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Rural Credit Relations in Bengal, 1859-1885

BINAY BHUSHAN CHAUDHURI

1. Origin of Rural Indebtedness and the Circumstances Affecting its Size

Unlike the report of the Deccan Riots Commission (1878) or Darling's *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, for Bengal we have no contemporary study of the origin of rural indebtedness. The explanations offered by contemporaries were of a general nature, not necessarily applicable to any particular situation. They assumed that the origin was not recent.¹ We also assume that this is a valid assumption, and so we concentrate more on the circumstances that affected the growth of indebtedness.

Daniel and Alice Thorner² have explained this growth and the increasing importance of money-lenders in the rural economy during British rule partly by the changes which that rule had brought into the land revenue administration of the country—changes consisting in a demand on a far larger scale than before for payment of land revenue in money and 'a relatively inflexible demand . . . within the context of a private property structure of landholding'. The demand for payment of land revenue in money

'resulted in great pressure on the peasantry to produce cash crops for the market, in addition to the older subsistence crops for the personal consumption. As the income of the peasants became more and more dependent upon the sale of their commercial crops, they came to need regular supplies of credit to tide them over from one financial year to the next'.

1. The Deccan Riots Commission held a similar view : 'The enquiries of the Commission enable us to state with some measure of certainty that the chief cause of the present indebtedness of the ryot is *ancestral debt*'. (Parl. Papers, 1878, lviii (C 2071), para 55 of the Commission's Report.)

2. Daniel and Alice Thorner, *Land and Labour in India*, pp. 55, 108.

The consequence of the relatively inflexible demand was increased dependence of the peasantry on moneylenders 'in times of bad crops or low prices'. 'In pre-British times', the Thorner's observe, 'local moneylender extended casual credit to meet occasional needs of the villagers'.

As far as Bengal is concerned, this explanation of the growth of rural indebtedness during British rule is only partially valid. It is true that the greater rigour with which land revenue was collected led zamindars to collect rent from their ryots with a similar rigour, and when crops failed the dependence of peasants on moneylenders became unavoidable. But the particular land revenue settlement in Bengal did not lead to a demand on a larger scale than before for payment of land revenue in money. Land revenue was almost invariably paid in money even before. There is no evidence either that the land revenue settlement alone resulted in a large scale replacement of produce rent by money rent. Produce rent prevailed mostly where cultivation was uncertain or the productivity of land poor. Any attempt to force a system of money rent without changing the conditions of agriculture would, therefore, have been self-defeating. In view of the uncertainty of cultivation a fixed money rent would have been an impossible proposition for the peasants, and they would have abandoned cultivation altogether. It is also a questionable argument that the introduction of money rent had immediately and directly caused the cultivation of cash crops on an increasing scale. Cash crops were produced for the market, but money rent could not of itself create it. Peasants' choice in this was limited by the pre-existence of a market. Moreover, cash crops were regional and occupied only a small part of the total cultivated area of Bengal, while rural indebtedness was far from confined to, or particularly acute in, the regions where such cash crops were grown.

Some Government officers related the origin of indebtedness to some social institutions and stressed the role of 'extravagance' in social ceremonies in this. The Deccan Riots Commission examined the view and found it untenable. Expenditure on such ceremonies, the Commission remarked, 'forms an item of some importance in the debit side of his [ryot's] account, but . . . rarely

appears as the nucleus of his indebtedness'.³ In his *Report on the system of agriculture and agricultural statistics of the Dacca district*⁴, A. C. Sen, Assistant to the Director of Land Records, Bengal, held a similar view. A later official report⁵, based on elaborate local enquiry, also concluded that social ceremonies 'make but small contributions to the total indebtedness'.

Apart from the fact that the view emphasising the role of social extravagance in rural indebtedness is untenable, the approach to the question of indebtedness that it suggests is misleading. Central to the view was a certain notion of a rational social conduct—a notion that the social ceremonies were pointless and should, therefore, have been dispensed with. It is, however, irrelevant to isolate the social needs of peasants from the economic ones, since it is inconsistent with their system of values. These ceremonies had a vital part in their life, and, in the prevailing cultural milieu, were indispensable, since these were the means of establishing their communal identity. Peasants attached as much importance to the loans for agriculture as to those for these ceremonies. As a Bengali saying puts it, a money-lender was '*jater o pater mahajan*'—the guardian of honour and the supplier of food.

The prevailing conditions of agriculture, in fact, adequately explained the origin of indebtedness, though numerous other circumstances aggravated it. In his *Dacca Report*, A. C. Sen made a striking generalisation: with 'the general low prices'⁶ of agricultural produce the income from agriculture was scarcely enough 'to keep men engaged in this pursuit afloat, notwithstanding the most rigid economy.'⁷ Agriculture was remunerative, Sen held, only under exceptional circumstances—nearness to a trading centre, abundance of cultivable land and the cultivation of a 'particularly paying crop.'

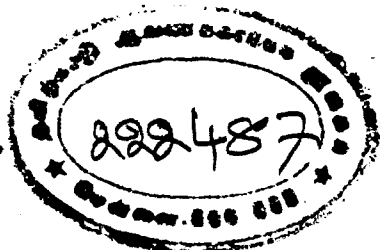
3. Para 54 of the Commission's Report.

4. Published from Calcutta, 1889, para 50. (Hereafter referred to as *Dacca Report*.)

5. *Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929-30*. (Calcutta, 1930), Vol. 1, para 97. The Report is hereafter referred to as the B.P.B.E.C. Report.

6. At the time Sen wrote his report (1889), the price level was not low by recent standards.

7. *Op. cit.*, para 50.



Peasants were well-to-do only where they combined agriculture with other occupations, such as trade in fuel and service as boatmen. Such peasants, however, Sen found, were a small minority—only 10% of the peasant population.

We come across a similar generalisation in several other contemporary reports too. But in these cases it mostly rested on the assumption that the size of average peasant holdings was small—a qualification which Sen does not explicitly make. We shall analyse in a later section the available statistics relating to the size of peasant holdings. The conclusion that the analysis leads to is that given the existing size most holdings were uneconomic. *The Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee* too agreed with this. The Committee estimated the *per capita* annual surplus at a small sum of Rs. 6, and concluded: 'there is very little room for improvement in the standard of living unless means are devised to improve the productiveness of the soil and to bring to the producer a greater share of the value of the crops than the harvest price that he now commands'⁸

The question that still remains to be answered is: why were the holdings small? Was this a consequence of the pre-existing poverty of peasants or of other circumstances? What prevented peasants from enlarging their holdings—their limited means, an uneven balance between the cost of new cultivation and the additional income from it, increasing population, non-availability of new land, difficulty of access to it where it existed, social institutions like inheritance laws, or other circumstances? All these perhaps had a role. But in the absence of relevant statistics it is not possible to reach any conclusion about their relative role in different places.

The small income from petty holdings was liable to be occasionally further reduced. Extremely sensitive to variations in rainfall, the cultivation of rice, the main crop of Bengal, failed not infrequently. Drought destroyed it over a wide region in 1865-66, 1873-74 and 1897-98. Failures on a smaller scale and affecting particular regions were more frequent. Failure of rain was a perpetual hazard for the rice cultivation in the new agricultural settlements in northern Bihar. Crops also failed for various other reasons.

8. *Op. cit.*, para 27.

Paradoxically, given the existing market conditions, even an abundant harvest resulting from particularly favourable climatic conditions occasionally, as in 1880-1882,⁹ resulted in reducing the peasants' income, because such abundance led to a slump in the prices of rice. In many parts of Bengal the income of peasants tended to diminish with the declining productivity of the land and the shrinkage of cultivation, caused by certain circumstances—the decaying river system, the extensive rural depopulation and other developments. Enhanced rent,¹⁰ and several new cesses and taxes—the Roadcess (1871), the Public Works Cess (1877) and the Licence Tax (1873)—were a further drain on their income. Rural indebtedness must have increased as a result.

2. Extent of Rural Indebtedness

The importance of phenomenon of rural indebtedness for the peasant economy derives from its extensiveness. There was no statistical enquiry, official or non-official, into the question covering all parts of Bengal, but there was much contemporary evidence bearing on it. In response to 'the cry . . . from many parts of India that people are becoming discontented because of the oppression of the moneylenders', Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, instituted a confidential enquiry into the question.¹¹ The enquiry during Dufferin's administration into the conditions of the 'lower orders of the people provides a more comprehensive body of evidence.'¹² The vast famine literature deals with a wide range of questions relating to rural indebtedness. Several district monographs, reports from the officers connected with the Opium Department, reports on the administration of canal revenue of Midnapur and other innumerable district reports are excellent source materials for regional studies of the phenomenon of rural indebtedness.

9. *Infra* pp. 226-229.

10. *Supra*, Chapter II.

11. Temple Collection, Vol. 161, Circular to Divisional Commissioners, 27 Aug. 1875, No pagination. Unless otherwise stated, Temple Collection in subsequent references would mean Vol. 161 of Temple Collection.

12. India Famine Progs., Dec. 1888, No. 8, Serial No. 27 and its enclosures. The Dufferin Enquiry reports will hereafter be referred to as D. E.

Though evidence of widespread rural indebtedness was overwhelming, there were some dissenting opinions. It is first necessary to examine their validity. Some local officers argued from *a priori* grounds. For instance, from the existence of more land than the peasants could cultivate in Dinajpur at the time, the district Collector concluded that the degree of indebtedness was 'very small.'¹³ The Collector entirely overlooked the origin of the diminishing population. Decaying rivers, malaria and the general unhealthiness of the climate, which led to it, were scarcely compatible with prosperous agriculture. The thinness of population, as the Commissioner of Rajshahi remarked while forwarding the Collector's letter to the Governor of Bengal, would have probably persuaded a creditor, where he happened to be a zamindar, to be forbearing to his indebted ryot and not to press him too hard, but did not necessarily causally link up with the non-existence of indebtedness. The Settlement Officer of Bihar dismissed as 'pure fallacy'¹⁴ a similar opinion fashionable among the officers of Champaran—a district demographically similar to some parts of Dinajpur.

Where the opinion of local officers about the non-existence or the negligible scale of the existing indebtedness had an empirical basis, it was often inconsistent with other observations made by the same officers or with other facts recorded by them, evidently suggesting a misunderstanding on the part of these officers of the characteristics of rural indebtedness. Oldham, Collector of Burdwan, who investigated in 1888 the conditions of the 'lower orders of the people' of Kaksa, 'a typical area' of Burdwan, described 'the disappearance of indebtedness, which was general in 1872' and of 'the rural *mahajuns* [moneylenders], to whom poor cultivators and labourers were practically bound as serfs' as 'a remarkable circumstance.'¹⁵ The irreconcilability of this assertion with another observation of his is all too palpable: 'Nowhere in the district is there a lower rate of income, a lower standard of ease, a narrower margin for subsistence

13. Temple Collection, Commissioner of Rajshahi to Government of Bengal, 1 Nov. 1875.

14. Stevenson-Moore, *Champaran Settlement Report*, paras 578-81.

15. D. E., Oldham's report quoted in the letter from the Burdwan Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, Revenue Dept., 16 April 1888, para 17.

or a greater prevalence of poverty among the agricultural and labouring classes than at Kaksa.'¹⁶ Taylor, Collector of Bankura, similarly contradicted himself. His conclusion that the peasants 'are generally beyond the power of the heartless moneylenders' does not agree with an observed fact: 'the cultivators generally get loans of money or grain which they repay after the harvest.'¹⁷ The foundation of moneylenders' power was precisely these loans which tended to grow in size. Such contradictory statements were numerous.

Reports written at about the end of the 19th century on the survey and settlement in some Bihar districts contain the most elaborate defence of the view that rural indebtedness did not exist to any appreciable extent. The defence was not based on any minute case studies. The available statistics of mortgages and alienations of peasants' holdings were the only direct evidence the Settlement Officers could produce in its support. From the small numbers of such mortgages and alienations they concluded that rural indebtedness was far from widespread.

The method of analysis was as follows:¹⁸ The total 'money value' of the aggregate production of the area cultivated by the 'pure cultivators' and 'cultivating labourers' was first estimated. (The Settlement Officers deducted from the total cultivated area a certain area classified as 'cultivated by landlords.') The estimated cost of cultivation was deducted from the 'money value' and what remained was divided by the number of the 'pure cultivators' and 'cultivating labourers' in order to ascertain the income of an individual peasant from agriculture alone. His total income was calculated by adding to it the income from other sources. What remained after the deduction of the cost of living formed his actual surplus. From this the writer of the Muzaffarpur Report concluded that the income of 'pure cultivators' was 55% 'more than the amount required to maintain them in a fair state of comfort, apart from the cost of luxuries and ceremonies'. The percentage in the case of 'cultivating

16. *Ibid.*, para 11.

17. *Ibid.*, paras 37 and 39.

18. For this see Stevenson-Moore, *Muzaffarpur Settlement Report*, paras 918-927 and Chapter 4 in each case of the reports on Saran, Darbhanga and Champaran.

labourers' was 39.¹⁹

Both the methods, direct and indirect, of the Settlement Officers are of questionable validity. As for the first, the Officers themselves were not unaware of some of its obvious limitations. The statistics used by them did not cover cases where the peasant borrowed on security other than land, or where land was mortgaged as security while he retained its possession. Anyway mortgages and alienations of peasants' holdings were only a small segment, as we shall see, of the wide spectrum of rural credit relations.

The indirect method is a sheer irrelevance, even if we assume the correctness of the various estimates, though in view of the immense range of regional variations one can legitimately doubt it. The category of 'money value' of aggregate production is appropriate only to capitalistic farming. Where peasants themselves consumed the largest part of what they produced, the whole concept of market value—a basic assumption of the produce was marketed the pre-existing credit relations sometimes prevented peasants from getting its full market value. The officers entirely ignored this.

It is curious to find that the Officers knew that the conclusion of their indirect analysis was contradicted by the intimate experience of other local officers, whose evidence they themselves believed to be highly trustworthy. The Saran Report quotes an opinion of Tytler, Sub-deputy Opium Agent at Siwan, one of the subdivisions of Saran: '95 percent of the raiyats live and die in debt, and that they die in debt follows as a matter of course, in the great majority of cases, from the fact that they are born in debt, and make no effort during their life-time to pay off debt'.²⁰ The evidence may be taken as unimpeachable in view of 'Tytler's long experience of the district, extending over 30 years, and his intimate acquaintance, not only with all matters connected with agriculture, but also with the cultivators themselves, whose confidence he possesses in the very highest degree'²¹—a judgement from the writer of the Saran Report himself.

That rural indebtedness was widespread—with obvious regional

19. Muzaffarpur Settlement Report, paras 925-26.

20. Saran Settlement Report, para 556.

21. *Ibid.*, para 548.

variations in point of degree—was the majority opinion. In some cases, however, this was an impressionistic judgement. But it would be wrong to dismiss this as an improper basis of generalisation on the state of indebtedness. This impression was not one of a stranger, but derived from long acquaintance with the rural life. The fact that the same opinion had been expressed, time and again, by different local people and local officers increases its value as a valid historical evidence. Most statistical enquiries, whatever their coverage, tended to corroborate this opinion. Moreover, the wide extent of rural indebtedness can be inferred from numerous established facts of peasant life. We first quote some impressionistic opinions and then summarise the findings of some local enquiries.

To officers like Metcalfe, Commissioner of Patna, who formed his opinion on the basis of 'the impressions on my mind left by village scenes in moffusil wanderings over a period of some 17 years', the dependance of peasants on moneylenders was very much a part of the constitution of rural life and sometimes a kind of social attitude: 'the *rajah* [landlord], the ryot and the *mahajan* [moneylender] are so many parts of a machine; the one without the other would bring the whole to a standstill'.²² He found: 'the agriculturist regards a village without its moneylender as an abnormal state of things. The social fabric of rural life is incomplete without its usurer'. The Commissioner of the Presidency Division had formed a similar impression: 'The debt is kept on partly from habit... The *mahajan* is an institution which the ryots think it worthwhile to support even at the sacrifice of a certain quantity of paddy in the form of interest'.²³ John Boxwell, Commissioner of Patna, found rural indebtedness very natural in a country like Bengal: 'In a low state of civilisation people are unable to do their own saving. Their *mahajans* do it for them, and make them pay well for it'.²⁴ The Deputy Collector of Sasaram in the district of Sahabad went as far as to say: 'a cultivator not in debt is viewed

22. Temple Collection, Metcalfe's note of 5 Nov. 1875, para 17.

23. D. E., Presidency Commissioner to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., 17 May 1888, para 55.

24. *Ibid.*, Patna Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 2 June 1888, para 10.

with dislike and suspicion, and debt is their common burden.²⁵

General observations on the wide extent of rural indebtedness are numerous. Here are some examples. The following generalisation by Mangles of the Amwah Opium Factory of Patna, apart from emphasising the acuteness of the problem of rural indebtedness, has defined its essential nature: 'In ordinary years the ryot makes over to the *mahajan* his whole crop; the *mahajan* pays his rent for him and keeps him in grain for the rest of the year.'²⁶ To the Collector of Bhagalpur: 'figures were perhaps scarcely necessary to prove the melancholy fact, which any one acquainted with the *moffusil* knows, that the majority of our ryots live in debt and pay off one year in order to begin borrowing for the next'.²⁷ The Collector of Midnapur deplored that the peasants 'adhere to the existing custom of living for at least three-fourths of the year on the security of their ensuing crop'.²⁸

Local investigations have everywhere tended to confirm the validity of such observations. In fact there was a feeling that the extent of rural indebtedness was larger than the statistics compiled during such investigations indicated, since, as the Collector of Bhagalpur remarked, 'enquiries about debt in a village always challenge concealment to whichever party you may go, for the *mahajan* at once suspects taxation'.²⁹ A major limitation of some of these local reports is their omission to quantify the degree of indebtedness of individual peasant families, though they give us a fair idea of the number of indebted families. The general impression, however, was that once in debt peasants could seldom extricate

25. Beng. Gen. Progs., Nov. 1873, File 1—100/109, Annual General Report on Sarasam by the Deputy Collector, 26 April 1873, enclosed with the Annual General Report, Patna Division, 1872-73, 8 Sept. 1873.

26. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., Aug. 1886; No. 127, Mangles to Patna Commissioner, 3 July 1865.

27. D.E., Collector of Bhagalpur to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 12.

28. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Nov. 1873, File 1, Nos. 85/89, General Annual Report, Burdwan Division, 1872-73 by the Commissioner, 20 Aug. 1873, Appendix II, Collector of Midnapur on the 'Condition of the People' of the district, undated.

29. D.E., Collector of Bhagalpur to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 12.

themselves. This is consistent with the known facts of small peasant farming in Bengal. Given the small size of peasant holdings³⁰ the surplus of peasants, even in normal years, was very small; and given the technique of cultivation, production could not increase to an extent to enable them to pay off their old debts and still to have enough to subsist on. Add to it the high rate of interest exacted by moneylenders, and their chances of getting rid of debts nearly disappeared. Another limitation of the local enquiries was their small coverage. In view of this the validity of the generalisations on their basis with reference to the state of indebtedness in the regions not covered by them may be legitimately questioned. One extenuating circumstance was the great care of the investigator in selecting 'typical' areas, though, one can say, the criterion of 'typicality' is itself a debatable point. Anyway we use the findings of the local enquiries for whatever they were worth.

The enquiry during Temple's administration was not designed to elicit statistical information. Yet reports of some officers embodied the results of either past enquiries of a statistical nature or of the ones they themselves made. A 'special enquiry' in 1873 by the Manager of Chanchal Wards' estate in Maldah (which was not a compact state but an agglomeration of estates scattered all over the district—a circumstance giving the enquiry a representative character) showed that out of 13,179 peasant families covered by it 4,572 (about 34%) were indebted.³¹ Writing of the situation in 1875 the district Collector noted that 'the famine of 1874 has since largely increased the general indebtedness'. The Maldah *Munsif* (judge in a lower court) 'inferred from what appears on the records of his court' that 60% of the peasants were indebted. Apart from the famine, the depression in the silk trade³² had a role in this, since 'about 30% of the ryots follow the silk trade'.³³ On the basis of local enquiries the Presidency Commissioner concluded that 'not

30. *Infra* pp. 167-69.

31. Temple Collection, Commissioner of Rajshahi to Govt. of Bengal, 1 Nov. 1875.

32. Silk prices suddenly slumped in 1872-73.

33. Temple Collection, Rajshahi Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 1 Nov. 1875.

more than 10 to 12½ p.c. of ryots' were free from debt. The 'majority' of them were indebted to the extent of 'two years' income on an average, falling to one year's and rising to 3 years' according to seasons'. A debt to the extent of even one year's income tended to be self-perpetuating, and in the case of the 'poorest ryots' the result was that 'the crops . . . go bodily to the *mahajan*, unless a very good season leaves the ryot a little over'. In the six villages chosen for enquiry in the Sadar subdivision of Faridpur about 51% of the peasants were in debt. Such indebtedness was permanent: 'The ryots who are in debt remain so more or less year after year'.³⁴ They paid off a portion of the debt at the *gur* (crude sugar) manufacturing season or after the *aman* harvest, only to borrow, 'except in very favourable years . . . pretty nearly what they had previously paid off, so that the debt remains practically much the same'. The 'experience' of Harsahai Sing, 'a Deputy Collector whose whole service has been spent on settlement in duty', was that 75% of the Bihar peasants were indebted.³⁵

The confidential enquiry of 1888 during Dufferin's administration provides us with more elaborate statistics. Since the instructions of the Government of India insisted on precise information, whatever the coverage of enquiry, it is probable that such statistics are more reliable.

In two 'typical' villages in the 34-Parganas out of 158 families of cultivators, 'who cultivate their lands without hired labour,' 116 (73%) were in debt. Of the rest some were not formally in debt, possibly, as the District Collector writes, 'because they have not sufficient credit to justify the *mahajan* allowing them advances'.³⁶ The fact is that they borrowed, but not in the usual way. They borrowed pledging their physical labour to their creditor, and laboured as long as the creditor could make them believe that the debt was not paid off.³⁷ It was debt of a far worse kind. Of the 145 families of agricultural labourers chiefly subsisting on 'wages for work in cultivation', 95 (65.5%) were indebted. The degree of

34. *Ibid.*, Dacca Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 4 Nov. 1875.

35. *Ibid.*, Metcalfe's note of 5 Nov. 1875.

36. D.E., Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, para 13.

37. *Ibid.*, para 54.

indebtedness of both the groups is suggested by the Collector's description of the nature of their borrowing. In ordinary years they had an 'easy' time during the three or four months after the harvest, when 'the *mahajan*'s account is settled so far as means and inclination permit'. For the rest of the year borrowing was indispensable.³⁸

In Nadia peasant families consisting of six persons and having one plough and ten to twelve *bigahs* were found 'generally indebted'.³⁹ In two villages studied by the district Collector the percentage of such families was 62.5 and 82 respectively.⁴⁰ In another village out of 44 families 12 did not borrow, 17 borrowed and the rest were 'too poor to get credit'.⁴¹ In the village of Momenabad in Murshidabad only six families out of thirtythree did not borrow.⁴² In two villages in the Government estate Chandkhali in Khulna more than 80% of those holding from 10 to 30 *bigahs*, who constituted 55% of the peasant population, were in debt.⁴³ The percentage of the indebted peasants and indebted agricultural labourers in five villages in another Government estate Chooraman in Dinajpur was about 56.⁴⁴

In Bihar the most elaborate enquiry seemed to have been made in Gaya by the district Collector Grierson.⁴⁵ The percentage of the indebted peasants was 55 in the Aurangabad subdivision and 19 in the Sadar. Grierson's study is, however, largely vitiated by his entire concentration on what he called 'genuine debt', debt 'contracted for marriages and the like'. He does not call advances to peasants on the security of their crop a debt: 'So far as Gaya is concerned, the much-abused *mahajan* is much more of a banker

38. *Ibid.*, para 17.

39. *Ibid.*, para 41.

40. *Ibid.*, paras 29 and 35.

41. *Ibid.*, para 55.

42. *Ibid.*, para 129.

43. *Ibid.*, paras 85 and 89.

44. *Ibid.*, Rajshahi Commissioner to Government of Bengal, Agr. Dept., 30 April 1888, para 6.

45. The Patna Commissioner did not send his full report to Government. Hence its absence in the official proceedings. The findings of his enquiry were incorporated in his book *Notes on the district of Gaya*, (Calcutta, 1893).

than a moneylender, and advances grain during the hot weather and rains to be paid at harvest time'. Such a system of advances was generally recognised to have been the nucleus of rural indebtedness. Commenting on its effects, Stevenson-Moore, Settlement Officer, North Bihar, went as far as to say: 'The raiyat can never get free, and must be sold up in the end, to begin life afresh in some other village'.⁴⁶ As regards the wide prevalence of indebtedness in its usual sense Grierson was, however, unambiguous: 'It must be understood that nearly every cultivator has a debtor and creditor account with the landlord or *mahajan*'. His conclusion that 'Gaya raiyats . . . live too near the margin of subsistence to have much to spare to pay the *mahajan*'s or banker's interest' is the most convincing way of saying that most peasants were indebted.

In the six villages selected for enquiry in Bhagalpur the percentage of indebted peasants varied from 76 to 86. In one case only was it 45.⁴⁷ Reports from other districts of Bihar, as we find them, suggest that the extent and size of rural indebtedness there was not directly investigated. But from the district officers' analysis of the average size of peasant holdings and the peasants' income from them it is possible to draw some relevant conclusions. A holding of less than 7 *bigahs*, it was found, was not enough for supporting a family of five members. An enquiry by the Collector of Patna showed that the size of holdings of more than 40% of the peasants was only 4 *bigahs* or less.⁴⁸ In some villages in the Tajpur subdivision of Darbhanga the percentage of peasants holding less than 4 *ligahs* was 60.⁴⁹ Labour for relatively well-to-do peasants was the primary means of supplementing their income from the petty holdings. This, however, occasionally failed them, as in seasons of crop failure. 'The condition of these people', the Collector of Patna wrote, 'can only be described as one of extreme poverty and indebtedness, those only being free from debt whom the *mahajan* will not trust'. This perfectly agrees with the conclusion that

46. *Champaran Settlement Report*, para 595.

47. D.E., Collector of Bhagalpur to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 12.

48. *Ibid.*, Patna Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 2 June 1888, para 15.

49. *Ibid.*, para 19.

Metcalf, Commissioner of Patna, drew from his study of the Bihar peasant life in 1875: 'Every family consuming 5 seers of grain per diem and cultivating less than 8 *bigahs* of good arable soil incurs a debt yearly of from Rs. 6 to 32'.⁵⁰

Official reports on the Midnapur canal provide a lot of material for a regional study of the question of rural indebtedness. The area covered by the leases for canal water, an area exclusively producing rice, was about one hundred thousand acres in the 1880s. The reports show how the poverty and indebtedness of the peasants stood in the way of potential agricultural growth through a wider use of a technical innovation like canal irrigation. Indebtedness of the peasants was cited as the 'most potent cause'⁵¹ of their reluctance to use canal water unless a continuing drought forced them. The enormous amount of the arrears of water rate was also related to this. 'All that they obtain from the lands', an Irrigation Department officer wrote, go 'punctually to fill the coffers of the *mahajans*, and yet they have to borrow money for the payment of the water rate'. The desperate financial position of peasants can be inferred from the following extract from an official report: 'While collecting the last year's rent [the water rate], I had invariably to watch and wait the debtor's return from making the sale, [of rice], and where we failed to catch hold of him the very day or the day following, he had nothing to pay'.⁵² The officer estimated the number of such peasants at nearly 75% of the total peasant population.

Some contemporary district monographs also dealt with the question of rural indebtedness. The general conclusions of some of them are misleading. Yet the statistics provided by them enable us to estimate the number of indebted peasants. According to the *Report on the statistics of Rungpore*⁵³ by Gopal Chandra Das, Special Duty Collector of Rangpur, the percentage of the indebted peasants

50. Temple Collection, Metcalf to Govt. of Bengal, 20 Nov. 1875.

51. Beng. Irr. (Accounts) Progs. Dec. 1877; Appendix A, Deputy Revenue Superintendent of Canals, Midnapur to Collector of Midnapur, 1 Aug. 1877, para 9.

52. Beng. Irr. (Accounts) Progs., Jan. 1874, Appendix B, Deputy Revenue Superintendent of Canals, Midnapur to Collector of Midnapur, 28 July 1873, para 22.

53. Published from Calcutta, 1874, para 221.

in the district was less than 25. But the statistics of the various strata of peasants sufficiently refute this estimate. Das classified the 'agriculturists' into three groups : 15% had more than a pair of bullocks and more than 7 or 8 *bigahs* of land ; 50% had a pair of bullocks and 7 or 8 *bigahs* of land, and 35% had no bullocks and no land of their own, but 'live by labor *bhagi* or *batai* [share-cropping].'⁵⁴ The farm servants (*krisans*) and share-croppers, who opposed the third group, were almost invariably, as we shall see later, indebted to either affluent ryots or zamindars. Das himself found that 'the servant class generally take advance before they enter service and work it off by their labor.'⁵⁵ His comment on the economic conditions of the second group justifies the inference that indebtedness was not an uncommon thing for it too : 'The second class agriculturists have scarcely sufficient income to support themselves and their children.' It is thus safe to conclude that the percentage of the indebted peasants was much higher than 25.

In his *Dacca Report* A. C. Sen estimated that 'with the single exception of a few zamindars and their superior servants, the percentage of those who are free from debt will not amount to more than 25.'⁵⁶ 'Very few ryots', he concluded, would survive 'a real famine' without 'external help.'

3. The Creditors

Who provided loans to peasants ? Moneylenders were sometimes thought to be an alien community. The fact that the creditors of the Santals and of the Deccan peasants, against whom they rebelled with considerable violence, were aliens, had once created such a feeling. Thorburn had formed a similar impression of the Punjab moneylenders : 'Throughout Eastern Europe the Jews are hated and persecuted rather because they are successful aliens . . . than because they are successful. So with the *Buniahs* of the western Punjab'.⁵⁷

54. *Ibid.*, para 167.

55. *Ibid.*, para 169.

56. *Op. cit.*, para 50.

57. S. S. Thorburn, *Musalmans and Moneylenders in the Punjab*, (Edinburg, 1886).

Such a view scarcely applied to Bengal. Taking the province as a whole the role of aliens in rural credit was insignificant. Of the grain merchants who made advances to peasants some were, of course, not local men, particularly in the regions close to a trade centre or a trade route. But even here direct transactions with peasants were limited. Local agents often acted as intermediaries. In the prosperous days of indigo cultivation indigo planters, who were mostly Europeans, had in very many cases the role of money-lenders too, and their success in this was largely at the cost of indigenous moneylenders. With the gradual decline of indigo cultivation, particularly in the districts of Bengal proper, such a role tended to be unimportant, and the position of the local men was restored. The reports of the Bengal, and the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1929-30) mentioned some alien credit groups—such as *Kabulis*, *Punjabis*, *Peshwaries*, *Marwaries*, *Atiths* and *Gossains*.⁵⁸ But the Bihar and Orissa Committee found that they controlled 'much less than one per cent of the whole rural credit business.'⁵⁹ We do not know how active they had been in the period under review.

The predominance of alien creditors in the Santal Parganas and also in other tribal areas was attributable to some exceptional circumstances. The Santal agricultural settlements in waste lands were fairly recent, and their inability to produce all the necessities made indispensable, their dependence on a group able to provide them. Naturally such a group was not local. The gradual increase in the land revenue or rent demand and the resultant obligation of the Santals to pay a big sum, either in cash or in kind, further increased this dependence.

In most parts of Bengal the credit agency was predominantly local. Even this was not a sharply differentiated body. According to the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee a village moneylender—described by the Committee as 'the small capitalist, who lives permanently in the village, and whose forefathers have as a rule, for centuries carried on the business'—was

58. Bengal Report, paras 4.4-4.5 ; Bihar and Orissa Report, para 67.

59. Bihar and Orissa Report, para 60.

'generally a *bania* by caste.'⁶⁰ Golak Poddar of the village of Kanchanpur in Burdwan, the *mahajan* of Govinda Samanta, the hero of Lal Behari Day's novel *Bengal Peasant Life*⁶¹ was professionally a goldsmith and a *Suvarna Vanika* by caste. The caste based credit group could not, however, dominate the credit scene. A *bania* 'ordinarily combining shopkeeping with moneylending' was, the Bihar and Orissa Committee wrote, 'found in the larger and not in the smaller village.' How could the small villages do without moneylenders? They could not, and in fact they did not. Various other groups, independent of the *bania*, participated in the credit business:

'it is generally the case that every man and woman, who saves a little money, invests a great part of it in such business. In fact in the villages there are few, except the poorer field labourers, who follow the advice of Polonius, and are neither borrowers nor lenders.'⁶²

It is difficult to analyse the composition of this undifferentiated credit agency. In contemporary reports the word *mahajan* (moneylender) was a generic name, and the particular social background and economic activity of various groups were not specified. It is far more difficult to ascertain the importance of the relative role of different groups.

Petty proprietors all over Bengal and the *thikadars* in Bihar particularly, had extensive moneylending interests. Big zamindars, as a rule, seldom participated in rural credit. There were, however, certain exceptions. In Bihar, the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee tells us, *Kist Kothis*, as moneylending establishments of some big zamindars were called, were very active till about the end of the 19th century, though only a few of them survived till 1929-30, the time of the Committee's investigation.⁶³

60. *Ibid.*, para 58.

61. (London, 1884); first published in 1874, p. 289. *The Suvarna Vanika* caste was 'the banker's caste', according to Day.

62. Para 58 of the Bihar and Orissa Report.

63. Para 62 of the Committee's Report.

The Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee recorded it as a 'disquieting feature of agricultural indebtedness' that 'there is not much loaning among agriculturists themselves.' 'In the vast majority of cases of agricultural loans', the Committee found,⁶⁴ the creditors were 'non-agriculturists', with the consequence that their appropriation of 'a portion of the agricultural income' further depleted 'the already scant stock of agricultural capital'. Contemporary reports in the period under review, however, provide contrary evidence. There was universal agreement that affluent ryots had quite an active role in rural credit. Assuming that the opinion of the Committee was well-founded, the change in the rural credit scene in the course of four decades since the end of our period must have been enormous.

Analysing the statistics of alienation of peasant holdings in 1883-84 the Bengal Board of Revenue thus concluded: 'of these so-called *mahajuns* [who purchase these holdings] but a small proportion were probably other than substantial ryots themselves, for these are the chief moneylenders in rural Bengal.'⁶⁵ Westmacott, Collector of Noakhali, found that 'the capital used for agriculture in Bengal is in the hands of thrifty saving ryots and that they lend it to their unthrifty neighbours and to those who are struggling into the position of a cultivator.'⁶⁶ The Commissioner of Burdwan had a similar experience:

'In many parts of Bengal, especially of this division, it is difficult to draw a distinction between a moneylender and an ordinary ryot. Any ryot who saves a little money... lends it in small sums to his neighbours so that almost every well-to-do ryot is a moneylender.'⁶⁷

64. Para 105 of the Committee's Report.

65. Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1894.

66. *Report of the Government of Bengal on the proposed amendment of the law of landlord and tenant in that province*, (Calcutta, 1881) Vol. II, 1881, Report of Collector Noakhali, 30 April 1881, para 100.

67. *Report of the Government of Bengal on the Bengal Tenancy Bill 1884*, (Calcutta, 1884) Vol. 2, Burdwan Commissioner's Report of 8 Aug. 1884.

The Collector of Burdwan drew on his experiences in districts other than Burdwan :

'In the districts with which I am familiar, a rustic moneylender is generally a successful cultivator, and a cultivator if he is successful and saves a little money becomes almost as a matter of course a money-lender.'⁶⁸

Cotton, Commissioner of Chittagong, thus wrote of his Division :

'What is meant by *mahajun* ? Is it not the case that in many, if not the most, cases the *mahajun* is also a person directly interested in agriculture ? As soon as a ryot gets free from debt, his head is above water, does he not immediately set up as a moneylender on his own account ?'⁶⁹

In the extensive Chakla Roshnabad estate in Tippera and Noakhali the Settlement Officer rarely met with a 'professional moneylender': 'The truth is that throughout the estate it is generally the well-to-do cultivator who lends money to his poorer neighbours.'⁷⁰ In Jessore affluent ryots had a significant role in paddy loans: '*Dhan* [paddy]—lending is a very important trade. . . . Every ryot who has a little *dhan* set up a *dhan* lender, and in this way one such trader may be found in almost every village.'⁷¹ Even the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, which tended to minimise the role of all credit agencies other than professional moneylenders, admitted: 'The importance of the ordinary raiyat as a moneylender is increasing everywhere.'⁷²

68. *Ibid.*, Report of 9 Sept. 1884.

69. *Ibid.*, Report of 10 July, 1884.

70. J. G. Cumming, *Report on the survey and settlement of the Chakla Roshnabad estate, 1892-99*, (Calcutta, 1899), para 38.

71. Ram Sunker Sen, *Report on the Agricultural Statistics of Jhenidah, Magurah, Bagirhat and Sunderbuns subdivisions*, (Calcutta, 1874), Chapter : Agriculture.

72. Para 58 of the Committee's Report.

The available statistics of alienated peasant holdings are also evidence of the active role of affluent ryots in rural credit. Such alienations were of two kinds : sale and mortgage. Holdings were sold, apart from other reasons, for arrears of rent, and *in theory* at least, the alienees in such cases need not necessarily have been the creditors of the peasants. But alienation by mortgage was invariably to creditors. Contemporary statistics sometimes ignored this distinction, and lumped these two kinds together. To that extent they are an unsatisfactory basis of generalisation with reference to the activity of affluent ryots as moneylenders. The following statistics, all relating to some select areas in Bihar and covering roughly the decade 1885-95, make this distinction, though they ignore it in classifying the alienees. But in view of the preponderance of alienations by mortgage this imperfection in the statistics does not vitiate our conclusion.⁷³

(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)
District	Total number of alienations	% of alienations by mortgage	% of alienations to ryots
Saran	95,233	98 (approximately)	83.9
Champanan	18,890	77 ..	55
Muzaffarpur	14,640	78 ..	79

In Darbhanga⁷⁴ the percentage of alienations by mortgage was 60, and the percentage of alienations to ryots was 79.63. Affluent ryots thus dominated rural credit in Saran and Muzaffarpur, and played a significant role in it also in the other two districts. A Bihar Settlement Officer thus characterised the alienation of the lands of '*Koeries*, *Kurmis* and lower cultivating classes': 'The tendency is not towards the amalgamation of small holdings into large ones held by non-agriculturists . . . but rather to the ousting of

73. Kerr, *Saran Settlement Report*, paras 531-635.

74. Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, paras 429 and 436.

raiyyats by petty landlords and other raiyyats of a better class'.⁷⁵

4. Forms of Credit

Usual descriptions of the credit relations in rural Bengal concentrate on one major form of credit—grain loans during some particular months of the year and money loans of various kinds given by a certain section of moneylenders—against the security of crop or land or some other valuable—and tend to overlook other specific forms of credit associated with the role of zamindars and affluent ryots as creditors. Credit relations were, in fact, far wider than these descriptions suggest.

The grain loan had two forms—grain for seed and grain for food. The seed, invariably the best quality of grain, had 'to be specially grown, matured and preserved, and not many cultivators engage in this business'.⁷⁶ The usual period of the loan of grain for food was March to July. Where the early crop, harvested usually in August-September, was unimportant, the period of loan was longer, peasants had to subsist on borrowed grain till November-December when the winter rice crop, the most important crop of Bengal, was harvested. The failure of the autumnal harvest, where it provided a part of their food supply, had the same consequence.

To contemporaries the answer to the question why the surplus of peasants lasted them, usually, for only three months, December to February, was simple enough: the small produce from petty holdings tended to be gradually depleted by their various compulsory payments. It is curious to find that the usual explanation of contemporaries of why peasants borrowed soon after the harvest was that they had borrowed in the past, so that as soon as crops were harvested a large part was handed over to moneylenders towards the liquidation of past debt. While investigating in November and December 1873, when famine on a wide scale was forecast, whether peasants had any stock of grain, district officers had invariably come to this conclusion. The payment of rent had a big role in this depletion. The time of the winter harvest and the time of the

75. Stevenson-Moore, *Muzaffarpur Settlement Report*, para 864.

76. B.P.B.E.C. Report, para 113.

largest instalment (*kist*) of rent coincided.⁷⁷ The comparative lowness of the price immediately after the harvest compelled peasants to convert a larger quantity of grain into cash than they would have had to if they could have paid their rent at a time when the price of rice tended to rise. A part of the grain loan was necessitated by the tendency of the prices of food-grains to rise from April-May onwards, which made it difficult for peasants to purchase them in the market, even if their cash fund had not completely run out. The need to hire labour which was unavoidable at times, i.e., during the sowing (May-June), transplantation (July-August) and harvesting (December) of the winter rice, also accounted for part of such loans, since this labour was usually paid in grain.

The most important occasion for money loans was payment of rent. Metcalfe, Commissioner of Patna, called it a 'curious fact' that zamindars started bringing rent-suits against peasants at about the same time (March) when their store of grain had nearly run out. This made money loans unavoidable. It is, however, pointless distinguishing between different occasions which led peasants to borrow. One reacted on the other, so that the beginning of the process became unidentifiable.⁷⁸

77. A.P. MacDonnell, *Report on the food grain supply and the statistical review of the relief operations in the distressed districts of Bengal and Bihar, during the famine of 1873-74*, (Calcutta, 1876), p. 10, para 41.

78. It is interesting to see how a contemporary wrote of the cyclical process: 'The process by which a ryot exists may be thus described. Having reaped his rice and *rubbee* (spring) crops, and paid up a part of his *mahajun's* demands, he lives till March doing little or nothing. He is then one day summoned to the village cutcherry [office maintained by zamindars for the collection of rent] and pressed for rent. A violent altercation then ensues between the *patwaree* [village record-keeper], the debtor and the village *mahajun* who is usually present. It ends in the *mahajun* paying the rent in cash . . . From time to time as his stocks disappear, and the ladies of the family get more abusive and demonstrative, he pays the *mahajun* a visit and gets advances. Then the sowing time comes for the rain crop, and he has no seed . . . He goes to the *patwaree*, and there is another stormy interview, but the *patwaree* in the end gives in, for he well knows no seed, no crop, no rent. So the seed is advanced and the ryot lives on till the crop comes in. Again is the *patwaree* satisfied, and the *mahajun* for the time being appeased, the crop gathered and extended, and the whole scene is re-enacted as it has been for generations before', Temple Collection, Metcalfe's Note of 5 Nov. 1875, para 16.

Rural credit had other forms too. The foundation of new agricultural settlements was sometimes a kind of credit. A rich entrepreneur, variously known as *hawaladar*, *jotedar*, *grantidars* and *aymadars* and belonging more often to the landowning class than to that of the affluent peasants, took the initiative in this, providing the necessary capital for the first work of reclamation, and taking proper measures for ensuring its continuity. Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, thus described the functions of a *hawaladar* of Bakarganj, whom he called 'a small agricultural capitalist': 'he settles down some cultivators on the land, advances them some little money wherewith to erect homesteads, buy ploughs and cattle, and gives them seed for sowing the food-crops and the like'.⁷⁹ He collected 'rent' from the cultivators, but his relation with them differed, as we shall see, from that of an ordinary zamindar with his ryots. Credit relations preceded rent relations and determined, to a considerable extent, the shape of the latter.

There were yet other distinctive forms of credit. These were associated with the role of affluent ryots and of zamindars as creditors, who could meet certain needs of peasants which other moneylenders, excluding those who had acquired the ownership of the indebted peasants' land, could not. These needs usually arose where peasants had no land of their own, or ploughs, or even if they had both, their income from their own land was too small to support them. Assuming that the sources of income other than agriculture were very limited or non-existent, peasants in such cases had to depend, mainly or wholly, on the employment provided by agriculture, in some form or other. They might have cultivated a part of the lands of affluent ryots sublet to them, or fully cultivated their own lands by borrowing ploughs, or if neither was possible, they might have hired out their labour to affluent ryots or zamindars. A village moneylender who usually lent money on the security of land or produce or some other valuable, could not provide for any of these needs. In fact the acuter such needs, the lesser his inducement to offer credit. We can take, for instance, the case of

79. Beng. Sur. Sett. Progs., April 1876. Colln 7-42, Minute of Temple, 26 April, 1876, para I.

landless agricultural labourers. We frequently come across in contemporary reports observations like the following one: 'The debts of landless labourers are small because they have no credit'.⁸⁰ Contrary to what such observations suggest 'landless labourers' were far more deeply involved in debt than most other peasants. The form of their indebtedness, however, differed. Unlike others indebted to village *mahajans* who offered loans on the security of land or produce, they were indebted to zamindars or affluent peasants, and the security they offered was not of a tangible kind like land or produce but invisible—physical labour. The description by the Collector of Birbhum of the mode of employing such labourers shows how the basis of such employment was credit: 'The cultivators take them on by the year to do the bulk of the work of cultivation under their supervision During the year before the crop ripens, these labourers live upon advances of grains given by cultivators'.⁸¹ This is not the kind of credit that a typical village moneylender we have described usually provided.

We can study this particular kind of credit from two kinds of statistics: firstly, statistics of peasants who had no land of their own, or ploughs, or whose income from their land was far too small for the subsistence of their family, from which we can infer that the survival of such families was possible largely because of their dependence of various kinds indicated before on affluent peasants or zamindars; secondly, statistics of peasants generically known as agricultural labourers—defined by Grierson as those who 'live wholly or mainly by cultivating other people's lands' as distinguished from 'cultivators' who 'live wholly or mainly by cultivating their own lands'.⁸²

The available statistics do not enable us to measure the size of the class of landless peasants. Apart from other imperfections they do not carefully distinguish between owner cultivators and 'tenant' cultivators. But it is pretty safe to conclude that cases of complete

80. Stevenson-Moore, *Muzaffarpur Settlement Report*, para 929.

81. D.E., Birbhum Collector of Burdwan Commissioner, 30 May 1888, Section: Agricultural Labourers.

82. Grierson, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

dissociation of peasants from agriculture as an occupation only because they did not own land were not many. This was true even of the districts having a very high density of population like Saran. Tobin, Subdivisional Officer of Sewan, once remarked : 'If by landless labourer is meant a labourer who actually rented no land at all, and cultivated no crop with rental paid in kind, such labourers are most rare'.⁸³ Even where they did not cultivate land in the way implied by Tobin they were connected with agriculture in some way or other.

The necessary relation between the number of ploughs and the economic status of peasants was well understood by contemporary officers. Ram Sunker Sen observed : 'In a country where so much depends on the stock the ryot is able to provide himself with, the size of his farm is in proportion to the means he possesses for keeping the same under cultivation, and is limited according to the extent of those means'.⁸⁴ According to the Presidency Commissioner the possession of a plough provided the real criterion of distinction between a cultivator and an agricultural labourer : 'The distinction between small cultivators and labourers lies in this, that a man who has a plough and oxen is called a *chasa* or cultivator, and he that has no plough or oxen for tilling his small holding is known as a *majoor* or labourer'.⁸⁵ He concludes : 'The prosperity of a family appears to be regulated by the number of ploughs it can afford to keep'.

The system of lending ploughs by richer peasants prevailed, Ram Sunker Sen tells us, in many parts of Jessore and Khulna. Collin, a Settlement Officer of Bhagalpur, found a similar practice in the villages where he was investigating the conditions of the 'lower orders of the people' in 1888 : 'Generally the ploughs belong to a big raiyat who lends them to smaller raiyats in exchange for their service in driving them'.⁸⁶ Precise statistics of peasants with an inadequate plough strength, or without any ploughs at all, are,

83. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1881, File 119— $\frac{1}{2}$, Annual General Report, Patna Division, 1880-1881, by the Commissioner, 25 June 1881, para 172.

84. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Chapter : Agriculture.

85. D.E., Presidency Commissioner to the Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, para 60.

86. *Ibid.*, Collin to Collector of Bhagalpur, 13 April 1888, para 11.

however, lacking. Ploughlessness was an index of extreme poverty of peasants, but it is not true to say that mere possession of ploughs lifted them above their wants, let alone made them independent of creditors. It might have been that the size of cultivation that a peasant could maintain with his plough-strength, was not enough for the subsistence of his family. This was precisely the case in the two villages of Nadia in which the district Collector investigated the conditions of the 'lower orders of the people'. Ploughless peasants were practically non-existent. But he found that the size of holding of the families having only one plough—which constituted 62.5% and 82% of the total peasant families in the two villages respectively—seldom exceeded 10 or 12 *bigahs*, and that 'families of six persons and over with one plough and 10 to 12 *bigahs* are generally indebted and have to pay from 25 to 37.5 per cent interest for advances'. Even this land was not their own ; it was 'generally held on the *burga* system' [share-cropping].⁸⁷

There are, however, abundant statistics to conclusively prove that the income from most holdings was far too small for the subsistence of peasant families cultivating them. From a 'very careful enquiry' in two villages in Patna in 1888 the Collector found that while the minimum size of a 'subsistence holding' for a family of five members was 7 *bigahs*, the holding of 40% of the peasants was less than even 4 *bigahs*.⁸⁸ The consequence was a starvation level existence : 'Their fare is of the very coarsest, consisting to a great extent of *khesari dal* [an inferior kind of pulse], and the quantity is insufficient during a considerable part of the year. They can only take one meal, instead of two'.⁸⁹ The Collector, however, did not quantify the group which suffered from insufficient means of livelihood, but was a little better off than this wretched one. In Darbhanga the size of 60% of the holdings was less than 4 *bigahs*. 'As a general rule', their holders were 'badly off'.⁹⁰ The only means of supple-

87. D.E., Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, paras 29-41.

88. D.E., Patna Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., 2 June 1888, para 15.

89. *Ibid.*, para 17.

90. *Ibid.*, para 18.

menting their income was wage labour for 'the more independent tenants' in the locality or some kind of employment during the harvest season in neighbouring districts. Statistics compiled by the Collector of Gaya 'with much care', and which, he claimed, were not mere 'estimates of guesses' reveal a similar pattern. 48% of the cultivators had holdings of 5 *bigahs*, and from his enquiry into 3,500 holdings he found that 'nowhere will a holding of 5 *bigahs* support a cultivator and his family'.⁹¹ Even for the families with holdings of 5 to 10 *bigahs*, which were 20% of the total peasant families, the income from agriculture sufficed only 'under favourable circumstances'. In the village of Dholia in Birbhum, only one out of 30 peasant families had holding of a size which by the local standard could support a family of three.⁹² In two villages in Nadia the peasants with holdings of 10 to 12 *bigahs* were 62.5% and 82% respectively of the peasant population, and the Collector found that they were usually share-croppers and 'generally indebted'.⁹³ Of the 798 peasant families in 'nine villages situated in different parts' of Jessore 155 had holdings of 10 *bigahs* or more, 232 had less than 10 *bigahs*, 365 had two *bigahs*, and most of the rest had no land at all.⁹⁴ Peasants of the first group were fairly well-to-do, 'often moneylenders', and 'generally have under-tenants and others in various degrees of dependence on them'.

'Agricultural labourers' were a fairly numerous group. From a census of over 10,000 people in 1888 in Gaya, Grierson found that 23% were agricultural labourers. Roughly a decade later a Settlement Officer estimated their number in Gaya at 34.05% of the population.⁹⁵ In two subdivisions of Bhagalpur the number ranged from 26% to 46% respectively of the population of six villages selected in each subdivision for investigation in 1881.⁹⁶ According to a special census in Darbhanga in 1876, nearly 25% of the agri-

91. Grierson, *op. cit.*, Chapter : On the profits of cultivation.

92. D.E., Birbhum Collector to Burdwan Commissioner, 30 May 1888, Section : Cultivators.

93. *Ibid.*, Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, paras 29-41.

94. *Ibid.*, paras 80-81.

95. Stevenson Moore, *Report on the material condition of small agriculturists and labourers in Gaya*, (Calcutta 1898), paras 52-53.

96. D. E., Bhagalpur Collector to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 4.

cultural population were agricultural labourers.⁹⁷ Towards the close of the 19th century the officer supervising the survey and settlement work in Champaran found 'one-third of its population compelled to eke out a living by labour'.⁹⁸ An obvious limitation of these statistics was their omission to distinguish between the total population and the actual peasant population. Needless to say, the percentage of agricultural labourers of the peasant population was higher than their percentage of the total population, since all people were not peasants. The following statistics, however, make this distinction. In two villages in the 24-Parganas the agricultural labourers were nearly as numerous (145 families) as the 'cultivators' (158 families)⁹⁹, though the average size of the 'cultivator' families was larger. In a village in the north of Nadia, considered to be one of 'considerable prosperity', the number of the 'cultivator' families was 44 and that of the 'labourers' 58. Of the former even, 50% held lands on the *burga* system. 'Practically they are', the District Collector observed, 'little better than labourers on the co-operative system'.¹⁰⁰ In 1888 the agricultural labourers in the *Rarh* tract of Murshidabad were estimated at from 10% to 15% of the 'agriculturists', and those in the *Bogri* and *Kalantar* at 30%. The Road Cess returns of two 'large typical estates' of Rangpur showed that 36% of the peasants paid less than Rs. 5 as annual rent (the average rent was Rs. 2-Rs. 8). Of them, the Collector found, 'every one is an *adhiyar* [share-cropper]. They cultivated their own small *jotes* [holdings] at their leisure, but were principally employed in tilling the fields of others'. Even of the group paying Rs. 5 to Rs. 20 and constituting 50% of the peasants, 'a large number' were also *adhiyars*.¹⁰¹ Joy Krishna Mukherji, a zamindar of Uttarpara in Hugli, who 'for more than half a century personally managed estates containing hundreds of villages', once wrote to the Government of Bengal, how in 'many' of the estates purchased by him he 'found the culturable land in the village, fully half, if not two-

97. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Nov. 1877, File 162-1/15, General Annual Report, Patna Division, 1876-77, para 52.

98. Stevenson Moore, *Champaran Settlement Report*, para 592.

99. D. E., Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, para 10.

100. *Ibid.*, paras 28-29

101. Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs., May 1879, Colln 14-59.

thirds, in the hands of middlemen who not only appropriated to themselves no less the best cultivable land . . . but then let them to the actual cultivators as temporary *korfa* [share-cropping] tenures'.¹⁰² In two villages in Nadia the district Collector found that 62.5% to 82% of the peasant families were share-croppers.¹⁰³

5. Forms of Appropriation

Rates of interest on grain and money loans widely varied. The range of variations in the interest rates on grain loans was, however, much smaller. The rate on such loans was more or less customary. The custom was, as a Bengali saying puts it, *Bhojer deri, bijer dwigun*, i.e., 50% on grains lent for food and 100% on seed grains provided the loan was paid off at the following harvest. The higher rate of interest on seed grain was due to its superiority in quality over food grain.

It has sometimes been argued that if measured in terms of money the rate was not as high as it looked. The *mahajan* lent the grain, the argument goes, at a time of the year when prices tended to rise and got it back when they were the lowest, i.e., the money worth of the grain lent was much greater than that of the grain returned. The argument is fallacious. *Mahajans* did not necessarily sell the grain as soon as they got it. They invariably waited for the market prices to rise.

The rate of interest sharply rose with the failure of the borrowing peasants to pay off the loan at the agreed time. In the village of Raghunathpur in Bhagalpur it rose by 150%, if the payment due at the next harvest was postponed till the following year.¹⁰⁴

Where the loan was a grain loan in mere form but a cash loan in content, peasants suffered worse, and the number of such cases was quite big. The loan was made in grain and paid off in grain. But the principal amount of the loan was not the quantity of grain lent but its money value at the market price of the time when it was lent, and the quantity returned was what the principal amount plus

102. *Ibid.*, letter of 30 June 1879.

103. D. E., Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888.

104. D. E., Collin, Settlement Officer, Raj Banaili and Srinagar Estate to the Collector of Bhagalpur, 13 April 1888, para 12.

interest brought in the market after the harvest. It was compulsory payment at the harvest which caused the real hardship to peasant, since in view of the low market prices at the time they had to surrender a much larger quantity than if they paid at a later time when prices tended to rise. Creditors took all possible caution to enforce this condition of payment. In Jessore they sent *bawardar* (guard) to keep a watch on the ripening crop.¹⁰⁵ In the Pichasa estate of Bihar the grain-dealers, who usually provided the grain loans, 'sent their bullocks to the threshing floor'.¹⁰⁶ The practice persisted till a much later date.¹⁰⁷

Rates of interest on money loans were scarcely customary, and the range of variations in them was extremely wide.¹⁰⁸ This alone, apart from other things, makes it pointless to compare the two forms of loan in terms of the quantum of appropriation.

We have no case study to show how big had been the quantum of appropriation in these cases in relation to the aggregate income of peasants. But given the small produce of peasant families from petty holdings it is reasonable to infer that the high rate of interest, with its tendency to accumulate, soon obliterated the peasants' surplus. This is consistent with the contemporary view that once in debt they could scarcely escape from it.

With the accumulated debt far outstripping the peasants' surplus the form of appropriation soon changed. Where peasants possessed any valuable movables creditors distrained them. The revised Civil Procedure Code of 1877¹⁰⁹ limited the freedom of creditors in this by prohibiting, in execution of decrees, the attachment of the 'implements of husbandry' and the 'materials of an agriculturist's house or farm-building'. With this legal restraint the right to distrain movables as a measure towards the recovery of debts became, for all practical purposes, meaningless. This made creditors more willing than ever to formally acquire the ownership of the debtors'

105. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Section : Produce and Labour.

106. Beng. Agr. (Misc.) Progs., Jan 1887, Appendix I ; Report of D. B. Allen, Assistant to the Director of Agricultural Deptt., Patna Division, Section : Agricultural and Trade Statistics.

107. B. P. B. E. C. Report, Vol. 2, pp. 26 and 137.

108. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, para 413.

109. Act X of 1877, Section 266.

lands, and where land was mortgaged as security, foreclosure became more frequent. Whatever the form of the alienation of peasant holdings to moneylenders—sale or mortgage—the consolidation of the process over the years on an increasingly large scale was an undoubted fact. The strong opposition by zamindars,¹¹⁰ particularly the big ones, to alienation by sale persuaded moneylenders in some places not to have recourse to formal sale. The existing law on the point favoured zamindars. Even where they did not oppose such sales on principle, the conditions on which they agreed to recognise them were often too hard for moneylenders to accept. Apart from a handsome perquisite (*salami*), moneylenders were obliged to pay the entire arrears of rent of indebted peasants. Alienation by mortgage was consequently more popular with moneylenders. The transaction was easier to conceal from zamindars. Rent continued to be nominally paid by the old ryot, and even if zamindars saw through the device it was difficult for them to prove the fact of formal alienation.

For most districts precise statistics of such alienations are wanting. We have, however, some fairly reliable statistics for some Bihar districts and the Santal Parganas. For the Bihar districts our main source is the official reports on the survey and settlement work there. While compiling a 'Record of Rights', which was a part of such work, the Settlement Officers investigated the alienations that had taken place in roughly the decade 1885-1895. In the Santal Parganas alienation to *mahajans* bothered Government ever since the Santal rebellion of 1855, and the local officers studied the question more carefully than elsewhere. The non-regulation status of the district and the direct administration by Government of a large part of it allowed them more freedom in such enquiries.

The Bihar statistics are classified into alienation by mortgage and alienation by sale. Alienation by mortgage was, of course, alienation to creditors, but alienation by sale was not, as we have explained earlier, necessarily so. The Settlement Officers, however, had no doubt that in most cases the purchasers were none else than the creditors themselves. As a rule, moneylenders preferred the two methods, peasants lost ownership of their land. We have statistics

¹¹⁰. *Supra*, pp. 89-91.

for four districts :

District	% of area (held by occupancy ryots) affected	By mortgage	By sale	% of holdings affected	By mortgage	By sale
Saran	5.78	5.61	0.17	15.60	15.30	0.31
Champaran	4.00	3.00	1.00	14.00	10.00	4.00
Muzaffarpur	2.00	1.00	0.40	3.00	2.30	0.70
Darbhanga	2.53	1.27	1.26	6.03	3.61	2.42

SOURCE : For the first three districts Kerr, *Saran Settlement Report*, para 533 ;
For the last Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report*, para 430.

Assuming that individual peasant families were the units of holdings, the size of the peasant population affected by such alienations in the course of a decade, was considerable, particularly in Saran, Champaran and Darbhanga. We do not know if the peasants there had been losing lands at such a rate before and after. Continuing alienation at this rate would have resulted, in the course of three decades, in degrading half the owner-cultivator families of Champaran and Saran into landless labourers.

Most statistics of the alienation in the Santal Parganas related to the 1870s and afterwards. By then sale was far more popular with *mahajans* than mortgage. They were invariably the purchasers in such sales. The increasing number of sales was explained by the local officers in terms of a new strategy of the *mahajans* to consolidate their power under the circumstances created by the Santal rebellion of 1870-73 and the new land revenue settlement in the district in 1872. J. R. Hand, Deputy Collector of Pakur, thus analysed the impact of the rebellion : the *mahajans* suffered a great deal from it when, animated by the dream of millennium and encouraged by the way some local officers punished a group of unscrupulous *mahajans*, the Santals repudiated their debts. With the situation back to normal the *mahajans* struck back. When the Santals implored them again for loans they imposed harder conditions, one of which was the sale of a part of the Santal holdings

in liquidation of their past debts. The Santals had no alternative but to yield. The *mahajans* were encouraged in this by the Settlement of 1872 which by defining the land rights of the Santals made their holdings more valuable.¹¹¹ From now on, as security for loan, land became far more acceptable than before.

The available statistics show the extent of both forms of alienation. Whereas before 1872 sales were 'rare', in the course of a decade after their number was 50,000.¹¹² In the Pakur Subdivision the yearly average of sales before 1874-75 was only 10 to 12. In 1879 the number was 83 in the first seven months alone.¹¹³ Between 1874 and 79 the increase in the number of mortgages and sales was five-fold.¹¹⁴ In 1882 Oldham, Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas, reported the alienation of entire Santal 'settlements' around the Dumka headquarter to the 'bazar traders'. The Santals thus lost 'a considerable portion' of their land in Handwe, which was an area of 450 square miles. Government failed to take any active steps to prevent this. They once intended to entirely prohibit such sales. This was not carried out in practice. Instead the local courts were asked to ban sales only where they were contrary to the 'local custom'. This partly stopped sales through the courts, but private sales flourished as ever.

The available statistics for most other districts are imperfect, and no valid inference can be drawn from them. The controversy over the Rent Bill and the Bengal Tenancy Bill (1880-85) stimulated interest in the question, and since the Government of Bengal stood for legalising alienation of peasant holdings, the Registration Department published a lot of statistics of such alienations. They are imperfect in several ways. They relate entirely to sales and ignore mortgages. This is bound to vitiate any conclusion based on them, since in view of the opposition of zamindars to such sales the number of mortgages must have been considerable, as in Bihar.

111. Beng. Sur. Sett. Progs., May 1880, Colln 8-39, Hand to Deputy Commissioner, Sonthal Parganas, 7 Aug. 1879.

112. H. Mcpherson, *Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Santal Paraganas, 1898-1907*, (Calcutta, 1909), para 37.

113. Beng. Sur. Sett. Progs., May 1880.

114. *Ibid.*

The observation of the Collector of Mymensingh may be taken as evidence of this: 'the *mahajan* is in this driven into the background by the zamindar. The former consequently frequently appears in the form of a mortgage like the *zarpeshgidar* [holder of an un-sufructory mortgage] of Behar, but not often as a purchaser of a raiyat's holding'.¹¹⁵ Apart from this, it is extremely doubtful if these statistics covered all the sales. The Registration Department was concerned only with the registered sales, and all sales were presumably not registered. But though the extent of alienation cannot be quantified the practice was undoubtedly common. Apart from other things, this accounted for the discontinuation, or the very small use, of the coercive means of the *mahajans* for recovering debts, of which we read in the official reports towards about the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁶

Evidence of how alienation to creditors affected the quantum of appropriation is scanty. Such alienations occasionally led the expropriated peasants to desert their villages, though its scale is unknown.¹¹⁷ Those who remained sank into the status of under-tenants of their creditors, cultivating land on a share-cropping basis, i.e., surrendering half the produce after the payment of village charges. Where money rent prevailed previously, it was presumably substituted for produce rent. But contemporary reports do not tell us how the size of the crop surrendered now compared with that before, nor do they clearly say whether the change amounted to a suspension or complete discontinuation of the pre-alienation credit relations.

115. Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1894.

116. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, *Agrarian Relations in Bengal after the Permanent Settlement, 1793-1819*, (Unpublished, Calcutta D. Phil. dissertation, 1958), Ch. 1. Physical torture was common. Of coercions of other kinds the most important was for the *mahajan* to shut up grain-stores (*golahs*), and to stop all advances in grain.

117. From an enquiry into the question in 1893 the local officers of Bhagalpur concluded that where alienation had affected only a part of the holdings such desertions were rare, and in most cases, it was found, alienation of entire holdings was an exception. Of 142 alienations registered in the Prataganj Sub-Registration Office in January-February 1893, only 36 were alienations of entire holdings. Of 175 cases registered in the Supul Office only 15 affected entire holdings. (Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1894).

Appropriations associated with the distinctive role as creditors of zamindars, affluent peasants and also of moneylenders who had acquired the ownership of the indebted peasants' lands had some particular forms. 'Rent' paid by cultivators in new agricultural settlements to their organisers had undoubtedly an element of interest. In return for the initial advances made by the 'small agricultural capitalist' and for some occasional expenses borne by him, he reserved the right to enhance the cultivators' rent. This was more or less a custom in some places.¹¹⁸ This customary right was stabilised by new laws. The 'agricultural capitalist' gained the legal status of an occupancy ryot after the Rent Act X of 1859, and the actual cultivators were automatically relegated by the Act to the position of under-ryots, who as regards enhancement of rent had no legal protection. Such enhancements were resisted by the cultivators in several parts of Eastern Bengal and in Midnapur, but without any remarkable success. Surprisingly enough, 'the zamindar does not usually move in the matter. Whatever the reason . . . landholders, broadly speaking, prefer that their immediate tenants be classed as raiyats'.¹¹⁹ There are only two recorded cases¹²⁰ of intervention by the zamindars to protect the under-tenants—one in Nadia and the other in Midnapur. The anomaly of the situation where peasants, despite their continuous cultivation of land 'for many generations', had been denied any legal protection was clear to many officers, but they frankly admitted that under the law it could not have been helped. In such a case in Midnapur, Beames, Commissioner of Burdwan, had 'reluctantly to rule that the ryots

118. The Commissioner of Chittagong wrote: 'By custom and tradition the privilege to hold at a customary rent has attached to the person bringing land under cultivation, not to the actual cultivator. The same idea prevails to this day . . . I have been told that the right to the land is vested in the person who, by his exertions, causes cultivation (*chash kerwata*) and not in the person who merely tills the ground (*chash karta*). Ind. Leg. Progs., April 1885, Vol. 1 (of Bengal Tenancy Law Papers), Prog. No. 74; Chittagong Commissioner to Board of Revenue 30 June 1883, para 16.

119. *Report of the Government of Bengal on the Bengal Tenancy Bill, 1884*, Vol. 2; 'Notes on the Bengal Tenancy Bill, 1884' by Dampier, Member, Board of Revenue 26 July 1884, pp. 31-32.

120. *Ibid.*

had no status beyond that of mere *korfas* [under-ryots]'.¹²¹ In the absence of 'custom enabling them to acquire an occupancy right . . . the courts have more than once decided that under the law as it stands, they have no such rights'. Government contemplated defying the custom in some of its own estates in Bakarganj, but had to yield in the face of the organised opposition of the *hawaladars*. Richard Temple had reluctantly agreed that 'the right of the *haoladar* to settle the rents with his cultivators, without interference from the Settlement Officer, must be allowed'.¹²²

The credit relations of poor peasants without ploughs with affluent peasants lending them have been described by Ram Sunker Sen.¹²³ The creditor and the debtor entered into a 'compact by which one gives his stock and the other his labour for the cultivation of land belonging to both'. Where the plough was borrowed for a month the debtor cultivated his land for a fortnight and his creditor's land for the rest. This arrangement was known as *adh-hali* (half-plough). The period of labour on the creditor's land was 20 days where, in addition to the plough, the debtor borrowed a certain amount in cash, usually three or four rupees for the season, and during this period the creditor provided him with one meal a day.

The quantum of appropriation by the creditor in such a case can be calculated by comparing the usual cost of labour put in by the debtor for which he was not paid with the cost of the creditor on account of the mid-day meals provided by him and of feeding the bullocks. The cost of ploughing a *bigah* of winter rice (*aman*) land was Re. 1-As. 8 in Burdwan¹²⁴ and Re. 1-As. 6 in Jessore.¹²⁵ The normal size of cultivation by one plough was ten *bigahs*.¹²⁶ Assum-

121. Ind. Leg. Progs., April 1885, Vol. 1, Prog. No. 63, Beames to Board of Revenue, 22 June 1883, para 37.

122. Beng. Sur. Sett. Progs., April 1876, Colln 7-42, Minute of 26 April 1876, para 4.

123. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Section: Agriculture.

124. Beng. Agr. Misc. Progs., Jan. 1887, Appendix II. Report from A.C. Sen, Assistant to the Director of Agricultural Department, on the Burdwan Division, Section: Paddy (1b).

125. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Section: 'On the cultivation of foodgrains'.

126. *Ibid.*, Section: 'Agriculture'.

ing that 5 *bigahs* belonged to the debtor, the normal cost of ploughing the rest would be Rs. 7-As. 8. How much did the creditor spend for the debtor? Ploughing and the related processes in the *aman* land did not usually take more than two months.¹²⁷ Even assuming that the creditor provided 60 mid-day meals (though, in fact, the period of the debtor's labour was less than 60 days, because he was obliged to work for the creditor only 20 days a month and also because ploughing was only one of the several processes in cultivation), he paid for 30 seers of rice, since a full meal did not require more than half a seer. The cost of 30 seers of rice at the normal price was not more than Re. 1-As. 8. Feeding the bullocks did not cost more than a rupee. Where the creditor did not buy straw, which he seldom did, the cost was less. Since the bullocks were employed also on the creditor's land, at least half the ploughing season, the share of the debtor in their replacement cost was extremely small. A quantity of labour worth Rs. 7-As. 8 could be thus had for about Rs. 2-As. 8, excluding the charges for interest on the loan of three or four rupees, which we cannot estimate.

Where the creditor provided the land, the usual form of appropriation was share-cropping (variously known as *adhiyari*, *bhag-chash*, *bhagjote*, etc.). The creditor paid the rent and got half the produce. This was the typical system, but there were variations. A *bhagjote* cultivator in Birbhum had to surrender two-thirds of the produce if the land had been of the best quality. The half-share principle applied only to 'poorer' lands.¹²⁸ By the custom of the district, however, he retained all the straw. In Jessore a creditor claiming half the produce provided the seed grain or paid half the cost of reaping. Otherwise, his share was two-fifths of the produce.¹²⁹

The quantum of appropriation was very high here too. Let us take a typical case in Jessore. The rate of rent on a *bigah* of land

127. Mid-May to Mid-July where the rice was sown broadcast, and mid-June to mid-Aug where it was transplanted.

128. Report of the Government of Bengal on the proposed amendment of the law of landlord and tenants in Bengal, 1881, Vol. 2, Collector of Birbhum to the Government of Bengal, 6 Oct. 1880.

129. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Section : 'Agriculture'.

was Re. 1-As. 6. The quantity of seed grain required for a *bigah* was seldom more than 20 seers. (In Burdwan the quantity was only 10 seers). At the current market rate it cost about Re. 1. The cost of reaping was, presumably, not higher, since the creditor agreed to pay for either of the two. The total expenditure of the creditor was thus about Rs. 2-As. 6. The value of the average produce of a *bigah* in Jessore was estimated at Rs. 7-As. 8, half of which was Rs. 3-As. 12. The agricultural season of the main rice crop (*aman*) lasted a little over 7 months. The rate of interest for the period was thus 57.8%. The country's law did not protect a *bhag* cultivator if the creditor meant to be harder. This accounted for the popularity of the *bhag* system with rich peasants, and the consequent 'tenacity of the ryot in keeping the *korfa* [share-cropper] down'.¹³⁰

A big section of share-croppers were, in fact, agricultural labourers in the sense in which we have defined the group. But agricultural labour had other forms too, with their corresponding forms of appropriation.

Bonded labour¹³¹ of the group known as *Kamiya*, *mushahar*, *jan*, etc., employed by both zamindars and affluent ryots, was an extreme case of appropriation. Its origin was credit : 'A *kamiya* usually sells himself to a master for a lump sum of money down'.¹³² Even if the money worth of the *kamiya's* labour far exceeded the borrowed amount, 'the fiction is usually kept up that the labourer is in his master's debt'.¹³³ The credit basis of the labour was reinforced by caste coercion. Such labourers invariably belonged to very low castes—such as *kurmis*, *dosadhs*, *chamars* and *jolahs*.¹³⁴

130. Beng. L.R. Misc. Progs., Nov. 1876, Colln 14-68, Herschel, Collector of Hugli to Govt. of Bengal, 1 Sept. 1876, para 8.

131. The Collector of Gaya related how in the suits relating to partition of estates 'the main quarrel is often over the *basti* [settlement of *kamiyas*] division : an aggrieved party often openly complains that the Deputy Collector has not given him his fair share of the *kamiyas*, as if they were liable to division like the other fixtures of the land'. (Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Nov. 1887, File 153-1/2, Annual General Report, Patna Division, 1886-87, para 29).

132. Grierson, *op. cit.*, Chapter : 'Labourers'.

133. D.E., Patna Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 2 June 1888, para 31.

134. *Ibid.*

The *mushahars* of Mongyr were described as the 'black, miserable descendents of aboriginal tribes'. This explains their concentration in the outskirts of the village.

Tied to their master's land the *kamiyas* were prevented by him from breaking with him and seeking employment elsewhere. In 1855 when some *kamiyas* in Mongyr deserted their creditors' estates to work for the 'railway officers', the affected zamindar-creditors complained to the District Magistrate and persuaded him to issue an order to the railway authorities not to employ them.¹³⁵ A similar thing happened in Manbhum in 1867. With drought completely dislocating agriculture the *kamiyas* lost their only employment, i.e., field labour, and left their masters to work on the new roads designed by Government as relief measures. The zamindars, too, did not object to it at the moment. In the beginning of the next agricultural season, however, they raised a hue and cry, and suggested to the local officer that he should reduce the wages for work on the roads. The district officer did not agree, arguing that 'it is rather the farmer who should advance his rates and by offering to the labour wages as good as they will get on the road, induce them to resume their ordinary occupations'.¹³⁶ But the zamindars eventually succeeded in getting the labourers back. Local officers of Saran attributed the failure of Government in inducing the *kamiyas* and other poor peasants to emigrate to the opposition of the peasants of superior castes :

'possessors of a larger kind of farm, with area from 15 to 30 *bigahs*, and even less, know the importance of preserving this class [the *kamiyas*] alive As long as there is a large class of middle class farmers whose caste or pride restrains them from working, and who are prepared to devote all their influence and much of their substance to keep the really poor in the district, so long will all schemes for diminishing the population

135. Beng. Jud. Progs. 27 Sept. 1855, Nos. 62-63 & 25 Oct. 1855, No. 25.

136. Beng. Rev. Dept., Progs., July 1867, No. 188. Manbhum Commissioner to Chotanagpur Commissioner, 3 July 1867.

by emigration infallibly fail'.¹³⁷

It is difficult to estimate the quantum of appropriation in such cases. For his compulsory labour throughout the year, not necessarily confined to agriculture, a *kamiya* was paid in coarsest grains—paid just enough for him to keep body and soul together. Nobody has, however, recorded for us how many hours of labour a *kamiya* put in for his master. Grierson quotes an 'aphorism' which, he believed, embodied the 'accumulated wisdom of villagers on this subject': 'a *kamiya* gets a quarter of the out-turn of his work'. The utter destitution of the *mushahars*, 'pilfering in times of plenty or starving in times of scarcity', was poignantly portrayed by the Collector of Mongyr: 'any one riding over the rice-fields at this season of the year [December] will see where they have been digging up the field mice and filching their stores of grain'.¹³⁸

The majority of agricultural labourers, however, were not bonded labourers. Contemporary reports classified them into two groups: labourers employed on a daily wage system and seasonal or annual labourers. This classification is confusing. Daily wage was by no means a distinctive feature of the first group alone. Even bonded labourers received their wages daily in grain. So did seasonal labourers. The classification makes sense if we take it to mean that the period of employment of the first group, not necessarily less than a season, was not explicitly specified by an agreement between the employer and the labourer.

About the universality of indebtedness among 'day' labourers cotemporary reports leave us in no doubt, and there is no doubt either that the basis of their employment was credit. The relation between credit and the employment of their labour was in fact direct and immediate. In the 24-Parganas their material condition did not 'differ very much from that of the poorest of the ryots who cultivate their own lands', both groups having been obliged to borrow for nearly 8 or 9 months a year.¹³⁹ In Nadia such labourers

137. Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs., Aug. 1879, File 129-1, General Annual Report, Patna Division 1878-79, para 35.

138. Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs., Jan. 1874, File 13-75, Famine narrative by the Collector of Mongyr, 18 Dec. 1873.

139. D.E., Presidency Commissioner to Govt. of Bengal, 17 May 1888, paras 15-16.

were 'more or less slaves of *mahajans* and the so-called *bhdrolok*'.¹⁴⁰ Since the usual village moneylender did not lend them grain or money because of their inability to repay, their survival depended on loans from affluent peasants or zamindars which they liquidated by their physical labour.¹⁴¹

In the absence of detailed statistics we cannot show how this credit relation affected the size of their wage. But that it was extremely low had been admitted by most contemporary observers. Grierson found from his 'practical experience' that 'taking one year with another, a *mazdur* (labourer) or a *kamiya* has very much the same income. It is universally stated that a labourer has frequently to content himself with one meal a day in order to avoid curtailment of the food of the children': 'The majority' of the 'informants' of the Collector of Bhagalpur 'consider the labourer to be under-fed for about a fourth of the year'.¹⁴² This was in normal seasons. In the indifferent ones their condition was far worse. Since their main employment was field-labour and their daily wage was paid in grain, with drought or other circumstances dislocating agricultural operations their employment contracted and the grain-fund diminished. As a result, instead of a fixed quantity of grain their wage dwindled to a small share of the grain they had reaped. This led the Collector of Bhagalpur to conclude; 'These grain payments, though they suit the rural economy of the country, are of course the real danger to the population'.¹⁴³

About the seasonal or annual labourers our knowledge is more certain. The basis of their employment too was invariably credit. In Birbhum and Bankura such a labourer usually employed by 'well-to-do farmers holding from 30 to 80 *bigahs*', was 'lent' all the

140. This is a term hard to define. By it the Collector presumably meant a group deriving its income partly from professions and partly from land let out on a share-cropping basis.

141. The Presidency Commissioner wrote: 'If people of this class require a lump sum of money, they engage to serve some well-to-do cultivator for a certain term, and get the requisite advance'. (*Ibid.*, para 54).

142. D.E., Collector of Bhagalpur to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 8.

143. *Ibid.*, para 15.

paddy he wants for himself and his family throughout the year'.¹⁴⁴ In Nadia the system prevailed 'on a much larger scale'.¹⁴⁵ In Bhagalpur the established 'rule of buying a man's exclusive services for the year' was the 'lump payment of anything from Rs. 10 to 30 at the beginning of the year'.¹⁴⁶ In the parganah Bogri in Midnapur the amount of this advance was Rs. 24.¹⁴⁷ In Maldah the amount was equal to the labourer's wage 'for two or three years', and 'the debtor has to serve out his time as a bond'.¹⁴⁸

It was an undisputed fact that the surplus of these labourers was extremely small. Their wages varied from place to place. In Birbhum and Bankura they got one-third of the produce, including the straw. In some parts of Birbhum they had to surrender 25% of this share as charges for interest on the grain advances.¹⁴⁹ Even where such an interest was not paid it was found that 'as a rule, the servant does not get enough to pay off his old debt'.¹⁵⁰ As a consequence, the seasonal or annual employment developed into a kind of perpetual 'attachment' of such labourers to their employers. The size of such 'attached' labour was 50%, 60% and 42% respectively in the subdivisions of Banks, Madhepura and Supul in Bhagalpur.¹⁵¹

144. Beng. Agr. Misc. Progs., Jan 1887, Appendix II, Report on the Burdwan Division by A.C. Sen, Assistant to the Director of Agricultural Department, Bengal, Section: 'Agricultural labourers and servants'.

145. *Ibid.*

146. D.E., Bhagalpur, Collector to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April, 1888, para 13.

147. *Ibid.*, Settlement Officer of Bogri and Kesiari to the Director of Land Records and Agriculture, 13 April 1888.

148. *Ibid.*, Maldah Collector to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April 1888, para 24.

149. *Ibid.*, Birbhum Collector to Burdwan Commissioner, 30 May 1888, Section: 'Agricultural labourers'.

150. Beng. Agr. Misc. Progs., Jan. 1887, Appendix II, Report on the Burdwan Division by A.C. Sen, Assistant to the Director of Agricultural Department, Bengal, Section: 'Agricultural labourers and servants'.

151. D.E., Bhagalpur Collector to Bhagalpur Commissioner, 7 April, 1888, para 13.

6. Credit relations in Bengal and the British Laws and Institutions

How did British law and institutions affect these credit relations? The existing laws can be classified into two groups: some relating to the rate of interest and some others to the recovery of debts. Legislation sought not to put limits on the rate of interest, but rather to do away with whatever limits there had been. In 1895 the law limiting the maximum rate of interest to 12% was repealed.¹⁵² No change in Bengal itself called for it. It merely copies a contemporary (1854) law in England which repealed the earlier ones relating to rates of interest, because they were believed to have been a hindrance to raising big industrial and mercantile loans in a period of industrial expansion. The Government of India did not depart from this principle of *laissez faire* till 1899. Even then the law courts could intervene only where there was evidence of 'undue influence' exercised by the creditor to make the debtor enter into a contract. Not until as late as 1918 did Government legislate to control the rate of interest.¹⁵³

Till 1918 the function of the law courts was not to examine the origin of debt, but merely to enforce legally valid contracts relating to it. The Civil Procedure Code of 1859 made it easier for the creditor to realise loans. The introduction in 1865 of compulsory registration of deeds dealing with immovable property protected the creditor from attempts to repudiate or dispute a registered bond. To help creditors recover their debts was thus looked upon as a normal function of Government. This was a complete departure from the pre-British practice in this respect.¹⁵⁴ Such recovery was not a legal right of the creditor in the pre-British period. The repayment of a loan was merely a moral obligation of the debtor. The attitude of the State was one of 'apathy', as Darling put it. The creditor could ask for assistance of local officers, but a formal

152. B.P.B.E.C. Report, Vol. 1, para 307.

153. *Ibid.*, paras 307-308.

154. See Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt* (O.U.P., London, 1947), 4th edition, p. 170; S.S. Thorburn, *Muslims and moneylenders in the Punjab*, (Edinburg, 1886), pp. 59-60.

machinery for the enforcement and realization of debt did not exist. The creditor relied, therefore, 'more upon personal influence than official action'.

The legal principles introduced during British rule were thus new, but they were not always enforced in their entirety. The law of 1855 was in fact an irrelevance, since the prevailing rates of interest were seldom lower than 12%. The law of 1899 was a dead letter. The courts admitted the extreme difficulty in proving that 'undue influence' had been brought to bear upon the making of a contract. So was the more ambitious law of 1918. To the principle that a creditor had a legal right to recover debts Government strictly adhered. Political considerations necessitated interference with the contracts between the *mahajans* and the Santals in the Santal Pargans, and the administration of the district on a non-regulation basis made it practicable. In 1858 Yule, Commissioner of the district, succeeded in suppressing in some places the credit-based system of bonded labour. He cancelled such bonds, risking the discontent of the creditors. His answer to their question how cultivation would be possible without the bondsmen was inconceivable in other parts of Bengal: 'by paying a fair day's wages for a fair day's work and not by taking an illegal bond from a necessitous man and screwing every inch of work out of him on the merest pittance that will keep him above the point of starvation'.¹⁵⁵

Elsewhere in Bengal even the exceptional circumstances of famine could not persuade Government to deviate from its firm stand regarding the recovery of debts. During the famine of 1866 the District Superintendent of Police, Manbhum, wrote of his conviction that 'unless some measures are taken by zamindars and *mahajans* to give up their claims to debts in grain due to them from ryots, the country will take several years to recover itself'.¹⁵⁶ Government did not take any step in this direction. A similar suggestion by the Collector of Saran during the famine of 1873-74 that 'no suits should be allowed to be brought for arrears of rent or for debts due by ryots to *mahajans* during the . . . scarcity' was rejected on the

155. Beng. Jud. Progs., 17 March 1859, No. 290.

156. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., July 1866, No. 147, letter to Deputy Commissioner, Manbhum, 21 May 1866, para 11.

ground that 'it would produce a disturbance of credit which would affect the country for years'.¹⁵⁷ The only remarkable case of interference by Government was to prohibit in 1876 (by the revised Civil Procedure Code) the attachment of ploughs and other implements of husbandry by creditors.

How often creditors themselves enforced such laws is a more pertinent question. A big segment of credit relations was not in fact much affected by these laws. For instance, share-croppers cultivating a part of their creditor's holdings, poor peasants borrowing ploughs from affluent peasants, and agricultural labourers working on their creditors' lands only rarely entered into formal agreements. Where zamindars or *thikadars* were moneylenders, their positions as rent-receivers constituted an effective coercive authority, and consequently, such laws were superfluous. Creditors did not always make use of them even where formal contracts existed. The Bengali drama *Nildarpan*¹⁵⁸ tells us that *mahajans* seldom had recourse to law-suits to recover their debt. Where such debts resulted from a bad harvest they treated them as arrears (*baki bakeya*) and did not insist on immediate payment. In order to prevent the accumulation of arrears they became more cautious in making further advances, and even took the trouble of visiting the rice fields of their debtors to make sure that they had been properly looking after them. The practice of the *mahajans* in this respect in some parts of Jessore and Khulna is thus described by a local officer. 'Bonds are executed where confidence is wanting, or in cases of large advances, but no mortgages are usually made, except where the ryot's faith is questionable'. The *mahajan* did not go to the court 'so long as faith is kept . . . but if he breaks it and goes over to a rival *mahajan*, he is made to suffer all the terrors of law'.¹⁵⁹ Rare were the cases where debtors were guilty of breaking with their creditors, even under the strain of famines. The occurrence of such cases in the Santal Parganas in 1854-1855 and again in

157. Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs., Jan. 1874. File 13-48, Fortnightly Divisional Famine Report, Patna, 8-22, Dec. 1873, paras 27-28.

158. Dinabandhu Mitra, *Nildarpan*, Act V, Scene 1 (Calcutta, 1860). (The English translation was published in 1861).

159. Ram Sunker Sen, *op. cit.*, Section: 'Dhan lending'.

1870-73 was the product of an anarchic mood of the Santals created by their dream of a coming millennium. Their rage vented itself not only against the *mahajans*, but all the institutions which seemed foreign to their beliefs and which they thought caused their sufferings. Similar cases occurred during the famine of 1865-66 in some parts of Midnapur and other western districts of Bengal. But considering the intensity of the famine their number was surprisingly small.

Even where *mahajans* had recourse to law they did not always go its full length. Such at least was the case in Hugli. 'Our law', wrote the Collector, 'enables him [the moneylender] to recover strictly what is written [in the bond], but even to this day, to my knowledge, in many parts of the country *mahajans* did not dream of insisting on the letter of the bond'.¹⁶⁰ A local panchayat often intervened and gave an award after carefully considering the material circumstances of the debtors. 'Such an award . . . gives the *mahajan* only a very moderate interest'. The Collector explained this forbearance on the *mahajans'* part by their reluctance to incur the opprobrium of society by defying the *panchayat* decisions.

Such laws were undoubtedly enforced in a number of cases, particularly where creditors were keen on formalising foreclosure of mortgages as a necessary means of safeguarding their right of ownership in the debtors' land. It is, however, impossible to estimate the proportion of such cases to the total number of indebted peasants. The available statistics of mortgages in some Bihar districts, which we have analysed before, give an impression that the proportion was very low. Where 'an inferior class of moneylenders dealing at exorbitant rates with the lower strata of the agricultural poor' had been brought into existence, as the Deccan Riots Commission observed, 'by the facilities for the recovery of debt by our civil courts', such cases were probably many.

7. Conclusion

The positive role of moneylenders in the peasant economy has generally been recognised. But such descriptions of this role as the

160. Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs., Aug, 1894.

following one suggest a wrong sense of perspective : 'in the Indian village the moneylender is often the one thrifty person amongst a generally thriftless people . . . his methods of business, though demoralising under modern conditions, suit the happy-go-lucky ways of the peasant'.¹⁶¹ The suggestion that the so-called 'thriftlessness' of peasants alone had called the creditor's role into play entirely ignores the conditions under which peasants worked.

The role of village moneylenders in the peasant economy was indispensable in view of the non-existence of any other credit agencies which could provide the loans vitally necessary for the agricultural process in the way they did. Instance of *takavi* advances (usually without interest, repayable after the harvest) by zamindars were becoming increasingly rare. In the period under review co-operative credit societies did not exist. As later experience shows, their existence would hardly have made any difference. Government occasionally provided credit, but on conditions too rigid to have been acceptable to peasants. That was why the Agriculturists' Loans Act (1884) remained virtually a dead letter.¹⁶² Such conditions were scarcely easier even during famines. During the famine of 1873-74 Government planned to make grain advances, but the insistence on the 'right' kind of security for repayment nearly completely wrecked the plan, particularly the one for Bihar. The dilemma before Government was two-fold. Since the usual securities offered by peasants seemed of doubtful value,¹⁶³ Government was reluctant to make advance direct to them. The alternative plan of getting zamindars and *mahajans* to distribute the advances and making them responsible for their re-payment also largely miscarried. In the numerous co-parcenary estates of Bihar the search for a representative, trusted by all the co-sharers, was a frustrating task for

161. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 194. W. W. Hunter held a similar view, *ibid.*, p. 168.

162. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, para 73. The Report says : 'the amounts advanced are quite insignificant in proportion to the agricultural needs.'

163. Campbell, Lieutenant Governor, thus commented on it : 'Occupancy rights are ill-defined ; the titles to trees and tanks . . . to rent-free lands which ryots proffer as security most largely available consists chiefly of silver ornaments . . . Would it be possible for the Government to open a vast pawn-broker's shop to lend on ornaments ? I hardly think so'. (*Correspondence relating to the famine in Bengal and Bihar, from Oct. 1873 to May 1874, Calcutta, 1874, p. 337, para 44*).

Government. Government met with a greater difficulty in the reluctance of some zamindars to recognise the right of peasants to mortgage their land as security for the grain advance, since this recognition amounted to a recognition of the right of occupancy of peasants—a right zamindars opposed. 'Consequently,' the Magistrate of Saran reported, 'zamindars will not guarantee their ryots' solvency'.¹⁶⁴ Substantial *mahajans* were unwilling to accept the advances for the same reason for which they did not themselves make any advances—the existing indebtedness of the peasants and the apprehension about the meagreness of the next harvest, so that any fresh advances would only add to the debt. The only persons really eager to accept the advances were the petty moneylenders, who saw their fortunes largely wiped off by the recent crop failures and who risked having a bleaker future unless fresh loans could prevent their clients (*khataks*) from dying of starvation.

Moneylenders thus had a vital role to play in the rural economy. But certain interpretations of this role are questionable. The following observation¹⁶⁵ of W. W. Hunter, for instance, seems to suggest that the primary concern of rural moneylenders—whom he called 'rural capitalists', a class 'combining corn-dealing with moneylending' and composed of 'many of the landholders, and most of the village bankers'—had shifted from deriving income from loans to needy peasants to deriving income from uninterrupted cultivation, for which they must provide credit, regardless of the state of crops and of the material conditions of borrowers :

'The blessed difference between the present and former famines in lower Bengal is that a class of rural capitalists existed to feed them [peasants]. Instead of the cultivator dying of starvation and his land going out of tillage for want of seed, moneylenders were anxious to advance food, landlord were willing to remit rents on consideration of obtaining a share in the crops at harvest time'.

164. *Ibid.*, p. 300, para 12.

165. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., April 1867, No. 119, From W. W. Hunter, Formerly Officiating Inspector of Schools for the South West Division of Bengal to the Director of Public Instruction : undated.

Contemporary famine reports tend to refute Hunter, and rather show that the basic contradictions in the rural economy bound to moneylenders' credit intensified during famines—the time of dwindling grain-supply and rocketing prices. Some moneylenders continued making advances despite the manifest signs of failure of the next crop, not because they were faithful to their alleged role of 'rural capitalists', but because they calculated that the discontinuation of advances and the consequent disaster to agriculture would have amounted to irretrievably losing the chances of recovering the past debt of the peasants. In fact some marginal creditors went down with their debtors.¹⁶⁶

Most substantial moneylenders, however, refused to make any advances till the prospects of a safe crop in the next season were assured. The Magistrate of Nadia wrote of his conviction that 'mahajans will advance but little food as the poor are already so deeply in debt that they are unwilling to run any further risk.'¹⁶⁷ A frequent complaint of the peasants to the Collector of Dinajpur during the famine of 1874 was the refusal of their *mahajans* to 'advance until the rain guarantees a return of loan'.¹⁶⁸ The representative of a group of peasants 'harangued' the Collector of Rangpur 'on the refusal of the *mahajans* to advance grain this year [1874], and he named in succession a list of men who had two or three *golahs* [grain-stores] full'.¹⁶⁹ Such was, in fact, the experience of all district officers.

With extensive crop failures the moneylenders thus temporarily

166. Here is a contemporary description of the predicament of such creditors in Nadia during the famine of 1866: '*mahazuns* are few and far between, most of them having been ruined by not being able to collect their outstanding balances; I know several who advancing money and rice last year, have barely collected anything and prefer withdrawing from business to risking any new capital where even 50% interest is insufficient to compensate for the risk and bad debts incurred'. (Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., July 1866 No. 124, R. Harvey, Khalbolia (indigo concern) to the Magistrate of Nadia, 10 April 1866).

167. *Ibid.*, No. 123, Magistrate of Nadia to the Presidency Commissioner, 30 April 1866, para 5.

168. Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs., Jan. 1874, File 1-161, Collector of Dinajpur to Government of Bengal, 2 Jan. 1874.

169. *Ibid.*, Feb 1874, File 13-151, 'Narrative of scarcity and relief in Rangpur for the fortnight ending 24 June 1874', dated 26 June 1874.

dissociated themselves from their usual role of financing agriculture. Other activities of theirs at the same time produced a further strain on the economy. The export of grain in the midst of the local scarcity was the one.¹⁷⁰ Some district officers attributed the outflow of grain to the 'improvident manner' in which peasants, tempted by high prices, sold their grain stock to traders. The view is baseless. The peasants' stock of grain undoubtedly passed into the grain-dealers' hands, but this was far from a result of the so-called price-stimulus inducing the peasants to sell their grain. In fact, as the official enquiry demonstrated everywhere, the stock of grain that remained with the peasants after they paid off their grain loans was extremely small, so that, as a local officer put it, the 'exportation is not really in the hand of the ryot, it rests mainly with the local *moodies*'¹⁷¹ [grain-dealers]. The moneylenders' control over much of the local stock of grain was a direct consequence of his role as a creditor. This stock went into the making of the export grain-fund. The so-called surplus of peasants ultimately finding its way into the export trade is a myth.¹⁷² The so-called price-stimulus, i.e., the continuing high prices, was the effect, as the Collector of Midnapur found, of 'a cause general to the whole district, i.e., the rigour with which the *mahajans* were enforcing

170. For this, however, the professional grain-dealers, having also a role in rural credit, were more responsible than the local moneylenders of small resources, whose grain-dealings were more or less confined to local markets. There is much truth in what Madhu Sudhan Pal, a landholder and moneylender of Nadia, told the Magistrate of Nadia: 'A *mahajan* who sells his rice instead of supplying his regular customers is a marked man' (Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., April 1867, No. 182).

171. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., Feb. 1867, No. 210, Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, 22 Jan. 1867, para 4.

172. Barton, On Special Duty (in connection with famine relief), Bhagalpur, thus observed: 'Political economists say that a country exports food grains when, and because, it produces more than it wants. From the fact of export they infer the other fact of superabundant production. This reasoning may be . . . sound enough in England, where producers are independent, free from debt, and can, uncontrolled by any one, sell their grain in the best market, The *mahajunee* system which prevails here would not justify us in inferring that, because a district was exporting grain, therefore it has produced more than it required for its own wants. Nine out of ten of the ryots in this country are in debt.' (Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs., Feb. 1874, File 13-198, Barton to Govt. of Bengal, 2 Feb. 1874, para 17).

their demands for grain, and the strictness with which they are holding it'.¹⁷³ The price-rise resulting from this was the antithesis of a wholesome stimulus. With little or no stock of grain and without any purchasing power (except where the employment on relief works organised by Government partly provided it), peasants, confronted by a sudden upward swing in the prices, made the last desperate attempt to procure grain-loans, whatever the conditions for them, changed over to inferior grains when the borrowed grain was exhausted, and, where their means were too small even for these, started to starve. In 1874 Coates, Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, while investigating the conditions of health in some famine-affected districts, found 50% to 75% of the people 'in these out-of-the way villages [where the quantity of the foodgrain sent by Government was far too inadequate for the needs], anaemic and emaciated'.¹⁷⁴ No wonder that such people were easy victims to epidemics. The heavy toll of the cholera of 1866 in Bankura was partly attributed to the 'extreme scarcity of food' at the time.¹⁷⁵

With large scale crop failures the activities of the moneylenders thus tended to be antagonistic to the small peasant economy. With the assured prospects of the new crop, the machinery of credit, temporarily defunct, started to function again. Everywhere the peasants were keen on increasing their cultivation, the obvious motive being to make up for the loss they had suffered during the famine and 'to diminish the force of a similar calamity, should such befall them this year'.¹⁷⁶ A considerable increase did result, except where the shortage of labour caused by the death or migration of the peasants on a big scale stood in the way. The Presidency Commissioner found that 'Towards Khulna, the ryots on the Trust estate and the neighbouring zamindaries went considerable

173. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., March, 1867, No. 112, Midnapur Collector to Burdwan Commissioner, 26 Feb. 1867.

174. Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs., Dec. 1874, File 121-30, Coates to Govt. of Bengal, 9 Oct. 1874.

175. *Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the famine in Bengal and Orissa, 1866*, (Calcutta, 1867) Vol. 2, Appendix, Magistrate of Bankura to Burdwan Commissioner, 3 March 1866, p. 568.

176. Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs., April 1867, No. 75, Presidency Commissioner to Board of Revenue, Bengal, 26 March, 1867.

distances to procure *jummas* [leases for cultivations] of rice-producing land'.¹⁷⁷ Peasant insisted on the cutting of the Bhairab canal to facilitate the reclamation of swamps. Hunter also noted this zeal : ¹⁷⁸

'Land that had lain so long untilled, was again ploughed up, and in every district along the west of lower Bengal from Beerbhoom to Midnapur, cultivation was extended into the jungle and pushed up to dry elevations, where it had never been attempted before'.

The Assistant Magistrate of Chuadanganh in Nadia related the higher price of cattle at the time to 'the increased demand for them for the purposes of cultivation ; the people are said to be preparing for *dhan* [rice] old gardens, sides of tanks, sides of roads etc., and places never before used for that purpose'.¹⁷⁹

Apart from this extension of cultivation the anxiety of the peasant to produce food crops of any kind led to a temporary change in the traditional crop pattern. Where the famine was caused by the failure of the winter rice, the peasants cultivated a larger area than usual with the early rice. This increase in cultivation, needless to say, was impossible without the 'advances on an unusually liberal scale' by the *mahajans*.¹⁸⁰

Hunter's characterisation of moneylenders as 'rural capitalists' is thus misleading. Moneylenders were far from a group of entrepreneurs paying for continued agricultural production. Their role was entirely one of a creditor. True, agriculture would have considerably suffered and in some cases, collapsed altogether without the credit they provided. But their main concern was not agricultural prosperity, but the security of a good return on their loans.

In fact, since such loans were far from casual, given the more or less static technique of cultivation, the increasing appropriation

177. *Ibid.*

178. *Ibid.*, No. 119. Hunter to Director of Public Instruction, undated.

179. *Ibid.*, No. 182, Officiating Magistrate of Nadia to Presidency Commissioner, 29 March 1867.

180. *Vide* No. 2.

over the years by the creditors and the resultant diminution of the peasant's surplus created conditions where the basis of the agricultural process became more precarious and the economy more vulnerable to sudden crises. Even a small crisis could temporarily derange agricultural production, and in view of the wide extent of rural indebtedness such derangement was likely to have occurred on a large scale.

Even where the creditor acquired the ownership of the indebted peasant's land he scarcely attempted to more efficiently organise its cultivation. Its basis remained unchanged. The indebted peasant continued to cultivate the land which he lost to his creditor agreeing to surrender half the gross produce.

The Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee investigated whether the degradation of the owner-peasants into share-croppers had adversely affected their efficiency as producers. Opinions on it were conflicting. Some persons believed that the share-cropper status had resulted in a falling efficiency. This they related to a feeling of the peasants that since the land was not any longer theirs and they would have to surrender anyway half the gross produce to the creditor-owners, they lost zest in cultivation. Some others argued that this was not necessarily the case, since a deliberate carelessness in the cultivation process would have diminished their own share in the produce—a share already precariously small.

Agriculture seems to have been adversely affected so much by the share-cropper's lack of enthusiasm in it as by the extreme smallness of the share of the produce left with him. Similar was the consequence where peasants, whose holdings were far too small for the subsistence of their families, had to mostly depend on the cultivation as share-croppers of a part of the holdings of affluent peasants. Usually where affluent peasants were the creditors, as in very many cases they were, their appropriations resulting in enriching them only encouraged them to gradually dissociate themselves from agriculture. Instead of using their superior economic resources and the knowledge of practical agriculture for more efficiently organising cultivation, they let out their land to needy peasants on a share-cropping basis. Where caste prevented the owner-peasants from touching the plough, cultivation entirely depended on the employment of labour, the credit basis of which

was reinforced by caste coercion. Drawn from the lowest castes or tribes and socially looked down upon, these wretched labourers, with no stake in any increase in output, were scarcely the basis of efficient farming.

Abbreviations

Beng. Agr. Progs.	Bengal Agriculture Proceedings
Beng. Gen. Progs.	Bengal General Department Proceedings
Beng. Gen. Misc. Progs.	Bengal General Department (Miscellaneous) Proceedings
Beng. Irr. Progs.	Bengal Irrigation Proceedings
Beng. Jud. Progs.	Bengal Judicial Department Proceedings
Beng. L. R. Misc. Progs.	Bengal Land Revenue (Miscellaneous) Proceedings
Beng. Rev. Dept. Progs.	Bengal Revenue Department Proceedings
Beng. Scar. Rel. Progs.	Bengal Scarcity and Relief Proceedings
Beng. Sur. Sett. Progs.	Bengal Survey and Settlement Proceedings
Ind. Leg. Progs.	India Legislative Department Proceedings
Parl. Papers	Parliamentary Papers.

Protestant Missions, Caste and Social Change in India, 1850-1914

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I

Recent research underscores the importance of Protestant missionary activity as a dynamic factor in modern Indian history—as one of the significant causes of intellectual ferment and social change.¹ Perhaps more than most other Westerners, the Protestant missionaries, especially those from Britain and the United States, deliberately challenged the *status quo*, questioned accepted values, attacked cherished customs and attempted to undermine traditional beliefs. The part played by these missionaries in agitation against infanticide and sati, in developing Western education and in stimulating religious reform and revival movements in the Nineteenth Century has already been at least partially examined by Ingham, Potts, Ali, Sharpe and others.²

Attention has also been drawn to missionary attitudes towards caste and to the direct and indirect effect of their propaganda and activity on the caste system. Ingham has described Protestant missionary attempts to suppress caste within the Church during the period 1793-1833³ and H. Tinker in *South Asia A Short History*⁴ suggests that “orthodox Hindus suspected (not without reason in

1. See especially M.M. Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities, 1833-1857*, Chittagong, 1965.

2. K. Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793-1833*, Cambridge 1956; E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837*, Cambridge 1967; Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities*; E. J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil*, Uppsala 1965; S.M. Pathak, *American Missionaries and Hinduism*, Delhi 1967.

3. *Reformers in India*, Chapter II.

4. Melbourne 1966, p. 177.

the years before the Mutiny) that the missionaries intended an all-out assault upon caste." Misra, referring to the indirect effect of missionary activity on the caste structure, describes the way in which he believes the creation of an Indian Christian community cut across caste lines and "set in motion a process of social mobility,"⁵ while Ali, in a detailed and perceptive study, shows how Protestant missionaries in Bengal, through their influence on legislation and by resorting to law, helped to undermine the authority of caste councils and the effectiveness of caste regulations. Whereas Ali, in particular, stresses the destructive effects of missionary activity on caste rules and observances, Hardgrave, in a more recent study, concludes that missionary work among the Nadars of South India had positive effects in fostering caste feeling and in helping to build up a sense of caste solidarity among these people.⁶

The remarks by Tinker and Misra are, however, little more than passing observations, while the detailed studies mentioned above are confined largely to the period before 1850, or to an examination of some aspect of the overall missionary impact on the caste system. There has, in fact, been no general study of missionary attitudes towards caste after 1850 nor a systematic attempt to assess the overall effects of Protestant missionary activity on the caste structure. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore these wider issues—to examine the development of British and American Protestant missionary policy towards caste within the Church during the period 1850 to 1914; to analyse their attitude towards caste outside the Church and, finally, to assess the way in which their direct assaults on caste, as well as their other activity, affected the system during this period.

II

By 1850 there was considerable unanimity among British and American Protestant missionaries that the caste spirit and caste

5. *The Indian Middle Classes*, London 1961, p. 200.

6. "The Breast-Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. V, No. 2, June 1968.

practices were incompatible with the profession of Christianity. Caste was not apparent among converts in the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies where the missionaries had insisted on its exclusion from the churches from the very beginning.⁷ However, in South India, where caste feeling in general was stronger than in the north and where the early Protestant missionaries had allowed some caste practices within the Church, caste had become strongly entrenched—especially in some of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) Anglican missions originally conducted by the Danes. A survey conducted in the Tanjore mission in 1828 (four years after its transference to the S.P.G.) revealed, for example, that at church the Christians of the higher caste still sat on the right while those of the lower caste sat on the left side of the pulpit; that the same chalice was used for separate castes, but that they went up at different times to the altar and that the high caste Christians still refused to intermarry or eat with the lower caste converts.⁸

Inquiries instituted in the 1820's by Reginald Heber (Bishop of Calcutta, 1823-26) and also privately by the Rev. C. Rhenius of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) among about sixty Protestant missionaries of various denominations in India and Ceylon showed that with one exception and some reservations (on the grounds of inadequate knowledge) these missionaries believed that the retention of caste within the Church was harmful to Christianity;⁹ and, as Ingham has shown, individual missionaries such as Rhenius and the Rev. Mead of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) grappled boldly with the problem and attempted to suppress caste practices among their converts.¹⁰ These efforts, however, remained scattered and uncoordinated. In 1833, Daniel Wilson (Bishop of Calcutta, 1832-58), influenced especially by a conviction that the retention of caste encouraged apostasy, issued his famous circular letter to

7. British Museum, *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference and other documents on the subject of Caste* (1850) pp. 25, 32.

8. This report and other documents on the caste question have been published in P. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, London 1854, pp. 485-507.

9. J. Bateman, *The Life of the Right Rev. Daniel Wilson, D.D.*, London 1860, Vol. I, pp. 434-35.

10. Ingham, *Reformers in India*, pp. 25, 27.

Anglican missionaries throughout his diocese (which then included the whole of India) in which he declared that "the distinction of castes . . . must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally."¹¹ But this, however, was easier said than done and, in spite of the fact that many of those most affected by caste seceded, only eleven years later, notably among the Vepery Christians of the S.P.G., caste feeling was apparently as strong as ever. Commissioners especially appointed to make inquiries at Vepery in 1845 reported to George Spencer (the second Bishop of Madras, 1837-49) that "in every instance" the parties who appeared before them seemed to be "in some sense or degree" influenced by caste and they urged "the general adoption" by Anglican missions of "some definite plan" for its suppression.¹² While it does not appear that "some definite plan" was immediately evolved, a few years afterwards (in 1848) Bishop Spencer and 84 clergy and missionaries of his diocese published a resolution in which they expressed their "extreme concern" that "the Heathen Institute of Caste" should have found any place in the Christian Church and declared that its retention was incompatible with "the Spirit of the Gospel".¹³

While caste difficulties stimulated the formulation of more definite attitudes towards caste and closer co-operation among Anglican missionaries there still had not been a serious attempt to co-ordinate the approach of the different Protestant denominations or enunciate an overall Protestant policy on the question. Matters, however, soon came to a head. The Lutheran missionaries of the Leipzig Society, which took over the work of the Danish Halle mission among Tamils in 1840, adopted a conciliatory attitude on the issue and, because of this, (or so it was believed) a number of caste Christians belonging to the Anglican churches in Madras and Tanjore seceded and joined with them.¹⁴ The Madras Missionary

11. Bateman, *Life of Wilson*. Vol. I, pp. 436-43; Percival, *Land of the Veda*, pp. 496-502.

12. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, pp. 503-7.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 507; *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, pp. 34-39.

14. G. Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions*, Edinburgh 1901, pp. 121-123; *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. III, April 1876, pp. 412-14; *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, pp. 28-30; J. A. Sharrock, *South Indian Missions (containing glimpses into the lives and customs of the Tamil people)*, Westminster 1910, pp. 283, 285-6.

Conference, composed of missionaries of various denominations and more than ever aware of the need for co-ordination and unity in dealing with the caste problem, published a Minute in which they too recorded their opposition to caste distinctions within the Church and pleaded with all Protestant societies to adopt a similar policy. This Minute, signed by nearly one hundred missionaries, including Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and others, was endorsed by the Calcutta and Bombay Missionary Conferences. It was published together with the Anglican statement of 1848 and, notwithstanding the known opposition of some of the Lutherans, was held to represent the united testimony of "nearly all the Protestant Missionaries in Southern India."¹⁵ It is especially important as the first notable attempt to formulate an agreed inter-denominational Protestant policy on caste among converts and while, as we shall see, many missionaries subsequently disagreed with its specific recommendations on how to tackle the problem, they almost invariably endorsed the Minute's general contention that caste within the Christian Church was an unmitigated evil. Opposition to the retention of caste among converts was expressed repeatedly in resolutions carried at South Indian missionary conferences held in 1858, 1879 and 1900.¹⁶ The resolution of 1900, recommending that caste in the Christian Church "be treated as a great evil to be discouraged and repressed," was endorsed by the Fourth Decennial Missionary Conference meeting in Madras in 1902, while continued widespread opposition to caste within the Church was expressed by delegates and correspondents to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910.¹⁷

The main reason for this continued hostility to caste within the churches sprang from the conviction that has already been briefly mentioned that caste was incompatible with Christianity.

15. *Minute of Madras Missionary Conference*, p. 29.

16. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference held at Ootacamund April 19th-May 5th, 1858*, Madras 1858, pp. 294-5; *The Missionary Conference South India and Ceylon 1879*, Madras 1880, Vol. I, p. 421; *Report of the South Indian Missionary Conference held at Madras, January 2-5, 1900*, Madras 1900, pp. 14-15.

17. *Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference held in Madras, December 11-18, 1902*, London (N. D.) pp. 26-27; *World Missionary Conference 1910, Report of Commission*, Vol. IV, pp. 164-166.

In his initial inquiries, Bishop Heber raised the question as to whether caste among Christians was a civil or a religious institution still connected with Hinduism.¹⁸ By 1850 the great majority of British and American missionaries believed they had found the answer—that caste among converts was primarily a religious institution based on concepts derived from Hinduism.¹⁹ They argued that caste distinctions among Christians were no different from caste distinctions as found among Hindus and that, in both cases, caste was based on the idea of “birth purity or impurity” as those qualities were conceived of, not by the Christian, but by the Hindu religion. Thus, in retaining caste, converts retained an important part of their former religion, caste being “one of the evils of heathenism which has unwarily and most unfortunately been allowed to accompany the native convert in his passage to Christianity.”²⁰

The mere discovery that caste among Christians was Hindu in origin and nature seems to have been for most missionaries (at least in 1850) a sufficiently compelling argument against its retention. The Madras Missionary Conference, referring to caste practices, stated that “as these and similar usages are, in their nature and origin, heathenish, they must be discountenanced and abandoned by every follower of the Redeemer.”²¹ The general assumption seems to have been that Christianity and Hinduism were completely incompatible and that because caste was now discovered to be part of Hinduism it too must be completely rejected: to do otherwise was like trying to mix oil and water. Either the “convert” must be a Christian or he must be a Hindu. If he retained anything of Hinduism in his outlook or way of life then he could not be truly Christian. It was only later, towards the end of the century, that belief in a sharp dichotomy between Hinduism and Christianity was gradually broken down as the idea developed that there was in

18. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, p. 488.

19. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, pp. 503-5, 507; *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, pp. 1, 4-8, 24. This view was repeated at subsequent conferences. See, for example, *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference* (1858), p. 294 and *The Missionary Conference South India and Ceylon, 1879*, Vol. I, p. 421.

20. See especially Percival, *Land of the Veda*, pp. 503-4; *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, pp. 4-6.

21. *Minute*, p. 6.

fact much in Hinduism that could be accepted and transformed by the Christian faith.²² But while it was then no longer a sufficient argument against caste simply to say it was “heathenish” or part of Hinduism (and to imply that it must therefore be rejected) the missionaries continued to oppose caste among Christians on other grounds and for more specific reasons reiterated time and again throughout the period.

One of these objections was that the idea of a spiritual hierarchy implicit in caste contradicted the idea of equality implicit in Christianity and in Scripture which taught that all true Christians (regardless of origin) were “*equally . . . members of the mystical body of Christ*”.²³

“With regard to the social relation of Christian men and women”, wrote the Rev. A. F. Painter (C. M. S.), “it [Scripture] recognises different grades of authority and of status, but it distinctly teaches that there is no difference in spiritual nature among believers. ‘There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. III. 28). See parallel passage, Col. III. 2. ‘For in one spirit were ye all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free’ (I Cor. XII. 13)”.²⁴

Thus Christians, such as those of Brahmin origin, who continued to parade “as gods before men” and shunned fellow Christians of lower caste origin as polluted or spiritually inferior were quite

22. For an analysis of changing attitudes towards Hinduism in general see K. A. Ballhatchet “Some Aspects of Historical Writing on India by Protestant Christian Missionaries during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”; in C. H. Philips (ed.) *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London 1961, pp. 344-353, and Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil*, pp. 23-56.

23. Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, pp. 185-6, 192-3; Percival, *Land of the Veda*, p. 507; *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, p. 8; C. F. Andrews “Race within the Christian Church”, *The East and the West*, Vol. 8, July 1910, pp. 253, 260-1.

24. “The Attitude of the Christian Church to Caste.” *The East and the West*, Vol. VI, October 1908, p. 442.

clearly dishonouring "those whom God has honoured" and acting contrary to Scripture.

Linked with this objection was the belief that caste in the Church cut at the roots of brotherly love and militated against "the true union which should exist among all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁵ In their Minute of 1850 the Madras missionaries declared that "caste breaks the unity of the Spirit, deadens the energy of divine love in the souls of believers, preys on the *vitals* of Christianity and dries up the streams of affection in every Native Church where it is allowed to exist."²⁶ Throughout the second half of the Nineteenth Century and later, the disruptive, divisive and anti-social effects of caste among Christians were often described and condemned—especially by missionaries charged with the pastoral care of congregations.²⁷

While, as we have seen, the missionaries opposed caste among Christians partly because it was an essential part of Hinduism, and because it seemed to damage the quality of life among Christians and conflicted with the idea of a true Christian community, these were not the sum total of their objections. They were also influenced by the fact that caste distinctions and feeling within the Church frustrated attempts to build it up in numbers. Caste, in their opinion, provided a strong link with the unregenerate. It was "the chief tie which binds the Christian to his old faith;"²⁸ and because converts who retained caste had not yet fully renounced their former religion and way of life, it was all the more easy for them to backslide into Hinduism. Bishop Wilson's decision to suppress caste was, as we have seen, influenced partly by the fact that "apostacies to heathenism have been of late but too frequent in the congregations where the distinction is permitted to remain."²⁹ This consideration also influenced the Madras Missionary Conference and other missionaries

25. *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. XI, April 1884, p. 209.

26. p. 8.

27. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. III, April 1876, p. 508; Vol. IV, January 1877, pp. 356-7, 369; *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference* (1858), p. 294; *The Missionary Conference, South India and Ceylon* (1879), Vol. I, p. 421.

28. *The East and the West*, Vol. IV, October 1906, p. 420.

29. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, p. 500.

who stated that "the retention of caste tends to keep up an intercourse with heathen . . . and the road to apostacy is kept open".³⁰ Furthermore, because of caste feeling, Christians of high caste origin were sometimes reluctant to evangelize the lower castes or welcome them when converts into their congregations. Referring to the apathy of Christians in the Krishnagar district of Bengal in 1878, for example, the Rev. James Vaughan (C. M. S.) complained that caste was not only "eating out the little life of the church", but had "utterly prevented" its growth and expansion.³¹ The Rev. Caldwell (S. P. G.) in a reply to Bishop Gell (Bishop of Madras, 1861-1898) wrote of the same problem in Tinnevely in South India. After detailing a long list of the evil effects of caste in his congregations he concluded that :

"Worse than all, it is asserted and believed that there are still Christian people, and even Mission agents who are reluctant to evangelize the low-caste people in their neighbourhood, lest the converts should disturb their equanimity by claiming the right of attending the same churches as their neighbours, and sitting under the same roof, though in a different and a lower place."³²

Although the missionaries remained remarkably united in their attitude towards the 'evils' and disastrous effects of caste within the churches they became increasingly disunited and uncertain about how to tackle the problem.

In 1850 there seems to have been a fairly widespread consensus that converts should be required to renounce caste at their baptism, Bishop Wilson had already ruled that this should be done by converts wishing to join the Anglican Church³³ and, in 1850, the mis-

30. *Minute*, p. 8.

31. F. M. Milman, *Memoir of the Right Rev. Robert Milman, D. D.*, London 1879, p. 354.

32. Quoted in P. Rajahgopal, "Caste in its Relation to the Church", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. IV, January 1877, p. 366.

See also F. Lenwood, "Reverges of Caste upon the Church in India," *The East and the West*, Vol. XI, October 1913, pp. 403-4.

33. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, pp. 497, 500.

sionaries of the Madras Missionary Conference (which included a large proportion of missionaries from other Protestant denominations) declared that "Candidates for baptism . . . should be required to declare that they renounce Caste usages, for ever, both in principle and practice."³⁴ Bishop Wilson's decision and this resolution were confirmed in a resolution passed at the Missionary Conference of South India and Ceylon which met in 1879. There it was stated in reference to caste that "it is the duty of all missionaries and churches to require its entire renunciation, with all its outward manifestations, by all those who desire to enter the Church of Christ."³⁵

But although this resolution was passed unanimously there were even then some signs of dissent. Bishop Gell for one (who was not present at these deliberations) had already expressed his doubts about the wisdom of insisting on the entire renunciation of caste before baptism.³⁶ Twenty two years later, in 1900, the missionaries participating in the South Indian Missionary Conference openly admitted they could not agree on how to tackle the problem of caste within the Church and, instead of passing a resolution demanding the renunciation of caste before baptism, confined their specific recommendations merely to a statement that "in no case should any person who breaks the law of Christ by observing caste hold any office in connection with the Church." This resolution was upheld by the General Missionary Conference meeting in Calcutta in 1902.³⁷

Along with this growing reluctance to insist on the renunciation of caste at baptism was the development of what seems to have been considerable compromise with caste in practice. For example, one of the aims of the Caste Suppression Society, formed at Tuticorin in 1893, was to counteract the practice among missionaries and pastors of using caste titles when addressing members of the congregation and of allowing communicants to approach the altar

34. *Minute*, p. 10.

35. *The Missionary Conference, South India and Ceylon*, Vol. I, p. 421.

36. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. IV, January 1877, p. 369.

37. *Report of the South Indian Missionary Conference (1900)*, pp. 14-15; *Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference (1902)*, pp. 26-27.

in order of caste.³⁸ Writing in 1906 the Rev. J.A. Sharrock (S.P.G.) well known for his opposition to caste within the Church confessed that

"We missionaries preach against it, and we use occasional opportunities to check it, but the great stream flows on incessantly and unrestrainedly. Theoretically, we all, English and natives denounce it; practically, we all permit or practise it. We preach against it, we write against it, and in fact we do everything but *act* against it."³⁹

In his book on South Indian missions published in 1910 Sharrock claimed further that

"In spite of the never-ceasing curse that this evil [caste] has been to the Church in South India, at Holy Baptism, at Confirmation, and at Ordination not a word is ever asked as to whether the candidate has renounced this central feature of Hinduism."⁴⁰

The truth of the matter seems to have been that, after an initial enthusiasm for firm measures against caste, the missionaries found that this approach was extremely costly and sometimes ineffective. They discovered, for example, that firm and decisive measures sometimes weakened their influence over their congregations⁴¹ or, worse still, led to secession—part of the congregation walking out, declaring its independence, joining some other mission (if they could find one which would receive them) or else slipping back into Hinduism.⁴² In fact, Christians of different sudra castes frequently

38. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. IV, January 1877, p. 369; *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, 1898, pp. 302 ff.

39. *The East and the West*, January 1906, Vol. IV, p. 102.

40. *South Indian Missions*, p. 190.

41. Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, pp. 181, 194.

42. H. Bower, "Caste in the Native Church", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. III, April 1876, p. 414.

seceded from Protestant churches rather than admit any kind of equality with Christians from the outcastes in Madras, Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Tinnevely.⁴³ S.P.G. missions, especially were greatly reduced in size as a result of the missionaries' refusal to countenance caste observances. In a report, presented in 1860, one observer confessed, for example, that "all the missions of the Tanjore circle" were suffering "more or less diminution" in consequence of the measures taken to suppress caste practices.⁴⁴

While strong arm measures sometimes weakened the missionaries' influence and caused secession there was no guarantee that these steps would achieve their objective of eliminating caste practices and feeling within the Church. In fact, some missionaries argued, not without some justification, that vehement assaults on caste practices among converts merely stimulated opposition and hardened the attitude of congregations.⁴⁵ As we have seen, in spite of Bishop Wilson's courageous stand, caste feeling and distinctions apparently persisted in the Vepery congregation and were possibly as strong as ever in 1845. Caste troubles also recurred in Tinnevely.⁴⁶ Furthermore, even although a large number of caste-keeping Christians seceded from the churches in Tanjore caste feeling was still strong among Christians there in the 1860's. In a letter to Bishop Gell the Rev. J. Ignatius, an Indian pastor, complained that high-caste Christians still regarded common pariah Christians as unclean and that they refused to associate with them or approach their houses. The pariah Christians, also influenced by caste feeling, were beginning to assume caste titles in the hope of moving up the caste hierarchy.⁴⁷

Advocates of strong repressive measures against caste within the Church sometimes argued that the firm stand taken by Bishop Wilson and others failed to achieve long term permanent results simply because their policy was not sustained by their successors—

43. Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, p. 183; *The East and the West*, Vol. IV, January 1906, p. 102.

44. *Digest of S.P.G. Records*, London 1893, p. 514.

45. *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, 1898, pp. 241 ff., Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, p. 191.

46. See especially S. Paul, "Caste in the Tinnevely Church", *Harvest Field*, Vol. V, September 1893, pp. 81-89.

47. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. IV, January 1877, p. 367.

weak-minded Bishops, missionaries and pastors who allowed caste feeling to creep back into Christian congregations.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in spite of this argument, the disruptive effects of the hard-line approach could hardly be denied and there was still enough uncertainty about the effectiveness of "firm" action for some missionaries to argue that this policy was a gross mistake.

Hence, by the end of the period, there were two main schools of thought on the caste problem among converts. On the one hand, some missionaries, like their forebears in the 1850's, continued to advocate firm and unyielding measures. They argued that firmness did have a salutary effect and that, even if it caused secession, it was far better to have a few real Christians rather than many nominal adherents. On the other hand, were missionaries, some of whom were perhaps forced to compromise in practice, who were not entirely convinced of the effectiveness and wisdom of "coercion" and who advocated a more tolerant flexible approach. They pinned their hopes on a view, influential in the late Eighteenth Century and expressed in the attitude of Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1724-98), that with gentle persuasion and the gradual dissemination of Christian ideas caste within the churches would gradually disappear.⁴⁹

III

Although the great majority of these missionaries were, at least in theory, opposed to caste distinctions among converts, this does not necessarily mean they were equally opposed to caste among non-Christians. Caste within the Church was one thing—caste outside the Church another. It was quite possible to disapprove strongly of caste within the Church and yet feel that outside the Christian community the advantages of caste outweighed its defects and that it was inadvisable to attempt its wholesale destruction.

48. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. III, April 1876, p. 509; Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, pp. 185-189; *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, 1898, pp. 241 ff.

49. *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. III, April 1876, pp. 414-417, 509; Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, p. 183; *The Missionary Conference South India and Ceylon*, 1879, Vol. I, p. 422; H. Pearson, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of the Rev. Christian Frederick Schwartz*, 3rd ed., London 1839, Vol. II, pp. 74-76.

There were probably always some missionaries who felt like the well-known Abbé Dubois that caste among Hindus (although not a perfect system) was at least worth preserving. Bishop Cotton (Bishop of Calcutta, 1858-66) opposed in 1858 a suggestion that Parliament might abolish caste mainly on the grounds that, in the absence of a widespread system of education and of a complete hold of Christianity, it was caste that had been "socially and politically the means of keeping India from the utter disorganization into which its religion would otherwise have long precipitated it."⁵⁰ A similar desire to preserve the system is also reflected in the attitude of the Rev. Cooling, a Methodist missionary, who warned the Madras Missionary Conference in 1897 against "the dangers of ill-considered attempts" to uproot caste among Hindus, and asked

"Are we to go on doing our utmost to batter it down? Let us remember that if we do, we are throwing down what is practically the only bulwark Hinduism has against immorality Is it wise, is it right, for us missionaries to go on destroying the only safeguard to morality that there is in Hinduism, when there is so little hope of the people accepting the only other safeguard we have to offer."⁵¹

The Rev. W. Hooper (C. M. S.) also questioned, by implication, the wisdom of attempts to destroy caste outside the Christian Church. Writing in the *Church Missionary Review*, in September 1908, he declared that

"It is a great mistake to suppose that caste is an un-mixed evil. On the contrary, it is my firm conviction that, as long as a Hindu remains a Hindu, the bonds of caste do him, on the whole, more good than harm . . ."⁵²

50. Quoted in B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes*, p. 202.

51. *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, February 1898, pp. 53-55.

52. *Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, September 1908, p. 519.

However, there can be little doubt that these views were exceptional—all available evidence suggesting that the missionaries far more frequently longed for the complete destruction of the system—even if there were times when they felt it was less of an evil than caste among Christians. This widespread desire for the abolition of caste among even Hindus is reflected in the Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference signed, as we have seen, by nearly 100 missionaries;⁵³ it is also implicit in resolutions of the South Indian Missionary Conference of 1858⁵⁴ and is evident in widely scattered individual missionary comment,⁵⁵ as well as in missionary policies pursued throughout the period. Particularly significant is the attitude of some of the foremost exponents of a more sympathetic approach to Hinduism who were writing at the end of the period. The Rev. T. E. Slater (L. M. S.), author of *The Higher Hinduism in Relation to Christianity* and an early advocate of the idea that the best in Hinduism could find its fulfilment in Christianity, declared that one of the best signs of new life in India was "the healthy desire to abolish among other crying evils, the great caste system",⁵⁶ while the Rev. C. F. Andrews, of the Cambridge Mission, who also admired much in Hindu tradition, exposed what he believed were the evils of caste, extolled the work of reformers attempting to abolish the system, and declared that the missionaries must fight caste "to the

53. Here the missionaries argued that all societies should cooperate to suppress caste within the churches partly on the ground that they (the missionaries) were endeavouring to destroy the system in general. See *Minute*, p. 14.

54. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference* (1858).

55. The desire to destroy caste, as well as being made explicit, is clearly implied in the comment of missionaries who rejoiced in what they believed was its gradual disappearance, in the attitude of writers who, like the Rev. J. Bradbury (L. M. S.), applauded the work of Indian reformers dedicated to its overthrow, and in the comment of others who described the caste system, but in such a way so as to leave their readers in no doubt about their longing for its eventual elimination. See, for example, J. Murdoch (ed.) *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, pp. 34, 41; J. Vaughan, *The Trident, the Crescent and the Cross*, London 1876, pp. 30, 39; J. Bradbury, *India: Its Condition, Religion and Missions*, London 1884, pp. 93, 95; G. Trevor, *India: Its Natives and Missions*, London [N. D.], p. 136.

56. T. E. Slater, *The Higher Hinduism in Relation to Christianity*, London 1906, p. 119.

death."⁵⁷

But whatever the precise extent of missionary feeling against the caste system the result was a widespread campaign against its inhumane regulations and influence. Some missionaries (such as those meeting at Ootacamund in 1858) considered it their duty to preach openly against what they believed were its "absurdities" and evil effects on Hindu society⁵⁸—so much so that W. W. Hunter, an English official not unsympathetic to Christian missions, deplored in 1888 what he described as the missionaries' "tirade" against the system.⁵⁹ Missionaries also attempted to ignore caste distinctions as far as possible in their schools, hospitals and medical dispensaries⁶⁰—though how far this policy was successfully carried out is not easy to ascertain. Thirdly, they frequently appealed to the Government itself to ignore caste in all its activities. In 1858, for example, they pressed the Government "to discountenance this absurd and injurious system by all proper methods, and especially to take steps to prevent its recognition in all Government documents, as well as all offices and courts". Nor was this the last time the missionaries attacked the Government for seeming to recognize and buttress the caste system. The Revs. Duff of the Free Church of Scotland Mission (F. C. S.), Murdoch of the Christian Literature Society (C. L. S.), Sherring (L. M. S.), Morrison (F. C. S.), and others—all criticised the Government for indirectly using its "vast

57. C. F. Andrews, "Race Within the Christian Church", *The East and the West*, Vol. 8, July 1910, p. 261; C. F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India, Its Missionary Aspect*, London 1912, pp. 184-5. J. N. Farquhar, perhaps the best known of all the advocates of the fulfilment theory, was scarcely less critical. His main argument, when dealing with the Hindu social order in his book, *The Crown of Hinduism*, seems to be, not that the caste system as it stood, but that the rebellion against it (reflected in the search for individual freedom, equality and social justice) would find its completion in Christianity. See pp. 153-210.

58. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference*, (1858), p. 294; G. Smith, *Stephen Hislop*, London 1888, p. 323.

59. W. W. Hunter, *India of the Queen and Other Essays*, London 1903, p. 229.

60. Trevor, *India: Its Natives and Missions*, p. 129; Sharrock, *South Indian Missions*, p. 116; W. Hooper, "Caste, Its Origin and its Evils", *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, September 1903, pp. 519-20. *Report of the Second Decennial Missionary Conference held at Calcutta 1882-83*, Calcutta 1883, p. 402; J. Lowe, *Medical Missions; Their Place and Power*, London 1886, pp. 53-4.

influence" to perpetuate caste feelings and distinction.⁶¹ Finally, as we shall see, the missionaries played a part in forcing the enactment of legislation affecting caste practices and constantly resorted to the law courts in an attempt to undermine caste regulations imposing various disabilities on Christian converts and others.

This widespread and sometimes intensive campaign against caste among Hindus arose partly from the fact that the missionaries were convinced that it frustrated their attempts to spread Christianity even more than caste within the Church.⁶² There were a number of aspects to this objection. In the first place, caste feeling seemed to harden the heart of the higher caste Hindu against Christianity because the doctrine of equality, implicit in its teachings, threatened to undermine his exalted status and reduced him to the same level as others.⁶³ Secondly, caste regulations restricted the movement of European missionaries among the people. The missionaries like others Europeans, were often regarded as unclean and this restricted their activities in visiting or in receiving guests, and in conversing and eating with Hindus.⁶⁴ For example, the Rev. S. Mateer of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (W. M. M. S.), author of *Native Life in Travancore*, complained that

"Europeans, because they eat flesh and mingle with all castes, are excluded from access to the interior of a native house, or entering beyond the common reception

61. Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, pp. 38-41; M. A. Sherring, "The Prospects of Hindu Caste", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. VII, October 1880, pp. 191-2; J. Morrison, *New Ideas in India during the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 3-6; Trevor, *India: Its Natives and Missions*, p. 136.

62. *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference*, (1850), p. 1; *Proceedings of a General Conference of Bengal Protestant Missionaries held at Calcutta, Sept. 4-7 1855*, Calcutta 1855, pp. 29-31. *Report of the General Missionary Conference held at Allahabad, 1872-73*, London 1873, p. 461.

63. *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, April 1834, Vol. IX, p. 209; W. Hooper, "Caste, Its Origins and its Evils", *The Church Missionary Review*, Sept. 1908, Vol. LIX, pp. 519-20.

64. *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, Sept. 1908, pp. 520-21; S. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, London 1883, pp. 332-3; Bradbury, *India, Its Condition, Religion and Missions*, pp. 88-9; M. Monier Williams, *Modern India and Indians* London 1878, p. 182.

hall of a Hindu palace. After shaking hands with a European, the caste Hindu must bathe to remove the pollution; and there are special occasions when it is highly inconvenient to them to meet foreigners even in the most casual manner A distinguished Brahman priest and Raja once granted an interview on the express condition that I should not expect to shake hands, as the old gentleman could not conveniently bathe just then."

These practical difficulties, however, were not always so apparent and, as the century progressed, Hindus, especially the educated classes, began to mix more freely with Europeans. Thirdly, and more importantly, caste often affected the attitude of would-be converts. Fear of expulsion from caste acted as a powerful deterrent against the acceptance of baptism into the Christian Church. Once the lone individual, rejecting the pressures of his caste, allowed the waters of baptism to touch his body, he was almost invariably expelled as an outcaste, shunned by friends and relatives, turned out of his home and, in some parts of India, even after 1850, still deprived of his ancestral property.⁶⁵ The Rev. Vaughan (C. M. S.) wrote, for example, that

"Of all the obstacles to the evangelisation of India, this is by far the most formidable. . . . The judgment may be convinced, the heart impressed, but the fearful consequences of decision stare the individual in the face, and no wonder that he falters. The higher his caste, the heavier the cross which threatens him. To be loathed by all who once loved him, to be mourned for as *dead* by her who bore him, to have the finger of scorn pointed at him by all his associates, to be doom-

65. Act XXI of 1850 protecting converts and others against the forfeiture of property on the grounds of loss of caste and change of religion did not apply to the Native States such as Mysore, Travancore and Cochin (*Report of the South Indian Missionary Conference*, (1900), pp. 59-61).

ed for life to social ostracism as a polluted thing, is the penalty of conversion which caste inflicts . . ."⁶⁶

Furthermore, because of his expulsion from Hindu society, the individual convert lost the opportunity of commending his faith to the very people (his friends and relatives) who in other circumstances may have been the most willing to receive his message.⁶⁷

In all these ways, caste was quite correctly recognised as one of the most formidable obstacles to missionary work in India. Nor were these objections any less cogent or keenly felt because, in some cases, caste actually worked in favour of Christianity pushing converts into the Christian Church. When the caste elders or the whole caste group was sufficiently sympathetic to missionary preaching the whole caste *en masse* sometimes decided to accept baptism. The individual moved together with his friends, relatives and caste colleagues into the Christian Church. And whereas the lone individual who acted contrary to the will of his caste group was usually expelled, in this case, the convert remained within his society and continued to share in its advantages.⁶⁸ These so-called "mass" movements, predicted and even noted by more shrewd observers before 1850,⁶⁹ gathered momentum, especially among the depressed classes, in the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century and attracted widespread attention. Some missionaries, like the Rev. W. Camp-

66. *The Trident, the Crescent, and the Cross*, p. 37. See also *Proceedings of a General Conference of Bengal Protestant Missionaries* (1855), pp. 29-31; *Report of the General Missionary Conference held at Allahabad*, (1872-73), pp. 461-62; *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, September 1908, pp. 517-18; A. F. Painter, "The Attitude of the Christian Church to Caste", *The East and the West*, Vol. VI, October 1908, p. 437; F. Lenwood, "Reverges of Caste in India", *The East and the West*, Vol. XI, October 1913, pp. 399-400.

67. *Proceedings of a General Missionary Conference of Bengal Protestant Missionaries* (1855), pp. 30-31; A. W. Carmichael, *Things as they Are. Mission work in Southern India*, London 1903, p. 88.

68. J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass movements in India*, New York 1933, esp. pp. 22-24.

69. E. Hoole, *Madras, Mysore and the South of India*, London 1844, pp. 310-11; W. Arthur, *A Mission to Mysore* [1847], London 1902, pp. 261-64; G. Kerry, "Mass Additions to the Nominal Church", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. XIX, October 1892, pp. 107-108.

bell (L.M.S.), impressed by these movements, began to feel that perhaps after all, caste was not such a deadly foe and that "caste feeling, once the great obstacle in the way of Christian progress" was then acting "in an entirely different direction."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of the changing attitude of Campbell and others, it was still widely acknowledged that, in the case of the individual enquirer, and, in general terms, caste remained a serious barrier to the open profession of Christianity.⁷¹

But the missionaries were not only concerned with the problems of evangelism and the spread of Christianity: their attitude towards caste, in general, was also influenced by humanitarian feelings and by a concern for the "temporal" well-being of the individual as well as for the progress and welfare of the country at large.

Throughout the period, the missionaries argued (sometimes with reference to their own experience) that caste with "its terrible cruelty and pride", stifled human sympathy, bred an "apathetic indifference" to the needs of others and led to injustice and suffering, especially among the lower castes.⁷² "Few can imagine how thoroughly it dries up the wells of human sympathy", wrote the Rev. Sawday (W.M.M.S.) "how it separates class from class, how it opposes itself to everything approaching brotherly love."⁷³ These views were confirmed by what seemed to be an increasing number of "enlightened" Hindus and were reinforced as the missionaries gained increasing knowledge of the disabilities, poverty and degra-

70. *The East and the West*, January 1906, Vol. III, p. 25.

71. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 178-181; Carmichael, *Things as they are*, p. 104; *World Missionary Conference 1910 Report of Commission IV*, p. 164; W. J. Wilkins, *Daily Life and Work in India*, London 1888, p. 255; *Harvest Field*, Vol. XV, April 1904, p. 130; June 1904, pp. 216, 219.

72. See, for example, *Proceedings of a General Conference of Bengal Missionaries*, (1855), pp. 29-30; *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference*, (1858), p. 294; Vaughan, *The Trident, the Crescent, and the Cross*, pp. 30-32; Carmichael, *Things as they are*, pp. 101-104; Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, pp. 26-29; M. A. Sherring, "The Prospects of Hindu Caste", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. VII, October 1880, pp. 170-71; G. Gogerly, *The Pioneers*, London 1871, pp. 75-76.

73. W. Sawday, "Modern Hinduism and Caste", *Harvest Field*, Vol. VI, May 1886, p. 327.

dation of pariahs and others.⁷⁴ Indeed, as the Christian Church expanded, especially among the depressed castes, the missionaries found themselves increasingly occupied in fighting for the civil rights of their converts and in opposing what they often regarded as the unjust and inhuman sanctions of the system.

The missionaries also claimed that the caste system was a form of "tyranny" which stifled individual freedom and initiative and consigned the bulk of the population to "hopeless slavery."⁷⁵ Coming from a Christian tradition which emphasized the importance of individual decision and responsibility in matters of faith and morality (as well as the right of individual dissent) they disliked certain corporate aspects of the caste system where, even on moral questions and on the important issue of changing one's religion, the individual's will was subordinate to that of his group.⁷⁶ Furthermore, most of the missionaries had grown up in an environment which stressed the value of worth rather than birth and while in Britain or the United States lived in a society where it was possible for well qualified, enterprising or talented individuals to rise through the class structure. Some missionaries were well aware of the phenomena frequently noted by modern sociologists that whole castes might rise in the caste hierarchy, thereby improving their position, but they lamented the fact that the individual as distinct from the group could not improve his social status. In this respect missionaries compared the caste system unfavourably with the more flexible class system of Europe.⁷⁷ In their resolution of 1848 the Madras Anglican clergy declared that caste was grounded upon "a

74. Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, pp. 29-30; J. N. Farquhar, *Crown of Hinduism*, London 1930, p. 162.

75. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, p. 507; *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference* (1858), p. 294; Gogerly, *The Pioneers*, pp. 75-76; Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 26; *Harvest Field*, Vol. VI, May 1886, pp. 327, 331; Vol. VII, September 1886, p. 74.

76. *The East and the West*, Vol. VI, October 1908, p. 440; J. Cooling, "The Christian Substitute for the Caste System", *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, February 1898, p. 52.

77. *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, Sept. 1908, p. 520; Bradbury, *India. Its Condition, Religion and Missions*, p. 82; *The East and the West*, Vol. VI, October 1908, pp. 438-39.

totally false standard of rank, irrespective of virtue, learning, or station."⁷⁸ The missionaries of the Madras Missionary Conference and others argued that on scale of caste "wealth, talents, industry and moral character, confer no elevation" and throughout the period other individual missionaries also complained of how the caste system frustrated the individual and kept him "locked up" within his social circle.⁷⁹

Besides the criticism that caste repressed and thwarted the individual was the further objection that it was "deeply injurious to the welfare of the country at large."⁸⁰ It was claimed that caste retarded economic development, created social evils, handicapped social reform and impeded the growth of a healthy patriotic spirit.

When discussing the economic aspects of caste some missionaries declared that originally caste had been of some economic advantage—that because of the fact that occupations were hereditary "the knowledge and skill acquired by the father descends to the son." In this way Indian arts and crafts had reached a certain level of perfection.⁸¹ But it was also argued that "it is essence of caste not to admit of change" and that because of this "the technical and industrial arts of Europe soon outstripped those of India." By making occupations hereditary caste may have encouraged developments up to a point, but it wasted the talent of those more suited to employment in something other than their hereditary occupations and successfully prevented the infusion of new ideas.⁸² J. N. Farquhar declared that

"The old caste rule as to occupation is altogether indefensible Except in the very occasional case when a boy's genius happened to run along the lines of his father's profession, every man of original gift has

78. Percival, *Land of the Veda*, p. 507.

79. *Minute*, (1850), p. 4.

80. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference*, (1858), p. 305.

81. *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, February 1898, p. 52; Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 21.

82. Bradbury, *India. Its Condition, Religion and Missions*, pp. 91-92; *Harvest Field*, Vol. IX, February 1898, p. 52; Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 23.

been forcibly deprived of the opportunity of exercising it. His spirit has been imprisoned, squeezed into the groove of the traditional occupation How many thousands of gifted boys, born up and down the centuries in the lower castes and among the Outcastes, have been prevented, by the wasteful tyranny of caste, from serving India."⁸³

The effect of caste regulations in giving rise to some of India's greatest social problems (apart from the condition of the depressed classes) was occasionally mentioned.⁸⁴ The Rev. Painter, for example, echoing Malabari and other Indian reformers, held that in many cases caste was bad physically because it

"limits intermarriage to small communities by forbidding marriage with any outsiders, and by preventing fresh individuals from becoming members. Thus the effect is necessarily in time the intermarriage of near relations. It brings about childmarriage and polygamy. For since it is a disgrace for a girl to remain unmarried, as well as contrary to religious regulations, and the choice of a husband is so limited, very early marriages and polygamy become practically a necessity."⁸⁵

While Painter and others believed caste was responsible for some of India's most serious social 'evils', the Rev. Murdoch pointed to the way in which caste regulations impeded progress by threatening potential reformers with excommunication.⁸⁶

But caste was more frequently criticised because it was thought to frustrate the growth of patriotic feeling. While some British administrators lamented the growth of the national spirit (one of them even suggesting that caste distinctions should be fostered so

83. Farquhar, *Crown of Hinduism*, p. 184.

84. *Harvest Field*, Vol. VII, September 1886, p. 74; Murdoch (ed.) *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 22.

85. *The East and the West*, Vol. IV, October 1908, p. 440.

86. *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 24.

as to prevent a combination against British rule⁸⁷) the missionaries, less concerned with the maintenance of the British Raj, were possibly more sympathetic to the growth of the national spirit⁸⁸—especially if it led to greater enthusiasm for social reform.

Writing in 1859 Dr Duff claimed that caste tended “to extinguish every spark of true patriotism, and quench all zeal in the promotion of enterprises of public utility.”⁸⁹ In 1880 the Rev. Sherring, author of an influential book on caste, claimed that because of caste distinctions the Hindu had “no faith in distinterested patriotism” and could not combine together on a large scale “in any matter of national importance.”⁹⁰ When, after the foundation of the National Congress, it could no longer be denied that Hindus were combining together on matters of national importance, Murdoch argued that these combinations were in spite of rather than because of caste distinctions.⁹¹ C. F. Andrews, writing in 1912, quoted Rabindranath Tagore on the way in which caste was preventing India’s national regeneration and, in 1913, Farquhar, also quoting nationalist leaders, pointed to the way in which caste impeded the development of a healthy representative government.⁹²

IV

The effect of the missionary assault on the caste system is by no means easy to ascertain. However, there can be little doubt that missionary agitation and arguments against caste, together with the spread of Christian ideas, at least stimulated or reinforced Hindu attempts at reform. It is well-known, for example, that Keshab Chandra Sen, a fierce critic of the caste system,⁹³ was strongly

87. *Ibid.*

88. See for example, G. A. Oddie, “Indian Christians and the National Congress, 1885-1910”. *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, June 1968, pp. 47-8.

89. Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 37.

90. “The Prospects of Hindu Caste”, *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. VII, October 1880, p. 174.

91. *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 26.

92. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 184-5; Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, p. 174.

93. Murdoch (ed.), *Papers on Indian Reform, Caste*, p. 34.

influenced by Christianity⁹⁴—so much so that, in 1866, some of the missionaries and others believed his conversion was imminent.⁹⁵ In Western India, Jotirao Phooley, founder of the Satya Shodak Samaj which aimed at challenging brahman supremacy and emphasized the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, was educated in a mission school where he was deeply influenced by Christian teachings on equality.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) the noted Parsi reformer and opponent of caste was likewise, according to his own admission, greatly influenced by his contact with Christian missionaries—especially by Dr. John Wilson, himself author of a book on caste.⁹⁷

Missionary agitation and attempts to improve the condition of the outcastes pricked the Hindu conscience and stimulated Hindu attempts to improve their lot. Partly because so many converts came from the depressed classes the missionaries were among the first to draw the Government’s attention to their plight and disabilities. In 1891, for example, the Madras Missionary Conference stimulated public discussion when they urged the Government of Madras to appoint a commission of inquiry into the condition of the pariah⁹⁸ population. In their petition they argued that for all intents and purposes slavery continued among pariahs and that these people faced almost insuperable obstacles in obtaining secure

94. See, for example, his well-known speech on “Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia” in Keshub Chunder Sen, *Lectures in India*, Calcutta 1954, pp. 1-36.

95. P. C. Mazoomdar, *The Faith and the Progress of the Brahmo Samaj*, Calcutta 1934, p. 101; *Calcutta Christian Observer*, Vol. 35, October 1866, pp. 457-8.

96. D. Kerr, *Mahatma Jotirao Phooley. Father of Our Social Revolution*, Bombay 1964, pp. 13-15, 72, 92, 125-7; A Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism. Competition and Collaboration in the later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 1968, p. 240.

97. Like Phooley, Malabari was educated in a mission school. When interviewed by one of the missionaries in about 1890 he stated that, next to his mother’s influence, the missionaries of the Irish Presbyterian Mission and especially Dr. Wilson had been the most formative influence on his life. [*Harvest Field*, Vol. II, 1890-91, pp. 329-332]. See also C. H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton 1964, p. 149.

98. “The Pariahs or outcaste tribes . . . call themselves pariahs in Tamil, Malas in Telugu, Holia in Canarese, Poliyar in Malayam and Dheda in Mahratti . . . they are everywhere the menial servants of the country.” *Census Report*, 1881.

house sites, land and even elementary education.⁹⁹ Missionary work among these and other outcastes greatly impressed some Hindu observers and fear of losing large numbers to Christianity spurred educated Hindus into increased activity.¹⁰⁰ For example, Lala Lajpat Rai, the Arya and nationalist leader, declared in a public speech in about 1912 that "the possibility of losing the untouchables has shaken the intelligent section of the Hindu community to its very depths" and he went on to urge Hindus to forestall the movement towards Christianity by improving the condition of these classes.¹⁰¹

Apart from their effect in stimulating Hindu movements for reform of the caste system the missionaries were also, more indirectly, undermining the effectiveness of caste sanctions and weakening the power and hold of caste over individuals. The effect of the new British legal system in undermining the authority of caste councils, in weakening their ability to impose sanctions and in constantly reminding the people that "civil law is higher than caste law" has been referred to by Ghurye.¹⁰² But behind this legal system, expanding its usage and application, was the constant pressure of missionary as well as other activity. Through their petitions and agitation the missionaries played a part in the more precise formulation of law affecting and undermining the authority of caste and, by using the law courts, they frequently forced the authorities to put the new system of equality before the law into operation.

The role of missionaries in bringing into operation the Caste Disabilities Removal Act (Act XXI of 1850) has already been noted

99. For this petition and other documents on the pariah question, see Madras Record Office, M/SS G. O. 1010-1010A, Revenue Department, 30 September 1892. See also *Times*, 13 July 1891; *Madras Times*, 7 April 1891; *Madras Mail*, 7 April 1891, 1, 6 June 1891, 6 June 1892, 18 November 1892; *Report of the Third Decennial Missionary Conference held at Bombay, 1892-93*, Vol. II, pp. 544-8, 574-5.

100. C. V. Chintamani (ed.), *Indian Social Reform*, Madras 1901, Part I, pp. 327-8; A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay 1966, pp. 266-7; Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, p. 173.

101. L. Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj: An Account of its Origins, Doctrines and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder*, London 1915, p. 228.

102. G. S. Ghurye, *Caste, Class and Occupation*, Bombay 1961, pp. 180-182, 188-9.

by Dr. M. M. Ali.¹⁰³ This legislation overrode the authority of caste councils by giving converts to Christianity and other non-Hindu religions the right to inherit their ancestral property. Then again, by bringing various cases of persecution before the law courts and in winning their case, the missionaries and Christian converts were also in other ways undermining the authority and effectiveness of caste sanctions. In Madras and Travancore, for example, the missionaries were particularly active in establishing, in defiance of caste feeling and regulations, the right of shanars, pariahs and Christian converts to the use of public roads and highways.¹⁰⁴ In Travancore, after serious disturbances, they also succeeded in establishing the legal right of shanar women to change their traditional dress by covering the upper part of their bodies.¹⁰⁵ But perhaps even more important than these triumphs was the success of the missionary campaign against caste practice and feeling which forbade certain castes from making use of public wells.

The water question was probably one of the most frequent causes of conflict between Hindus and Christians¹⁰⁶ and was particularly acute in the drier parts of India (such as the Punjab and parts of Mysore) where converts, increasing in numbers and moving out beyond the mission compounds, did not have easy access to an alternative source of supply other than wells already used by caste Hindus. One of the most important of these disputes occurred in Ahmedabad in the Bombay Presidency in 1859.¹⁰⁷ Initially, the

103. *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities*, Chapter VI, pp. 117-132.

104. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, pp. 335, 338.

105. Hardgrave, "The Breast-Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. V, No. 2, June 1968, pp. 171-187; J. Mullens, *A Brief Review of Ten Years Missionary Labour in India*, London 1963, pp. 106-7.

106. *Harvest Field*, Vol. V, August 1893, p. 42. In some cases Hindus regarded even the approach of an outcaste to water as sufficient to cause contamination [J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India, Its Nature, Function and Origin*, 3rd ed., Oxford 1961, p. 196].

107. L. Bissell, "Rights of Native Christians", *Indian Evangelical Review*, Vol. II, July 1874, pp. 25-33; J. Hudson, "Christians and the Public Wells", *Harvest Field*, Vol. IV, April 1893, pp. 43-44; G. W. Sawday, "Native Christians and Public Wells",

Christians lived on the mission compound and used its water supply, but as their numbers increased and they began to live in distant parts of the city they found it necessary to use the public reservoirs near their houses. In September 1859, after careful consideration, the Christians, originally of high caste, commenced to take water from one of the public reservoirs used by Hindus. This act was noticed and the reservoir was abandoned by the people. They petitioned the local magistrate, Mr. Tyler, asking him to forbid converts from using the public water arguing that "our tradition teaches us that low caste persons by touching our water pollute it and us." The magistrate replied that the Christians were entitled to use public wells, but said he would forward the petition to the Bombay Government. Although the Governor-in-Council upheld the magistrate's decision the trouble continued and the Hindus petitioned the Bombay Government a second time asking it to set aside separate reservoirs for Christian converts. In their reply, closing the case, the Governor-in-Council declared that "Government never will admit that a tank is polluted by being used by Christian converts." This decision was subsequently upheld by the Secretary of State. As no distinction was made between Christians originally of different castes this meant that even those who before their conversion were denied the use of public wells now had this right and actually improved their legal status by becoming Christian. However, in spite of this ruling, which clarified the legal position of converts throughout British India, trouble continued. Disputes at Hoshiarpur in the Punjab in 1874, disputes over the right of Christians to dip their cups in the Krishna River in Madras Presidency and a dispute in Poona in 1880 were all decided in favour of Christian converts.¹⁰⁸

The position of Christians in Native States where British law was not in operation was less secure. In Mysore the occupation of a number of new mission stations in the 1880's and 1890's brought

Harvest Field, Vol. IV, Sept. 1893, pp. 83-4; J. Mullens, *A Brief Review of Ten Years Missionary Labour in India*, pp. 107-109; [M/SS] Bombay Missionary Conference Minutes, 7 Nov. 1859; [M/SS] United Theological College, Bangalore, Bangalore Missionary Conference Minutes, 3 July 1893.

108. *Harvest Field*, Vol. IV, April 1893, pp. 44-5. Bangalore Missionary Conference, Minutes, 3 July 1893.

the water question once again to the fore. In April 1886 brahmans at Sidenghatta attempted to prevent one of the Christian preachers (formerly a caste man) from using the public well. The case was considered by the Deputy Commissioner of the district who prohibited Christians from using the well. The missionaries of the Bangalore Missionary Conference petitioned the Dewan on behalf of Christians throughout the Province.¹⁰⁹ As a result, the Mysore Government not only restored to Christians at Sidenghatta the right of using the public well, but issued an important statement of principle in which it was stated that "It is repugnant to the policy of any enlightened government that change of religion should involve the forfeiture of any civil rights previously enjoyed."¹¹⁰ Thus, while the Mysore Government did not go so far as the Bombay authorities in that they stipulated that a change of religion could not be regarded as conferring any *new* civil rights, nevertheless their declaration contradicted orthodox tradition and practice in so far as a high caste convert could no longer lose his existing rights.

Finally, as Dr. Ali has already shown,¹¹¹ missionary activity and the spread of Christianity was slowly forcing Hindus to modify their attitude towards those expelled from caste and to frame new rules for the readmission of apostates. In Calcutta, in May 1851, for example, a great meeting of Hindus took place at the Oriental Seminary where leaders of the orthodox community clearly acknowledged the necessity of altering caste rules and proposed a mode of atonement far less painful and far simpler than that originally prescribed in the *Shastras*. The following year an organization called "the Society for the Deliverance of Hindu Apostates" was formed with the object of reintroducing into society "those young men who, by the evil counsels and wills of the missionaries, may become Christians" and subsequently, at a meeting, four out of six applicants for expiation were restored to caste. As the century progressed apostates appear to have been readmitted to Hinduism in

109. Bangalore Missionary Conference, 2 August, 4 October 1886, 3 July 1893.

110. Bangalore Missionary Conference, 2 August, 4 October 1886, 3 July 1893; *Harvest Field*, September 1892, pp. 84-89.

111. *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities*, pp. 94-100.

increasing numbers¹¹² and, in 1897, the National Social Conference meeting at Amorati recorded its "satisfaction" that "some two hundred converts to other faiths were received back into Hindu Society in the Punjab" during that year. The Conference recommended that Social Reform Associations should interest themselves in the subject "with a view to facilitate such readmissions in all instances where it is sincerely sought".¹¹³

V

As we have seen, the attitude of British and American Protestant missionaries towards caste within the Church had to some extent crystallized into a policy of widespread co-ordinated opposition by the middle of the Nineteenth Century. And while, in subsequent years, there was increasing disagreement over how to tackle the problem, the missionaries remained opposed in principle to caste among converts throughout the period. They were also extremely critical of caste as an institution among Hindus and do not appear to have greatly modified their attitude as the years progressed. Even the more outspoken advocates of a more sympathetic approach to Hinduism remained strongly opposed to caste as it stood, hoping either for an end to the system, or, for modifications which would have changed it almost out of recognition. Missionaries persisted in attempts to eliminate the influence of caste in their own and in Government institutions and practices and continued to campaign against various caste disabilities.

These conclusions may seem surprising in view of the fact that other studies have shown that Protestant missionary attitudes towards Hinduism in general (in contrast to their attitudes towards caste) became quite unmistakably more sympathetic as the period progressed. Why then did opposition to caste persist more strongly than opposition to Hinduism?

No doubt part of the answer lies in the fact that developments, such as an increasing knowledge and understanding, which appa-

rently encouraged greater sympathy for Hinduism failed to create a more sympathetic attitude towards caste. It may be true that, as their knowledge of caste was enlarged, the missionaries began to recognise more of its advantages; but, on the other hand, increased experience of caste among the depressed classes, far from creating more favourable attitudes, merely confirmed a conviction that caste fostered cruelty and oppression. Moreover, a longer and more mature experience of caste within the Christian Church did not in the least weaken the feeling that caste was incompatible with the Christian profession. While the stress the missionaries placed on particular objections to caste may have changed, no major developments occurred during the period 1850-1914 encouraging the adoption of a more sympathetic attitude towards caste either within or outside the Church. Outside the Church, for example, caste persisted as one of the most serious obstacles to the spread of Christianity; it still appeared to cause injustice and suffering, to conflict with the missionaries' concept of the place and freedom of the individual in society and to inhibit, in various ways, social, economic and political progress.

Secondly, the missionaries quite possibly remained more hostile towards caste than towards Hinduism partly because of developments in the attitude of the educated classes. As educated Hindus became increasingly defensive about the beauties and truth of Hinduism they became, on the whole, more critical of caste regulations. Hence, from a tactical point of view, the missionaries (even mindful of their influence over these classes) stood to gain by adopting similar attitudes—by becoming more tolerant in their approach to Hinduism, but, at the same time, remaining firm on the question of caste. While attacks on Hinduism undoubtedly created a great deal of resentment, the missionaries believed their assaults on caste were not nearly so unpopular and that their views on the subject were welcomed or even applauded by an increasing number of educated Hindus. The Rev. C. F. Andrews claimed, for example, that one of the things the educated classes admired most about the Christian Church was its opposition to caste and he described how on one occasion, when it was rumoured that the Bishop of Calcutta was intending to make a very slight concession to the caste spirit, "the leading Hindu papers spoke out with indignation at the very

112. *The Church Missionary Review*, Vol. LIX, September, 1908, pp. 518-19; *Harvest Field*, Vol. VII, July 1886, pp. 10-11.

113. C. V. Chintamani (ed.), *Indian Social Reform*, p. 373.

idea of this happening", while Hindu professors and others also joined in protests.¹¹⁴ Because of incidents such as these, the missionaries had at least some grounds for believing that, far from weakening their influence over the important educated classes, their campaign against caste strengthened their position and created more favourable attitudes towards Christianity.

The effect of the missionary assault on caste and of missionary activity in general on the caste system varied.

As a result of the growth of cities, the introduction of new methods of transport, overseas travel, the spread of education, the new system of equality before the law and other factors the caste system was becoming more flexible; attitude towards caste, especially among the educated classes was changing, the authority of caste councils was in some cases undermined and many caste observances were no longer performed with such regularity. As we have seen, the missionaries played a part in this process of social change. Their arguments and agitation against caste probably influenced Hindu reformers and stimulated a desire for change; they publicised the condition of the outcastes and, through their example, stimulated Hindu attempts to improve the lot of the pariahs and others. The missionaries also played a part in the more precise formulation of laws affecting caste and, by resorting to the law courts and winning their case, they helped to undermine the effectiveness of caste councils and weaken caste regulations such as those restricting the use of public highways and wells. Finally, by increasing the number of converts to Christianity, they exerted indirect pressure on Hindus forcing them to modify their attitude towards those expelled from caste and to frame new rules for the readmission of apostates.

But while the missionaries played a part in undermining particular caste observances, in making the system more flexible and in forcing it to change and readapt, they were probably not as successful as they wished in destroying caste consciousness and feeling. Hardgrave's study has shown that by providing an education and

by campaigning against disabilities affecting the nadars the missionaries encouraged a sense of caste solidarity among them and intensified inter-caste rivalry. It remains to be seen how far missionary activity affected the pariahs and other castes in a similar fashion.

114. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 187-88; *The East and the West*, Vol. I, July 1910, pp. 259-60.

The Poona Sarvajanic Sabha : The Early Phase (1870-1880)

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In the nineteenth century Bombay was, like Calcutta, a city of recent growth. Both cities were the creation of British rule. But, while Calcutta became the hub of Bengal, overshadowing all the other cities in the eastern presidency, Bombay never occupied the same pre-eminent position in the western presidency. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Calcutta was the capital not only of Bengal but of India as a whole. Bombay was the capital only of the western presidency and it had to share that honour with Poona, the old capital of the Peshwas. Calcutta, though the capital of India, was essentially a Bengali city and most of the important members of the aristocracy in Bengal—landed, commercial and intellectual—resided there. Bombay had no such distinctive character. It was of all Indian cities the most cosmopolitan. Both the eastern and western presidencies were composed of at least three or four distinct regions, each with its own separate language and traditions. Neither Calcutta nor Bombay could, therefore, become the focus of the territorial, linguistic and cultural loyalties of the entire presidency of which it happened to be the capital. But Calcutta had at least one advantage over Bombay : it belonged to Bengal proper and the Bengalis looked upon it as *their* city. Bombay did not belong even to a part of the western presidency and no linguistic group looked upon it as *their* city. What Calcutta was to the Bengalis, Poona was to the Maharashtrians, Ahmedabad to the Gujaratis and Karachi to the Sindhis. Except, perhaps, the Parsis no other people in the western presidency looked upon Bombay as *their* city. But the Parsis were a small community and, as they spoke Gujarati, they formed no separate linguistic group. Bombay was thus in the western presidency but not of it, or even of a part of it. 'The

position of Bombay', said a memorial of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha to the government in 1872, 'has been geographically and historically unique and isolated, so that notwithstanding the beneficial measures that have been introduced within the last fifty years, with a view to connect it physically, commercially, and intellectually with the great interior, the Island still preserves its separate and peculiar character.'¹ Bombay's large population, its immense wealth, its ever expanding trade and commerce, its lead in industrialization, and its position as a port, metropolis and university town gave it great influence and prestige. But in the intellectual, social and political life of western India Bombay never enjoyed the same unquestioned supremacy which Calcutta enjoyed in eastern India.

The greatest rival of Bombay in the western presidency in the nineteenth century, not in the commercial but in the cultural and political spheres, was Poona. There was—and still is—a marked difference in the character of the two towns. It was thus summed up in 1881 by a writer in the *Quarterly Review*: '... whilst Bombay is anglicized, Poona remains sullenly native and almost anti-English.'² The *Mahratta* of Poona not only approved of this remark, but also embellished it with its own comments. It wrote: '... have not many of the leading gentlemen of Bombay taken a peculiar fancy to trousers and boots; do not the streets of Bombay present the appearance more of an English town than a native one; do we not observe that in Bombay there is less of that dash and pluck than there is in Poona; does not Bombay almost worship Englishmen? In short, in eating, drinking, living, playing and in almost every other thing Bombay shows more of an English town than Poona does.' The *Mahratta* maintained that, though Poona had remained 'sullenly native', it had great progress so far as 'education, mode of living and thought, and lastly political ambition' were concerned. 'Poona', said the paper, 'proportionately claims as many graduates, as many political thinkers, nay more, as many writers, as many

1. Memorial of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha to the government of Bombay, dated 28 July 1872, demanding an equitable representation in the local legislative council for the various regions and interests in the presidency and objecting to the practice of generally nominating men from Bombay city as additional members of the council. *Native Opinion*, 18 August 1872.

2. 'Sir Richard Temple's India in 1880', *Quarterly Review*, July 1881, p. 68.

speakers, as many authors and everything as many as Bombay does; and we are certainly proud that while this capital of the Western Presidency has availed itself of every opportunity of gaining a step in the advance, it has not receded—if not actually advanced—a single step in patriotism. The instinct of nationality, the pluck of the Mahratta, the zeal of the Hindoo, the intelligence of the Brahmin, the self-esteem of the individual and lastly the fire of patriotism are all our own. Would that we do not surrender to the influence of anglicization; would that the solemn scenery of the Deccan that exercises a healthy influence on our patriotism is not changed; would that we continue to make a progress in political thought without giving even an inch of what we proudly call our own; would that Poona continues "sullenly native" in the sense in which we understand it.'³

Poona was a Maratha city *par excellence*, and the Marathas were one of the great bugbears of the British in India. A hardy, intelligent and proud people, the Marathas had a highly developed sense of freedom and patriotism. Warren Hastings had noted in 1784: '... the Marattas possess alone, of all the people of Hindostan and Deccan, a principle of national attachment, which is strongly impressed on the minds of all individuals of the nation, and would probably unite their chiefs as in one common cause, if any great danger were to threaten the general state.'⁴ The proud memories of the valour of Shivaji and the glorious days of the Maratha empire continued to haunt the city of Poona even after the defeat of the last of the Peshwas, Baji Rao II, at the hands of the British in June 1818. In 1860, when the proposal to make Poona the capital of the western presidency was being discussed, the *Bombay Times and Standard*, then edited by Robert Knight, remarked: 'There are special grounds of objection to making the Peishwa's capital the seat of Government in Western India. Traditions are slow in dying out of any people, and the glory of the old Maratha empire survives in the memory of Maharashtra to this hour. ... Our rule is popular almost in no part of India, and the extent to which the movement

3. *Mahratta*, 21 August 1881.

4. G. W. Forrest (ed.), *Selections from the State Papers of the Governors-General of India: Warren Hastings* (1910), Vol. II, p. 54.

in the North-West [in 1857-8] was sympathized with throughout the Deccan, will hardly be credited when it comes to be known. One vast conspiracy to overthrow our rule bound together all classes above the Ghats, and the reign of a new Peishwa in Poona, was the fond dream of half Southern India. True policy suggests that instead of raising the Maratha capital into importance, the focus, as it is, of Brahminism and disaffection—we should allow it to sink into insignificance, and if possible starve the traditions associated therewith.⁵

The *Bombay Times and Standard* was faithfully reflecting the deep-rooted apprehension and antipathy with which most Britons viewed Poona. It was the focus of Maratha patriotism and a centre of Brahmanical influence. The Maratha Brahmans, particularly those of the Chitpavan variety, who dominated Poona, were considered by the British to be ambitious, intriguing and incurably hostile to the *raj*. Captain James Grant Duff had written in 1819 that they were 'generally discontented, and only restrained by fear from being treasonable and treacherous'.⁶ Sixty years later Richard Temple, then governor of Bombay, remarked: '... never have I known in India a national and political ambition, so continuous, so enduring, so far reaching, so utterly impossible for us to satisfy, as that of the Brahmans of Western India.... They think that as the same mountains and fastnesses still stand to favour uprisings, and the same climatic conditions still exist to sustain martial qualities of a certain sort—so the Hindoo polity, perhaps without the Hindoo religion, will one day reassert itself over the white conquest.'⁷

How the spirit of Poona differed from that of Bombay is exemplified by an episode in 1883. In the July of that year the *Indu Prakash*, the famous Anglo-Marathi weekly of Bombay, wrote that those Indians who dreamt of the period when their country would be free and self-governing indulged in a speculation which was as wild

5. *Bombay Times and Standard*, 17 October 1860.

6. Quoted in Mountstuart Elphinstone, *Report on the Territories Conquered from the Paishwa submitted to the Supreme Government of British India* (1821). p. 8.

7. Temple to Lytton, 9 July 1879, Temple Collection, MSS. Eur. F. 86/5, India Office Library.

as it was unprofitable, and that given a good and impartial rule, it did not matter whether that rule was foreign or native.⁸ This elicited an angry rejoinder from 'A Maratha Brahmin', obviously of Poona, who wrote to the editor of the *Indu Prakash* that the latter's remark had 'struck many of us here in the Deccan with surprise' and that 'no public writer in the Deccan will make it even in a fourth rate paper'. He asserted that the glorious traditions and history of their country might be forgotten 'in the hybrid and *bania* atmosphere of Bombay', but they were still remembered in the Deccan and 'there are among us men, who in their boyhood breathed the free air of national independence'. The correspondent added that the people of India were 'not such slavish creatures' as to accept the 'most untrue and unnatural dictum' that good government was preferable to self-government, and he quoted approvingly the remark of a writer in a recent issue of the *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha* to the effect that though the aegis of British rule was a necessity for the present, a nation of 250 millions could never be permanently held down by sheer force, and sooner or later in God's providence and under the encouragement of British example and discipline, the people of India must rise to the status of a self-governed community and learn to control their own affairs. A people who, the correspondent maintained, had produced Janak, Ramchandra, Shivaji, Mahadji, Madhav Rao and Fadnavis could not be said to be wanting in the art of government and in men able to govern and guide the destinies of a free and independent nation. He concluded by saying: 'All men are born free, but a people, who, at a given time and place, happens to possess some advantage in energy, organization, honour, etc., over other races, becomes for the time being and only while the advantage lasts, a dominant and ruling race. The people of this country had their days of supremacy and dominance, not many years hence, and the torch of freedom, though it now glimmers before the dawn of superior light, is most certainly destined, under rule of a people pre-eminent for the love of, and sympathy with, freedom, to revive and shed a glorious lustre over the land.'⁹

8. *Indu Prakash*, 23 July 1883.

9. *Ibid.*, 30 July 1883.

Poona was among the last of the British conquests in India. And although defeated, it had refused to surrender to the victor its unconquerable will. Its elite, the Chitpavan community, was marked for its manliness, love of freedom, pride in its past and faith in its future. Richard Temple noted in 1879: 'Like as the Mahrattas under Brahminical guidance once beat the Mahomedan conquerors bit by bit, inch by inch, out of the Deccan, so the Chitpawans imagine that some day more or less remote, the British shall be made to retire into that darkness where the Moghuls have retired. Any fine morning an observant visitor may ride through the streets of Poona and mark the scowl with which so many persons regard the stranger. . . . What would happen if British Rule were to be blown into the "air", is a question which I know constantly occurs to the Native mind. Most Natives when this question crops up feel the answer to be so hopeless, that they turn from it in dismay, and return to acquiescence in the present order of things. Some Natives think otherwise, however, and are not afraid to face that question, thinking that they could manage India quite well without the British and could organize states and confederacies just as they did 150 years ago. And these Natives are the Brahmins of Western India, especially the "Concanust" Brahmins'¹⁰

Bombay had the advantage of wealth and westernization over Poona. But, while Bombay, with its heterogeneous population, found it difficult to act promptly, unitedly and effectively in matters political, Poona, with its compact Hindu population led by the Brahmins, suffered from no such drawback. Moreover, Poona sent out its educated young men into offices everywhere throughout western and central India, including the princely states. Poona thus yielded greater influence in the interior than Bombay ever did. It was, however, not until the 1870s that Poona really made use of its advantageous position and established itself as a centre of constitutional agitation in the western presidency, out-rivalling even Bombay. By the 1870s Poona had not only caught up with Bombay in the fields of English education and journalistic activity, its brain drain had also been to some extent checked, thanks partly to the anti-Maratha-Brahman policy adopted by the Bombay government

10. Temple to Lytton, 9 July 1879, MSS. Eur. F. 86/5.

regarding employment in the public services, especially after the revolt of 1857. More and more of Poona's fast multiplying population of English-educated young men were now forced to stay at home and take to independent professions such as journalism, law and teaching. These men contributed to the growth of public life—and of discontent—in Poona.

Poona was the first city in western India to follow the lead of the British Indian Association of Calcutta, established in 1851. A few young men there who had 'received a liberal education prevailed upon the local gentry to take advantage of the ensuing revision of the Company's charter in order to ventilate their grievances by sending 'a mission' to Britain.¹¹ After a few preliminary meetings held in January 1852, a society called the Deccan Association was formed on 1 February 1852.¹² Its affairs were to be managed by an elected committee of fifteen. Yashwantrao Madhav Rastia was appointed secretary of the Association and Gopalrao Hari Desmukh its assistant secretary. Its membership was open to those who subscribed Rs. 20 or more towards a fund 'for the purpose of meeting the expenses of a mission to England, and a petition to the British Parliament, praying for the redress of certain grievances, to be presented at the ensuing Charter discussion.¹³ By the end of March 1852 about Rs. 10,000 had been collected.¹⁴ Correspondence was opened with the British Indian Association of Calcutta and with prominent 'sirdars, jagheerdars and merchants in the Deccan and Konkan'.¹⁵ A 'List of the Grievances and Wants of the Deccan' was drawn up which was to form the basis of the proposed petition to Parliament.¹⁶ The Association was to demand security of land tenures, cheap and speedy justice, the abolition of the salt tax, the equalization of customs and duties on exports and imports, increased expenditure on education and public works, the prevention of

11. *Bombay Telegraph and Courier*, 26 February and 20 March 1852.

12. *Proceedings of the Madras Branch of the British India Association and of the Deccan Association* (1852), pp. 12-15.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

'the drain' of Indian capital to Britain, preference to educated Indians in public employment, 'no less than half of situations now held exclusively by Europeans to be held by natives', and 'an equal number of natives with Europeans . . . to have seats in the Legislative Council of India'.¹⁷ But the Poona Deccan Association did not live long to send a mission or even a petition to Britain. If the newspapers are to be believed, the local British officials nipped it in the bud by frightening the *sardars* and by removing the two most active English-educated members of the Association from Poona by offering them lucrative jobs elsewhere.¹⁸

Poona made another attempt at political organization in 1867. The stimulus for this latest attempt was obviously provided by the recent establishment of the East India Association in London. Poona once again stole a march over Bombay and in the spring of 1867—more than six months before the resuscitation of the Bombay Association—organized a political body called the Poona Association or (in Marathi) the Poona Sarvajani Sabha.¹⁹ The avowed objects of the Association were: to communicate to the government the wishes and opinions of the people regarding the laws passed or proposed to be passed by the government; to suggest ways and means of improving the functioning of the local municipality; to interpret the acts and policies of the authorities to the public; to promote amity and understanding between the rulers and the ruled; and to attend to various other matters of public interest.²⁰ The office-bearers of the Association were: Ramchandra Ganesh Natu, president; Vasudev Ramchandra Dhamdhare and Baburao Krishna Gokhale, vice-presidents; Kashinath Parashuram Gadgil and Kashinath Govinda Natu, secretaries for work in English; Kashinath Trimbak Khare and Naro Appaji Godbole, secretaries for the work in Marathi; and Vishnudas Harkrishnadas, treasurer.²¹ Most of the 50-odd members of the Association, representing various castes,

17. *Ibid.*

18. See *Prabhakar*, 10 October 1852, cited in *Bombay Gazette*, 16 October 1852, and letter from 'N' to the editor, *Bombay Gazette*, 24 November 1852.

19. *Native Opinion*, 21 April and 12 May 1867.

20. *Poona Association hanje Punyanti Sarvajani Sabha hya Sabheche Niyam* (1867), pp. 4-5.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

creeds and professions, belonged to Poona, though a few also came from other places such as Bombay, Kalyan, Karhad and Nagpur.²² Among them we find the names of such prominent public figures as Gopalrao Hari Desmukh and Kashinath Balakrishna Marathe. Members of the Association were required to pay a monthly subscription of 1 rupee, 8 annas, or four annas, and were accordingly divided into three different categories.

The Poona Association did not thrive. Addressing a meeting of the Association early in 1868 on the subject of the reform of the Poona municipality, Baburao Krishna Gokhale remarked that, though the Association had done some useful work in the beginning, it had been so inactive 'during the last three or four months' that people had begun to enquire whether it was alive or dead.²³ He hailed the occasion as marking the revival of the Association. But the attempt to revive the Poona Association seems to have failed. Not only do we have no information about the activity of the Association in the months which followed, a report of the managing committee of the Bombay Association, dated 26 June 1869, even tells us that 'several native gentlemen of Poona have joined the Bombay Association'.²⁴ This would suggest that by the middle of 1869 the Poona Association was already dead.

Undaunted by their repeated failures, the public men of Poona soon made a fresh attempt to organize a political association. On 2 April 1870 they launched the Poona Sarvajani Sabha. The Sabha was intended to be 'a mediating body [between the government and the people] which may afford to the latter facilities for knowing the real intention and objects of Government as well as adequate means for securing their rights, by making a true representation of the real circumstances in which they are placed'.²⁵ There was nothing unusual in the declared objective of the Sabha, but the basis of its organization was rather novel and different from

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

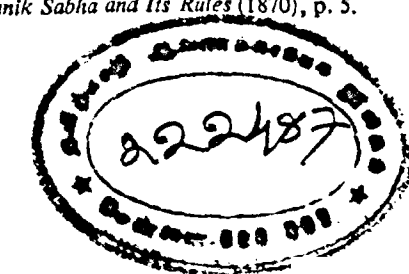
23. *Poona Association. Sabhepudhe Ra. Baba Gokhale Vachlela. Pune Yethil Municipalitychya Sudharanukevishayi Suchana* (1868), p. 1.

24. *Minutes of Proceedings of the First Annual General Meeting of the Bombay Association . . .* (1869), p. 28.

25. *The Constitution of the Poona Sarvajani Sabha and Its Rules* (1870), p. 5.



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that of the other existing political associations in India. In order to become a member of the Sabha a person was required to produce a *mukhtiarnama* (power of attorney) signed by at least fifty adults, authorizing him to speak and act on their behalf in all public matters.²⁶ An attempt was thus made to give the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha a representative character and to ensure that the members of the Sabha enjoyed the confidence of the people. Within four months of its launching the Sabha had about 100 members who had acquired *mukhtiarnamas* from about 7,000 people.²⁷ By June 1871 the number of the members of the Sabha had risen to about 140 and that of their constituents to about 17,000.²⁸ Each member of the Sabha was also required to take an oath that he would impartially and according to the best of his judgement and abilities

26. *Ibid.*, p. 6. How the Sabha came to adopt this novel mode of membership is explained by the *Bombay Star of India*, 9 May 1871, deriving its information from an article published in the *Indu Prakash* in the early part of the same year: '... the cause of its [Sabha's] origin was the management of the fund, we believe about Rs. 20,000, which the Government is in the habit of annually granting to the Parvati temple. Certain trustees were appointed to receive the money and manage its distribution. But some domestic quarrels between the son and the grandson of one of the principal trustees having broken out, the funds were mismanaged.... The Hindu residents of Poona became clamorous about this mismanagement, and the more earnest of them wished to adopt some method by which redress could be obtained.... They resolved that a representation of their grievances should be made to the Government, and in order to make the petition represent the opinions of the whole community they adopted the following method for doing so. They set to work by inducing each caste to assemble and nominate some of its members as its representatives. Having succeeded in obtaining their nominees, they gave a legal form to the whole of the proceedings which might be deemed necessary, by granting to their representatives powers of attorney, to act on behalf of the community, on eight-rupee stamp papers. When these documents were ready they were circulated for the signatures of the adult male members of the respective castes. But it occurred to the promoters of this scheme, whether other subjects besides that one which was the immediate cause of the Sabha's formation, should not be taken into consideration at the same time as the matters relating to the Parvati grievance. ... The end of these movements has been the formation of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha....' See also V. M. Potdar, 'The History of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha', the *Jubilee Number of the Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*, April 1920, pp. 68-75.

27. *Pune yethil Sarvajanik Sabhechi Rachana va Niyam* (18 July 1870), pp. 1-5.

28. *The Constitution of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and Its Rules* (25 June 1871), pp. 1-5.

perform the duties of the Sabha which might be assigned to him.²⁹

According to its constitution the Sabha was to take up the following subjects: all bills of regulations and acts published in the government gazette; all bills of regulations, acts, circulars and rules which were in force or which might come into force; all such regulations, acts, circulars or rules as the passing of which was essential to the welfare of the people; the operations of the municipalities; the management of *devsthans* (religious endowments); and all matters connected with the public weal. The Sabha was debarred by its constitution from taking up any matter involving the interest or injury of any individual or individuals, or any religious subjects or disputes. To defray the expenses of the Sabha each member was required to pay annually, on an average, his one day's income. The affairs of the Sabha were to be managed by an elected committee. A meeting of all the constituents of the Sabha, that is the electors of *mukhtiaris*, was to be held annually.³⁰

An examination of the available lists of members and office-bearers of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha during the first ten years of its existence reveals some interesting facts.³¹ The Sabha represented the wealth and intelligence of the local community. It was composed of *sardars*, landholders, businessmen, retired government servants, lawyers and teachers. Most of the members of the Sabha were Hindus. This was to be expected, for the Hindus formed the bulk of the local population. But the Sabha also had a fair number of Parsi, Moslem and Christian members. Of the Hindu members of the Sabha, a vast majority were Brahmans. This, too, was to be expected, for the Brahmans were the traditional as well as the modern elite of Poona and of the Deccan generally. The president and vice-presidents of the Sabha were invariably first-class chiefs, such as those of Aundh, Akalkot, Jamkhindi, Jat, Karandawad and Sangli. But these appear to have been mere figure-heads. The managing committee of the Sabha was dominat-

29. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

31. See *The Constitution of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and Its Rules* (1870, 1871 and 1874) and the *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*, July 1878-April 1880.

ed by retired government servants and lawyers. Its most active members were G. V. Joshi, S. H. Sathe and S. H. Chiplonkar.

During the first two years of its existence the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha 'discussed a variety of subjects, most of them of a local character.'³² Representations were made to the various authorities on such matters as the procedure for the recovery of costs in revenue cases, the reduction of liquor shops in the city of Poona, the management of the Parvati temple endowment, the application of the funds contributed by the Deccan chiefs in honour of the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh for the establishment of a law class in Poona, the unsatisfactory state of the accounts of the David Sassoon poor asylum of Poona and of the Alundi municipality, the desirability of opening a vernacular school in the Poona cantonment, the recent rise in taxation, the desirability of appointing an Indian judge to the bench of the high court of Bombay, the necessity of publishing the texts of official bills and debates in the legislative councils in the vernaculars; collisions between European soldiers and Indians; and the necessity of some rules for regulating the relations between Indian chiefs and their subjects and the chiefs and the British government.³³

The arrival in Poona in November 1871 of Mahdev Govinda Ranade, then a subordinate judge, appears to have infused new life and vigour into the Sabha. Ranade's is probably the greatest name in the history of India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He was a versatile man—a scholar, a judge, an educationist, a religious and social reformer, an economist and a politician. One of the earliest and most illustrious products of the Bombay University, Ranade had already made his mark in Bombay as a religious and social reformer. He had also been an active member of the Bombay Association and of the Bombay Branch of the East India Association. In August 1871 he had projected a new political body in Bombay, called the 'Town Association.'³⁴ He was an

32. See the 'Annual Report of the Managing Committee of the Poonah Sarvajanik Sabha for 1794 (Shake or Deccan era)', *Native Opinion*, 11 May 1873.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Hindu Reformer*, cited in *Times of India*, 17 August 1871; also *Bombay Gazette*, 17 August 1871.

indefatigable worker, a clear thinker, a prolific writer, a compelling orator, and, above all, a great patriot. Earnest and erudite, a visionary who did not lack a sense of realism, a traditionalist in outward appearance but at heart a great modernizer, Ranade was soon to establish himself as the leading moderate and liberal thinker of his time in India. Ranade was a government servant, but he took a keen interest in public affairs. Though he was hardly thirty years of age when he arrived in Poona late in 1871, Ranade soon became the mentor of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha.

While Ranade was the brain behind the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, its heart and soul was Ganesh Vasudev Joshi, the real founder of the Sabha and its secretary for many years. Joshi was a *vakil* (pleader) of the local court. He was not very highly educated, but he was a born agitator and leader. Like the clothes which he always put on, Joshi was home-spun. The devotion and zeal with which he exerted himself in behalf of the Sabha earned him the sobriquet of the '*Sarvajanik Kaka*' ('Uncle of the People'). On the death of Joshi in 1880, Shishir Kumar Ghose, the editor of the Calcutta *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, recalled an episode which bears testimony to the fact that the welfare of his country was the one consuming passion of Joshi's life. In the autumn of 1877 Ghose had paid a visit to Poona and stayed with Joshi. 'When leaving that historical city', Ghose recalled three years later, 'Mr. Joshi took hold of our arm and enquired: "You are going away; but tell me, before you go, what will become of India?" When he told this, tears began to trickle down his wrinkled cheeks. What could we say in reply? The destiny of India was not in our keeping and we could not, therefore, give satisfactory reply to his earnest query. "What will become of India?" and this thought oppressed him all the days of his life.'³⁵ Joshi evolved a new style of political agitation which was a curious amalgam of the old and the new, of the indigenous and the foreign, and was later followed by many other Maratha politicians, notably Tilak. Ranade and Joshi combined to build the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha into one of the foremost political associations in India. In December 1873, the *Indian Statesman* of Bombay wrote: 'The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha is the leading

35. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 August 1880.

Association of the progressive party in Western India, and the secretaries to Government have, we should think, painful recollections of its interminable memorials on every subject that could be made an excuse of asserting rights or remonstrating against wrongs. No *koonbee* [peasant] can have a grievance against Government and want the championship of the great Sabha.³⁶

But the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha did not content itself with memorializing the authorities. It had already taken the lead in organizing a *swadeshi* movement in the Deccan. Societies for 'the revival and enouragement of native arts and industries' were established in several towns, whose members took an oath not to use European articles where the corresponding indigenous ones could be procured without any marked difference of price.³⁷ Some enthusiastic members of these societies, of whom Joshi was one, even 'vowed not to use any foreign-manufactured article under any conditions.'³⁸ Shops upon the co-operative or joint-stock principle were opened in many towns to sell indigenous goods. The manufacture of simple articles like ink, candles, soap, etc., was encouraged. Joshi and his friends made excellent use of lectures and songs to spread the message of *Swadeshi* among the people.³⁹ In 1872—and again in 1876-8—the Sabha took an active interest in organizing famine relief in the Deccan and won the approbation of both the people and the government.⁴⁰ In 1872 the Sabha appointed a sub-committee of its members to conduct an elaborate inquiry into the condition of the agricultural classes in the Deccan with a view to enlighten the parliamentary committee on Indian finance on the subject. Agents of the Sabha travelled in the interior, interviewed people and collected a great deal of information regarding prices, wages, indebtedness, the pressure of land revenue and of increased local and central taxation, and the working of the forest laws, etc. This information was sifted and analysed by the sub-committee of the

36. *Indian Statesman*, 10 December 1873.

37. See letter of 'M. G. R.' (M. G. Ranade?) to the editor, *Times of India*, 20 October 1875, giving history of the movement since 1872.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Dnyan Prakash*, cited in *Indian Statesman*, 21 May 1873; also *Times of India*, 29 October 1873.

40. *Times of India*, 2 December 1876.

Sabha and the results were published as a pamphlet,⁴¹ which, according to the *Times of India*, bore the 'impress of veracity and sound judgement.'⁴² In 1873 the Sabha combined with the Bombay Association in sending Naoroji Fardunji to London as their delegate to give evidence before the parliamentary committee on Indian finance.⁴³ Like many other important political associations in India, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha conveyed in 1872 its thanks to Henry Fawcett, M. P., for his services to India.⁴⁴ In 1874 the Sabha raised funds for the relief of the then famine-stricken population of Bengal.⁴⁵ In 1875 the Sabha submitted a petition to the House of Commons, signed by 21,713 persons, demanding the direct representation of India in Parliament. The petition complained of the scant attention paid to India by Parliament and of the prevalence therein of one-sided official views on Indian questions. It referred to the presence in the French and Portuguese assemblies of representatives from their respective possessions in India, and demanded that 16 persons from British India (4 each from Bengal, Bombay and Madras, and 2 each from the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab), elected by those who paid at least Rs. 50 per year in direct taxes, should sit in Parliament.⁴⁶

The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha did much to stimulate political activity in western India. Thanks to the example and exertions of the Sabha, political associations grew up in many places in the presidency, especially in the Deccan. These associations were closely modelled on the Sabha and maintained regular contact with it. The leaders of the Sabha made a systematic and extensive use of the platform in order to arouse patriotic feelings among the masses. Not only did they themselves travel up and down the country addressing public gatherings, they also secured the services

41. *Report from the Sub-Committee of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, appointed to collect information to be laid before the East Indian Finance Committee on matters relating to India* (1873). A copy of this now rare pamphlet is available in the *Temple Collection* (MSS. Eur. 86/214) in the India Office Library.

42. *Times of India*, 14 November 1873.

43. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1873.

44. *Ibid.*, 20 December 1872.

45. *Ibid.*, 30 March 1874.

46. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1875.

of educated men for the purpose of preaching patriotism to the masses at street corners and market places. These lectures invariably dealt with the fallen condition of the motherland and the means to ameliorate it. They were often accompanied with *kirtans* (songs) specially composed for the occasion.⁴⁷ In July 1878 the Sabha launched its *Quarterly Journal* which published the proceedings of the Sabha and contained ably written articles—many of them from the pen of Ranade—on the more important political, social and economic issues of the day, especially those 'upon which public opinion has to be created and formed before any formal action can be taken in respect of them by the Sabha.'⁴⁸

From 1876 on the Sabha took an active interest in organizing arbitration courts (*nyaya sabhas*) in the Deccan for the private settlement of civil disputes without having recourse to the ordinary courts of justice.⁴⁹ The object of the Sabha in organizing these arbitration courts was two-fold: to revive the ancient institution of the *panchayat*, and to curb the growing evil of expensive and often ruinous litigation. The lead given by the Sabha was followed by its branch and affiliated associations in the interior and arbitration courts were established at many places in the Deccan, but they do not appear to have been a great success.

As a political association in the ancient capital of the Peshwas and conducted with energy and ability by the Maratha Brahmans, the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha had always been suspect in the eyes of many Anglo-Indians. The leading part played by the Sabha in the agitation against the deposition of Gaikwar Malharrao and the threatened annexation of Baroda in 1875 served to heighten the latter's suspicion. Anglo-Indian papers accused the Sabha of disaffection and suggested that the government should authorize an inquiry into its working. What particularly worried them about the Sabha was its 'representative' character and its claim to speak on behalf of the people of the Deccan. The *Englishman*, for example, wrote: 'It is not too much to say that this body [the Poona Sarva-

47. *Dnyan Prakash*, cited in *Indian Statesman*, 21 May 1873.

48. 'Notice to Subscribers', *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha*, July 1878.

49. *Poona Observer*, 4 March 1876.

janik Sabha], backed by its branches or affiliated societies at Sholapoor and other stations, threatens to grow into an *imperium in imperio* in the Deccan—a power whose interests are not necessarily identical with those of the responsible administrators, and whose action is sometimes antagonistic to them . . . [the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha] boasts that each of its members represents the votes, and is entitled to interpret the political wishes and views of two thousand men . . . a society thus constituted would exercise immense weight with a section of the press in England. That influence would act primarily on the Government here, and would prove capable of being held *in terrorem* over a weak or tottering Viceroy . . . the Government lies under a very heavy responsibility to prevent such societies from growing into a danger to the State. Popular representation is a sharp weapon, and a very perilous one to play with. It is well to realize that we are not yet prepared to govern India by means of popular representation, and that anything which approaches to be a *bona fide* representative body will necessarily exercise a power incompatible with the existing system of administration. If a society could carry out the programme above indicated, and could state with truth that such of its members represented a certain number of thousands of votes, and that they were pretty fairly drawn from the different districts of a province, it would very soon begin to claim and, unless watched, would practically exercise, the weight of a local Parliament. Government would find it very difficult to disregard its wishes. We would commend to the Viceroy the expediency of ascertaining to what extent such societies have already sprung up, especially in Western India; on what subjects they have already volunteered their advice; and what results have followed these expressions of their wishes. It is a most delicate and difficult task to suggest a repressive policy as regards popular representation. But we ought not to shrink from the fact that while in England the whole framework of Government is built upon such representation, it here depends, not on the will of the people, but upon the deliberate judgement of the governing body. If the peril has not been exaggerated to us, perhaps a practicable line might be drawn between societies representing individual localities, or individual castes or sections of the community and societies, of the

more ambitious sort, which claim to represent the whole community or large areas, or territorial entities.⁵⁰

The government increased its surveillance on the Sabha and its leaders, and though it could not, despite its best efforts, discover even a 'shred of positive evidence which connected them with any treasonable activity, it continued to regard them with the deepest suspicion. In 1878 two prominent members of the Bombay government, L. R. Ashburner and James Gibbs, in their confidential minutes, described the Sabha as 'a seditious association.'⁵¹ Believing that Ranade was the master-mind behind the Sabha, the Bombay government, under Richard Temple, removed him early in 1878 from Poona to Nasik, and later from Nasik to Dhulia, where, it was hoped his 'pernicious influence upon his fellow-countrymen' would have less scope.⁵² In 1880 Bombay officials blocked successfully the promotion of Ranade to a judgeship, despite his recognized abilities and the favourable recommendation of the chief justice, on the grounds of his connexion with the Sabha and his 'strong patriotic, national feeling.'⁵³ 'The disloyalty of this gentleman', wrote Ashburner, 'has for some years been a matter of public notoriety.'⁵⁴ And E. W. Ravenscroft, another member of the Bombay council, remarked that Ranade was 'in the Deccan, what Mr. Parnell is in Ireland, an ardent Home Ruler.'⁵⁵ The activities of a 'Maratha Robin Hood'—Vasudev Balwant Fadke—in the Deccan in 1879 provided the enemies of the Sabha with another

50. *Englishman*, 18 May 1875.

51. Ashburner's minute was in connexion with the proposed Vernacular Press Act and was later published. See *Copy of Correspondance between the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India on the subject of Act No. IX of 1878, 'An Act for the Better Control of Publications in Oriental Languages,'* C. 2040, 1878, p. 58 Gibbs's minute dealt with the origin of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha and the history of its promoters and leading supporters. It was considered by Temple to be of such a strictly confidential character that it was not allowed to be placed on record in the secretariat. Only extracts from this minute are available in 'Appointment of a Native of India to the Joint Judgeship of Nassick', Home, Judicial, August 1880, Nos. 203-5, A., National Archives of India.

52. Home Judicial, August 1880. Nos. 203-5, A.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

opportunity to impugn its loyalty. The leaders of the Sabha knew that they were disliked and distrusted by many Anglo-Indians, but they continued to perform their patriotic duties energetically, though cautiously. They were convinced that their proceedings were useful and perfectly legitimate and that they were so regarded not only by their own countrymen, but also by a few liberal-minded Anglo-Indians such as Professor William Wordsworth and Sir William Wedderburn.⁵⁶

In May 1876 the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha voted a congratulatory address to Queen Victoria on her assumption of the title of 'Empress of India'. The address, which was probably drafted by Ranade, was meant as much for the eyes of the rulers as for those of the people of India. It surveyed the progress of India under British rule and gave expression to the wishes and aspirations of educated Indians for the future. Both for its tone and contents it was highly praised by the press in India. The *Times of India*, for example, wrote: 'From the native stand-point it may well claim to be moderate in tone, while in mere outward form of nicely balanced words, of sonorous sentences, of accurate expression, even in persistent argument and close deductions from the lessons of the past as to the exigencies of the future, it would scarcely have disgraced the official minutes of a Talleyrand, a Palmerston, or a Gladstone. Of course we do not go with this interesting document in its entirety, but there is very much put forth here worth the serious consideration of every Anglo-Indian . . .'⁵⁷

The address acknowledged in the amplest terms the beneficent results of British rule in India, especially since 1858. 'The great work of union, inaugurated by the Proclamation of 1858,' it said, 'has been continued with unabated progress for a whole generation, and now this assumption of an Indian title is regarded by us as the crowning of the noble edifice. Unbroken peace has reigned throughout the land for twenty years; the whole country has been covered by a network of civilization which brings the remotest parts to feel

56. For the views of Wedderburn and Wordsworth about the Sabha, see 'Opinions about the Journal', *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha*, July 1879, pp. 3-5.

57. *Times of India*, 23 June 1876.

sympathy with each other as members of a living body, and many races, and tribes, and varieties of creed and language are, under your benign sway, forgetting their old differences and petty traditions, and are being welded together into a great and homogeneous nation. The Native Princes, great and small, are protected by the strength of the paramount power from internal dissensions, and their continuance as the feudatory members of the Empire has been assured to them beyond all risk of change. The blessing of a fixed and generally uniform law of equality of personal and civil rights has been secured to every part of this Empire. The subordination of the military to the civil power, the separation of judicial from executive functions, publicity in matters of legislation, justice and taxation, the general freedom of enterprise, commerce and locomotion, the three-fold freedom of speech, of public assemblies, and of the press, religious neutrality and toleration, the blessings of a widespread and elevating machinery of education, the vast development of foreign commerce, and the revival of home industries, these and many similar blessings which your most gracious Majesty's subjects in this country have been enjoying, have endeared your rule to many millions.⁵⁸

The address of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, however, did not confine itself to a mere enumeration and eulogy of the blessings of British rule. It went on to demand that new privileges should be granted to the Indian people so that the recent historic occasion might be associated in their minds with the hopes of 'peace and progress and free government.' The new privileges asked for by the Sabha were as follows : the association of the Indian princes in the councils of the empire 'through some organization of a recognized diet or assembly where they could meet one another and the great officers and statesmen who rule India, and discuss all imperial questions'; the employment of Indians in high civil and military offices; the representation of India in the British Parliament; the reform of the legislative councils in India with a view to making them more representative and responsible; the extension of the permanent settlement of the land revenue in a modified form to the

58. *Deccan Herald*, 31 May 1876.

whole of British India; and the lightening of 'the great burden imposed by the Indian national debt upon the finances of India... by consolidating the debt and extending an English guarantee to it.' The address concluded by expressing the hope that 'the assumption of the imperial title may be signalized by the grant of new constitutional rights to the people of the country, thereby inaugurating a new era in the gradual development of the institutions of this country, elevating its people to the political and social status of the British nation, and teaching them gradually, by examples and encouragement, and by actual exercise of responsible power, to be manly and self-sustained, prepared to welcome their connexion with England as a providential arrangement intended for their welfare, and resolved to abide by it through all troubles and trials of their mutual growth.'⁵⁹

In order to mark the assumption of the new title of 'Empress of India' ('Kaiser-i-Hind') by Queen Victoria, the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, announced a grand *darbar* to be held at Delhi on 1 January 1877. Sensing the unique significance of the forthcoming event and anxious to turn it to some national advantage, the leaders of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha addressed, on 5 December 1876, a circular letter to the princes, chiefs and gentlemen who had been invited to the great imperial assemblage to be held at Delhi. The letter, which was also given wide publicity in the press, exhorted the Indian invitees to the *darbar* not to look upon the coming event as an occasion for gaiety and pageantry but as one symbolizing the growing unity of India as a nation and to take advantage of it for furthering that unity. 'The honour that has been paid to you in your personal or representative capacity [in being invited to the gathering at Delhi]', said the Sabha's letter, 'is regarded by us as an honour to the nation to which you belong, and we have no doubt that the gathering of so many representative men from all parts of India is an event of national importance, and that it will be regarded, in all future history, as the commencement of that fusion of races and creeds, the second birth of the great Indian nation, for which we have so long prayed and dreamed, which has been so wonderfully brought by Providence through strange agencies. On

59. *Ibid.*

such an occasion, it behoves you to sink the individual and the temporary in the national and permanent concern of the event, and to prove to the world that you are fully alive to the greatness of the responsibilities thrown on you by being thus singled out to represent all that is great and good, true and hopeful, in this vast country. Never since the introduction of foreign rule in this country has such an assemblage been brought together, and it is in justice due to the great power under whose sheltering wings we have learned to outgrow our small differences, and feel as one united nation with a great past behind, and a greater future before us, it is justly due to the British Government that you should not be dazzled by the gaities of the gathering, but learn the great moral lesson of healthy, self-sustained, and joint political action, which such an event is so well calculated to teach. You are the great Notables of the land, the first Parliament of the united Indian nation, the first Congress of the representatives of the diverse states and nationalities which make up the body politic of India.⁶⁰

Having thus underlined the great 'national importance' of the coming *darbar* at Delhi, the Sabha's letter proceeded to suggest the following 'programme of work to be done at the assemblage':

- '1. We pray that you will make it a point of duty to see each other individually during your stay in Delhi, and bid welcome to each other, foregoing all reserve and petty misunderstandings, which have separated us long enough to our ruin.
- '2. We propose further that you will all meet together in private gatherings, and discuss with each other our present situation and future prospects.
- '3. The great act of condescension on the part of our most Imperial Majesty in taking a purely Indian title and in bringing all India together, demands loyal recognition, and we propose accordingly that a united address from all India, may be presented by you at the foot of the throne in humble but hearty response to the gracious Proclamation which His Excellency the Viceroy will issue on the occasion. . . .
- '4. We request that you will, independently of the invitation you

⁶⁰ *Poona Observer*, 7 December 1876.

have received from Government, secure from the inhabitants of the town or district to which you belong, the necessary written authority, empowering you to present the address in the name of the millions who will not be able to attend in person at the gathering.⁶¹

In the last week of December 1876 a deputation of the Sabha, which included its two secretaries, Ganesh Vasudev Joshi and Sadashiv Ballal Govinde, travelled to Delhi, where it tried, among other things, to canvass support for the idea of holding periodical conferences of representative Indians.⁶² Before the Sabha's deputation arrived in Delhi, the Bengali leader Surendranath Banerjea had already, on 27 December 1876, organized there a 'Native Press Association', consisting of the representatives of the Indian press who had assembled in Delhi for the *darbar*.⁶³ Joshi and his associates lent their enthusiastic support to the Association and even tried to mould it nearer to their heart's desire. The 'Native Press Association' presented a 'loyal address' to Lytton on 3 January 1877 and decided to hold a conference at some central place once or twice a year for discussing and adopting measures for protecting the interests of the press and of the country at large.⁶⁴ Thus, by a strange irony of history, it was on the occasion of the imperial *darbar* at Delhi, and encouraged in part by its very example, that the Indian patriots made the first tentative efforts to organize a periodical conference of representative men from all parts of the country which nine years later led to the establishment of the Indian National Congress.

After the Delhi *darbar* was over, Joshi and his associates paid a visit to Calcutta, where they discussed with the local leaders questions of mutual interest. As in Delhi so in Calcutta, the idea of holding 'an annual conference of the representative men of India'

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² The Sabha's deputation left Poona by train for Delhi on 26 December 1876. See *Poona Observer*, 26 December 1876.

⁶³ *Native Opinion*, 31 December 1876, 14 January 1877; *Hindoo Patriot*, 8 and 15 January 1877. S. N. Banerjea had gone to the Delhi *darbar* as the correspondent of the *Hindoo Patriot*. See also Banerjea, *A Nation in Making* (1927), p. 59.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

was mooted and generally welcomed.⁶⁵ It was even agreed that the first such conference should assemble in Calcutta.

The agreement reached in Calcutta early in 1877 was probably confirmed later in the year when some prominent Calcutta leaders such as S.K. Ghose and S.N. Banerjea visited Bombay and Poona. Towards the end of 1877 the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha addressed a communication to public men in Calcutta which said: '... about this time last year certain members of the Sarvajanic Sabha paid a visit to Calcutta and other places in Northern India, and they had the pleasure of seeing you, and of interchanging thoughts and discussing certain questions of general importance with you. At that time the idea of holding annual conferences was suggested, and was received with favour generally. It was suggested that at these conferences representatives of the Native Press and Political Associations should meet together, and, after ascertaining each other's views upon the general political questions of the day, fix the general lines of policy which should be pursued by the exponents of Native public opinion, and commended for adoption to the Native public generally. It was also agreed that the first conference should meet in Calcutta with a view to give effect to this suggestion. Some members of the Sabha will proceed to Calcutta in a few days, and will be present there about the first of January 1878. The Sabha hopes they will receive brotherly welcome from your Association, and that this first attempt to incorporate the different provinces of India, and to form a collective and representative opinion will be so far successful as to encourage similar attempts in the future. The questions which demand special attention about this time may be briefly stated to be :

- '1. The Indian Civil question, upon which a general expression of Native opinion has been secured by the efforts of Baboo Surendranath.
- '2. The question of the income tax, which is likely to be imposed to meet famine charges.
- '3. The question of demanding a Parliamentary inquiry into the causes of the frequent recurrence of famines of late

65. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 February 1877.

years, and of the success of the preventive and remedial measures adopted by the Government.

- '4. The question of the liberty of the Native Press, about which it is rumoured that the Government is seriously thinking of passing exceptional laws to curb its alleged license.
- '5. The question of the extension of the permanent settlement of land revenue with suitable modifications to other presidencies.
- '6. The policy pursued of late in regard to schools and colleges for higher education.
- '7. The proposal to levy excise duties upon cotton yarn produced in Native mills.
- '8. The question of how far reduction in public expenditure can be practically suggested as advisable.
- '9. The question of the withdrawal of State support from the Christian ecclesiastical establishments.
- '10. The question of the enlargement of the Legislative Council by the admission of more non-official Native members.
- '11. The question of the extension of the elective franchise in the municipalities of the larger cities in the *mofussil*.

'These and similar other questions which will suggest themselves to you, will be discussed, and as far as possible the principles of action will be definitely settled.'⁶⁶

Four members of the Sabha—G. V. Joshi, S. B. Govinde, G. V. Kanitkar and A. G. Bhagvat—arrived in Calcutta early in January 1878 and stayed there for a couple of weeks. The visit of the Poona leaders aroused much greater interest in Calcutta this time than it had done a year earlier. They were accorded a public reception by the citizens of Calcutta on 8 January, at which speakers, both host and guest, vied with one another in emphasizing the need for unity and inter-provincial co-operation—a theme which had already been taken up by the local press.⁶⁷ They had talks with the leaders of the various associations in Calcutta on the important

66. *Indian Mirror*, 4 January 1878.

67. *Ibid.*, 12 January 1878.

questions of the day.⁶⁸ They participated in a conference, held in Calcutta on 14 January 1878, ostensibly to celebrate the first anniversary of the 'Native Press Association' established in Delhi at the time of the *darbar*. The conference adopted the following important resolutions:

'That with a view to promote mutual sympathy and co-operation among the members of the Native Press, to foster among them harmony of views as far as practicable on questions of national policy and interest, and to diffuse among them a proper sense of their duties and rights, a meeting of their representatives be held at least once a year

'That it would be their anxious care, while faithfully representing to Government the wants and wishes of the people to nurture in them feeling of loyalty to the Crown.

'That it be their earnest endeavour to vindicate the rights and liberties of the Native Press by constitutional means.

'That efforts be made to secure the co-operation of the different political associations of India with the objects of the meeting.'⁶⁹

A local committee was appointed with S. N. Banerjea and Navgopal Mitra, editor of the *National Paper*, as joint secretaries.

On their way back home from Calcutta, Joshi and his colleagues visited some other places in northern India, and wherever they went they urged the need for greater unity and co-operation between public men and associations in the various parts of the country. What they were aiming at is made clear by a speech which Joshi delivered while in Allahabad early in February 1878. In this speech he remarked: 'It is . . . incumbent on us all to elect a number of right-thinking, public-spirited and patriotic gentlemen and to form them into a committee to watch over the national welfare and interests, and to represent our common grievances, in every considerable town all over the country; and these gentlemen should meet together in a general conference once a year, and thereby exchange their thoughts and opinions on various subjects affecting

68. For a report of talks with the British Indian Association, see *Hindoo Patriot*, 14 January 1878.

69. *Ibid.*, 21 January 1878; also *Indian Mirror*, 15 January 1878.

our happiness.'⁷⁰

Encouraged by the success which had attended the efforts of its deputation to Calcutta in organizing a 'Native Press Conference' there in January last, the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha resolved on 10 March 1878 'to hold a similar conference [in Bombay on the 29th instant] of the editors of the Native Press of the Bombay Presidency and the adjoining provinces [sic] of Berar and Hyderabad, in the hope of forming a committee to correspond with that in Calcutta'.⁷¹ The passing of the notorious Vernacular Press Act on 14 March 1878 did not apparently disturb the plans of the Sabha. The Sabha had already secured 'the consent of some of the leading members of the Native Press of this Presidency' for the proposed conference. It was, however, anxious to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the Bombay Association and other public bodies in its endeavours. With this end in view the Sabha addressed to the latter a communication on 20 March 1878, which pointed out that the object of holding the conference was that 'representatives of the Native Press and the several Political Associations existing in the several parts of this Presidency, should meet together and after ascertaining each other's views upon the current political questions, chalk out general lines of policy which should be pursued by the exponents of Native public opinion and recommended for adoption to the Native public generally'. The communication also contained a long list of the questions which were proposed to be considered at the forthcoming conference at Bombay. These were, in addition to those which were submitted to the Calcutta conference, as follows: the Vernacular Press Act; the admission of representatives from India into the British Parliament; 'the relation of the British Indian Political Agencies to the Native States'; general customs tariff, with special consideration of the duties on finer kinds of imported cotton; the 'Home Charges' and army expenditure, organization and reform; the admission of Indians to volunteer corps; the uniformity of weights and measures throughout India; the decentralization policy of the government; 'the international condition of the jurisdiction of the criminal courts of British India and Native

70. *Indian Mirror*, 15 February 1878.

71. *Times of India*, 26 March 1878.

States'; the commercial relations between England and India; the guarantee of the British Parliament for debts of the Indian government; the systematization of Indian coins with special consideration of gold coinage for British India; the Arms Act; and 'the formation of a representative Indian Diet of the several heads of Political Societies in India'.⁷²

The conference met at the Framji Cowasji Institute in Bombay on 29 March 1878. It was an 'influential' gathering, consisting of leading journalists and public men, mainly from Bombay and Poona, which resolved that a 'Conference of the Native Press' be established in Bombay and that it should meet at least once a year.⁷³ A local committee, similar to that in Calcutta, was also established. The Vernacular Press Act appears to have struck terror into the hearts of some Bombay journalists, who dissociated themselves from the proceedings of the conference on the ground that they were 'a leap in the dark' or that 'the present time was rather ticklish'.⁷⁴ Because of this rift in the lute the conference proved to be, as the *Bombay Gazette* described it, 'a poor affair'.⁷⁵

The 'Native Press Association' existed on paper only. Its local committees at Calcutta and Bombay soon disintegrated. The experiment of holding 'Native Press Conferences' was not repeated in later years. But the idea that lay behind that experiment, namely, that of bringing together periodically the representatives of the press and the various political associations in India in order to discuss questions of common interest and the ways and means of promoting national solidarity, did not die. It was taken up again more earnestly, and under more favourable circumstances, in the 1880s. It was no accident that the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, which made the first tentative efforts to realize this idea in the 1870s, was also to have served as host to the first session of the Indian National Congress in December 1885, and would have done so had it not been for the last-minute decision to change the Congress venue to

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Bombay Gazette*, 30 March 1878.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*: see also *Native Opinion*, 31 March 1878.

Bombay because of an outbreak of cholera in Poona.⁷⁶

With the departure of Temple and Lytton from India in the first half of 1880, the official prejudice against the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha decreased, though it did not entirely disappear.⁷⁷ Lord Ripon's acceptance of an address of welcome from the Sabha during his visit to Poona in December 1880 made the Sabha 'respectable' again and its opinion began to be solicited by the government on important public issues.⁷⁸ But respectability seems to have exacted its price. In their anxiety to retain the respect of the government the leaders of the Sabha tried in the 'eighties to appear as moderate and reasonable as possible and in doing so they often ran counter to the sentiments of their more radical supporters. It was not long before complaints against 'the constitution and working of the Sabha' began to be made in the local press.⁷⁹ The death of G. V. Joshi in July 1880 was a great loss to the Sabha, for it deprived the Sabha of a genuinely popular leader. But, despite a certain decline in popularity, the Sabha in the early 1880s still wielded enormous influence and was conducted with great energy and ability. According to A.O. Hume, the 'Father of the Indian National Congress', the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was 'the most powerful Association (in those days) in the country'.⁸⁰

76. 'Origin and Composition of the Congress', *Report of the First Indian National Congress, 1885*, p. 3.

77. In 1883 Ripon wrote to the Secretary of State: 'People differ as to the character of Poona Sabha, some holding that it is a disaffected body, and others believing that whatever may have been its intentions at one time, it is not now animated by a spirit hostile to our rule; but whichever of these views may be the true one, there can be no doubt that it is an influential body guided by intelligent men . . .'. Ripon to Kimberley, 19 July 1883, Ripon Papers, BP 7/3, No. 55, British Museum.

78. A Political Rishi, 'New Life in Poona', *Indu Prakash*, 9 February 1885.

79. See for example, *Mahratta*, 8 January and 18 June 1882; 22 September 1883; and *Native Opinion*, 26 August 1883.

80. Hume to Ripon, 13 January 1889, Ripon Papers, Add. MSS, 43616, No. 33, British Museum.

Some Trends in India's Foreign Trade in the Seventeenth Century : A Reply

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I must first of all thank Dr. Bagchi and Mr. M. F. Fuller for the detailed attention they have given to my paper.¹ Since the paper was meant to be only experimental, their suggestions and comments are particularly helpful, and I should merely like to add here a few points of clarification.

The reason for the difference in Mr. Fuller's test for pepper (equation (i)) and that of mine, as he rightly guessed, was due to a technical reason. In my calculations I omitted the two years of very low purchases (1666-67 and 1668-69). Thus the equation (IA) in my text was based on 16 observations arranged in order of time, while the equation (IB) contained 18 observations. Furthermore, logs were taken in my computations to base 10 instead of to base e as in Mr. Fuller's case.

Dr. Bagchi's criticisms concern the following four points : (i) the specification of the structure equations explaining the behavior of the exports and imports, aggregated and disaggregated, (ii) the mathematical notation used in the paper, (iii) the omission of the income variables from the balance-of-trade equation on p. 18, and (iv) the handling of conventional trade theory. The alternative model suggested by Dr. Bagchi is certainly very persuasive. But the vital question that needs to be asked here is what finally determines the ceiling of capital costs and the availability of total financial capital which appears as a constraint in the alternative model. The whole problem can perhaps best be studied from a complete structural model which is given below. The answer to the second point about the redundant matrices on p. 17 lies in my effort to clear up a

¹ *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. VI No. 1, pp. 31-40.

frequent confusion in the minds of historians about the behavior of prices ; the matrices were intended to dispel the notion of universal market prices determined on the basis of perfect competition and to show that since there was a functional relationship between each pair of the elements, prices could 'stick' at any point.

On the third and fourth points, I think a valid case can be made for the view that the use of a highly formal and simplified model to explain the actual economic behavior of real world can be a hazardous exercise. However, the zero income change assumption in the balance-of-trade model can be easily relaxed, although, since we have no information on movements of national income, anything that is said on the subject will necessarily remain speculative. It is also somewhat doubtful if the trade between India and Europe during this period can be described as one between unequal partners. But it must be admitted that the Ricardian or neo-classical trade theory cannot be easily adapted for empirical testing. Finally, I entirely agree with Dr. Bagchi that for any conclusive treatment of the subject, it is necessary to take all the variables together and the estimation of the parameters must be carried out by means of accepted statistical techniques. A tentative structural model is suggested in the accompanying table.

AN AUTO-REGRESSIVE MODEL OF THE EAST INDIA
COMPANY'S TRADE

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Endogenous Variables</i>	<i>Exogenous Variables</i>
1	t_0	1. Capital available for investment in any one year	2. interest rates in London 3. interest rates in India 4. the level of profit on the Company's imports in previous years 5. general business condition
1	t_{+1}	6. Provision of silver and gold	7. bimetallic ratio in Europe and London 8. bimetallic ratio in Asia 9. the state of supplies from Spanish America
1	t_{+1}	10. Provision of goods in London	11. price of such goods 12. estimated demand in India
1	t_{+1}	13. Quantity of shipping chartered	14. freight rates 15. quantity already under charter
1	t_{+1}	16. Provision of goods in India	17. price of such goods 18. climatic factors affecting supplies 19. political factors
1	t_{+3}	20. Revenue from the sale of East India goods in London	21. demand for such goods in Europe 22. previous stock

BOOK REVIEWS

Western India in the Nineteenth Century : A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra, by Ravinder Kumar (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. xii + 347.

This is,—not a history of western India or Maharashtra as a whole—, but a fascinating account of the economic and social history of those districts in Maharashtra which came under British rule in 1818. In a broader sense, Dr. Kumar has written a penetrating essay on British agricultural policy in India during the century 1818-1918. The reader is brought into the villages, especially the villages adjacent to Poona; he lives with the *kunbis* (cultivators) and the *vanis* (money-lenders); he is made to see how the various changes in policy affect their lives.

After describing the pattern of society and administration under the Peshwas, Dr. Kumar proceeds to show how the first generation of British administrators, notably Elphinstone, adopted a policy of caution. By continuing such practices as the award of *dakshina* to brahmans, they aimed to preserve as much as possible of the traditional pattern. Later came the generation of officials thoroughly imbued with utilitarian doctrine. Application of Ricardian theory to land revenue policy, and promotion of individual ownership by cultivators removed the traditional restraints on the cupidity of *vanis*. The tensions thus unleashed precipitated the agrarian disturbances of 1875, even though Sir Henry Maine and his disciple, Justice Raymond West, already were attempting to mitigate the rigors of utilitarian doctrine. Dr. Kumar proceeds with a discussion of the use of co-operatives and other governmental measures for supplying the *kunbis* with credit to relieve them of oppression by the *vanis*. He describes the development of a *nouveau-riche* class of *kunbis* who were to play an important part in the political life of Maharashtra in the twentieth century.

Foreign readers will perhaps find Dr. Kumar's social history of the brahmans in Maharashtra of most interest. He thoroughly

analyses the emergence of a moderate or 'liberal' group among them. His essay on Ranade might well stand by itself. Dr. Kumar's concern for unraveling the strands of brahman social history dominates the closing chapters of his book. This prevents him from developing a penetrating comparison between the Maharashtra of 1918 and the Maharashtra of 1818 which the reader has been led to expect. Nevertheless, the unique history of the Maharashtra brahmans deserves the great attention which he gives to it. As he says in his conclusion, the religious ties between the brahmans and the *kunbis* prevented the non-brahman movement "from acquiring the virulence it acquired in regions like Tamil Nad. Consensus rather than conflict dominated the political life of Maharashtra, and it contributed to social stability and to harmony in relations between different social groups to an extent unknown in other parts of India," (p. 332).

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HOLDEN FURBER

Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement 1883-1920, by D. ARGOV, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1967, Rs. 25.00.

In the writings of and about Indian nationalism, perhaps the most abused words are, "moderates" and "extremists". The "moderates" are said to be those who, during the years 1885 to 1947, favoured gradual constitutional progress, while the "extremists" advocated unconstitutional agitation and fiery revolution. But obviously the content of these words changes so much during the years as to lose all meaning. To classify in one category such diverse figures as Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose in the presalvation era, Jawaharlal Nehru in the 'twenties and 'thirties and Subhas Bose, is to make the word "extremists" a portmanteau, shapeless term. All that these "extremists" had in common with each other was their impatience. But the word "moderates" has greater consistency, for there was much that men like Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Sapru and Sastri shared,—a love of English parliamentary practice, a trust in British objectives in India, a dedication to

gradualness. The *raj*, too, in the years when it was harassed by the Gandhian Congress placed some, if not much, faith in these lovers of constitutionalism, and "rallying the moderates" became the slogan of Delhi and the India Office. Jawaharlal Nehru, who could understand the motivation of imperialism but could not forgive his faltering fellow-countrymen, held up the "moderates" of his time to immortal ridicule in his *Autobiography*.

However, the "moderates", who were never politically more than half alive, have secured some posthumous vitality. An influential school of historians now seriously contends that these "moderates" were the shrewdest of Indian politicians and would have, in collaboration with the altruistic rulers of empire, secured freedom for India long before 1947 had not their efforts been vitiated by Gandhi, Nehru and their followers who, by seeking to grab what was being offered to them, delayed the transfer of power. This line of argument, which ignores both the nature of British rule and the context of Indian nationalism, would need little attention were it not so flourishing.

So, long after their little day, the Indian "moderates" are now enjoying sympathetic attention. Some years ago Dr. Wolpert wrote a study in contrast of Tilak and Gokhale; and Dr. Argov's book is, in a sense, a sequel. It is a study specially of the second generation of Indian leaders, of the "moderate" Banerjee and the "extremist" Lajpat Rai. Dr. Argov is handicapped by the fact that these two figures were second-rank politicians and, therefore, his work necessarily is more limited and of less general interest than Dr. Wolpert's book. Yet Dr. Argov has done his research well, and he has much that is of interest to disclose. It is a pity that he feels obliged, at the very end of his work, to curtsy to the prevalent fashion and to reach a conclusion which his evidence does not compel or justify; "Yet, within the larger context of Indian history, the moderates were the real revolutionaries, in having successfully introduced parliamentary democracy to India—a system of government which is foreign to Indian traditional political ideas and government."

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S. GOPAL

Ideas in History, by Bisheshwar Prasad (ed.), Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1968, Rs. 25.00.

This is a collection of papers read at a seminar held at Delhi University in 1964 on the ideas motivating social and religious movements and political and economic policies in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Judging by the summary given by Dr. Romila Thapar of the main trends of the discussion, this seminar seems to have been a stimulating one at which many new questions were asked and fresh lines of research opened up. Some of these papers are worth having. Professor R. S. Sharma analyses the use made of ancient values in promoting modern reforms, Dr. Rizvi gives a scholarly account of the ideological background of the Wahhabi movement, Professor Satish Chandra assesses Maratha policy and its agrarian consequences, and Dr. Bhattacharya throws fresh light on *laissez-faire* in India (the last paper has already been published in this journal).

However, on the whole, this volume does not provide an adequate substitute to those who were not present at the seminar. Not only, as in all such collections, are the papers uneven; in some cases, only brief synopses of papers on important subjects are provided, while the proof-reading, is, to put it mildly, disgraceful. Many sentences have little sense and less syntax. Here is an example; "Bentinck was a simple, though confirmed western, a man of utility, admiror (*sic*) of James Mill, a friend of Bentham and who became subsequently a supporter of Grey's ministry, keen on the re-shaping of society by applying new ideas to the things antique". Surely one has the right to expect higher standards in a book published under the auspices of Delhi University.

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The Social Framework of Agriculture : India, Middle East, England, by Harold H. Mann, Vora & Co., Publishers Private Ltd., Bombay, 1967 ; 501 pp ; Rs. 25.00.

This collection of papers of Harold H. Mann has been edited with devotion by Daniel Thorner. It is a testimony both to the

range of Mann's interests as a social scientist and to the length of his working life. The subjects of these papers range from India in the sixteenth century to the collective farm system in Russia. The earliest paper, on 'Calcutta Drink Shops', was published in 1904 and the latest, on the investigation of economic conditions in under-developed countries in 1961.

The papers have been divided into six groups : Approach and Outlook ; Village Studies in India and England ; Town Studies in India ; The Social Setting of Agricultural Development in India ; The USSR and The Middle East ; and Agricultural Science and Method. Parts II, III and IV are probably of most interest to the readers of this Journal, in particular the famous article, "A Deccan village under the Peshwas" (1923), which traces the economic history of the village of Jategaon Budruk from 1698 to 1823 from the village records. Other papers of interest to both social and economic historians are those dealing with social and economic conditions of Indian cities in the early part of the twentieth century and an article on the early history of the tea industry in North East India (1918).

This volume also contains a description by F. C. Bawden of Mann's contribution to science and agriculture, a study of his work as a social scientist by Daniel Thorner and a bibliography of Mann's works by C. A. Thorold.

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