. Some contemporaries thought it was a Muslim conspiracy to restore the Mughal empire; but there was not much evidence to support that. The more dominant contemporary official interpretation of the events was that it was primarily a mutiny of the sepoys, the civilian unrest being a secondary phenomenon, which happened as the unruly elements took advantage of the breakdown of law and order. Some of the later Indian historians coo, like S.N. Sen, in his officially sponsored centennial history of the revolt, have echoed the same colonial argument. "The movement began as a military mutiny", Sen argued; and then "[w]hen the administration collapsed the lawless elements ... cook the upper hand".[108] R.C. Majumdar's thoughts are also identical: "What began as a mutiny", he thinks, "ended in certain areas in an outbreak of civil population", which was sometimes organised by self-seeking local leaders and sometimes was only "mob violence" caused by the breakdown of the administrative machinery.[109] Bue differing views from across the political spectrum were also being voiced since the time of the revolt itself. "Is it a military mutiny, or is it a national revolt?"—asked Benjamin Disraeli in the Hou e of Commons on 27 July 1857. Karl Marx in the summer of 1857 expressed the same doubts in the pages of *New York Daily Tribune*: "what he [john Bull] considers a military mutiny", he wrote, "is in truth a national revolt". It was V.D. Savarkar who drafted the revolt of 1857 directly into the historiography of Indian nationalism by describing it, in a 1909 publication, as the "Indian War of Independence", a war fought for *"su/adharma* and *swaraj"*.[110] Although this claim was vigorously denied by both Sen and Majumdar, it received serious academic support in 1959 from S.B. Chaudhuri, who saw in the revolt "the first combined attempt of many classes of people to challenge a foreign power. This

is a real, if remote, approach", he thought, "to the freedom move-ment of India of a later age. [111]

The debate has been going on since then, with a growing consen-sus gradually emerging that the revolt of 1857 was not a nationalist movement in the modern sense of the term. In 1965 Thomas Metcalf wrote: "There is a widespread agreement that it was some-thing more than a sepoy mutiny, but something less than a national revolt".[112] It was not "national" because the popular character of the revolt was limited to Upper .India alone, while the regions and groups that experienced the benefits of British rule remained loyal. There were also important groups of collaborators. The Bengali middle classes remained loyal as they had, writes Judith Brown, "material interests in the new order, and often a deep, ideological commitment to new ideas".[113] The Punjabi princes hated the Hindu-stani soldiers and shuddered at the thought of a resurrection of the Mughal empire. On the other hand, those who rebelled, argued C.A. Bayly,had various motives, which were not always connected to any specific grievance against the British; often they fought against each other and this "Indian disunity played into British hands."[114] There was no premeditated plan or a conspiracy, as the circulation of chapatis or wheat bread from village to village prior to the revolt conveyed confusing messages. The rebellion was thus all negative, it is argued, as the rebels did not have any plan to bring in any alterna-tive system to replace the British Raj. "(l]n their vision of the future the rebel leaders were hopelessly at odds", writes Metcalf; some of them owed allegiance to the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah, others to various regional princes. "United in defeat, the rebel leaders would have fallen at each other's throats in victory".[115]

This so-called "agreement" described above has, however, been seriously questioned by a number of historians in recent years, It can hardly be denied that among the rebels of 1857 there was no con-cept of an Indian nation in the modern sense of the term. Peasant actions were local affairs bound by strictly defined territorial bound-aries. Yet, unlike the earlier peasant revolts, there was now certainly greater interconnection between the territories and the rebels were open to influence from outside their *ilaqa* (area). There was coordi-nation and communication between the rebels from different parts of north and central India and there were rumours afloat which bound the rebels in an unseen bondage. A common feature shared by all of them was a distaste for the British state and disruptions it brought to their lives. Anything that stood for the authority of the Company, therefore, became their target of attack. They all felt that

their caste and religion was under threat. Like the sepoys of Jhansi, rebels everywhere fought for their *"deen* [faith] and *dharam* [religion]"-to restore a moral order, which had been polluted by an intruding foreign rule.[116] As Gautam Bhadra puts it: "It was the perception and day-to-day experience of the authority of the alien state in his immediate surroundings that determined the rebel's acrion'v!"[117] Yet, although unknown to each other and also perhaps separated by their different experiences, they were nonetheless pitted against the same enemy at the same historical conjuncture. "They took up arms", writes Ranajit Guha, "to recover what they believed to have been their ancestral domains". [118]

But what did this domain actually mean? The idea of domain, in terms of geographical or social space, was perhaps now larger than the village or their immediate caste or kin group. As Rajat Ray has argued, they were trying to free "Hindustan" of foreign yoke. There was remarkable religious amity during the revolt, as all agreed that Hindustan belonged to Hindus and Muslims alike.[119] The rebels of 1857 wanted to go back to the old familiar order and by this they did not mean the centralised Mughal state of the seventeenth *century*. They wanted to restore the decentralised political order of eighteenth century India, when the provincial rulers functioned with considerable autonomy, but all acknowledged the Mughal emperor as the source of political legitimacy. When Birjis Qadr was crowned by the rebel sepoys as the King of Awadh, the condition imposed on him was to recognise the Mughal emperor as *the* suzerain authority.[120] Delhi, the Mughal capital and Bahadur Shah, the Mughal emperor acted as symbols of that familiar world, and on this there was no dispute among the rebels. In his most recent book, C.A. Bayly has discovered in the rebellion of 1857 "a set of patriotic revolts". What the rebels demanded, *he* writes, "was the restoration of the Indo-Mughal parrias within the broader constellation of Mughal legitimacy, animated by mutual respect and a healthy balance between lands and peoples".[121] As the revolt made progress, even among the so-called collaborators there was no uncritical acceptance of British rule. The profession of loyalty, for example, by the Calcutta intelligentsia was not without dilemma, as they too were feeling what the *Hindoo Patriot* described, the "grievances inseparable from subjection to a foreign rule". The paper aptly summed up the dilemma: "This loyalty, it may be true, springs nearer from the head than from the heart".[122] Thus, conscious voices of dissent and disaffection against foreign rule, if not always an avowed yearning for liberation, ran across the different sections of population in India

in 1857-58. In recent years, the pendulum of historical interpretation of 1857 has moved considerably to the opposite direction.

The other important question about the character of the revolt is whether or not it was an elitist movement. Some historians like Judith Brown think that during the revolt the feudal elements were the decision makers and that much of the revolt was determined and shaped by the presence or absence of a thriving magnate element committed to British rule, for it was only they who could give the revolt a general direcrion.!'' Eric Stokes goes on to conclude that: "Rural revolt in 1857 was essentially elitist in character".124 This position, however, trivialises the role of the masses. So far as the feudal lords were concerned, in many cases they were reluctant to assume leadership and were indeed pushed by the rebels. Bahadur Shah was taken by surprise when approached by the rebel sepoys, and only with great hesitation did he agree to be their leader. Nana Sahib in Kanpur–as it was later revealed in the confession of his close confidante Tantia Topi-was seized by the rebel sepoys and was threatened with dire consequences; he did not have much choice other than joining hands with the rebels.t-' And the Rani of Jhansi was actually threatened with death if she did not assist the sepoys or collaborated with the British.126 The initiative for the revolt and even its effectiveness did not really depend on the feudal leadership.

So far as the taluqdars were concerned, it is true that in many areas peasants followed their leaders, because of the existence of a pre-capitalist symbiotic relationship between the two classes. But the role of the taluqdars varied widely from region to region. In Awadh, for example, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee has shown, taluqdar participation was never universal: some of them remained loyal, some became turncoats, others followed a middle course and some submitted at the sight of the approaching British rroops.127 In many areas the peasants and the artisans forced the taluqdars to join the revolt, while in some cases, the masses insisted on carrying on the revolt even after the taluqdars had made peace with the British. And above all, the main initiative came from the sepoys, the peasants in uniform, who now had shed their uniforms to merge with the peasants again. Almost everywhere in central and northern India, the rising in the army barracks soon spread to the neighbouring villages; caste and ethnic ties of the sepoys also connected them to the peasant communities. Almost everywhere, rebel action was preceded by conferencing and panchayat meetings or open gatherings of large number of rebels. And finally the chapatis, which circulated rapidly

between villages in geometrical progression conveying divergent meanings to different peoples, stood as a symbol or an omen, rather than index or cause, of an impending crisis.ru It is difficult to ignore the evidence of autonomous mobilisation of the peasantry in the rebellions of 1857-58.

The rebellion was suppressed with brutal force. Lord Canning gathered British troops at Calcutta and sent them to free Delhi. On 20September1857, Delhi was finally recaptured and Bahadur Shah Zafar was imprisoned and later deported; but this did not yet mean the end of the rebellion. Very slowly Banaras, Allahabad and Kanpur were taken over, the rebels fighting for every inch of territory and the British unleashing an unmitigated reign of terror in the countryside. The arrival of fresh British troops at Calcutta in October decisively tilted the balance against the rebels. Between the spring of 1858 and the beginning of 1859, British troops gradually recovered Gwalior, Doab, Lucknow and the rest of Awadh, Rohilkhand and the remainder of central India. The contemporary colonial explanations for the defeat of the sepoys and of the rural rebels highlighted British bravery, their superior national character, better leadership qualities and effective military strategies, as against the lack of unity, discipline and order among the rebels. Some of the earlier Indian historians too believed in the same theory. Modern historians would, however, point out that the British won as they committed unlimited men and resources to reclaim their empire, while the sepoys suffered from a desperate scarcity of cash. The ordinary rural rebels in the true fashion of a peasant army were only equipped with primitive weapons and most of them were not even trained soldiers. They were facing the British army, which not only had control over most sophisticated weapons, but who were the masters of practically the whole of India, had the backing of a centralised bureaucracy and had access to an efficient communication system. Furthermore, as Stokes has argued, the rebel sepoys showed a remarkable "centripetal impulse to congregate at Delhi", which prevented the rebellion from spreading as much as it could. So when by March 1858 Delhi and Lucknow fell, the rebellion entered its dying phase.P? The extremely localised nature of the uprisings helped the British to tackle them one at a time. By the beginning of 1859 all was over.

The revolt of 1857 is in many ways an important watershed in Indian history. First of all, it ended the rule of the East India Company. Even before peace was fully restored in India, the British parliament passed on 2 August 1858 an Act for the Better Government of India, declaring Queen Victoria as the sovereign of British India

and providing for the appointment of a Secretary of State for India who would be a member of the cabinet. The act was to come into effect on 1 November and on that day the Queen issued a Proclamation, which promised religious toleration and proposed to govern Indians according to their established traditions and customs.P" Bernard Cohn has summarised what this constitutional change meant for the status of British rule in India: "In conceptual terms, the British, who had started their rule as 'outsiders', became 'insiders' by vesting in their monarch the sovereignty of India.'|31 The proclamation provided for the ordering of the relationship between the monarch and her representatives in India, their Indian subjects and the princes, all of them being neatly fitted into an elaborate imperial hierarchy. Apart from this, there were other far-reaching changes resulring from almost one year of bloody racial warfare. The sepoys were charged with a serious breach of trust and this in general made all the Indians suspect in the eyes of the British, both in India and at home. The stories of sepoy atrociries raised the clamour for punishment and retribution and if the saner elements like Viceroy Lord Canning tried to restrain this hysteria, he soon earned the derisive epithet of "Clemency Canning" from his own countrymen and requests were sent to the Queen for his recall. Although this madness subsided gradually, it left a lasting imprint on British-Indian relations in the subsequent period. Racial segregarion from now on became firmly entrenched, as Indians were regarded not only different, but also racially inferior. What is more important, the earlier reformist zeal of a self-confident Victorian liberalism now evidently took a back seat, as many believed now that Indians were beyond reform. This new mood, which Thomas Metcalf has called the "conservative brand of liberalism", rested upon the "solid support of the conservative and aristocratic classes and upon the principle of complete non-interference in the traditional structure of Indian society".132 This conservative reaction evidently made the empire more autocratic and denied the aspirations of the educated Indians for sharing power. This, therefore, also made the empire more vulnerable, as from this frustration of the educated middle classes arose modern nationalism towards the end of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. Viswanathan 1989: 71–74.
2. Nurullah and Naik 1971: 30-39.
3. Quoted in Gho h 1995: 20.
4. Viswanathan 1989: 25-27.

5. Quoted in Ghosh 1995: 31-33.
6. Bhattacharya 1998: 7.
7. Viswanathan 1989: 20, 45, 93.
8. Quoted in Mi ra 1978: 151.
9. Viswanathan 1989: 146-48.
10. Quoted in Singh 1998:115.
11. See Constable 2000 for details.
12. McCully 1966: 177.
13. Ghosh 1995: 88.
14. Quoted in Singh 1998: 108.
15. Viswanathan 1989: 93.
16. Panikkar 1995: 9.
17. Mccully 1966: 217.
18. For more on this point, see Ray 2001: 33-39.
19. Panikkar, 1995: 8.
20. Prakash 1999: 60, 71 and passim.
21. See Prakash 1999 and Panikkar 1995 for detail .
22. Sarkar 1985: 26.
23. Spear 1965: 203.
24. Vishwanath 1998.
25. Hawley 1994: 3.
26. Ray 1975: 3–5.
27. See Nandy 1994b: 138-142.
28. Carroll 1983: 379.
29. Sen 1977: 6.
30. Bandyopadhyay 1995: 8-9.
31. O'Hanlon 1991: 67-69; Chakravarti 1998: 81–94.
32. Forbes 1998: 24-25.
33. Heirnsath 1964: 87–88.
34. Chowdhry 1995: 40.
35. Bandyopadhyay 1990: 119.
36. Singha 1998: 168–93; also see Pinch 1996: 7-8; Gordon 1969.
37. Prakash 1992: 16.
38. Chakrabarry 1994: 53–54.
39. Ramusack 1990: 154.
40. Sarkar 1981: 5-6.
41. Jones 1994: 4.
42. Kopf 1979: 224-28, 317–27.
43. Borthwick 1978: 57.
44. ~P. Sen 1993: 46.
45. Dobbin 1972: 248-49.
46. Tucker 1976: 325-27.
47. Dobbin 1972: 249-52; Tucker 1977.
48. Quoted in Heimsath 1964: 108.
49. Jones 1994: 143.
50. Van der Veer 1994: 65.

51. Prakash 1999: 93-94.
52. Details in Jones 1976.
53. Jaffrelot 1996: 15.
54. Mukherjee 1993: 128-38.
55. Bhattacharya 1975.
56. Jones 1994: 141.
57. Dobbin 1972: 252.
58. Heimsath 1964: 110-12.
59. Mani 1998: 79.
60. Bandyopadhyay 1995.
61. Vishwanath 1998.
62. Sarkar 2000: 248.
63. Raychaudhuri 1995: 49.
64. Sarkar 1975.
65. R.K. Ray 1975.
66. Jaffrelot 1996: 14.
67. Dhanagare 1991: 14-15.
68. Hardiman 1993: 4–5.
69. Gough 1979: 94-97.
70. Bayly 1987: 172.
71. Gough 1979: 97.
72. Bose 1993: 145-46.
73. Details in Dasgupta 1992.
74. Pinch 1996: 24-25.
75. Van Schendel 1985; Bhadra 1994.
76. Bhadra 1994: 232–99.
77. Ibid 238-41.
78. Ahmed 1996: 39-41, 45.
79. Kaviraj 1982: 90.
80. Dhanagare 1991: 56–57.
81. Panikkar 1989: 48.
82. Dale 1975: 228-32.
83. Sumit Guha 1999: 96-102.
84. Surnir Guha 1994: 162.
85. Natarajan 1979: 140.
86. Ibid: 145.
87. Guha 1994: 7.
88. Ibid: 8.
89. Stokes 1980: 123.
90. Dhanagare 1991: 82.
91. Guha 1994: 6.
92. Fuchs 1992: 22-24.
93. Ibid: 11.
94. Bandyopadhyay 1997b: 19.
95. Bayly 1987: 177-78.
96. Mukherjee 1998: 23 and passim.

 97. Taylor 1997: 31-49.
 98. Quoted in Metcalf 1965: 49.
 99. Chandra et al. 1989: 31.
100. Quoted in Chaudhuri 1957: 14.
101. Khaldun 1986: 17.
102. Mukherjee 1984: 40, 57, 159-60.
103. Metcalf 1965: 68.
104. Mukherjee 1984: 62.
105. Stokes 1986: 218-19.
106. Chaudhuri 1957: 21.
107. Bayly 1986: 226.
108. Sen 1957: 398-418.
109. Majumdar 1963: iii.
110. Embree 1963: 5, 21, 39, 41.
111. Chaudhuri 1957: 297.
112. Metcalf 1965: 60.
113. Brown 1994: 90.
114. Bayly 1987: 183.
115. Metcalf 1965: 61.
116. Tapti Roy 1993: 213.
117. Bhadra 1985: 275.
118. Guha 1994: 318.
119. Ray 1993: 133-82.
120. Mukherjee 1984: 136; 1998: 64.
121. Bayly 1998: 88.
122. Quoted in Bandyopadhyay 1997b: 22-23.
123. Brown 1994: 92.
124. Stokes 1980: 185.
125. Mukherjee 1998: 62-63.
126. Roy 1993: 210.
127. Mukherjee 1984: 157.
128. Ranajit Guha 1994: 239-46.
129. Stokes 1986: 49-50.
130. Taylor 1996: 113, 277.
131. Cohn 1992: 165.
132. Metcalf 1965: viii.