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East Bengal Immigrants and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani in Assam Politics, 1928-47*

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Immigration was a welcome phenomenon for labour-short, land-abundant Assam from the economic point of view. Landless immigrants from over-populated East Bengal during 1901-51—of them some 85 per cent were Muslims—found an *el dorado* in the jungle-infested riverine belt of government wastelands, remaining water-logged for many years. Used to an amphibious mode of living, they were industrious and hardy enough to come up the Brahmaputra on steamers and boats and reclaim these malarial areas. All that they wanted was land. When they pressed forward in search of new land to areas held by the sons of the soil, conflicts with the latter began to take place.

GENESIS OF THE LINE SYSTEM

Administrative measures had to be devised to contain the conflict. The Line System which, as an idea, was first mooted out in 1916 and adopted in 1920 was such a device. Under this system, a line was drawn in the districts under pressure whereby immigrants were allowed to settle only in segregated areas, specified for their settlement. The system, as it was enforced, however failed to contain immigrants as intended. The number of settlers including children born after their arrival increased from an estimated three lakhs in 1921 to over half a million in 1931.[1] Colonists settled on government wastelands by families, and not singly. They were better farmers and hence could also offer higher than expected prices to allure Assamese peasants to sell their land. Local Marwari and even Assamese

*An earlier short version of this paper was presented at the Indian History Congress, Jadavpur, December 1974, and remains unpublished. A more detailed and wider study of the immigration question and Assam politics has been attempted in my forthcoming book, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* (Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977). For abbreviations used in this paper, see p. 453.

[1]*Census of India*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part II A, p. 73.

moneylenders financed the immigrants to reclaim land and expand the cultivation of jute, *ahu* rice, pulses and vegetables.[2]

Assamese public opinion began increasingly to clamour against the failure of the Line System. Pressed by Bishnu Bora—a *mauzadar*[3] member of the Assam Legislative Council—on 23 August 1923, the government admitted the fact of continued influx of immigrants into Nowgong, but asserted that there were enough available wastelands both for immigrant, and local people. Bora, in his turn, had to admit that the formation of segregated blocks for local Assamese and immigrant settlers in Nowgong during 1920-24 was not altogether unsatisfactory. Standing orders had been issued classifying villages in wasteland tracts into three classes: (*i*) those available exclusively to immigrants, (*ii*) those available exclusively to local people, and (*iii*) those available to both. No settlement could be made with an immigrant family beyond a ceiling of 16 bighas. Sub-letting of lands to and employment of immigrants as agricultural labour by local people in Assamese lines were also prohibited. Despite these rules, a large number of petitions poured into the district magistrate's office with complaints of encroachments on land held by or earmarked for local Assamese people. The alignment of the Line, generally drawn by pencils on maps, was often tampered by the corrupt revenue staff. From the latter part of 1924 onwards, the local administration was found to be increasingly tolerant of such encroachments and corrupt practices.[4]

The Assamese public demanded a rigid policy. Mahadev Sharma moved a resolution on 23 July 1927 with a view to preventing or restricting the settlement of wastelands with immigrants from other provinces and foreign countries. It recommended the appointment of a committee to examine, district by district, the actual position regarding (*a*) the availability of wastelands, (*b*) the desirability of reserving adequate area for future development, and (*c*) the implications of a suitable immigration policy in terms of requirements of grazing, fuel and forest reserves. Basanta Kumar Das spoke in favour of protecting the interests of the children of the soil. Having admitted that Sharma's motion was not happily worded, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi also emphasized the desirability of reserving adequate areas of wastelands in each district for future development. At the same time, he was one "who would not restrict immigration, so far as can be helped."[5]

The resolution was lost by 18 to 24 votes. The division in the house was completely on a Hindu and non-Hindu basis, which could not have been accidental. The government was not prepared to commit itself to any kind of restrictive legislation, but nevertheless agreed to call an all-party conference to thrash out the issue.[6]

COLONIZATION SCHEMES

In 1928, an all-party committee, with A. W. Botham as the chairman, conferred on this issue. The note circulated by the government advocated a positive colonization policy. Such a policy was defended on the grounds that it would enhance government's revenue and that administrative control over natural migration was necessary since planned settlement was to be preferred to haphazard squatting. The committee consisted of four European and five Indian members including S. M. Saadulla and Nabin Chandra Bardoloi.[7]

It was Bardoloi who suggested that every colonization area should be compact and that fresh immigrants should not be allowed to settle outside the colonization area. He also suggested that enough land should be left vacant for future expansion of the Assamese people. All these points were acceptable to the government, although opinions might differ as to the actual quantum of wastelands available in the Brahmaputra Valley.[8] On 3 April 1928 the Assam Legislative Council was told that the official policy of restricting and regulating land settlement with immigrants by means of "lines within villages" or of "exclusion from whole mauzas or villages" had been adopted mainly to protect the Assamese and aboriginal inhabitants, but partly also to avoid breaches of peace. The government was aware that it was practising thereby a system of racial segregation. Nevertheless, it believed that, in the earlier stages at least, it was desirable to settle wastelands "in blocks with persons of the same community and that land should remain for some time on annual basis in order

[2]Jagannath Bujar-Barua told the Assam Banking Enquiry Committee that immigration had led to all-round prosperity in Barpeta area. Many Assamese farmers had turned into land speculators. They sold their lands to immigrants at a good price; then they cleared new plots (*pam*) on wastelands and sold them again. The immigrants were financed by their own headmen (*matbar*) as well as by Marwari and Assamese (Barpetia) moneylenders. Even the *Hati* (indigenous co-operative bank) funds of Barpeta were involved in this financing, to a small extent. *Assam Banking Enquiry Committee Report*, 1929-30, Vol. II, pp. 508-17.

[3]A *Mauzadar* was entrusted with the collection of land revenue on behalf of the government and was paid with commission on a percentage basis. The office was near hereditary.

[4]Reply to Bishnu Bora, 13 August, *ALCP* (1923), III, p. 231; Bishnu Bora's speech, 23 July, *ALCP* (1927), VII, Part 2, pp. 1089-91.

[5]*Ibid.*, pp. 1084, 1091-93 and 1103.

[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 1104-5.

[7]Rhodes' speech, 16 March, *ALCP* (1931), XI, p. 307.

[8]Cited in R. K. Chaudhuri's speech, 24 February, *ALAP* (1938), pp. 410-12.

to control transfers."[9]

The colonization policy, as stated above, thus emerged from deliberations of an all-party conference and had initially the approval of both Saadulla and Bardaloi. The first colonization scheme, started in Nowgong in 1928, was followed in rapid succession by two more—one in Barpeta and another in Mangaldai subdivision. Under all these schemes, a small family was given about 20 bighas of land against the payment of a premium. Under the Nowgong Scheme, the areas allotted to 1,619 Muslim and 441 Hindu immigrant families together amounted to 47,636 acres till March 1933.[10]

By 1936 out of the total occupied area of 541,160 acres in the district of Nowgong, 204,078 acres or 37.7 per cent were under occupation of immigrants, as against 62.3 per cent still in the hands of the indigenous people. The culturable wastelands other than fallow in the district amounted to more than 1.4 million acres. The conditions in other districts were also inviting to the settlers.[11]

The land-hungry Muslim immigrants from East Bengal segregated and fighting against all odds, never appreciated the Assamese point of view. If all men were equal in the eyes of Allah, why should thousands of acres of land remain waste, when men in search of a livelihood were available to turn them into smiling fields? They resented being described as litigant, quarrelsome men with criminal propensities, as they were often described in private speeches and in official reports. They wanted the Line System to go. They would have even followed the Congress flag had it conceded them the right to land and a new home. But this did not happen.

POLITICS IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

The wordy support they received from a section of Assamese Muslims was politically motivated. For example, on 16 March 1936, Khan Bahadur Nuruddin Ahmed told the Council that the Line System had been preventing the immigrants from being absorbed into the Assamese society. He said:

> My Hindu friends of Assam Valley in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of the organisers of the Domiciled and Settlers' Association have been telling the immigrants that they regard them as Assamese people. But it is no use calling them Assamese without giving them the status of the Assamese.

He demanded the abolition of the Line System.[12]

Despite such motivated support, the hard fact was that a major section of the better-off and educationally advanced Assamese Muslim community was not enthusiastic enough for social intercourse with the East Bengal settlers. The two communities were poles apart, being separated by a wide gulf of difference in culture, psychological make-up, and socio-economic conditions. Unlike the immigrant Bengali Muslims, their Assamese counterparts professed loyalty neither to a strict purdah system nor to the Urdu language, as accepted status symbols. Nevertheless, Assamese Muslims, by and large, welcomed the immigrants with the hope that they would be Assamized in due course and would numerically strengthen the base of Muslim communal politics in the province. "They will become Assamese—not domiciled Assamese like many people—but Assamese in fact as much as the Ahoms and Kalitas became Assamese. So," asked Sayidur Rahman in a speech on 23 July 1927 in the Council "why raise sentimental objections to their coming?"[13]

The Assam Valley Muslim Political Conference met under the presidency of Khan Sahib Mijanur Rahman on 8 September 1935 at Gauhati. Appreciative of the Congress attitude to a solution of the communal question, it looked forward to the success of the talks then going on between Rajendra Prasad and Jinnah. It bitterly pointed out that the Communal Award had unduly favoured the European community in Assam at the cost of both Hindus and Muslims. It even passed a resolution for reservation of jobs for the Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley, as distinguished from the Muslims of the other Valley. But the interest it showed towards the immigrant question was rather perfunctory. It was suggested from the Conference that an Assam Settlers' Welfare Committee be formed to work in the interests of the immigrants.[14]

In the face of the unprecedented immigration, Assamese Hindus had raised the slogan of the Assamese race being in danger. Ambikagiri Raychaudhury floated the Assam Samrakshini Sabha (Association for Conservation of Assam) in 1926 to propagate the Assamese cause. Nilmoni Phukan, who thrice failed to get himself elected to the Council since 1923, also joined him in the cause. The Congress tried to

[9]*ALCP* (1928), VIII, p. 247. In 1924 a colonization officer was functioning in Nowgong district to look after immigrants' settlement. See *ALCP* (1924), IV, pp. 1189-90, 1245-46.

[10]*ALCP* (1931), XI, p. 307; Reply to B. C. Goswami, 24 March, *ALCP* (1933), XIII, p. 888.

[11]29 September, *ALCP* (1936), VI, p. 1446; Official data cited in R. K. Chaudhury's speech in August, *ALCP* (1937), p. 714.

[12]Speech by Nuruddin Ahmed, 16 March, *ALCP* (1936), p. 340.

[13]Speech by Sayidur Rahman, *ALCP* (1927), VII, p. 1095.
Ahom and Kalita are two Hindu castes of Assam.

[14]*IAR*, July-December 1935, pp. 315-16.

steer a middle course because of its all-India character, but was pressurized from below to take a chauvinistic line on such issues as land settlement, recruitment for jobs, and medium of instruction in schools. The publication of the 1931 Census Report aggravated this fear complex. In presenting the Census results, C.S. Mullan, a European member of the Indian Civil Service, instigated a campaign of hatred against the immigrants. He wrote that during 1921-31, the immigrant army

> ... has almost completed the *conquest* of Nowgong. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup has also fallen to their *attack* and Darrang is being *invaded*. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely, but the few thousand Mymensinghias in North Lakhimpur are an *outpost* which may, during the next decade, prove to be a valuable basis of *major operations*. Wheresoever the carcass, there the *vultures* be gathered together. Where there is waste land thither flock the Mymensinghias. (Emphasis added.)

Mullan tried to peer into the future and even tried to forecast the future course of this "invasion." He prophesied that Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where an Assamese race would find a home of its own.[15] The motivation behind such irresponsible and unfounded utterings was clear. He wanted the Assamese and the immigrants to be set against each other.

So mischievous and blatantly fallacious was Mullan's observation that even the governor in his address to the Council on 6 March 1933 thought it expedient to point out, citing the same 1931 Census Report, that

> inspite of the large increase in the population of Assam at every census since 1901, the percentage of speakers of Assamese to the total population has remained very steady. It is clear from the figures of increase in the speakers of Assamese at the Census that the language is at present in no danger of supersession.[16]

Time has shown that the governor was right and Mullan was wrong. However, it was the latter's false prophecy of 1931 that provided a rationale to chauvinistic forces that were to plague Assam for many years. An article on the future of the Assamese nationality was written by Jnananath Bora, a leading intellectual of the province, and published in 1937 in *Batori* (Jorhat)—the mouthpiece of

[15]Citation in *Census of India*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part I-A, *Report* (Shillong, 1954), p. 73.

[16]Governor's address, *ALCP* (1933), XIII, p. 5.

the Asamiya Samrakshini movement and edited by Nilmoni Phukan. Bora argued that unless Sylhet was separated, Assamese was declared the only medium of instruction in schools, and further influx of settlers was stopped, it would be difficult for the Assamese to survive as a nationality.[17] There was a cry in the same year on the floor of the Council: "... and now, sir, can this be reward from God that the Assamese people should confine themselves to Sibsagar alone! ... We will not allow this to be!"[18]

The Assamese public was noticeably agitated over the outsider issue. Till then in all government schools in the Brahmaputra Valley, attended by both Bengali and Assamese pupils, there was arrangement for teaching through the medium of their respective languages. But, under the changed circumstances, the government decided to close down Bengali classes in these schools in 1935 and to encourage the setting up of new aided schools exclusively for Bengali children. Thus another wedge was driven between the Assamese and the Bengalis through segregated school education.[19] Scared by legislation relating to moneylending and tenancy, the influential, urban Bengali middle class became increasingly panicky about their future status under the coming regime of the provincial autonomy in the local power-structure and took action.[20]

[17]The bundle of *APCC Papers* (Congress Bhavan, Gauhati) No. 6, File 4, contains a letter by Munin Barkataki, then a young man, appealing to the Congress to remodel its stand in the light of Bora's article.

The immigrants' right to compete for government jobs, scholarships, etc., was already severely restricted to holders of domicile certificates which were difficult to get. The Council was told that in 1935 only 64 domicile certificates had been issued by district magistrates of Assam. It is interesting to note that the Asamiya Samrakshini Sabha, Gauhati, also offered to issue non-official domicile certificates signed by its General Secretary to boost the process of Assamization. —Speech by J. A. Dawson 16 March, ALCP (1936), XVI, pp. 349-50

[18]J. N. Gohain's speech, 14 March, *ALCP* (1936), XVI, p. 297.

[19]For details on medium of instruction prior to the change, see reply to Nichols-Roy, 15 September, *ALCP* (1933), XIII, pp. 1190-94.

Following the establishment of a government-aided Bengali High School in 1935 at Gauhati, R. K. Chaudhury said: "... the seed of the poisonous tree which will ever disunite the Bengalees and Assamese was sown with their blessings." — 14 March, *ALCP* (1936), XVI, p. 262.

[20]While presiding over the first conference of the Assam Domiciled Peoples' and Settlers' Association held at Dhubri on 2 June 1935, Rai Bahadur Kalicharan Sen cited the Assam Tenancy Bill, the Assam Municipal (Amendment) Act and the Moneylenders' Act, 1934, as sources of great and grave danger to the landowning settlers and factory-owners of his community. The second conference held at Tezpur in December 1935 unanimously passed a resolution expressing "feelings of loyalty to the person and throne of His Majesty the Kind Emperor..." See *Assam Citizens Association* (compiled by Dhubri Head Office, Gauhati 1940), pp. 49, 52.

They founded the Assam Domiciled and Settlers' Association for the protection of their own interests and to seek alliance, if possible, with the Bengali Muslim settlers to make a common cause. But the latter looked forward neither to the Assamese Muslim nor to Bengali Hindu politicians for shepherding them out of the wilderness. A leadership within the community instead was slowly being built up by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan in Goalpara where he had immigrated in 1928.[21]

The Maulana was born in a peasant family at a village near Sirajgunj in the district of Pabna in East Bengal. After formal schooling for some years at a madrasa, he taught for some time as a primary teacher in the village of Kagmari in Tangail. After his first political experience reportedly as a Khilafatist and Non-cooperator, he discovered that the real interests of the Muslim peasantry of Bengal lay in a consistent struggle against the zamindars and moneylenders, who were mostly Hindus. He did not hesitate to exploit the religious sentiment to organize and unite the oppressed Muslim peasantry, who constituted the overwhelming bulk of the Bengal peasantry.[22] One of the issues he took up was the restoration of a forgotten and dilapidated mosque within the premises of the Hindu zamindar of Santosh in Tangail.[23] In 1932 he convened and organized a provincial conference of ryots (Praja Sammilan) at Sirajgunj which passed resolutions calling for the abolition of zamindaris and legislation for various reliefs to indebted peasants. The same conference also passed another resolution welcoming the communal award.[24]

The itinerant Maulana, with his simple and pious habits and great organizing abilities, was accepted by the rural folk not only as a political leader, but also as a *pir*, believed to be possessed of occult powers. Hounded out of Bengal by the zamindars and the police, he settled down on the wastelands of Ghagmari, a few miles from Dhubri in Assam, and also set up another establishment in Bhasanir-char, an island in the Brahmaputra.[25] Both were in Goalpara district where settlers already formed a fifth of the population. It was after the name of the latter place that he was nick-named "the Maulana of Bhasani" or simply "Bhasani" in due course.

[21]Mohammad Waliullah, *Yuga-Bichitra* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1967, pp. 420-21.

[22]*Ibid.*

[23]D. N. Banerjee, *East Pakistan: A Case Study in Muslim Politics*, Delhi, 1969, p. 62n and supplementary information obtained at Tangail by the present author in 1948.

[24]Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitiir Panchas Bachhar* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1970, pp. 80-82.

[25]Waliullah, n. 21, pp. 420-21.

From 1928 to 1936, while still maintaining his contacts with Bengal, Bhasani used to move up and down the Brahmaputra to visit the river-side immigrant Muslim villages in inaccessible areas of Assam and organized them on the basis of a peasant programme including the demand for land. The colonization of Ghagmari and Bhasanir-char was largely due to his own personal efforts. People, suffering under the oppression of zamindars in Bengal, were in any case flocking to Assam in large numbers in order to settle on its beckoning wastelands. By 1936 Bhasani emerged as the accredited leader of the Muslim immigrants of Goalpara. He stood as a candidate in the 1937 election and was returned to the Assam Legislative Assembly, formed under the Act of 1935. He remained an important figure in Assam politics during the next ten years.

THE TANGLED NATIONAL QUESTION

"Save the Assamese Race!"

The first Saadulla Ministry (April 1937-February 1938) had an uneasy existence and, because of its indecision on the question of the abolition of the Line System, it incurred the displeasure of the Muslim League. Almost all the Muslim members of the Assam Legislative Assembly were united on this demand. Nevertheless, Saadulla was powerless to move in that direction because of Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri's opposition inside the cabinet. Like Congress leaders, Chaudhuri also believed that segregation was necessary to avoid conflicts between autochthones and immigrants. Munawwar Ali exposed the inconsistency of this stand in his speech in the Assembly on 14 August 1937. "But if the line prevents friction, then," he asked, "why do my friends of the Congress Bloc press for joint electorate?" He even drew a parallel with the segregationist practice in South Africa. He finally agreed to withdraw his resolution calling for the abolition of the Line System only after the government had agreed to accept a committee to enquire into the question thoroughly.[26] The Congress Party agreed to allow its members to serve on this committee.

Meanwhile the Congress high command was kept informed of the gravity of the Assam situation. "If Karachi resolutions are literally interpreted, the immigrants have every right to acquire land, property etc., and there cannot be a line system. On the other hand," Gopinath Bardoloi wrote to Rajendra Prasad in November 1937, "our people, whether congressmen or otherwise, all feel that adequate reservations must be there." He apprehended that, short of a rigid Line

[26]Speeches on 5 and 14 August, *ALAP* (1937), pp. 233-34, 712-18; R. K. Chaudhuri's speech, *ibid.*, p. 714.

System, the linguistic problem would become in coming years "a source of constant friction resulting in violence, incendiarism and crimes of all kinds."[27]

Segregationists tried to thrash out the issue with Jawaharlal Nehru when he came to Assam in November 1937. Nilmoni Phukan and Ambikagiri Raychaudhury represented to him on behalf of the Asamiya Samrakshini Sabha that a "purely local and racial question" had recently been given a communal colour by the Muslim League. According to them, Muslim immigrants were willing to identify themselves with the Assamese people in matters of language and culture, but were now being persuaded and forced to read Bengali. The effect of each national movement and the constitutional advance in the province that followed had been, according to them, disastrous to Assamese interests. They pointed out:

> ... as a means of saving the Assamese race from extinction, a considerable section of the Assamese intelligentsia has even expressed their minds in favour of the secession of Assam from India. This is how the present situation appears to the average Assamese, and they look to you, the National Congress, to help the Assamese to get out of these dangers.

If Sylhet and the plains portion of the district of Cachar were separated from Assam and mass immigration into Assam were stopped, the Assamese people would be, they said, the staunchest supporters of the Congress.[28]

Aware of his limitations in understanding the local problems, Nehru was simply confused. The desire of the Assamese to preserve their own culture and language and not to be overwhelmed by non-Assamese appeared to him perfectly legitimate. He agreed on the desirability of separating Sylhet from Assam. But, at the same time, he argued that a sparsely-populated, land-rich area like Assam could no longer continue to remain so, with an over-crowded province neighbouring it. Therefore immigration was bound to take place as

[27]Bardoloi to Rajendra Prasad, 13 November 1937, File No. 11/37 Col. No. 5, Item No. 165, *RPP* (NAI).

[28]Memorandum presented to Nehru at Rangiya on 28 November 1937, p. 4 (i), 1937, *AICC Papers*, NMML.

Yet another memorandum was submitted on behalf of the "Asamiya Deka Dal." It suggested a six-point programme to save the Assamese: (*i*) transfer of Sylhet to Bengal, (*ii*) total ban on Bengali immigration to the Brahmaputra Valley for a period of 20 years, (*iii*) strict naturalization laws for resident Bengali immigrants, (*iv*) outlawing all anti-Assamese organizations in the Brahmaputra Valley, (*v*) a ten-year moratoriam on agricultural indebtedness, and (*vi*) purge of the planters' bloc from the legislature. See *ibid.*

an economic necessity. No amount of sentiment, not even laws, would stop it. "Indeed, even from the point of view of developing Assam and making it a wealthier province," he wrote to the APCC president, Bishnuram Medhi, "immigration is desirable. The real problem is how to control and organise this immigration."[29] Thus, though not in favour of its total abolition, Nehru nevertheless wanted relaxation of the Line System.

Nehru's was an idealist point of view which was neither palatable to the Assam Congress leaders nor acceptable to all of his colleagues in the all-India leadership. The proportion of Muslims in the population of the Brahmaputra Valley had increased from 9 per cent in 1881 to 19 per cent in 1931; it increased to 23 per cent by 1951. In 1911, Muslims constituted 0.1 per cent of the population of Barpeta subdivision, but by 1941 they constituted nearly 49 per cent. The area of land settled with immigrants from other provinces was about 1.1 million acres in 1940-41, i.e., one-fifth of the total temporarily-settled area inclusive of wasteland grants in the Brahmaputra Valley. East Bengal immigrants alone accounted for half a million acres.[30] These facts were sufficient not only to unnerve local Hindus, but also some Congress leaders of national stature. What was initially an economic issue was turned into a communal one not only by the Muslim League, but also by some Congress leaders. Rajendra Prasad acquired a first-hand knowledge of the problem as far back as the 1920s. Even at that time he toyed with the idea of populating Assam with Bihari immigrants so that Muslim immigration from East Bengal could be held back. He wrote in his autobiography:

> I sounded the Assamese on the subject and they welcomed it.... Some thought it better to have the Hindus of Bihar than the Muslims of Mymensingh.... They welcomed the idea also because by themselves the Assamese were unable to bring the land under the plough. But the influx of Muslims from Mymensingh was upsetting the population ratio, and the Assamese wanted to retain a majority in the Brahmaputra Valley. The influx from Mymensingh could

[29]Nehru to Medhi, 1 December 1937, *APCC Papers*, Packet No. 6, Congress Bhavan, Gauhati.

[30]Percentages are worked out from relevant Census figures. The analysis of Barpeta population is from Saadulla's speech in the Assam Muslim League Conference at Barpeta in April 1944. *Assam Tribune* (weekly), 5 May 1944.

The land settlement figures are worked out from *Assam Valley Division Land Revenue Report, 1940-41.* Inclusive of all settled lands permanent and temporary as well as wasteland grants the total settled area in 1940-41 amounted to 6,788 thousand acres in the Assam Valley Division. No figures are available for the amount of land settled by zamindars with immigrants in the permanent-settled portion.

be countered only by Bihar Hindus to settle down on the land.

In partnership with his brother and Anugraha Narain Sinha, Rajendra Prasad even joined a Bengali (Hindu) gentleman to acquire a thousand acres of land and a tractor in a jungle-infested malarial tract in Assam; but their joint venture in farming ended in a failure. Even with this costly experience, Rajendra Prasad continued to view the successful Bengali Muslim immigration into Assam as an unwelcome phenomenon.[31]

Bengali-Assamese Question

Yet another dimension of the immigration problem was the burning language issue. Expatriate Bengali Hindus, who were dominant in the towns, and many of the Muslim immigrants demanded equal rights for the Bengali language. Matiur Rahman Mia (West-Goalpara) told the Assembly on 16 February 1938:

> We are Bengalees. Our mother tongue is Bengalee.... Under the circumstances if this Assamese language be imposed as a new burden on our shoulders, on our children's shoulders, and if we are deprived of our mother tongue, then that will amount to depriving our children from opportunities of education.[32]

The same demand re-echoed from the Goalpara Praja Sammilan at Ghagmari in December 1940, which was organized by Bhasani. By and large, Muslim immigrants were however more concerned with acquiring land rights than preservation of their language. It was particularly so in Assam proper.

The attitude of the Bengali Hindu settlers, particularly its influential urban section, was quite different. Their leaders viewed the Brahmaputra Valley as a bilingual area. They built their case on Census figures. Demanding equal job opportunities for all by removing racial discrimination, S. M. Lahiri moved a resolution in the province's upper house on 31 August 1938. Despite official opposition, his resolution recommending revision of the existing domicile rules in accordance with accepted legal principles was passed. But it was not taken up by the lower house. Therefore, on behalf of the Bengali community, a memorandum was submitted to Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi in March 1939, drawing his attention to this resolution as well as to the Congress Working Committee's award of January 1939 on the Bengali-Bihari question. The memorandum

[31] Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay, 1957, pp. 259-60; also see his *India Divided*, Bombay, 1946, pp. 246-48.

[32] Speech in Bengali, *ALAP* (1938), pp. 66-71. (Translation ours.)

demanded equal rights and privileges—civil and political—for all persons having their domicile in Assam, whether of origin or of choice.[33]

The Congress Working Committee's aforesaid award had recommended abolition of the practice of issuing domicile certificates and suggested that birth in the province or ten years' continuous residence should be regarded as sufficient proof of domicile. It had also recommended educational facilities through the medium of any language, wherever there was a local demand for it. Instead of implementing these model recommendations, the Bardoloi Government opted for deliberate procrastination in this matter. While replying to S. M. Lahiri on 9 May 1939, Bardoloi promised to consider action on the memorandum, but his assurance remained unfulfilled. The third session of the Assam Domiciled and Settlers' Association (renamed Assam Citizens' Association), held at Nowgong on 24 March 1940, reiterated the demand for equal citizenship rights and for education through the medium of one's mother tongue, irrespective of race and language.[34] The conference was permeated with a spirit of challenge to the unilingual concept of the Brahmaputra Valley, as upheld by the Congress since 1920.

Unpalatable as this attitude was to the Assamese in general, it provided a grand opportunity to the governor to pose as a champion of Assamese nationalism. In reply to an address presented by the Bengali Association at Nowgong, he said:

> Though I fully sympathise with you in your desire to preserve your mother tongue, I cannot—as a purely personal view—but ask two questions. First, would not the possession of a common tongue tend towards the creation within Assam of a united nation? And secondly, if we accept a united nation as a desirable aim, could its tongue be other than Assamese? I do not think that it could.[35]

The governor was enthusiastically quoted in a speech by Nilmoni Phukan when he addressed the Assamese students of Shillong in August 1940. Phukan, who had consistently opposed the Congress till 1938, joined it towards the latter part of the year and was elected president of the Jorhat Town Mauza Congress Committee.[36] He ex-

[33] *ALCP* (1938), pp. 72-83; for the text of the memorandum see *Assam Citizens Association*, Head Office Dhubri, 1940, Appendix A, pp. 56-66.

[34] *Ibid.*, Appendices B and C, pp. 66-74; *Assam Tribune*, 29 March 1940; *ALCP* (1939), pp. 236, 277-78.

[35] Cited by Nilmoni Phukan in a speech at the annual session of the Assam Students' Union, held at Shillong, as reported in *Assam Tribune*, 23 August 1940.

[36] *Ibid.*, also see *Assam Tribune*, 6 October 1939.

plained that his decision was influenced by the acceptance of office by the Congress. In the economic crisis of 1930s, he had to sell out the tea garden he had built up with borrowed funds to a Marwari trader. This frustration made him perhaps aware of imperialism's strangle-hold over Assam's economy and salvaged him from his impeccably collaborationist politics. However, it could hardly cure him of the fear of his own countrymen.[37] Together with Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri he continued his tirade against the Bengali settlers, which was out of tune with the popular anti-imperialist struggles of the period.

Aftermath of Hockenhull Report

Under the circumstances of this growing distrust between Hindus and Muslims, on the one hand, and between the Assamese and the Bengali, on the other, F. W. Hockenhull, leader of the European Party, had the honour of presiding over the deliberations of the Line System Enquiry Committee. Its report, submitted in February 1938, emphasized that, without the aid of immigrant settlers, indigenous people alone would be unable to develop the province's enormous wasteland resources within a reasonable period. Nevertheless it urged that not only continuation of the Line System but even its tightening to protect tribal lands was advisable in the given context.[38] The situation was too delicate for Saadulla for taking a decision on the matter.

Even the first Bardoloi Government (Sept. 1938-Nov. 1939) that followed procrastinated. Only a few days before its resignation was it able to adopt a resolution on the subject, which was gazetted on 4 November 1939. Its main features were:

(*i*) Denial of land settlement to any body in village and professional grazing reserves.

(*ii*) Regulated settlement of landless people including immigrants on available wastelands, subject to a holding of 30 bighas per family.

(*iii*) Eviction of all immigrant squatters from areas declared protected tribal blocks, in the submontane region.[39]

The policy, on the whole, reflected a reasonable approach. But since much would depend on how and by whom it was going to be implemented, it satisfied nobody. The first conference of the Assam Provincial Muslim League at Ghagmari in November 1939 rejected the Line and demanded its total abolition. On the other hand, others thought that the policy adopted was not sufficiently protective, so far

[37]Dilip Chaudhuri, *Nilmoni Phukanar Cintadhara* (in Assamese), Gauhati, 1972, pp. 24-27, 91.

[38]*Report of the Line System Committee*, Shillong, 1938, Vol. I.

[39]*Assam Tribune*, 1 December 1939.

as tribal people's interests were concerned. While speaking on the budget on 26 February 1940, Bhimbar Deuri refused to make any distinction between the policies of Saadulla and Bardoloi in this matter. He complimented "the farsighted British Officers" on innovating the Line System "with a view to do even justice to all concerned" and demanded its strict implementation.[40] In an editorial on 29 March 1940, the *Assam Tribune* commented that the Saadulla Government was following "a completely anti-Assamese policy" in the matter of immigration. With Bardoloi out and Saadulla in, the policy could not in practice be what it was originally intended to be.

To work out the operational details of the policy in consultation with the Opposition, Chief Minister Saadulla held an all-party conference on the Line System on 31 May-1 June 1940. There the government advocated a development scheme, as envisaged in the majority report of the Hockenhull Committee, with some modifications to accommodate the minority view of Sarveswar Barua, Kameswar Das, and Rabichandra Kachari. The Government Resolution of 21 June that followed put a ban on settlement of wastelands with immigrants entering Assam after 1 January 1938 and decided to go ahead with a land development scheme for providing land to landless indigenous people and eligible immigrants, with an order of priorities in favour of the former.[41]

The salient features of the Development Scheme were published in the *Assam Gazette* of 4 December 1940. Under the scheme, a Special Officer was to be appointed by the government to examine whether the proposed areas could be opened for settlement without any detriment to normal requirements of grazing and forest reserves. The settlement was to be confined to only landless indigenous people and pre-1938 immigrants. Besides, people, affected by flood and erosion, who were then squatting in some "lined" villages and reserves and were under eviction orders, were also to be accommodated. Eligible applicants for wastelands were to be settled in specified development areas, on payment of stipulated premia, in blocks segregated for different communities as before. The government promised to put the scheme into operation as early as possible, after the land scrutiny was completed. To appease the Muslim public, an assurance was given that the Line in respect of non-tribal and non-backward people would soon be done away with.[42]

Line or no Line, the law of competition was in full operation. Whatever feeble attempts were made to set up lines, in Goalpara,

[40]*ALCP* (1940), p. 103.

[41]*Assam Tribune*, 28 June 1940.

[42]Harendranath Barua, "The Development Scheme, Position of Indigenou People," *Assam Tribune*, 29 August 1941.

for example, had been found self-defeating. Local people could not be stopped there from selling their lands even in "lined" villages to immigrants at high prices. The district being contiguous to Bengal and the bulk of the people speaking a language akin to Bengali, they could easily accommodate themselves, as was reported by the district magistrate, to the immigrants' ways of life and live in peace and amity with them.[43] But any such breakdown of the Line System in Assam proper was sure to have more serious implications. Assamese public opinion—Assamese Hindu opinion to be more precise—was therefore almost hysteric in denouncing the idea of a Development Scheme. It was in this atmosphere that the Congress launched its programme of anti-war individual civil disobedience in Assam in December 1940.

The third Saadulla Ministry (1939-41) did not have smooth sailing over its land policy. In the December 1941 session of the Assembly, a non-confidence motion was in the hatching against the Ministry's land policy, when yet another event—the lathi charge on the anti-war student demonstration at Gauhati on 6 December—sealed its fate. The Saadulla Ministry did not survive after Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri deserted it. One of the first acts of the governor's regime under Section 93 (till 24 August 1942) that followed was to scrap the Land Development Scheme. Even having been installed into power once more on 25 August 1942, Saadulla was busy putting down the August movement and did not take immediate steps to revive his scheme.

Resuscitated Land Development Scheme

The Bengal Legislative Council carried a motion on 16 July 1943 calling upon the Government of India to take immediate steps to remove all existing restrictions imposed by the Assam Government on cultivators from Bengal in getting settlement of land in the Brahmaputra Valley. Exactly a year after its formation, the fourth Saadulla Ministry (25 August 1942-23 March 1945) therefore adopted a new resolution on land settlement under the slogan "grow more food." What it really meant, according to the Viceroy, was "grow more Moslems."[44] The salient features of this resolution of 24 August 1943 were as follows:

(i) Renewed distribution of wastelands in proportion to needs of different communities in Nowgong and dereservation of select grazing reserves for that purpose, as per resolution of 21 June 1940.

(ii) Dereservation of professional grazing reserves in Kamrup and

[43] Goalpara district magistrate to Govt., 1 January 1938, cited in R. K. Chaudhuri's reply, 25 February, *ALAP* (1938), pp. 464-66.

[44] Quote from P. Moon, ed., *Wavell the Viceroy's Journal*, London, 1973, p. 41.

Darrang, if found surplus to actual requirements.

(iii) Opening up of surplus reserves in all submontane areas and in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur for settlement of landless indigenous people.[45]

S. P. Desai, a senior ICS man, was appointed Special Officer to ascertain what portion of professional grazing reserves could be declared as surplus land available for settlement. Desai reported that since forcible occupation of grazing lands by immigrants had already taken place on a large scale, even in predominantly Assamese or tribal areas, there was no surplus land available for settlement.[46] Ignoring the report, the Muslim League Coalition Government of Saadulla threw open professional grazing reserves for settlement with immigrants. The Revenue Secretary to the Government of Assam bluntly wrote to the Bengal Government in May 1944 that the gradual abolition of the Line System was, as a process, already under way and "will be continued in areas where Caste Hindus are in a majority." It was a matter of commitment "as far as is consistent with the necessity for reservation for indigenous people and protection of the tribal classes." The policy, thus elaborated, was claimed to have been liberalized considerably, to meet Bengal's objections.[47]

This policy gave a handle to the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha (the old Samrakshini Sabha so renamed) as well as the Hindu Mahasabha to raise the respective cries of the Assamese and the Hindus being in danger. They pointed out that the new resolution was nothing but resuscitation of the discarded Land Development Scheme under a new garb.[48] On the other hand, nothing short of the abolition of the Line would satisfy land-hungry Muslim immigrants and their leader Bhasani, president of the provincial Muslim League.

The provincial League conference was held in April 1944, with Choudhry Khaliquzzaman in the chair, at Barpeta—Bhasani's stronghold. "Ministers, give us land or resign" —slogans like this decorated the walls of the *pandal* to greet Saadulla. Replying to Bhasani's long harangue, Saadulla charged headmen of immigrant villages, *dewanis* and *matbars*, with unceremoniously grabbing land from seventy to

[45] *Assam Tribune*, 3 September 1943; also *IAR* (July-December 1943), Vol. 2, pp. 279-80, citing *Assam Gazette*, 25 August 1943.

[46] *Assam Tribune*, editorial, 27 October 1944; Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, Bombay, 1946, p. 247; S. P. Desai, "My Thirty-five Years in Assam' in K. L. Punjabi, ed., *The Civil Servant in India*, Bombay, 1965, p. 66

[47] A. G. Patton to Revenue Secy. to Govt. of Bengal, Shillong, 5 May 1944, Revenue Dept. Development Branch, File No. RD 25/44, (AS).

[48] *IAR* (July-December 1943), Vol. 2, pp. 258, 279-80; *Assam Tribune*, 31 March 1944 and 1 September 1944.

hundred acres each in order to settle sub-tenants thereupon for the purpose of exploitation. It was their greed which was at the root of the evil of the Line System. He cited instances of their driving out even Assamese Muslims from newly reclaimed lands. To drive the point home, he even drew a parallel with unrestricted Jewish migration to the Arab homeland. He pleaded for protection of Assam's plains tribals from the onslaught of more enterprising settlers. Finally, he appealed for support to his policy, for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity, since the Line System had already been relaxed a great deal, keeping an eye towards its gradual abolition.[49]

The debate was carried on before an assembly of some twenty-five thousand people. Bhasani, of course, won the day. The Ministry was thus confronted with a crisis. The quarrel between Bhasani and Saadulla, despite an enquiry ordered by the all-India Muslim League's Working Committee, remained unresolved.[50]

Congress Party Back to Legislature

The Congress Party as an official body had absented itself from the Assam Legislative Assembly, since December 1941, though some sessions were ineffectively attended by three or four members in their individual capacity.[51] On the publication of Rajagopalachari's Partition formula of 10 July 1944, Gopinath Bardoloi became very much perturbed, in view of the likelihood of the Muslim League's demand for Assam's inclusion in the so-called East Pakistan. He wrote to Rajagopalachari that excepting Sylhet, if any other part or whole of the province was grouped with Bengal to form a single unit under the plan, "the whole province will join to a man opposing it." While forwarding a copy of this letter to Tejbahadur Sapru on 14 August, Bardoloi requested him "to take a special interest in the matter and to see that no injustice is done to Assam."[52] Bardoloi apprised Gandhiji also of Saadulla's anti-national policy and asked for his advice. If the people really felt that the government's policy was oppressive and anti-national, let them fight it non-violently, or

[49]*Assam Tribune*, 5 May 1944.

[50]Waliullah, n. 21, pp. 420-24.

According to a police report, about one lakh people were believed to have attended the conference. Town D.I.B. to Supdt. of Police, 13 February 1945, Confidential B 1945, File C 27/45 (AS).

[51]On 11 March 1943 only four Congress Party members were present in the house. *IAR* (January-June 1943), Vol. I, p. 243.

[52]Bardoloi's letter to Sapru, 14 August 1944, and a copy of letter to Rajagopalachari, intercepted by CID, Special Branch, Lucknow in "Govt. Notes regarding Bardoloi's Intention to attend Assembly Session at Shillong in Nov. 1944," Confidential B, 1945, File No. C 241/1945 (AS).

violently if necessary—was Gandhiji's advice.[53]

In September 1944 the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam recommended removal of restrictions on the movement of released Congress legislators, so that they could attend the Assembly sessions. While he was in favour of relaxing the internment order on Bardoloi in particular, the governor and the chief minister were against it. Finally, after some consultations, it was decided that all interned legislators, Bardoloi not excepted, should apply for government's permission to attend the Assembly, and each case would be judged according to the concerned district magistrate's report. They all asked for the permission and had it.[54]

Back to the Assembly as the Opposition leader, Bardoloi declared on 14 November that his party's outlook as regards parliamentary activities remained unchanged. It would continue to take advantage of its position in the house to prevent the harm that was being inflicted upon the people. He demanded a shift in the land settlement policy, in favour of landless indigenous people and pre-1938 immigrants.[55] The Opposition suggested that the question might be considered by an all-party conference. The governor, too, threw a similar hint in his address to the Assembly. Saadulla accepted the offer. An all-party conference was duly held, under his chairmanship, on 16-19 December 1944, to recommend a suitable land settlement policy. He and Abdul Matin Chaudhury chose not to stand by the Muslim League policy on this issue. They agreed, in essence, to whatever was suggested by the Congress Party. Thirty per cent of the available wastelands were to be kept in reserve to provide for future expansion of the indigenous people. A policy of planned settlement of residual wastelands with landless sons of the soil as well as pre-1938 immigrants and of protection to tribal people in belts of territory specially reserved for them was recommended by the conference. Besides, it was also agreed that the integrity of grazing reserves would be maintained by evicting trespassers. The decisions, of course, were not unanimous. Two Muslim League participants, both of them

[53]This was what Bardoloi told the United Press of India in December 1944. The Congress decision to attend the Assembly session to protest the anti-national policy was claimed to have stemmed from Gandhiji's advice. Later, in clarification, Bardoloi issued a statement that what Gandhiji had said four months ago was in consonance of his general attitude to cowardice. *Assam Tribune*, 22 December 1944 and 5 January 1945.

[54]n. 50.

Saadulla noted on 12 September 1944. "When I find that this class of people who publicly speak of unity but secretly write to Gandhi and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru against the same move as in Mr. Bardoloi's case no reliance can be placed on their work."—*Ibid*.

[55]*Assam Tribune*, 24 November 1944.

immigrants, dissented.[56] Apparently, the outcome of the conference was a victory for the Congress. But soon it came out that there was many a fall indeed between the lip and the cup.

In response to the conference decisions, the government adopted a fresh resolution on land settlement on 16 January 1945. It envisaged a plan for wastelands settlement in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, and Nowgong with landless people of all categories including pre-1938 immigrants. Land was to be allotted to various communities according to their requirements in blocks, subject to local availability. The maximum allotment was to be 30 bighas (10 acres) per family. If enough land was not available in the aforementioned four districts for settling the landless, North Lakhimpur subdivision was also to be opened. A landless person was defined as one who held in ownership less than five bighas of agricultural land. Tribal belts were to be constituted, and the area required for tribal people was to be calculated at double the area already under their possession plus a reservation similar to that for non-tribals. On the whole, approximately 30 per cent of all cultivable wastelands, as they stood in 1940 in each district, was to be reserved to provide for future population expansion. Professional grazing reserves, even if they contained surplus lands, were henceforth to remain untouched, except where settlements in them had already been made. If any community failed to occupy their quota of the land allocation fully within two years, the unoccupied plots were to be allotted afresh to members of other communities.[57]

As expected, the resolution was not acceptable to immigrant Muslims. A meeting of the Assam Provincial Muslim League Council, held at Gauhati under Bhasani's chairmanship on 28 January and attended by 525 representatives, demanded total abolition of the Line System.[58] Even the Assamese public opinion was adverse to the resolution because of a number of built-in loopholes. Only a few of the indigenous cultivators owning uneconomic holdings could claim to be landless under the prescribed conditions; the five bigha clause operated as a disqualification to their getting land. Secondly, the tribal belts had yet to be delimited, thus leaving much room for administrative manipulation and bungling. Besides, contrary to the conference decisions, the resolution allowed wide discretion to local officers, "to keep in possession encroachers who had been in occupation of and cultivating land in the grazing reserves over three years." This meant that even immigrants who had come after 1938 to Assam could get land if they were already in illegal occupation of grazing reserves. The Congress therefore refused to back the resolution.[59] Because of this rejection of the land policy both by the Congress and the League, the Saadulla Ministry became shaky.

[56] *Ibid.*, 22 December 1944, 29 December 1944, 29 June 1945; Rajendra Prasad, n. 46, p. 248.

[57] *Assam Tribune*, 26 January 1945.

[58] *Ibid.*, 9 February 1945. As early as 14 November 1942, Bhasani charged Abdul Matin Chaudhuri, a Muslim League minister, of betraying the immigrants. "Whoever goes to Lanka, becomes a Ravan" was what he said on the Assembly floor. *ALAP* (1942), p. 79.

By the end of January 1945 the press began to talk about Saadulla-Chaudhury Ministry, as an emerging alternative to Section 93.[60] On 6 February, when armed police intervened in a clash between local graziers and Bengali Muslim encroachers in the Kawaimari grazing reserve, two of the latter received gun shots. This was followed by communal tension in the district. Under pressure from above, the local police officers failed to take any effective action against the illegal encroachments on grazing reserves, much to the resentment of the Assamese population.[61]

That Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri would try to fish in troubled waters was understandable. Though a trusted colleague for years, after his crossing the floor in December 1941, he was kept out of Saadulla's fourth cabinet. Nevertheless the latter told the lower house:

> ...Chaudhuri may be the leader of the opposition today but we were sleeping dogs of the same kennel. Although there have been instances of species changing their genus or there have been biological freaks where the gender was changed, but my separation with him is so recent that he has no time to change... .[62]

What was not easily understood was Bardoloi's role at this stage. Together with 18 Congress legislators, he attended the Assembly session that commenced on 1 March 1945.[63] Evidently afraid of a defeat and eventual resignation, Saadulla was by this time in search of

[59] Rajendra Prasad, n. 46, p. 248; Bardoloi's letter to Gandhiji, 14 March 1945, reproduced in G. N. Bardoloi, *Gandhiji* (in Assamese), Gauhati, 1965, pp. 39-41.

[60] *Assam Tribune*, 2 February 1945.

[61] Confidential B 1945, File No. C 27/45. A hue and cry was raised by the Muslim League press over the Kawaimari shooting. Two League ministers held spot enquiries on 12 February. On 20 February Saadulla noted on the file: "The entire Police officers in the Barpeta circle are Hindus, and the immigrants have reported to me various things against Hindu officers of Police." Saadulla concluded that he had "never come across so blatant and outrageous Police report" and ordered transfer of the Police Inspector pending further enquiry. See *ibid.*

[62] 14 November, *ALAP* (1942), p. 92.

[63] M. Tayyebulla, *Karagarar Cithi* (in Assamese), Gauhati, 1962, p. 349.

fresh allies. He soon entered into secret negotiations with Chaudhuri and Bardoloi.

Bardoloi had come to the conclusion that in the given situation, the Congress Assembly Party had only two alternative courses left open to it. One was to launch a mass struggle against the unpopular Muslim League Coalition Government. But such a course involved the risk of the movement turning violent. The other one, i.e., to work within the legislature to pull down the government, was therefore the only workable alternative. However, since tribal and scheduled caste politicians would not welcome Section 93, a no-confidence motion moved by the Congress would have a fair chance only if that helped in the formation of an alternative coalition government. Three possibilities were open: (*i*) a Congress-supported coalition ministry without congressmen as ministers; (*ii*) a coalition ministry headed by Saadulla that would include congressmen, and would be committed to a minimum programme; or (*iii*) a full-fledged Congress Coalition ministry.[64]

The Congress Assembly Party met to decide upon the strategy. Bardoloi told his colleagues that personally he was opposed to congressmen serving on any cabinet, in the given situation. But as a democratic leader, he was prepared to act according to the party mandate. Excepting two, all of his colleagues would go to any length to bring down the Muslim League Coalition Government. So the path for him was clear. However, he felt that he needed the moral sanction of Gandhiji for his coming action. In a long letter, dated 14 March 1945, Bardoloi graphically described Assam's burning land settlement and immigrant question. He explained the rationale of his strategy to oust or at least curb the Muslim League's power and concluded:

> ...if I am continuing as a parliamentarian, it is only because there is no alternative for me just at present, and that I would do all that is possible for me to do not to become a minister consistent of course only with the safety of my province.
>
> ...I have made up my mind for the action on the understanding that I have your approval.[65]

Gandhiji's reply to this letter was non-committal. "Do what is best. Kill corruption. Adopt that alternative," he wrote on 17 March, "which is the best under the circumstances."[66] Apparently without waiting

[64]The strategy as elaborated in Bardoloi's letter to Gandhiji, 14 March 1945, n. 59.

[65]*Ibid.*

[66]Cited in *IAR* (January-June 1945), Vol. 1, p. 214.

for the reply, Bardoloi had set at work. On 18 March he and Chaudhuri jointly sent a concrete five-point proposal to Saadulla for a reconstituted coalition ministry to be headed by him and supported by the Congress. The very next day Saadulla's coalition party agreed, by a more than two-thirds majority, to accept the proposal to form a stable ministry. They authorized their leader to negotiate about the land settlement policy and the allocation of cabinet seats.[67]

On 20 March the three leaders met together to thrash out the issues. The five points they agreed upon after three days' discussion were:

> (*i*) Restoration of civil liberties and gradual release of political prisoners.
>
> (*ii*) A suitable policy for procurement and distribution of essential goods, with a view to removing corruption.
>
> (*iii*) A revision of the land settlement policy with a view to accommodating claims of sons of the soil.
>
> (*iv*) Agreed distribution of local board seats amongst main contending groups.
>
> (*v*) Reconstitution of the Saadulla ministry on an all-party basis.

According to the agreement, Saadulla resigned on 23 March and reconstituted his cabinet in such manner as to include all the five Muslim ministers from his last cabinet, one tribal minister chosen by the tribal group and four non-Muslim ministers selected by the Opposition.[68] One of the non-Muslim ministers was to represent the scheduled castes.

Although all the five Muslim League ministers were retained in the cabinet, the two important portfolios of land revenue and finance were taken out of their hands. All the non-Muslim ministers were practically Congress nominees, although congressmen themselves refused to accept any office. The Congress achieved what it wanted. Relieved after the Assembly show was over, Bardoloi wrote to Gandhiji on 25 March: "In whatever has happened, I felt the hand of God and your good wishes and blessings working through them."[69] In a press statement, Bardoloi even said that "a new era in Assam" had been ushered in. It was gleefully noted by the *Assam Tribune*

[67]Chaudhuri and Bardoloi to Saadulla, Shillong, 19 March 1945 and Saadulla's reply to Chaudhuri and Bardoloi, Shillong, 19 March 1945. See *APCC Papers*, No. 43, "leaders correspondence," Congress Bhavan, Gauhati.

[68]*IAR* (January-June 1945), Vol. 1, p. 213; *Karagarar Cithi*, n. 63, pp. 351-55; M. Tayyebulla, *Between the Symbol and the Idol at Last*, Bombay, 1964, p. 158. Also see in this connection Bardoloi's letter to Gandhiji of 14 March 1945, n. 59, and speeches by Saadulla and Bardoloi, 22 March, *ALAP* (1945), pp. 780-82.

[69]*APCC Papers*, No. 43, "leaders correspondence," n. 67, *IAR* (January-June 1945), Vol. 1.

that "the Congress and the Moslem League have joined hands in Assam.[70]

All were not happy. Not certainly Tayyebulla, APCC president, who claimed to be no less a Gandhian than Bardoloi. Released on 27 March, he issued a press statement opposing the tripartite agreement. Bardoloi, he said, had no right to use the name of Congress in signing any agreement with war collaborators like Saadulla and Chaudhuri. In June he asked the Congress high command to take up the matter for discussion in the next meeting of the Congress Working Committee (all-India). Meanwhile, however, the Congress League *entante* in the Assam Legislative Assembly showed signs of a total breakdown. Under the changed circumstances, the Congress high command was not in a mood to discipline Bardoloi for his non-conformist role in ministry-making. The lapse, if any on his part, was treated as past history. The faction-fight within the APCC on this issue became pointless with the end of World War II by early August 1945 and new developments in the province.[71]

Burial of the Tripartite Agreement

Ministry-making with personnel acceptable to everybody proved to be a rather easier task than fulfilling the remaining part of the Saadulla-Chaudhuri-Bardoloi Agreement. The revision of the resolution of 16 January needed, in particular, careful handling. The working committee of the CPI-controlled Assam Provincial Kisan Sabha, meeting on 30 May at Gauhati, appealed to all political parties concerned for a compromise on this controversial issue. It recognized, on the one hand, the prior right of the Assamese people to the local soil and, on the other, the demand of landless Bengal peasants to be settled on wastelands in Assam after a proper survey.[72] Due to intricacies of the situation and various obstacles put forward by the League, the cabinet dared not adopt a new resolution on the subject until 18 June. Even this resolution was published as late as 13 July 1945. Thus, it was about four months after the signing of the agreement that the new land settlement policy was officially announced. A landless family was now re-defined as one possessing less than 20 bighas of land. All grazing reserves were to be maintained and all encroachers were to be indiscriminately evicted therefrom as a matter of strict policy. In short, the principles agreed upon in the December Conference were, in all respects, fully restored.[73]

The new government's halting and half-hearted action in fully

[70] *Assam Tribune*, 30 March 1945.
[71] Tayyebulla, n. 68, pp. 158-60.
[72] *Assam Tribune*, 8 June 1945.
[73] *Ibid.*, 27 July 1945.

implementing the agreement provided Bardoloi with an opportunity to wriggle out of the marriage of convenience that was already under heavy fire from his rival faction in the APCC. On 10 July 1945, he wrote to Abul Kalam Azad, national Congress president, giving him a detailed report of the Assam situation. He also privately wrote to Saadulla on 13 July, charging him with deliberate procrastination. The contents of the last-mentioned letter leaked out in the press. Away in Simla, Saadulla presumably received it only after his return on 19 July. Meanwhile Rajendra Prasad wrote on 21 July to the APCC president, Tayyebulla, that his complaint about the unprincipled tripartite deal must be receiving Azad's attention and might be taken up in the next Working Committee meeting. Azad advised Bardoloi to carry on the negotiations with Saadulla and allow him a few weeks' time so that "our attitude may remain straight-forward and unambiguous" until the Congress Working Committee decided on the next step.[74]

If Bardoloi was working under constraints from above, so was Saadulla. The Central Parliamentary Board of the Muslim League had frowned upon the resolution of 18 June and advised its modification. Accordingly on 28 July, Saadulla apprised R. K. Chaudhuri, Land Revenue Minister, of the suggested modifications. The crux of the proposed amendment was that those immigrants who had already sown at least one crop should be entitled to land settlement, irrespective of their arrival dates in the Brahmaputra Valley or of the legality of their squatting on grazing reserves. Chaudhuri handed over this letter of 28 July to the APCC leaders.[75]

Caught on the horns of a dilemma, Saadulla could do very little to improve the worsened relations. In vain did he stress that Assam had been the first province to lift the ban on the Congress and that the new ministry had already released 70 security prisoners, while retaining only 13. Denying the charge that he had not implemented the agreement terms, he wrote to Bardoloi on 2 August, "You are welcome to take whatever course your conscience dictates. I know you are not a free agent . . . ."[76] The Congress Coalition Party and the Independent Muslim Party thereafter held a joint meeting on 14-15 August, which was attended by 24 members. The suggestions from the Muslim League quarters regarding further modification of the land policy were discussed by the meeting and rejected. Finally, it authorized their leader,

[74] For reference to Rajendra Prasad, see *Karagarar Cithi*, n. 63, p. 366, Azad to Bardoloi, 22 July 1945 and Bardoloi to Saadulla, 21 August 1945 in the File containing "leaders' correspondence," *APCC Papers*, Packet No. 43, n. 67.
[75] Saadulla to Chaudhuri, 28 July 1945, *ibid.*
[76] Saadulla to Bardoloi, 2 August 1945, *ibid.*

Bardoloi, to protest the non-implementation of the agreement. Bardoloi, accordingly, wrote to Saadulla on 21 August.[77] Thus "the new era in Assam" came to its end. The superannuated Assam legislature was dissolved on 1 October 1945, while the fifth and last Saadulla ministry was to continue until the general election, scheduled to be held in the second week of January 1946.

National Question Divides Peasantry

What loomed large in the minds of the people of Assam was the big question mark posed by the Line System. Was it to stay or go? The local peasant society wanted to remain a closed one, lest they lost their separate cultural identity through loss of their lands to the more enterprising immigrants. The immigrants, already in their second generation, welcomed further immigration and an open society, competitive, yet electorally divided. The national question in Assam had obviously been transformed into a peasant question, evolving around the land problem.[78]

Since the legislature had the power to retain or abolish the Line, parliamentary activities attained increasing importance for the peasants. Congress leaders who mattered soon found that if they bypassed the legislature and the opportunities of ministry-making for the sake of mere principles, they would lose their mass following. In the same way Saadulla too could not afford to lose the support of Muslim peasants by denying land to newcomers, even if he had a mind to do so.

Through its communal electorates, the constitution of 1935 helped maintain the segregation of the two communities. Peasants, so divided, failed to thrash out the issue on a common platform. During the war years the Muslim League in the Brahmaputra Valley was slowly able to draw the Muslim peasant masses, mainly immigrants, towards it. It was then that Bhasani, with the help of Assamese

[77]Proceedings of the meeting and Bardoloi's letter to Saadulla, 21 August 1945, *ibid.*

The APCC met at Nowgong after 42 long momentous months on 9 August, but did not discuss the tripartite deal, although its Working Committee had, the day before, approved of Tayyebulla's stand on the issue. His memoirs indicate some confusion over the dates of these meetings. See Tayyebulla, n. 68, pp. 159-60 and *Karagarar Cithi*, n. 63, p. 367.

[78]"The very question of self-existence of the Assamese people as a distinct and growing nationality now hinges on this problem and, naturally enough, the people of Assam are seriously perturbed with an intense desire for checking further immigration which has been the primary cause for complicating the question of land settlement." See "Resolution on Land Settlement and Eviction in Assam," *Assam Fights for Freedom and Democracy Draft Resolutions of Assam Communists*, Assam Provincial Organising Committee, CPI, Gauhati, n.d., pp. 41-50.

Muslim student leaders of lower middle class and peasant origins, was able to establish his grip over this organization. Leaders with a more "respectable" aristocratic background were under a challenge. Saadulla, Sayidur Rahman, Keramat Ali—all had modest interests in tea gardens and were government title-holders at some time or other.[79]

In this confused state of things, no agreed solution acceptable to the masses could or did emerge from any quarters. Even the CPI (the majority of its members spoke Bengali) and its associate mass organizations failed to support in unequivocal terms the demand for wastelands settlement with the landless, irrespective of their race, creed, and language. It had to concede that the Assamese people should have the first right to such lands in their national homeland and that the problem required a political solution. It did not of course fail to condemn acts of government violence on the immigrant encroachers and their forcible eviction; but such pragmatic gestures were hardly meaningful.[80]

The growing demand for Pakistan and the bleak prospect of a divided India warranted a concern amongst the Assamese people about safeguarding their future political and cultural aspirations. It also spurred active promotion of unrestrained immigration from Bengal into Assam, as if to turn the latter overnight into a Muslim-majority province for inclusion into East Pakistan. The first conference of the CPI-controlled Assam Provincial Kisan Sabha held at Thakeragaon in Nowgong district in 1946 talked of peasant unity and wanted Gandhiji and Jinnah to come to terms, but could suggest no agreeable political solution other than mere patch-works. In a widely-publicized six-point election appeal in the form of a leaflet, the APCC announced that, after incessant agitation by the Congress, the British had at last agreed to allow an indirectly-elected constituent assembly to frame India's constitution, in accordance with its people's wishes. The appeal[81] reminded people of the Congress endeavours for reorganization of all provinces on the basis of

[79]Interview with Md. Akram of Jorhat on 12 August 1974.

[80]For example, the CPI which tried its best to remain above petty and communal considerations suggested the following principles for acceptance by the Congress and the League:

(*i*) Stop immigration; (*ii*) postpone evictions pending working out of planned settlement; (*iii*) withdraw voluntarily from reserves illegally encroached upon; and (*iv*) recognize the right of self-determination for the people of Assam and full democratic and cultural rights to the minorities. See n. 78.

[81]Congress election leaflet in Assamese printed at Jayanti Art Press by Jadunath Das and published by Hemkanta Barua and Harendranath Barua, joint secretaries publicity department, APCC, found with *APCC Papers*,

language and cultural and solicited votes particularly on that count. It further implored:

> Unless the province of Assam be organised on the basis of the Assamese language and Assamese culture, the survival of the Assamese nationality and culture will become impossible. The inclusion of Bengali-speaking Sylhet and Cachar [plains portion] and the immigration or importation of lacs of Bengali settlers on waste-lands has been threatening to destroy the distinctness of Assam and has, in practice, caused many disorders in its administration. For an appropriate solution and redress of this big problem, the Congress party should be installed as the majority party in the Assembly.[82]

Needless to say from such an election platform the Congress could hardly look forward to winning Muslim seats. Of the 34 Muslim seats, as many as 31 were bagged by the Muslim League, three by Jamiat-ul-Ulema, and none by the Congress. The Jamiat's success is explained by the influence of the Deoband school of Islamic theology and of Maulana Madani, the leader of the school. Of nearly 240,000 Muslim votes cast in Assam two-thirds were in favour of the League. However, the Congress swept the general constituencies. By taking up the local issue as its main election platform, it was able to keep the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha completely out of electoral politics.[83]

SECOND BARDOLOI MINISTRY (11 FEBRUARY 1946-1950)

March of Communalism

Never was the communal situation in Assam so tense as in the last year of the British rule. In the 1940s the demand for the abolition of the Line System had converged on the demand for a six-province Pakistan that would include Assam. In January 1946, the province's Muslim electorate stood firmly behind these demands and their champion, the Muslim League. If Assam could be yoked with Bengal in one and the same Section that had a 51 per cent Muslim majority under the Cabinet Mission Plan, these demands would be substantially achieved.

No. 43, n. 67.

[82] *Ibid.* We have translated "Asamiya Jati" as the Assamese nationality (it could be "race" as well) and "pamua" as settlers on wastelands. The latter term generally stands for Muslim settlers on the wastelands in the Brahmaputra Valley.

[83] IAR (January-June 1946), Vol. 1, pp. 221-31. The Muslim League secured 158,190 votes and non-League Muslims 81,756 votes.

Under the circumstances, the second Bardoloi Government's routine measures to evict thousands of immigrant squatters from grazing and forest reserves—this had sanction of the tripartite agreement of 22 March 1945—looked like a counter-measure to curb the League. Jinnah's statement issued from Gauhati on 6 March and the provincial Muslim League Working Committee's resolution of 8 March 1946 expressed grave concern over the future of thousands of immigrants facing eviction. A sub-committee of the League Working Committee was formed with Saadulla as treasurer to collect funds from all over India in their aid.[84] The government armed itself in due course with special powers by promulgating the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance to deal with the League movement.[85]

Communal feelings were running high, particularly since the observance of the Muslim League's Direct Action Day on 16 August. There was a minor communal clash in Sylhet resulting in injury to some 30 people and a loss of property worth a few thousands of rupees. Bardoloi instructed all district and subdivisional officers to control the situation through formation of local peace committees and, if necessary, through sternest police measures.[86] The district magistrate of Darrang felt in November that in many areas "the eviction operations would require strong military aid not only to give protection to officers... but also to protect Assamese villages against retaliation."[87] Apprehending retaliation in Sylhet in the wake of the proposed evictions in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Governor of Assam apprised Delhi of the impending perils of the situation.[88] Evictions of immigrant encroachers were nevertheless in progress in the Mangaldai subdivision in the beginning of January.[89] Ultimately, however, Bardoloi wisely decided to go slow with his policy and was able to keep the province free from communal riots.[90]

[84] Bhasani's appeal (in Bengali), 15 March 1946, cited in Revenue Dept., Development Branch, File No. RD/46 (AS).

[85] *Assam Gazette*, Part VI, 1947, cited by M. Kar, "Muslim Politics in Assam,' *North-Eastern Affairs*, 2 (July-December 1973), p. 19.

[86] Bardoloi to Chief Secy., 7 September 1946, Confidential B, 1946, File No. C 241/46 (AS).

[87] S. N. Maitra, district magistrate, to the Divisional Commissioner, 11 November, 1946, *ibid.*

[88] G. E. Abell to Patel and Bardoloi to Patel, both dated 15 November 1946, in Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Vol. 2, Ahmedabad, 1972, pp. 294-99.

[89] "Assam Police Weekly Intelligence Report for the Week ending 8th January 1947," typescript in the office of the editor of *History of Freedom Movement*, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati.

[90] S. Chaliha, "Barak banam Brahmaputra," *Saptahik Nitlacal*, 20 December 1972 (serialized).

Ambikagiri and Bhasani

The League politics provided an opportunity to the chauvinistic influence of Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri to thrive, particularly in the absence of Congress leaders in jails since 1942. In his concept of a future Indian federation of linguistic nationalities, the emphasis was on the principle of a dual citizenship. He even published an outline constitution for an ideal Indian confederation on that basis in September 1942, which was reprinted in 1946.[91]

Neither this concept of dual citizenship nor that of secession, as was earlier suggested by Jnananath Bora, had any general acceptance amongst the Assamese people. Their commitment obviously was to the Congress ideal of a single Indian citizenship alongside of regional autonomy within a federal structure. Raychaudhuri gave a call for raising a two-lakh strong Assamese volunteer corps, styled "Asam Atmarakshmi Bahini" with a view to resisting further immigration and the alleged Muslim League invasion of Assam.[92] Though he was widely acclaimed as a true son of the people, the volunteer corps never materialized. His party, the Asam Jatiya Mahasabha, flourished merely as a widely-shared sentiment and as a pressure-group within the Assam Congress.[93] Not much educated, poor of means and somewhat eccentric in his ways though, Raychaudhuri was nevertheless a first-rate poet, with a jail record as a freedom fighter. At times, Congress leaders found a man of his background handy and useful as a counter-pressure on League politics.

The provincial League observed 3 January 1947 as a day of protest against the evictions and of prayers to save Muslims from Congress oppression. Assamese-speaking Muslims however failed to respond enthusiastically to this call.[94] The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, meeting at Karachi on 1 February 1947, also urged upon the Assam Government to halt its inhuman eviction policy.[95] Bhasani, provincial League president, now contemplated a civil disobedience movement and sounded Bengal's League

[91]Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri, *Swadhin Pancayat Rashtragathanar Ancani* (in Assamese), 2nd edn, Gauhati, August 1946.

[92]Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri, "Atmarakshmi Vahini Gathan," reproduced in *Dekadekeriir Ved* (in Assamese), 2nd edn, Gauhati, 1958 by the same author, pp. 72-94.

[93]See Tilakchandra Das, *Ambikagiri Aru Teonr Jiivan Darshan*, Vol. 1 (in Assamese), Gauhati, 1952, pp. 1-172. The party never took the shape of a well-knit organization; it remained just a forum for a particular viewpoint on the national question.

[94]Assam Police Weekly Intelligence Report for the Week ending 8th January 1947," n. 89.

[95]*IAR* (January-June 1947), Vol. I, p. 112 (b).

leaders as to how much and what kind of help from them he could bank upon. He selected Dhubri, on the Assam-Bengal border, as the venue for a series of simultaneous conferences of such bodies as the Bengal-Assam Mujahadins, Bengal-Assam National Guards, Bengal-Assam Literary Conference and the Committee of Action against the Line System—all to be held on and around 3-4 March 1947. He established a centre at Mankarchar to train volunteers for the intended civil disobedience movement, soon to be declared against the Line System. With Gandhiji's historic salt march in his mind as a model, he hoped to lead a similar march from Mankarchar against the Line System.[96] When Bardoloi arrested Bhasani for alleged defiance of government orders under Section 144, the Muslim members of the upper house staged a walk-out in protest on 11 March 1947.[97] But in view of the receding prospect of Assam's inclusion in the eastern wing of Pakistan in the changed situation, Bhasani had to retrace his steps.[98]

CONCLUSION

Despite relatively lower rates of rent and higher fertility of soil in Assam, there was no migration of land-hungry Bengal peasants thereto at least till 1901. Thereafter a big peasant migration started mainly from the district of Mymensingh to the adjacent Assam district of Goalpara. Immigration alone led to an estimated 15 per cent increase in the district population, another 15 per cent increase being accounted for by natural increase, during the decade 1901-11. The migration, though mainly river-route based, was undoubtedly facilitated by the unification of East Bengal and Assam under a single administration during the years 1905-12 and the extension of the railway link up to Dhubri by 1903. Since then there was continuous migration, mainly of Bengal's Muslim peasants to Goalpara and other districts of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The migrants from East Bengal numbered an estimated 258,000 in 1921 and, together with their Assam-born children, estimatedly numbered more than one million by 1947.

This had a profound and multi-dimensional impact on the province—economic, cultural and political. Bhasani migrated to Assam

[96]Waliullah, n. 21, pp. 523-24.

[97]*ALCP*, 11 March 1947 cited by M. Kar, n. 85, p. 18.

[98]Same as n. 96. Bhasani apparently was preparing for the movement without any sanction from the high command of the All-India Muslim League. After his arrest, the League negotiated a face-saving settlement with the Bardoloi Ministry and Bhasani was released. See Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Karachi, Lahore, 1961, p. 373.

in 1928 and, having slowly organized this immigrant base in the inaccessible riverine tracts, emerged as an important political figure in Assam politics during 1937-47. In this challenging decade, his role in relation to the national question and the freedom struggle is interesting in more than one respect.

Bhasani's charismatic leadership was essentially based on his positive and creative response to the land-hunger of the Muslim peasantry, long oppressed by Bengal zamindars and moneylenders. With experience of amphibious mode of living on low lands under difficult conditions, East Bengal peasants were equal to the task of clearing the jungle-infested government wastelands on both banks of the Brahmaputra in Assam. Hence, there was already spontaneous migration in large numbers. The immigrants were welcome in Assam, on public revenue and development considerations, as long as their demand for wastelands was non-competitive with that of the local peasantry. They promoted new crops such as jute and *mung* pulse. Bhasani, a jail-returned Khilafatist, inspected the new field and found this migration a partial way-out for East Bengal's problem of landlessness. It was the economics of the movement that made him interested in organizing the immigrant and would-be immigrant peasants for land and in getting himself elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1937.

Bhasani joined the Muslim League at the same time as Sir Saadulla did in 1937. Through a dogged struggle against the latter within the League, he also emerged as its most dominating figure by the 1940s. The League was converted into a Muslim mass party led, *inter alia*, by proprietory peasants. Bhasani even went ahead for a civil disobedience movement in early 1947 against the segregationist Line System which the British administration had introduced in 1920 to contain immigration into select rural ghettoes. He had however to retrace his steps after the partitioning of India became a settled fact. Nevertheless he was jailed and finally expelled from Assam. In the latter part of his Assam career, he concretized the concept of Eastern Pakistan as Bangasam, in terms of providing a *lebensraum* to the teeming population of East Bengal. The concept of Bangasam never left him even during his subsequent political career in East Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Though initially welcomed, even sponsored by the British administration, Muslim immigration was later labelled by the British civil servants and Wavell as a virtual invasion of Assam by Muslims. The Administration played the game of "divide and rule" through contradictions of policy at the official level and, at the same time, it also played the role of a mediator. As a reaction to the immigrant-based Muslim politics in the Brahmaputra Valley, there arose the cry of the Assamese homeland being in danger, this as a pressure on Congress politics. The Assamese reaction was spearheaded by two important demagogues—Ambikagiri Raychaudhuri, poet, patriot and one-time non-cooperator and Nilmoni Phukan, also a poet with a long anti-Congress, pro-British career. There was even a suggestion from an Assamese intellectual in 1937 that for the preservation of the Assamese race, Assam should secede from India. Assam Congress steered clear of extremist positions on the immigrant question and confronted Bhasani and the League with a concept of self-determined Assamese homeland within a federated India. It was also the CPI stand.

The Congress was ready to absorb all immigrants who had arrived in Assam before 1938 and provide them with wastelands, as far as possible, after having provided for adequate land for the sons of the soil and their descendants. In no case was the Congress ready to accommodate any number of immigrants and thereby tilt the balance against the Assamese-speaking population in their own homeland called the Brahmaputra Valley.

The fate of ministries—Assam had six ministries and an interregnum of Governor's regime (Section 93) during 1937-47—depended very much on their skilful handling of the immigrant question, because Europeans constituting one-twelfth of the legislature held the balance between the two contending camps. Under the circumstances, Bhasani generally championed the peasants' cause against zamindars' and moneylenders' exploitation, but in the bad company of the European Group—a constituent part of the League coalition. Given the Congress politics of the day, he had no other alternative. Communal in outlook, he was not ready to seek allies amongst the communists and other leftists who were a new force in the Brahmaputra Valley in the 1940s. An economic issue to begin with, the immigration issue was transformed into a serious political problem. Despite tension, Assam nevertheless remained free of communal riots except in 1950. In that year one lakh Muslim immigrants left Assam for East Bengal because of the tension and a feeling of insecurity; most of them however came back when normalcy was restored. A majority of the Bengali Muslim immigrants declared *Asamiya* as their mother tongue before the census authorities in 1951. Thus ended a chapter of Assam politics over which the shadow of Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani had loomed large for more than two decades.

APPENDIX

NET MIGRATION INTO ASSAM AND MANIPUR
(1901-1931: In Thousands)

Year	*Total Provincial Population*	*Decadal Natural Increase*	*Net In-Migration (Life-time)*	*Decadal Net In-Migration*	*Bengal's Share of (5)*
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1901	6127	—	699 [a]	—	—
1911	7061	347	757	208	165 [b]
1921	7990	155 [c]	1140	575	212
1931	9248	440	1241	328	266

[a]54,000 from the three adjacent districts of Mymensingh, Jalpaiguri, and Rangpur, probably across a few miles only, not to be mistaken as migration proper.

[b]This figure includes also migrants from Bihar and Orissa.

[c]The decrease is apparently the result of the influenza epidemic.

NOTE: Although the above statistics cover the whole province of Assam and Manipur, the net migration, by and large, relates to the Brahmaputra Valley. Although 1911-21 was the peak migration decade, the majority of the migrants (274 thousands) were from Bihar and Orissa. In the next decade, Bengal dominated, Bihar and Orissa accounting for only 14 thousand migrants, and that too with a negative net female migration.

SOURCE: Summarized from relevant tables in K. C. Zachariah, *A Historical Study of Internal Migration in the Indian Sub-Continent 1901-1931*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964.

ABBREVIATIONS

ALCP — Assam Legislative Council Proceedings.
ALAP — Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings.
AICC — All India Congress Committee.
APCC — Assam Pradesh Congress Committee.
AS — Assam Secretariat, Shillong (later shifted to Gauhati).
CPI — Communist Party of India.
IAR — Indian Annual Register.
NAI — National Archives of India.
NMML — Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
RPP — Rajendra Prasad Papers.

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Recruiting and Organizing an Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India: The Case of the Coal Mining Industry, c. 1880-1939

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The Indian coal mining industry has long been characterized by a highly labour-intensive technology. As late as 1967 barely 2.8 per cent (or a little under 2 million tons) of the total output (70.1 million tons) was won with the aid of coal cutting machinery, and not much more than 1 per cent (790,000 tons) was mechanically conveyed and loaded.[1] Such mono-factor bias has only been practicable on account of the relative cheapness and availability of raw labour inputs. The crude employment data (Table I) indicate that between 1888—the year that statistics were first systematically recorded—and 1939 the labour force grew from 29,301 to 229,100, almost an eight-fold rise.[2] By the latter date coal mining was amongst the top half a dozen modern industrial employers of labour in the country.

This paper seeks to examine some of the processes, techniques, and problems of labour recruitment and organization with particular reference to the major coalfield areas of Jharia, Raniganj, and Giridih. In Section I the place of origin of the work force and its predominantly tribal and low-caste composition is discussed. Section II explores the role of women and children. In Section III we scrutinize the zamindary leverage exerted by the larger colliery enterprises. In the final section we deal with the role of the two main types of labour contractors operating in the coalfields.

I. PLACE OF ORIGIN AND TRIBAL/CASTE COMPOSITION OF THE LABOUR FORCE

The great majority of the mining labour force were recruited from villages either within or closely surrounding the coal bearing

[1]Derived from the *Monthly Coal Bulletin(s)*, compiled by the Director General of Mines Safety in the Ministry of Labour, New Delhi, January-December 1967, Section IV, Table 17, p. 23.

[2]We have chosen 1939 rather than 1947 as a rough terminal date because

areas. The first reliable series of birthplace statistics were collected during the 1911 Census and these show that by far the largest proportion of miners were born in the coal districts themselves. In Manbhum (Jharia coalfield) nearly two-thirds of the labourers were born in the district itself while a further fifth came from contiguous Burdwan and nearby Murshidabad. Similarly, in Burdwan (Raniganj coalfield), slightly more than two-thirds of the miners had their place of birth in the same district and one-sixth came from the Sonthal Parganas and Chota Nagpur.[3] This pattern of local predominance did not undergo any significant shift by the time of the next decennial census (1921). In the Jharia field 38 per cent of the work force originated from Manbhum and Bankura, and the contiguous districts of Hazaribagh, Gaya, and Monghyr supplied a further 45 per cent. The one change that did take place was the growing importance of migrant labour from the Central and the United Provinces which accounted for nearly 10 per cent of the total.[4] This new element had not yet penetrated into the lower Raniganj field however. The Bengal Census of 1921 differentiated between skilled and unskilled employees and found that two-thirds of the former and just under half of the latter came from Burdwan.[5] Unfortunately the Census surveys of 1931 and 1941 do not record the salient birthplace statistics but from other estimates it is clear that no substantial changes took place before the end of the Second World War. Thus the governments of Bihar and Orissa collected recruitment figures from four large Jharia collieries during 1928-30 which closely correspond to the earlier 1921 findings for the field as a whole: Manbhum and Bankura contributed approx. 40 per cent of the total labour force, and the contingent from the Central and United Provinces remained stationary at approx. 10 per cent.[6] In the mid 1930s Balraj Seth found that only 2 per cent of the Raniganj field was staffed with labour originating from districts outside Bengal and Bihar,[7] and in 1944 the Labour Investigation Committee noted that:

of the dramatic increase in aggregate employment that took place during the last two years of war (from 241,000 in 1943 to 334,445 in 1945).

[3]L.S.S. O'Malley, *Census of India 1911, Vol. V, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, Calcutta, 1913, Part 1, p. 540f, 587, and Table XII.

[4]P. C. Tallents, *Census of India 1921, Vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa*, Patna, 1923, Part 1, pp. 272-76, 298-301, and Table XII.

[5]W. H. Thompson, *Census of India 1921, Vol. V, Bengal*, Calcutta, 1923, Part 1, p. 398f, p. 436f and Table XII.

[6]*Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India*, H.M.S.O., 1931, IV, Part 1, p. 5. (Hereafter *Rep. R.C.L.*)

[7]B. R. Seth, *Labour in the Indian Coal Industry*, Bombay, 1940, p. 27.

The essential aspects of the composition of the labour force in coal mines in India have remained the same during the last half a century or so, namely that the labour employed in the different coalfields mostly belongs to the surrounding villages and districts of the province in which the coal mines are situated. In the Jharia coalfield, for example, it has been estimated that 80 per cent of the labour employed belongs to the Province of Bihar i.e., Manbhum, Monghyr, Gaya and Hazaribagh.[8]

In fact, it was only during the last two years of Hitler's War that the collieries began to seriously attempt to recruit labour from areas further afield than Chota Nagpur. Suggestions to this effect had been made by successive government committees in 1896,[9] 1906[10] and 1919,[11] but they had all been completely ignored by the industry. The imperative of war prompted the Government of India (in 1944) to establish a Directorate of Unskilled Labour Supply which set up recruitment centres in the United and Central Provinces.[12] The industry itself followed this example and created the Raniganj Coalfield Central Recruiting Organization with assembly depots located at Gorakhpur and Bilaspur. By 1947 over 30,000 up-country workers had been brought down to the collieries in this way.[13] They have remained a distinct feature of the labour force and until very recently were separately housed in special camps.[14] However even in the late 1960s just under three-quarters of the workers in Jharia came from Bihar (65.3 per cent) and West Bengal (9.3 per cent), and just under half (49.3 per cent) were born in Dhanbad (18.1 per cent), Hazaribagh (17.0 per cent), and Gaya (13.2 per cent).[15]

[8]*Report of an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Coal Mining Industry*, Delhi, 1946, p. 21. (Hereafter *Deshpande Report.*)

[9]*Report of the Labour Enquiry Committee*, Calcutta, 1896, pp. 1-25.

[10]*Report on Labour in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1906, Ch. VIII, pp. 60-68. (Hereafter *Foley Report.*)

[11]*Report on the Methods of Mining Coal in India*, London, 1919, p. 40. (Hereafter *Treharne Rees Report.*)

[12]*Report of the Indian Coalfields' Committee*, Delhi, 1946, Appendix XXI, p. 363. (Hereafter *Mahindra Report.*)

[13]*Deshpande Report*, p. 24f.

[14]According to an article written in the *Economic and Political Weekly* entitled "Slave Labour" (Vol. VII, No. 34, 19 August 1972), "The sordid truth is that the Coalfields Recruiting Organisation is a slave labour camp no different from the Ceylon Labour camps or the recruitment camps for the Fiji Islands .... The dark days of slavery have not yet disappeared in spite of the tall-talk of socialism."

[15]V. L. Srivastava, *A Socio-Economic Survey of the Workers in the Coal Mines of India*, Calcutta, 1970, Table 1-4, p. 31.

The remote, formerly jungle areas in which the coal mines were located were very largely inhabited by aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes who from the earliest days provided the bulk of the mining labour force.[16] These tribals or *adivasis* practised a crude and rudimentary type of shifting agriculture and had been progressively pushed westwards over the centuries towards the infertile plateau land of Chota Nagpur. This shift was markedly accelerated following the Permanent Settlement and the ensuing pressures of the *mahajan*. Any moral title to the land they may have had as a result of their efforts at jungle clearing went ignored. A succession of incoherent millenerian rebellions in the first half of the nineteenth century registered their protests effectively enough for the Government of Bengal to create a homeland district (the Sonthal Parganas) for the *adivasis* in eastern Bihar.[17] In the comparatively sparsely populated coalfield areas the mines were obliged to try and wean a labour force from these groups. The Sonthals together with the Bauris, a caste on the lowest rung of the Hindu hierarchy, took up mining employment and did not balk at the prospect of working underground. Throughout the nineteenth century the mining labour force was predominantly composed of these two groups.[18] The Geological Survey of India, conducting the first scientific exploration of the Raniganj field, noted in 1860 that:

> The workmen are mostly agricultural peasants, some by being Hindoos or Mussulman . . . but the majority of them belong to the quasi-aboriginal groups, Bhauris, Sonthals and others who form a large proportion of the inhabitants of the district.[19]

With the secular expansion of the coal production beginning in the early 1890s and, in particular, the opening up of the Jharia field, the industry began to draw upon a wider population—though one which was still confined to the semi-tribal and low-caste neighbouring peoples. No fewer than 50 different *jatis* were listed by the East Indian Railway Company as working in the Giridih colliery in 1894, including a sprinkling of Brahmins, Banias, Dhobis.

[16]*Rep. R.C.L.* p. 115f.

[17]See G. M. Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, London, 1924, p. 52f; P. C. Biswas, *Santhals of the Santhal Parganas*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 6-13; H. H. Risely, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1891, pp. 81-84; and S. K. Mukharji, *Bihar District Gazetteers, Santal Parganas*, Patna, 1938, Ch. 2, 3 and 10.

[18]J. C. K. Peterson, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Burdwan*, Calcutta, 1910, Ch. IX, and H. Coupland, *Manbhum*, Calcutta, 1911, Ch. IX.

[19]*Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India*, Calcutta, 1860, III, p. 171.

Chamars, and Moslems.[20] In 1911, the Census records that the Sonthals and Bauris still accounted for over 50 per cent of the labour force, the remainder consisting mainly of Bhuiyas, Muchis, Koras, Kamars, Meahs, Rajwars, Dosadhs, Kols, Bagdis, Telis, and Ghatwars.[21] Ten years later the Sonthals and Bauris although retaining their dominance in Raniganj where they formed 59 per cent of the unskilled and 38 per cent of the skilled work force, in Jharia they were being increasingly outnumbered by the Bhuiyas, Moslems, and the Chamars for both categories, though they continued to be important elements.[22] This trend continued throughout the inter-war period, the original miners becoming relatively less important vis-a-vis the newcomers from the west. The social milieu of the mining community, however, remained static—the depressed classes at the bottom of the social pyramid continued to provide the mines with the bulk of their raw labour needs.[23]

A distinct pattern of occupational specialization emerged from this growing heterogeneous composition. The Sonthals and the Bauris readily took to underground hewing from the beginning and this gave them the opportunity to work in conjunction with their womenfolk who acted as their loaders and carriers.[24] Not a few Bauri families who had been working in the pits for two generations or so came to regard coal cutting as their customary jati.[25] As late as 1944 the Labour Investigation Committee found that these two groups constituted nearly 90 per cent of all coal cutters working at the face in the Raniganj field.[26] By way of comparison, the Moslems invariably preferred surface labour such as building, screening, and coke-making.[27] The Bhuiyas and Rajwars gravitated towards tramming and loading whilst the Beldars and Nuniyahs had a predilection for earth-cutting. Kamars and Meahs were known as good engine operatives and many Bilaspuris, who had been employed as navvies on the construction of the Bengal Nagpur Railway found quarry work the most amenable to their

[20]*Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines in India*, Calcutta, 1894, pp. 49-53. (Hereafter *Ann. Rep. Chief Insp. of Mines.*)

[21]*Census of India 1911*, n. 3, p. 540.

[22]*Census of India 1921*, n. 5, p. 398, and Part 2, Table XXII, p. 436f; and Vol. VII, n. 4, Part 1, p. 275 and Part 2, Table XXII, pp. 298-301.

[23]*Rep. R. C. L.* and S. R. Bose, "The Jharia Coal Industry," *Indian Journal of Economics*, 17, 1931-32, p. 302ff.

[24]*Bengal District Gazetteers*, n. 14, p. 180.

[25]*Ann. Rep. Chief Insp. of Mines* (1902), p. 2.

[26]*Deshpande Report*, p. 21.

[27]See the note by Carapiet in the *Transactions of the Mining and Geological Institute of India*, Calcutta, 1932, XXVII, p. 106. (Hereafter *Trans. M.G.I.I.*)

sensibilities.[28] Most of the *sardari* supervisory functions were performed by men who had been recruited from the ranks of the workers themselves and therefore did not form a separate caste or regional entity. The clerical staff were (of course) overwhelmingly Bengali.

There is little evidence that such job specialization inhibited or seriously hindered the development of the work force. In the absence of any kind of formal training and apprenticeship schemes the hereditary passing on of skills performed a positive function. Technological change came so slowly and haltingly that job obsolescence never made more than a marginal impact. The only really major innovation of coal mining (at the face) during the colonial period was the steady growth in the use of blasting work. The migrant communities from up-country tended to monopolize any operation which required the use of explosives. They became so identified with this activity that they became universally known as "C.P." or "Compressed Pellet" miners.[29] This group also seemed to take more readily to machine work than did the indigenous miners.[30] Such men were not specially recruited because caste taboos prevented the original miners from learning the new techniques: they migrated to the coalfields in the normal course of events which, by chance, coincided with the creation of non-traditional avenues of employment. That the industry did not suffer inflexibilities on account of this institutionalization of caste—or more accurately, regional—demarcation of job functions can be demonstrated by examining the effects of the prohibition of women from underground employment in 1929. Prior to that date the trade argued that such legislation would seriously affect the flow of production because men would refuse to do loading and conveying work. In 1927, for example, W. J. Case (a mine manager) stated that "When the Mines Act prohibits the use of female labour underground, we shall have to look to mechanical methods for the loading of coal."[31] Although some collieries took this as an opportunity to substitute an element of capital for labour,[32] the great majority found little difficulty in persuading men to undertake this sort of work. The Royal Commission on Labour noted that "the figures for 1929 show

[28]*Deshpande Report*, p. 21.

[29]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 116. The pellet was a local explosive device.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]W. J. Case, "Machine Mining in India," *Trans. M.G.I.I.*, XXII, 1928, p. 78.

[32]The Chairman of the Bengal Coal Company addressing the shareholders in 1938 reported that: "We have had to make extensive purchases of rails in order to get tubs as close as possible to the working faces to offset the withdrawal of women loaders from underground." *Half Yearly Report of the Bengal Coal Company*, September 1938.

that the number of male loaders had increased from 8,774 in 1928 to 12,592 in 1929, i.e. by 43 per cent, so that this adjustment [the phasing out of women] should not be difficult."[33]

II. THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

As in the classic case of the nineteenth century British coal industry, women, and to a much lesser extent children, formed important constituent elements in the early Indian mining labour force. Until their prohibition from underground employment (in 1929 and 1923 respectively) a family system of production remained in vogue. The adult males would cut the coal at the pit face which was then loaded into baskets or tubs by the women and children and taken to the shaft bottom. If the mine was at no great depth, a series of ladders or, more commonly, inclines, would have to be climbed by the women who carried the baskets on their heads. Horses and pit ponies were rarely used in India for haulages[34]—no doubt due to their scarcity and cost. In 1905 the Chief Inspector of Mines described the rigorous work schedule of a typical female employee:

> In the course of a day's work she will carry approximately 13 cwt. of coal cut by her man up an incline of perhaps a gradient of one in ten . . . perhaps for the distance of 750 feet . . . in baskets of 80 lbs. [which is equivalent to] an uphill walk of over five miles.[35]

Before the general adoption of steam-powered winding engines in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, gins or windlasses were widely used to bring the buckets of loaded coal from the shaft bottom to the surface of the deeper mines. Women were employed to turn the revolving winches at the pit mouth, and this activity aroused the curiosity of a Mrs Benthal, the wife of a sessions judge who visited the Ranigunj colliery of the Bengal Coal Company in August 1852 and recorded the following description in her diary:

> The women are also best for turning the windlass that lifts the buckets at the shafts, 32 of them at once work the wheel with a peculiar spring or jump forwards and then a run, they sing all the while but in a wild harsh tone. The Scotch Engineer told us that these women were quarrelsome and more troublesome than

[33]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 128.

[34]*Census of India 1911*, n. 3, p. 540.

[35]*Ann. Rep. Chief Insp. of Mines* (1905), p. 2.

the men and one of his punishments was a short lock up in a godown warehouse—but though he finds them very provoking he does not permit their husbands to beat them unmercifully. Their dress is coarse and with most of them a scanty allowance, but a great many wear ornaments of various kinds of brass.[36]

This primitive method was still in general use in 1869 since we find Martin Fryar of the Geological Survey remarking that:

> Each gin has four horizontal arms, and to each arm about eight women are appointed so that each gin is driven by thirty two women. They are paid two and a quarter annas per day and they can raise about forty tons of coal from a depth of a hundred feet in the course of a day.[37]

Once ginning had been phased out women found a variety of employment opportunities open to them both underground and on the surface. We can see from Table II that between 1915 and the early 1920s (which also holds for the period before the war)[38] there were approx. six women to every ten men working below the surface—roughly a third of the total—and slightly less than this proportion if we take the total employment figures. The table also shows that the depression of the second half of the 1920s affected women rather more seriously than men since their relative as well as their absolute importance diminished. Thus even before Notification M-1055 of March 1929 (by which women were to be banned from underground employment over a ten-year period, 1929-38), collieries were reducing their dependence upon women. The onset of the Great Depression seems to have precluded the possibility of the underground *kamins* finding surface employment, so that by 1938 women constituted only 11 per cent of the total mining labour force.[39]

[36]Mrs Benthal, *The Diary of a Wife of a Sessions Judge in Burdwan District*, entry dated 2 December 1852, "On Visiting a Coal Mine." Reproduced in *The Cable*, July 1953, pp. 33-35. I was able to consult this publication—the house magazine of Bird-Helger's — by courtesy of P. Prashad, the former Chairman of the group.

[37]M. Fryar, *A Report on Indian Coal Mines*, p. 7, in the *Procgs. of the Home Dep't.*, Public Branch, Nos. 122-24, "A", July 1869, National Archives of India. (Hereafter N.A.I.)

[38]See the *Annual Reports on the Production and Consumption of Coal in India*, Calcutta, 1909-15, Table 21.

[39]During the War, however, the acute shortage of labour persuaded the government to temporarily lift the ban on underground work and within six months nearly 16,000 women were recruited (in 1943). See the *Deshpande Report*, p. 16.

Children did not play the same decisive role in the Indian mines as they had done in Britain. The peak year of their employment was 1921 when a total of 4,270 children below the age of 13 were hired (1,189 below and 3,081 above ground) or less than 5 per cent of the total. The figures presented in Table III below, however, do not take into account the number of children who for want of anywhere else to go (few creche facilities were provided in the period before independence), accompanied their mothers to work, and though unpaid by the mine-owners or contractors, helped in the process of mining. There were two main reasons why employers did not resort to child labour to any significant extent. In the first place, the thick seams and wide galleries of the Indian mines did not put any premium upon small physique and stature. Secondly, the problem of ventilation was much less than in countries like Britain, partly because mining had not reached very great depths in our period, and also because most of the mines were free of noxious gases, and therefore there was little demand for trapdoor attendants.

III. COLLIERY OWNERS AS ZAMINDARS

In order to attract a sufficient and permanent supply of mining labour many of the larger collieries acquired the zamindary rights of extensive areas of surface land in and around the coalfields The colliery could then attempt to take advantage of their position. as an influential landlord to exert pressure on their inherited tenants to perform some mining work. In this way whole villages would be purchased and incorporated into this industrial variant of the zamindary estate. Fortunately the complete zamindary records of one of the major estate proprietors, the Bengal Coal Company, have survived, and these show that at the time of the abolition of the zamindary system in the early 1950s this single concern had control of 367 *mouzas* scattered over Bengal and Bihar.[40] Moreover, these possessions enabled firms to offer plots of cultivable land to labour who had migrated to the mines from places further afield (as well as to the landless) as an inducement for them to settle down in the vicinity of the pits. To establish a firm hold over their tenants the *Nokarani* (in Bengali *Chakrani*) or service tenancy arrangement was developed whereby miners and particularly *malkatas* (the face workers) were granted free or only

[40]Preserved in the Record Room of the Company (at Sanctoria) are the "Thoka," "Jamabandi," "Cash," "Law," and "Mouza," documents which contain details of every plot of land which the Company owned, leased, and subleased.

nominally rented paddy land in return for working a certain number of days in the year in the company mine. This predial system of tenure has a distinct semi-feudal flavour and bears analogy with the conditions of actual serfdom that existed in the Scottish collieries and, to a lesser extent, with the tie of the Yearly Bond widely used in English mines in the eighteenth century.[41] Within India, the tea plantations of Assam sweetened their particularly unscrupulous methods of holding labour by providing small plots of cultivable land at nominal rents. In 1929 nearly 50,000 acres had been distributed to tea garden workers in this way.[42] The miners —unlike the tea employees—were legally allowed to leave these holdings when they chose, but in view of the endemic poverty which characterized the areas from which the labour was drawn and the hold that the *Mahajan* exerted, this was perhaps of little more than titular significance.

All of the major coal concerns maintained their own zamindary departments (which usually kept their accounts quite separate from the purely mining part of the enterprise), whose primary function was the provision of a regular supply of mining personnel. In 1914 the *Investors India Year Book* explained why the Bengal Coal Company's leasehold of 83,000 acres included over 30,000 acres of non-coal bearing land:

> The Bengal miner is primarily an agriculturist and this large area of non-coal bearing land has been acquired by the Company in order to secure their labourers or their own land and so lessen the labour difficulties which are so marked a feature of the Bengal collieries.[43]

A year later, the Chairman of the Company informed the shareholders that the zamindary department "was run solely for the benefit of the collieries." The department would "take a lease of a village from the superior landlord at a rent which we do not realize from the tenants, but we get the benefit of the labour which comes to work on our collieries."[44] The Company was leasing out 270,000 bighas of land, and as the average holding per miner rarely

41T. S. Ashton and J. Sykes, *The Coal Industry of the Eighteenth Century*, Manchester, 1929, Ch. V and VI.

42R. N. Gilchrist, *Indian Labour and the Land*, Commerce Dept. of the Govt. of Bengal, Calcutta, 1932, p. 31.

43*Investors India Year Book*, Calcutta, 1914, p. 241.

44*Speech of the Chairman of the Company at the First Half Yearly Meeting of the Shareholders, July 1915*. (Privately printed, Calcutta, 1916.)

exceeded two bighas, well over a lakh of separate tenancies had been created. Not all the tenants of the estate worked in the Company mines, and not all of those that did so had the *Nokarani* condition, but as the Chairman pointed out in 1908 the possession of such immense proprietorial rights meant that "we are able to claim unlimited labour at the hands of our ryots."[45] By the end of the Great War the Company had substantially expanded its zamindary holdings: in 1920 over 130,000 acres of territory extending from Raniganj (town) to Rajhara in western Bihar was under their jurisdiction.[46] Giving evidence before the Coalfields Committee of 1920 J. B. Wardlaw, General Manager of the Company, stated that: "It is customary for coal companies to acquire villages [sic] in the neighbourhood and thus gain the right of entry to such villages to recruit and induce the inhabitants to work at the Company's collieries."[47]

In 1926 the zamindary manager—always a European—had occasion to reprimand one of his circle officers for failing to ensure that certain pits (Dishergarh colliery Nos. 9 and 10 mines) had their necessary contingent labourers because: "You must bear in mind that the Zamindary exists primarily for the upkeep of the collieries, and so you must give every possible assistance to the colliery manager regarding labour supplies."[48]

During the inter-war period there were no significant net additions to the Company's minor raj, but when the zamindary was surrendered to the Government of West Bengal in 1953 over half a million separate tenancy agreements (covering 400 square miles) had to be wound up.[49]

45*Speech of the Chairman of the Company at the Second Half Yearly Meeting of the Shareholders, December 1916*. (Calcutta, 1917.)

This was an exaggerated claim, however, since the Company (as we shall see) was forced to use other means to recruit labour.

46*Ibid.*, December 1920.

47*Report of the Coalfields Committee*, Calcutta, 1920, II, p. 124. (Hereafter *Rep. Coal Cmte.*) This did not prove to be quite as simple as it sounded, however, since we find the zamindary manager writing to Andrew Yule (letter dated 15 November 1921) that: "It has lately become the practice of the Zamindars to allure one coal company into the purchase of such villages as, for example, Kristapur Mouza, and after the property is purchased, to gradually entice away the labour to another village, and when this proceeding is completed to offer the village in a similar manner. This process is repeated whenever the Zamindar is short of cash." Labour File, 1921, Record Room of the Bengal Coal Company, Sanctoria.

48Letter from the zamindary manager to Babu Sundar Roy, Tiluri Circle, dated 27 February 1926, in the Zamindary File (1926), Record Room of the Bengal Coal Company, Sanctoria.

49H.D.G. Humphreys, *Properties in the States of Bengal and Bihar belonging*

Apart from the Bengal Coal Company the railway colliery at Giridih provides a good example of the zamindary and *Nokarani* systems. Some interesting information on this subject was collected in 1892 when the Government of Bengal requested its local officials to examine the "allotment of land to pitmen and other colliery employees."[50] The *malkatas* were apparently allowed two bighas each of good paddy land (either *bahal, kanali* or *baid*, i.e., three classes of low-lying cultivable land), at a nominal rent ranging from seven and a half to thirteen and a half annas per bigha per annum. At least one member of the household had to put in 230 days work in the year at the mines, and failure to do so without "good reason" meant summary eviction. No family member was permitted to work in the colliery of another concern, and every three years the land allocated to each worker was changed around so as to preclude the claiming of occupancy rights. The note submitted by the Collector of Burdwan indicates that the collieries in the Raniganj field practised a very similar system to that of Giridih. *Malkatas* were given between two to three bighas, although if they were prepared to accept *danga* (hilly) land, they were allowed a little more. Rent, however, was not generally levied. It is not possible to quantify the general incidence of *Nokarani* from this file, but we have estimated that in the case of the Equitable Coal Company roughly a quarter of all *malkatas* were each in possession of a bigha of rent free land.

Further information about service tenancies came to light during the land settlement attestation of Hazaribagh which took place just after the First World War.[51] The colliery villages in Giridih were by now "entirely peopled with service tenants" and the original occupants had all been replaced by *Nokarani* tenants.[52] By continuing to charge rents the colliery was violating the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act which had laid down that no tenancies could carry the condition of both rent and service beyond 1908 (though the rents were still only nominal). The *Nokarani* system at Giridih remained very much intact until the late 1930s. H. Lancaster, the colliery superintendent, giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour in 1930 stated that: "The coal cutters are obliged to give so many days work in the year. The others feel that if they do not work here we shall not

to the *Bengal, Katras Jherriah, Seebpur, Kalapahari and New Beerbhoomi Coal Companies as at the 1 March 1964*, Sanctoria, 1964, p. 14f. Record Room of the Bengal Coal Company, Sanctoria.

[50] *Procgs. of the Revenue Dept.*, Miscell Branch, Nos. 11-17, and 22-23, "B", April 1892, Govt. of W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

[51] J. D. Sifton, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Hazaribagh 1908-1915*, Patna, 1917.

[52] *Ibid.*, para 136.

allow them to remain, and they would not be allowed to remain."[53]

As far as he knew "there are no people with colliery land capable of working who do not work in the colliery."[54] The Deputy Commissioner of Hazaribagh saw nothing wrong with the continuance of *Nokarani* at Giridih because he felt that it was "advantageous for both mine owners and the labour."[55]

The extent of the zamindary and *Nokarani* methods of recruitment was rather less in Jharia than in either Raniganj or Giridih. This was largely due to the fact that the Jharia field had had little available surface land for either village settlement or paddy cultivation, it being far more congested and subject to a higher risk of repeated subsidences. West of the Barakar Bridge the landscape has the appearance of a rather desolate plain comparatively bereft of rice fields. A few of the Jharia proprietors such as the East Indian Coal Company[56] and the Raneegunje Coal Association[57] purchased villages beyond the natural perimeter of the coalfield to circumvent this lack of space for settling labour, but they remained the exception rather than the rule.[58] The Mahindra Committee estimated that in 1946 approx. 25-40 per cent of the labour was permanently settled in Jharia, 30-50 per cent in Raniganj, and 70 per cent in Giridih.[59] Use was made of the zamindary system in both the Central Provinces (the Mohpani colliery of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway)[60] and in Pench Valley (the collieries opened up by Shaw Wallace).[61] The Manager of Mohpani wrote to the Chief Commissioner of the Province in 1915 that:

> We consider the settling of our miners upon small holdings is the best and in fact practically the only way of establishing a permanent mining population for the collieries.... We propose to give each family a small holding which they may work part of their

[53] *Rep. R.C.L.*, IV, Part 2, d-3357, p. 364.

[54] *Ibid.*, d-3349, p. 364.

[55] *Ibid.*, XI, Part 2, p. 339.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Investors India Year Book*, Calcutta, 1934, p. 126.

[58] *Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 118.

[59] *Mahindra Report*, p. 182.

[60] See the letter from the Manager of Mohpani to the Agent, G.I.P.R., dated 30 March 1917, *Railway Dept. Procgs.*, Railway Board (Ways and Works), No. 20-W-17/9-12, "B", October 1918, N.A.I.

[61] See the letter from Messrs Shaw Wallace to the Railway Board, dated 26 April 1917, *Railway Dept. Procgs.*, Railway Board (Stores), No. 763S-17/10-13, "B", October 1917, N.A.I.

time: 200 days p.a. in the mines leaving 113 days and 52 Sundays for the land.[62]

The *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour* contains the most interesting discussion of the subject.[63] The Commissioners had requested the governments of Bihar and Orissa to examine the extent to which mine owners had acquired zamindary rights to both recruit and keep a "better hold" on their labour. After consulting some of the district officials the Provincial Government came to the conclusion that it was only in the pre-war era—when the collieries were generally short of labour—that the purpose of zamindary acquisition had been specifically to secure and maintain control of mining labour.[64] In more recent times, the government argued, such rights were obtained "for the purpose of facilitating mining operations and, in particular, to avoid paying heavy compensation for surface lands which are dropped in the course of mining." Labour could no longer be exploited since "any attempt to do so has always resulted in the labourers refusing to work in the colliery and seeking work elsewhere."[65] The government did not therefore "think it necessary to take any special steps to prevent the exploitation of tenants."[66] This sanguine view was also shared by the Chief Inspector of Mines who in 1932 wrote: "At the present time there are few—if any—miners who recognise the right of the landlord to compel them to work.[67]

There are reasons to doubt whether this verdict was fully justified, particularly with regard to the *Nokarani* tenants. In the first place, it seems a little strange that a memorandum which gave "full particulars of all the known villages in which colliery proprietors in the Jharia field have acquired *Zamindary* rights" was not printed in the Report.[68] Considerations other than those merely of space and of commercial ethics doubtless prompted this negative decision: the subject was probably far too delicate. The records of the Bengal Coal Company illustrate the extent to which huge parcels of land were monopolized by powerful colliery zamindaries. A more serious reservation concerns the evidence which had been revealed earlier in

[62]See the letter from the Manager of Mohpani to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, dated 12 February 1915, *Railway Dept. Procgs.*, Railway Board (Ways and Works), No. 20-W-17/9-17, "B", October 1917, N.A.I.

[63]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 118f, and Vol. XI, Part 2, pp. 335-41.

[64]*Ibid.*, XI, p. 339.

[65]*Ibid.*

[66]*Ibid.*, p. 341.

[67]See R. R. Simpson's Presidential Address to the Mining and Geological Institute of India 1932. *Trans. M.G.I.I.*, 27, 1932, p. 119.

[68]*Rep. R.C.L.*, XI, p. 339.

the Provincial Government's own *Final Settlement Report of Manbhum* made between 1918-25.[69] Gokhale, the author of the Report, had written that:

> Several mine owners have acquired Zamindary rights as patnidars or mukararidars with a view to recruit labour and to have a better hold on their labourers.... The mine owners had complete control over their men who were sometimes not even allowed to attend the attestation camps on the dates fixed to put in their claims. The malkatas were always afraid that if they opposed the claims of the mine owners they would not only lose their land but their employment as well.[70]

The Provincial Government, only three years later, considered that this section of the *Settlement Report* was "likely to create misleading impressions" because once the Settlement had been completed, "tenants had learned to safeguard their interests and insist on their legal rights."[71] If any "real coercion" were to have taken place "complaints would certainly have come to the ears of the local officials."[72] This seems quite unacceptable; at the best of times it is hardly likely that illiterate, credulous, and tribal/low-caste miners were in a position to stand on their "legal rights." It seems even more unlikely that such consciousness was developed in less than five years! The *Gokhale Report* explicitly states that immediately prior to the attestation mine owners were fervently trying to change the tenurial status of many of the miners who had *ryotwari* claims to that of *Nokrani*: "Malkatas were threatened with having to pay heavy settlement costs if they accepted ryotwari status, and this ruse was often successful."[73]

The Royal Commission itself did not seem to take the view that the system had died a natural death long before. In their final report, the Commissioners recommended that no service tenancies should be created *in the future* and that those in existence should be examined by the government authorities to see whether they could be converted into purely rent holdings.[74] The Commissioners were also disturbed to find that this method of labour recruitment was being employed in an indirect and roundabout manner since labour "con-

[69]B. K. Gokhale, *Final Report of the Survey and Settlement Operations of the District of Manbhum 1908-1925*, Patna, 1928.

[70]*Ibid.*, p. 59f.

[71]*Rep. R.C.L.*, XI, p. 340.

[72]*Ibid.*

[73]*Gokhale Report*, p. 60.

[74]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 118.

tracts were still given to persons whose interest in land made it easier for them to secure labour from their tenants."[75] We know that the Bengal Coal Company had been supplementing its labour force in this way for many years. Instead of purchasing *mouzas* outright, the zamindary department would sometimes find it more convenient to come to an arrangement with a local zamindar by which the Company would receive a certain number of miners from within the area of influence of the zamindar—for a consideration (*salami*). In 1917, for example, Ram Chandracharia Goswani, a petty zamindar in Raniganj, undertook to supply 200 miners from the five *mouzas* under his control and, in return, he received a *salami* of Rs 500 plus a commission of three rupees two annas per every hundred tubs of coal that his men produced.[76] Similarly, in 1936 the Department negotiated with another local zamindar, A. Laik of Dishergarh, for 100 *Sonthal malkatas* in return for a *salami* of Rs 1,000 and a commission on their output.[77] This surely emphasizes the immense power that landlords—even of the minor variety—had over their tenants.

Even before the Great Depression rendered the zamindary and *Nokarani* methods obsolete a few colliery managers were coming round to the belief that the provision of cultivable land would not necessarily solve their labour problems. In 1919 Treharne Rees had urged the colliery owners to provide plots of land for the miners on the ground that such an inducement would "greatly enhance the supply of labour."[78] But some of the colliery managers who were called to give evidence before the (follow-up) Foley Committee were not too happy with this recommendation because they felt that it would not reduce the problem of seasonal absenteeism.[79] The Committee itself came out against the Rees proposal because "in many instances where paddy lands have been given the result has been the opposite of what was desired; the labourers have either given up mining for agriculture or have leased out the lands to others."[80] Neither the Committee nor the expert witnesses made any distinction between the zamindary and the *Nokarani* modes of

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Letter from the zamindary Manager to R. C. Goswani, dated 10 February 1917. Labour File (1917), Record Room of the Bengal Coal Company, Sanctoria.

[77] Letter from the zamindary Manager to A. Laik, dated 28 December 1936. Labour File (1936), ibid.

[78] *Treharne Rees Report*, paras 55 and 56, p. 40.

[79] *Rep. Coal Cmte.*, II. Nine witnesses were in favour of this proposal (see pp. 84, 88, 99, 92, 98, 101, 104, 107 and 115) and seventeen were against it (pp. 57; 62, 67, 71, 75, 78, 82, 95, 99, 111, 114, 118, 121, 124, 126 and 131).

[80] *Ibid.*, I, para 53, p. 15.

tenure, but it is evident that in the post-war period resort to both methods was becoming inappropriate and unnecessarily expensive for those collieries which had not already acquired large enough areas of real-estate. The older concerns such as Bengal Coal, Equitable, New Beerbhoom, and the Raneegunje Coal Association, together with the Giridih railway colliery, had purchased their extensive properties in the nineteenth century and there was little reason for them not to continue to practise what had become a traditional arrangement. The position was altogether different in the case of Jharia, however, which began to be intensively developed from the outset leaving little space for zamindary settlement. But there is some evidence that before 1914 the larger Jharia collieries did try to imitate the older pattern. In the course of a letter to the Director of land records, Gokhale (in 1923) noted that:

> In the colliery area of Dhanbad, settlement has come far too late to protect the interests of the raiyts and more especially the aboriginals. If a record of rights had then come into existence there would have been far less injustice to the raiyts.... In the Jharia area there are very few aboriginal raiyts left at present though there are plenty landless aboriginals.[81]

It is clear that many of the original inhabitants of the area had been systematically deprived of their occupancy rights and replaced with *Nokarani* tenants.[82] This was tacitly admitted by the governments of Bihar and Orissa when, almost as an afterthought, they stated that "the depression in the coal industry during the last five or six years [i.e. 1925-30] has resulted in a surplus of colliery labour and there is *no longer any need* for coal owners to resort to any unfair means to secure labour."[83] (my italics.) This was the nub of the matter: if widespread zamindary pressure had begun to diminish from the late 1920s (and not from the turn of the century as the local government had originally claimed) it was because it no longer served the general interests of the colliery proprietors.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE LABOUR CONTRACTORS

The zamindary method of recruitment was only open—on any effective scale—to the very largest of collieries, and then only if they had been an early starter in their respective coalfield. For the great majority of enterprises other means of obtaining the desired number

[81] *Gokhale Report*, Appendix K, p. 188f.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[83] *Rep. R.C.L.*, XI, p. 340.

of workers had to be evolved, and even the collieries with zamindaries were from time to time obliged to supplement their tenant mining community with additional supplies of labour. An extremely varied pattern of recruitment emerged reflecting the different scale sizes in the industry and the consequent access to financial resources.

In the three decades prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 there was fierce competition for labour not only between collieries but also, exogenously, between the coal and the tea industries. The tea gardens of Assam and northern Bengal had long regarded Chota Nagpur as a natural source of supply on account of its perennially depressed economic condition and the credulous nature of the tribal and semi-tribal inhabitants. Foley found that there had been heavy out-migration from the coalfield districts during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Over 70,000 people from Manbhum alone were working in Assam in 1901, and substantial numbers had also gone from Hazaribagh, Singbhum, Gaya, Monghyr, Bankura, Midnapore, Sonthal Parganas and Ranchi.[84] It is difficult to understand why so many people seemed to prefer travelling such vast distances when the comparatively nearby colliery areas were providing expanding employment opportunities (at least in this period). Foley, also puzzled by this question, heard one interesting theory:

> I was informed by one gentleman that the cooly who emigrated to Assam was a perfectly different person from the cooly who went to the coal mines. The one as a rule had no property and generally wished to escape from his past, whereas the other generally had property and land which he wished to supplement by his earnings.[85]

This failed to convince Foley however because he thought that "the coal miner, for instance a strong Sonthal, is exactly the person desired by the tea gardens."[86] There is no evidence that wages were more attractive or that living conditions were so much better on the plantations than in the collieries. Certainly tea garden work was closer to traditional agricultural pursuits than mining, especially if there was the question of venturing underground, but it is most unlikely that this was a factor of overriding importance. Perhaps a more convincing explanation is that the garden recruiting *sardars* conducted a far more concerted and aggressive campaign than the

[84] *Foley Report*, Ch. VII. Apart from the tea industry, the jute mills and dockyards of Calcutta utilized labour from these districts but they did not generally send out recruiting *sardars* since labour usually came directly to them.

[85] *Ibid.*, para 123, p. 64.

[86] *Ibid.*

collieries since the rewards for "coolie catching" were fixed at an altogether higher rate[87] (partly because of the greater imperative that the tea industry faced as a result of it being located so far away from any major concentration of population). This is probably what Foley had in mind when he wrote:

> Deficiency of labour is experienced far more by the tea gardens than by any other industry, and it would certainly not be fair to that industry for government to point out to the intending emigrants how silly they were to go away to Assam, when they could earn more pay by working half the month in the neighbouring coalfields, from which also they could return home whenever they liked.[88]

Although this competition caused the collieries, particularly those of the Jharia field, some inconvenience around the turn of the century,[89] Foley was not of the opinion that it seriously inhibited the growth of the mining force.[90] After the First World War the collieries virtually had the field to themselves, and it was only in 1943-44 when the Government of India's demand for unskilled labour for war needs (such as aerodrome construction) reached a climax that the coal industry suffered from competitive pressures of any serious order of magnitude again during our period.[91]

Apart from "poaching" labour away from working pits there were essentially two distinct methods of labour recruitment. Either the colliery itself would send its own selected employees to the villages, or a *ticcardar* (contractor) would be appointed to obtain the required amount of manpower. In the former case, if the colliery was more than a small family concern, full or part-time salaried *jamadars* and *chaprasis* would be given sums of money and told to visit those areas of the countryside they were most familiar with. There would naturally be an initial preference for the ancestral village (or thereabouts), and consequently not a few mining gangs (which comprised

[87] According to Foley, "Raniganj appears to have a bad name among the people because some have been taken there on the pretext of getting work in the collieries, and then carried to Assam." *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[88] *Ibid.*, para 123, p. 64.

[89] In the last quarter of the century overseas emigration from Bihar became important, but it seems that Manbhum and Burdwan supplied far fewer emigrants than Sahabad, Patna, Saran, and Gaya. See G. A. Grieson's *Report on Colonial Emigration from the Bengal Presidency*, Calcutta, 1883.

[90] *Ibid.*, para 119, p. 60. The natural growth of population in these districts was sufficiently high enough (see *Bengal District Gazetteers, Manbhum*, n. 14. Ch. 3) to accommodate this demand for labour.

[91] *Mahindra Report*, p. 183.

anywhere between five and 50 men and women) would be entirely composed of kin relations or people personally known to the recruiter. Once such a connection had been established every effort was made to ensure that the miners would always return to that particular mine. Some of the larger collieries required labour recruited in this way to sign a written agreement on reaching the colliery. The Bengal Coal Company, for example, requested a proportion of their recruits to put their thumb-print to a yearly contract which specified certain conditions and obligations of employment.[92] The miner was to be provided with a rent-free hut and given the travelling expenses incurred in reaching the mine. Any wage advances that had been made on hiring would have to be liquidated by monthly deductions. In return the miner would have to agree to work at any of the Company's mines at a wage that was the going-rate for that type of work. Unlike the tea garden employees (at least prior to 1926), the miners were not subject to penal or criminal liability if they broke the contract but, "should the said labourer abscond before the expiry of one year from the date of execution of these presents he will be liable to pay the said employers the sum of Rupees Twenty five only [equivalent to about four months' wages in 1900] as liquidated damages for breach of contract."[93]

During our period *ticcardars* were widely used by all collieries, be they European or indigenously owned. A minority of *ticcas* were offered on a per capita and/or commission basis. The mine manager would first of all tell the *ticcardar* the approximate quantity and type of labour that he required. The *ticcardar* would then despatch his network of agents to a selected area with instructions to establish links with the village headmen of the locality. On the payment of some *bakshish* those villagers interested in mining employment would be indicated. The potential recruits would be tempted with inducements such as wage advances and drinking money and then be sent off to the mine.[94] This process was described by the governments of Bihar and Orissa in the following way:

> The sardar visits villages and brings back the labour with him, and the labour brought by him forms his gang. He has to pay the labour *bakshish, khoraki* and travelling expenses, and for this purpose the sardar frequently receives advances either from the contractor or from the company. Thus at Bhowra colliery advances varying from Rs. 3 to Rs. 10 are paid to miners in addition to their travelling allowance and food, and such advances are seldom recovered.[95]

Estimates of the cost of this type of recruiting are difficult to come by. In 1929 the Indian Mining Association reported that two of its members had spent a (combined) total of Rs 21,280 in 1927 and Rs 24,500 in 1928 on recruiting (which works out to 7.82 and 10.25 *pies* per ton respectively), but there is no information about how many workers were hired as a result.[96] In the 1930s Balraj Seth found that the average per capita recruiting costs for his sample collieries (situated in Jharia) was three to five rupees if the labour came from the local districts, and ten to twelve rupees for every man originating from the United and Central Provinces.[97] These figures are appreciably lower than those of Professor Mukherjee who estimated that recruiting costs accounted for nearly 20 per cent of the entire cost of raising coal in Jharia and 25 per cent of the total cost of Raniganj.[98] Such fragmentary and non-uniform data, however, are of only very limited use; clearly they are quite inadequate to base any but the most flimsy of conclusions upon.

The *ticcardar* generally tried to keep his labour together in separate gangs under the watchful eye of a *sardar* who had been earmarked as the collective spokesman and was correspondingly remunerated. If the *ticcardar* had any zamindary or landlord status (with all that this implied in terms of creditor power) then it was much easier for him to control the gangs. In the summer of 1917, for illustration, the governments of Bihar and Orissa acting on a central government directive "to do their utmost" to encourage the industry to increase the output of coal for the war effort, instructed their district officers to approach the zamindars and urge them to exert their influence on their villagers to go to the mines. The only effect this produced though was exactly the reverse of the intention since in July the Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Industry reported that:

> the attempts of the Provincial Government to get Zamindars to induce their ryots to return to the mines from the fields as soon as possible are alleged to have done more harm than good, cases being instanced like that of the Rajah of Nawagarh who makes

[92]I managed to find two (identical) contracts of this type in the Labour File of 1917. Unfortunately both are undated. Record Room of the Bengal Coal Company, Sanctoria.

[93]*Ibid.*, Clause 8.

[94]See B. R. Seth, *op. cit.*, p. 41ff.

[95]*Rep. R.C.L.*, IV, Part I, p. 9f.

[96]*Ibid.*

[97]B. R. Seth, *op. cit.*, p. 44f.

[98]R. Mukherjee, *The Indian Working Class* (1st edn.), Bombay, 1945, p. 25.

owners of mines pay a blackmail rate of half an anna per ton of coal raised in the collieries in his sphere of influence on the threat of withdrawing the labour.[99]

The most important type of *ticcardar* was the raising contractor who, as the designation suggests, was responsible for more than recruiting *per se*. In fact, the raising contractor became a dominant entrepreneurial figure who undertook to mine, raise, and load a certain quantity of coal with a labour force wholly supplied by himself and which he paid. For this the contractor received a rate of remuneration based on the tonnage produced; this rate depended upon certain local factors such as the length of the leads, the particular seam being worked, and the presence of faulting (as well, of course, as the current state of the coal and labour markets). Most of the large-scale collieries employed raising contractors to work pit sections, a single mine, or, occasionally, as at Mackinnon and Mackenzie's Eastern Coal Company, the entire colliery complex.[100] In 1929-30 it was estimated that much the greater part of the total output of coal was accounted for by raising contractors: in Jharia 70 per cent of the coal mined came from *ticcardi*, 40 per cent in Raniganj, 90 per cent in the Nizam's Singareni field and over half in Giridih.[101]

In a labour-intensive industry the assumption of such wide entrepreneurial functions by the contractor and his subordinate staff substantially reduced the duties of the mine manager and relieved him of the necessity of having to deal directly with the labour force. As the Royal Commission pointed out, "he [the mine manager] has ordinarily no responsibility for the selection of the workers, the distribution of their work, the payment of their wages or even the number employed."[102] It can be argued that this was precisely the main merit of the system since it released much of the manager's time and thereby allowed him to concentrate on planning the overall direction of mining operations and of ensuring that he properly discharged his statutory obligations—particularly with regard to safety.[103] There is little evidence to suggest that this delegation of

[99]Letter from C. E. Low to Sir G. Barnes, dated 27 July 1917, *Procgs. Commerce and Industry Dept.*, Coal, No. 19, "B", October 1917, N.A.I.

[100]J. Mackie, *Notes on the Rise of the Jharia Coalfield and the Properties of the Eastern Coal Company*, Privately printed, Calcutta, 1937, p. 29f.

[101]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 119.

[102]*Ibid.*

[103]See the *Report of the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee*, Patna, 1940, I, p. 188. (Hereafter *Prasad Report*.)

responsibility had this happy result; in fact, quite the contrary appears to have actually happened. In terms of accident prevention, the manager had all the legal and none of the practical responsibilities for the labour force. The dangers inherent in this dualism was the main reason why the Royal Commission recommended the abolition of the raising contractor system.[104] It is also difficult to accept the proposition that because the manager nominally had more time at his disposal to concentrate on purely mining problems this made any difference regarding improved methods or greater efficiency. Assuming that the "extra time" was spent on giving serious thought to these considerations there was the fundamental question of the implementation of any instructions—routine or otherwise—emanating from the *burra sahib's* office. It was the contractor and his hierarchy of assistants who had control over the labour and situations often occurred when there was a conflict of interest between manager and contractor. The latter, unlike the former, had no long-term stake in any one mine and consequently would try to produce the maximum output at the minimum cost—which effectively meant that the temptation to indulge in pillar robbing often proved irresistable (and hence the higher rate of accidents under *ticcardi*).[105] In the absence of a trained professional cadre of supervisors and overmen the manager could not but rely on the raising contractor for supervisory duties and he therefore found it difficult to exercise any firm day-to-day control of what was going on underground, especially if it was a large mine with hundreds of working faces. This was precisely the reason why the "butty" sub-contract system, so widely practised in the Staffordshire collieries in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century, declined: the owners could not prevent the "butty" (or contractor) from operating the mine in his short-term interest with the consequent neglect of development work (which did not produce outputs quick enough).[106]

The rationale behind the widespread resort to the raising contractor system was not so much the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient supply of raw labour as it was with ensuring that a certain number of suitably disciplined, controlled, and organized gangs of miners were on hand when required. The contractor himself rarely went underground even if he had any mine engineering experience or qualifications, which was hardly ever the case. He relied on a pyramidal network of overseers, gang-men, and mining *sardars* (foremen) to actively

[104]*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 119.

[105]See *Prasad Report*, p. 188.

[106]A. J. Taylor, "The Sub-contract System in the British Coal Industry" in L. S. Presnell (ed.), *Studies in the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1960, pp. 224-30.

supervise the work. This structure was fully consistent with the general industrial experience; the Bombay cotton and the Bengal jute mills, for example, utilized the services of intermediaries (known as *maistries, jobbers* and *mukkuddam*) in much the same way as in the collieries.[107] Thorner points out that such "middle men" were delegated "an astonishing number of basic labour functions" which included "hiring, promotion, transfer, granting of leave, punishment and dismissal."[108] Similarly, in the mines the *sardars* had great, if not absolute, power over the men under their charge. It was through the *sardar* that the contractor generally paid the wages to the gangs; such an arrangement could scarcely have provided a better opportunity for the *sardar* to extract *dasturi* (fee or cut) from practically every wage earner.[109] The contractor would also use the same medium to lend money to the workers, at high interest, which was one very potent reason why there was often such a fund of "loyalty" between miner, *sardar*, and raising contractor. Mukherjee suggests that as few mine managers would advance sums of money to the miners, the contractor was performing a socially useful function.[110] This is a rather startling contention: mounting indebtedness was a powerful weapon that was undoubtedly used to strengthen the hold over labour.[111] The *sardar* not only played a pivotal role on behalf of his superior but used his position to distribute a myriad of "petty" favours—of vital significance to the everyday working life of the men—to those who were prepared to reward him. At the TISCO collieries the *sardar*, in conjunction with the other officials in the pay of the contractor ranging from the *munshis* down to the shot-firers at the face, were involved in this unsavoury business. A tangled web of obligations, favouritism, and *bakshish* payments was unearthed in 1936 after a special investigation into corruption had been ordered by Sir Ardeshir Dalal, the Special Director of the Steel Company.[112] Unless the *munshis* were bribed, for example, they would not provide sufficient mine cars to the gangs, would miscount tubs and credit them to others, and, commonly, would reject tub loads on the grounds that they were either over or below the correct weight. Because it is geographically so spread out the coal (or indeed any mining) industry provides an ideal setting for such practices, and despite the absence of full supporting documentation, mainly on account of the apparent acquiescence of the miners who were naturally in fear of their jobs, there is no reason to suppose that the TISCO experience was in any way unique or unrepresentative. Though such practices were not peculiar to the mines under the raising contractor, it is significant that organized labour, such as it then was, vehemently expressed the desire to replace *ticcardi* with the departmental system. Giving evidence before the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee in 1938-40, M. Dhari (Chota Nagpur Mazdoor Sangh), Siva Kali Bose (Indian Colliery Labour Association), P. C. Bose (Indian Miners Association), and Dr Satyanarain (Giridih Coal Workers Association) unanimously pleaded for the statutory prohibition of raising contractors on the grounds that it meant lower wages, poorer working conditions, and a veritable chain of corruption.[113] The Committee agreed that these claims had a great deal of substance and in their final report stated that "Our own observations and enquiries have convinced us that workers under the sirkari [departmental] system are better paid and better looked after than those under the contractors."[114]

Many collieries found it advantageous to work some of their mines by raising contractor and others by *sirkari*. This co-existence came about mainly because the contractor was able to make himself almost indispensable by virtue of his hold over the labour force. The railway colliery of Giridih, for instance, operated their Khurharbaree mine entirely by contractors, but in the immediately adjacent Serampore mine (in 1929-30) seven of the pits were run on a *sirkari* basis whilst the remaining three were under contractors.[115] The Superintendent of the colliery explained this juxtaposition on the grounds that the contractors concerned exerted such strong influence over the miners that any attempt to dispense with them and change over to *sirkari* would lead to a mass exodus to another coalfield.[16] In the Raniganj field the Equitable Coal Company maintained a similar mix. In 1926-27 four of their mines were worked by raising contractors (Dhemo-Main, Aldih, Methani, and Bejdih), and three by

107*Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 23f and M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills 1854-1947*, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 129-53.

108D. Thorner, "Casual Employment of a Factory Labour Force, The Case of India 1850-1939," *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 1957, p. 121.

109*Rep. R. C. L.*, p. 24 and *Prasad Report*, p. 189.

110*Mukherjee, op. cit.*, p. 67.

111This was certainly the case in the Tata (TISCO) collieries. See the letter from the Colliery Superintendent to the General Manager (Works), dated 7 September 1938, in File No. C-125, Archives of the TISCO, Jamshedpur Record Office.

112S. H. Dastur, *Report on the Corruption at the T.I.S.CO. Collieries*, dated 9 September 1936. In File No. C-42, Jamshedpur Record Office.

113*Prasad Report*, IV, Part C, pp. 245-80, 281-304, 305, 312 and 334.

114*Ibid.*, 1, p. 189. Also see *Rep. R.C.L.*, p. 119; *Mahindra Report*, p. 191; and *Deshpande Report*, p. 3.

115*Rep. R.C.L.*, IV, Part 2, d-3207, p. 358. The fact that such an extensive zamindary endowed concern should rely on contractors so much is indicative of their crucial organizational importance.

116*Ibid.*

sirkari (Dishergarh, Chowrassie, and Neumutpur).[117] The Company's consultant mining engineer (Glen George) was asked in that year to prepare a report comparing the various merits of the two alternative systems of production. One of his conclusions was that the contractors had been far more "enterprising" in obtaining labour than the *sirkari* managers who, amongst other things, were "too content to sit down and wait for labour to come in."[118] As a result, faster development and higher outputs were achieved (George maintained that the contractor could raise 30 per cent more coal than was possible under *sirkari* in the development stage).[119] George was at pains to point out that there were no intrinsic reasons why this should have been so; if the managers would have shown the same "energy" with regard to recruitment and organization as the contractors their production performance would not have been so disappointing.[120] This verdict, of course, only begged the question. It is interesting that the largest of Equitable's contractors, Lodha Singh Bedi, not only had the charge of three of the four mines let on contract, but was also the main contractor of the Bird's group of collieries (having complete charge of Saltore). Bedi had managed to create such a niche for himself because of his hold over labour that George was reluctant to recommend to the Company, the second largest in the country, any action against Bedi without first coming to an understanding with Bird's.[121] In the Jharia field the TISCO collieries operated Malkera and Choitodih for the most part by contractor, and Jamadoba and Digwadih by *sirkari* for the same considerations. The contractors had been engaged from the first opening of the mines (in the case of Jamadoba TISCO had initially retained the same *ticcardars* as were employed by the Indian Colliery Syndicate, the previous owners) and had come to develop a "special relationship" with the miners which the Company were loath (or frightened) to disturb.[122]

It was not until the 1930s depression when coal prices touched their floor level that the hitherto unassailable position of the raising contractor began to be progressively undermined. There can be little doubt that *sircari* was significantly cheaper than *ticcardi*, mainly because it eliminated the emoluments of the contractor. As long as the price of coal remained high enough to permit "satisfactory" margins

[117]Glen George, *A Report on Contract and Sircari Working in the Dhemo-Main and Dishergarh Areas*, 20 January 1927 (in MS). Record Room of Macneill and Barry, Calcutta.

[118]*Ibid.*, p. 3.

[119]*Ibid.*, p. 5.

[120]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[121]*Ibid.*, p. 16.

[122]File No. C-47(c), Jamshedpur Rec. Off.

of profit to be earned after the contractor had been paid, there was little inclination to take to *sarkari*. In 1926-27 when Dishergarh grade was fetching Rs 5 a ton, Equitable was informed that the cost of production in the four contractor's mines averaged at Rs 3-9-3 as against Rs 3-2-3 in the three under *sirkari*; the Company was therefore "losing" seven annas per ton.[123] George estimated that if the market price fell below Rs 5 (as it did in the 1930s to just over Rs 2), the argument for totally adopting *sirkari* became conclusive because, as a general rule, "the lower the selling price the better is the relative position of sirkari."[124] The industry must have accepted the logic of this costing since the incidence of contractual working began to decline, especially in Jharia. In 1929-30 over half the total quantity of coal raised in the Jharia and Raniganj fields had been won through the raising contractors, but by the close of the Second World War there were only 60 surviving contractors and their share of the output had fallen to under a quarter.[125] The only exception to this general trend was the railway collieries where contractors not only maintained their dominant position, but consolidated it even further. In 1946 the railway collieries were using the services of eleven raising contractors (employing 23,000 workers) who accounted for over 80 per cent of the coal mined. There were special reasons for this resistance however. The government had gradually assumed both the ownership and the management of the railways and there was a certain reluctance to directly employ so many workers when a convenient alternative was at hand.[126] Furthermore, by virtue of the size of the interest, the Railway Board had managed to ruthlessly cut the contractors rate to the extent that *ticcardi*, even at the height of the depression, satisfied the self-proclaimed watchdogs of railway accounts in the Legislative Assembly (especially A. H. Ghuznavi).[127] In theory, before accepting any contract tender the Board had to be fully satisfied that the rate fixed allowed a wage to be paid to the miners that was not less than the current Raniganj-Jharia average.[128] This did not happen in practice however; in 1934, for example, the rate per ton loaded into wagons at the joint E.I.R. and B.N.R. Bokaro and Argada collieries had fallen so drastically that the daily wages

[123]Glen George, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[124]*Ibid.*, p. 13.

[125]*Mahindra Report*, p. 190.

[126]*Ibid.*

[127]See the *Procgs. of the Fourth Legislative Assembly*, Fourth Session, February 1932, pp. 82, 934-37.

[128]*Railway Dept. Procgs.*, Railway Board (Financial), No. 33-132-6-5/1-33, "B", April 1935, N.A.I.

of the coal cutters was between 4-5 annas.[129] In Jharia, Raniganj, and even Giridih the same category of miners earned more than twice as much.[130] In fact, the Board had directed Giridih to fully resume *ticcardi*, which had been in the process of being phased out, because of its "success" in the other railway collieries.[131] It is significant that the contractors could still continue to find it worthwhile, not to say profitable, to tender at such floor prices. This is an indication of the lucrative pickings that lay implicit in the system.

V. SUMMARY

The greater part of the mining labour force was recruited from the ranks of villagers, mainly agriculturists, who were born in the districts clustered around the coalfields. Most were from tribal (for example, Sonthal) and low-caste (Bauri) origins. Until their statutory prohibition from underground labour in 1929 women played an important part in the sequence of mining operations, particularly as carriers and loaders, and so a family mode of production predominated. Children (i.e., those under the age of 13) were not in much demand in India because the relative thickness of the coal seams put little premium upon small stature. Many of the larger colliery enterprises took advantage of the Permanent Settlement to acquire extensive zamindary estates, and a significant proportion of their employees became their tenants. This arrangement, especially in Raniganj and Giridih, enabled the firms to exert considerable power over their workers. Labour contractors were widely used by all sections of the industry not only to simply recruit but also to organize and discipline. There were various types of contractors—the most crucial being the raising contractor who performed basic entrepreneurial functions as well as completely controlling the mining gangs supplied by himself. The 1930s depression, however, was severe enough to persuade the mine managers and coal owners to dispense with their services.

129*Ibid.*, and Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 67f.

130*Ann. Rep. Chief Inspector of Mines* (1934), Table 1, p. 6.

131*Railway Dept. Procgs.*, Railway Board (Stores), No. 36-132-3-S/1-4, "B", July 1937, N.A.I.

TABLE I

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED IN THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY, 1888-1939*

1888	29,301	1911	116,155
89	29,928	12	132,567
1890	32,971	13	144,966
91	34,827	14	151,376
92	38,645	15	160,086
93	37,674	16	156,554
94	43,197	17	167,272
95	57,919	18	191,325
96	61,958	19	203,752
97	59,859	1920	190,342
98	62,974	21	205,879
99	74,450	22	200,913
1900	89,248	23	200,918
01	95,318	24	204,198
02	98,312	25	189,086
03	88,530	26	185,749
04	92,740	27	180,532
05	89,995	28	179,687
06	99,138	29	179,607
07	112,502	1930	184,370
08	129,137	31	173,175
09	119,546	32	165,567
1910	116,081	33	163,173
		34	169,354
		35	179,152
		36	181,687
		37	194,704
		36	226,887
		39	229,100

*This total actually represented the "average daily attendance" in any one year and was obtained by dividing the total number of individual attendance by the number of working days in each year.

SOURCE: Derived from the *Annual Reports on the Production and Consumption of Coal in India*, Calcutta, 1907-1939, Table 21.

TABLE II

THE SEX-RATIO OF EMPLOYMENT IN COAL MINES IN BRITISH INDIA, 1915-39

Year	No. of persons employed underground (in 1,000's)		No. of women per 10 men working underground	No. of persons above and below ground (1,000's)		Total No. of women workers for every 10 male workers
	Males	Females		Males	Females	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1915	59.1	35.5	6.0	95.4	51.4	5.6
1916	55.9	35.3	6.3	90.3	50.7	5.6
1917	56.7	37.7	6.6	95.2	56.1	5.9
1918	65.4	43.4	6.6	108.4	65.0	6.0
1919	69.7	47.0	5.8	115.9	71.3	6.1
1920	61.2	41.0	6.9	106.8	65.8	6.1
1921	66.0	42.1	6.3	115.9	70.8	6.0
1922	66.9	39.7	5.9	115.5	64.8	5.6
1923	68.1	40.1	5.8	115.9	64.0	5.6
1924	73.9	41.6	5.6	120.6	63.5	5.2
1925	70.9	39.6	5.5	112.4	54.5	4.8
1926	79.8	40.3	5.0	120.1	50.4	4.2
1927	80.1	33.8	4.2	117.8	47.4	4.0
1928	78.1	36.4	4.6	114.2	49.8	4.3
1929	85.8	29.8	3.4	123.2	42.8	3.4
1930	92.8	23.9	2.5	132.1	36.8	2.7
1931	91.0	21.0	2.3	125.8	32.4	2.6
1932	89.4	16.0	1.8	121.6	26.8	2.2
1933	89.5	14.4	1.6	120.9	23.8	1.9
1934	95.9	12.5	1.3	128.9	22.5	1.7
1935	102.3	10.0	1.1	136.6	22.5	1.6
1936	105.4	9.2	0.8	141.5	21.4	1.4
1937	98.4	3.8	0.3	148.5	22.9	1.5
1938	120.2	—	—	177.6	23.5	1.3
1939	124.7	—	—	178.9	23.0	—

SOURCE: *Despande Report*, Table 9, p. 18f.

TABLE III

EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN UNDER THIRTEEN IN COAL MINES OF BRITISH INDIA, 1909-26

	Below ground	*Above ground*
1909	685	1,626
10	589	1,503
11	505	1,478
12	508	1,839
13	484	1,983
14	605	2,015
15	806	2,023
16	583	1,990
17	665	2,275
18	681	2,316
19	707	2,348
20	713	2,755
21	1,189	3,081
22	787	3,280
23	685	3,247
24	283	2,382
25	29	1,181
26	insignificant	insignificant

SOURCE: *Annual Reports on the Production and Consumption of Coal in India*, Calcutta, 1909-26, Table 6.

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Emergence of Bengalee Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantation in a Bengal District, 1879-1933

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I

The cultivation and manufacture of tea was one of the fields where Indians participated with Europeans from the very beginning. Though marginal in significance to European enterprise, this participation was nevertheless interesting in view of the alleged lack of enterprise on the part of the Bengalees in any kind of industries. From the Indian Tea Committee of 1834 to the formation of the first tea company—the Assam Company—in 1839 and the stabilization of the struggling tea industry by 1870, they had a continual involvement in tea.[1]

Tea cultivation was introduced in Darjeeling by 1850, and in the Tarai in 1860. The district of Jalpaiguri was formed in 1869, and the Western Duars, an undulating submontane tract ceded by Bhutan in 1864, constituted two-thirds area of this new district. It was in this latter tract that the district's first tea garden, Gazaldoba, was opened by Dr J. P. Brougham in 1874.[2] The entire Western Duars was the Khas mahal of the government, and these khasmahal lands—categorized as wastelands—were leased out to Europeans for opening tea estates. The first lease to an Indian, Munshi Rahim Buksh, was registered on 17 August 1877.[3] The second lease, held jointly by

[1]Raja Radhakanta Deb and Babu Ram Kamal Sen were the two Indian members of the Tea Committee 1834. The Indian members of the Calcutta Committee of the Assam Company were: Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Roostomji Cowasjee, Motilal Seal, and Hadjee Ispahani. Motilal Seal was one of the directors of Calcutta Committee. See H.A. Antrobus, *A History of the Assam Company, 1839-1953*, Edinburgh, 1957, pp. 16, 39.

[2]Gazaldoba is now the property of the Friends Tea Company of Jalpaiguri. Fulbari Grant was later transferred to the North Sylhet Tea Company. See G.F. Grunnings, ed., *District Gazetteer of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Jalpaiguri District*, Calcutta, 1911, p. 103.

[3]Leaseholders Register cited in B.C. Ghosh, *Development of Tea Industry in Jalpaiguri District 1879-1968*, Jalpaiguri, 1970. The original record was completely destroyed during the flood of 1968.

Mrs Durgabati Sen and Kalimohon Roy, was granted in 1878 who subsequently transferred it to Beharilal Ganguli. The Mogulkata grant (1879) was leased out to the Jalpaiguri Tea Company.[4] Since then the district's tea industry and its Indian sector underwent a process of rapid growth through the extension of the tea acerage and setting up of new gardens. This process came to a virtual stop by the time the international agreement was signed in 1933 (Table 1 in Annexure I).

During the period under review the entire tea industry in India, and for that matter also in its northeast region, was in British ownership and management. Whether registered as sterling joint stock companies in London or as rupee joint stock companies at Calcutta, all those companies, which had their gardens in northeast India, had their management entrusted to one or other of the Calcutta Managing Agency houses, also British-owned. Only a few of the sterling companies had their own branch offices in the area of operations in India. Indian-owned joint stock tea companies of this region, on the other hand, had their registered head offices outside Calcutta. In fact, the address of the head office of a tea concern could almost invariably give an indication whether it was controlled by European Managing Agents or by others. Sometimes the name of a company was also a pointer to this indication.[5]

The Indian-owned companies in northeast India numbered 163 in 1933, and the Bengalees of Jalpaiguri district owned and controlled 88 of them. These 88 companies were managed and controlled by their respective boards of directors: of the 128 members of these boards in 1933, only nine were non-Bengalees—three Europeans and six Marwaris.[6] Thus the Jalpaiguri Bengalees were the single largest Indian business group to invest in tea. Later on, mainly in the post-

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] In the 1850s some proprietory Indian estates were in existence in Assam, but no further information could be gathered from the existing sources. Sir P. Griffiths mentioned about the Indian ownership in Kumaon. Indians, including Maharaja of Kashmir, Raja of Mandi, and other princes, had proprietory estates in their own lands. See P. Griffiths (Sir), *The History of Indian Tea Industry*, London, 1967, p. 82. Indians having proprietory estates in Darjeeling and Tarai were as follows: Kamal Krishna Halder, Tehsilder of Burdwan Raj estate, having Kamalpur Tea Estate; Bhagabati Rai, a government contractor, had Phuguri, Sourini, and Samri Pani Tea estates; Bipradas Pal Chowdhury of the zamindar family of Maheshganj, Nadia, established Gayabari Tea Estate in 1869. See N. B. Rai, "How Tea Came to Stay in Darjeeling," *Assam Review and Tea News*, Calcutta, Vol. 51, No. 10, December 1962, pp. 653-59.

[6] *Indian Tea Statistics 1937*, Government of India, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, pp. 29-30.

independence period, the ownership and management of quite a large number of their gardens began to change hands. Through an gradual process of share transfer, the control was increasingly transferred to non-Bengalees in due course. This situation provides the rationale for our focus on Bengalee entrepreneurship in tea during 1879-1933.

Our aim of study is to find out institutional and structural correlates of the emerging Bengalee entrepreneurship in tea plantation of Jalpaiguri district. Bengalee entrepreneurship in tea was not limited to Jalpaiguri alone, though the largest concentration of the registered offices of their public limited tea companies was there (Tables 1 and 2 in Annexure I). This was observed even as late as 1954 by the Plantation Enquiry Commission.[7] Though of all districts Jalpaiguri had the largest area under tea in Bengal, yet our selection of area for an in-depth study is based on the very fact of the concentration of the registered head offices of Indian tea companies there

II

The Western Duars had caught the notice of the British for tea as early as 1861.[8] Before that, forcible annexation of this tract of Bhutan was thought to be unjustified because the area was not expected to contribute significantly towards revenue and trade. It was not until 1864 that the ground was politically ready for investment, British or Indian.

The Western Duars area had special advantages over Assam and Darjeeling. It was closer to and directly linked with the Calcutta Port through the railways since 1870. Common tea, a cheap variety, was produced here. Yet another important advantage, as highlighted by British capitalists, was that the recruitment and supply of labour here was not subjected to any kind of labour legislation, except for sanitation. The cost of procurement of labour was therefore said to be much less here than in Assam.[9]

[7] Plantation Enquiry Commission, *Report 1956*, Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Table III, p. 22.

[8] Col. Jenkins, Political Commissioner of Northeast India, made the observations in 1859 that the fertile lands of Duars would be quite attractive to the people of Rungpore and Cooch Behar, and the upper part was excellent tea land. He earnestly desired the input of European capital and management in the Duars. See A. Eden, *Political Mission to Bhutan*, Calcutta 1864, p. 21.

[9] "If Assam gardens could pay 10 to 16 per cent dividends then Duars would pay higher margin because of comparatively low labour recruiting cost. A capable manager of local experience is required who can deal with free labour." See *Capital*, Vol. I, No. 2, 13 November 1888, p. 34. The Jalpaiguri Labour Act, 1912, provided for some supervision of public health measures in the tea gardens.

The 88 Indian joint stock companies of Jalpaiguri, registered during 1879-1933, had their registered head offices either at the district town of Jalpaiguri and its vicinity or at Alipur Duars, the headquarters of Alipur Duars subdivision. The growth of the joint stock companies is indicated in Table 1 (Annexure I). The companies having their head offices not in the town but in its vicinity, within the same subdivision, are separately listed in Table 2 (Annexure I). Some Bengalee planters who had their estates in Jalpaiguri operated also from outside the district, as is shown in Table 3 (Annexure I).

The Jalpaiguri Tea Company (1879), the first corporate concern of Jalpaiguri, was not however the first Indian corporate concern in tea. It was the Cachar Native Joint Stock Company, floated by the Bengalees of the Surma Valley of Assam in 1876, which had this glory.[10] But this lead was not pursued by them so vigorously as by the Jalpaiguri Bengalees. In the early phase up to 1910, the same promoter-directors were credited with the promotion of most of the companies of Jalpaiguri. So long as khasmahal lands were available at nominal cost, the promotion of the new ventures proceeded slowly but steadily; and these companies were financially quite sound to withstand shocks and depressions. After 1910, the khasmahal lands were exhausted, and attempts were made to explore available khasmahal lands elsewhere or to procure *jote* lands—lands earmarked for ordinary cultivation but left unused because of unsuitability for such purpose—for tea cultivation. Thus, the location of the estates belonging to Jalpaiguri planters spread over Assam and Tarai from 1911 onwards. This export of capital from Jalpaiguri to Assam was stopped only when conversion of *jote* land into tea gardens was legitimized in 1919.[11] This is represented in Table 4 (Annexure I) showing the decadewise distribution of the estates according to the location.

This availability of land has an important bearing on the capital size of the companies. So long as the companies acquired khasmahal lands from the government and such lands were available in Jalpaiguri Duars, the capital size of the companies was limited to a maximum of one and a half lakhs of rupees. But this amount rose to three lakhs of rupees when land was to be purchased from the jotedars or private proprietors. As a result the shareholding became comparatively more broad-based than before. This observation is related to public limited companies. Another aspect of this spreadout was the managerial and executive limitations of controlling these distant estates from

[10]Alphabetical List of Joint Stock Companies in India, 1861-1902, Government of India, Part IV, Planting and Mining.

[11]See n. 15.

Jalpaiguri. Many ventures of the Jalpaiguri Bengalees in Assam had been liquidated because of inefficiency in management.

A question naturally comes to the surface: Who were these people? To be more precise, what was the social origin of these Bengalees entrepreneurs of Jalpaiguri district? Had their social origin anything to do with their choice of entrepreneurship? Answers to these questions require a description of the Jalpaiguri society since the middle of the last century. It is highly doubtful whether any elite society existed in Jalpaiguri before the formation of the district in 1864. The Regulation portion of the Jalpaiguri district had, until then, only two noteworthy centres of habitation—Sukhani with a revenue office, and Jalpaiguri village with a small cantonment and an establishment of the Raikots (the local zamindars).[12] The two centres of population could hardly be called a society. A few government employees and a few suppliers to the cantonment who were there were all outsiders. The Raikots had their revenue office at Jalpaiguri, and petty revenue officers and collectors had been in employment there.[13] The rest were the cultivators residing chiefly in the villages. The changes in the other parts of Bengal did not even touch the area in any significant way.

The picture changed after Jalpaiguri was made the district headquarters. Local administrative centres were developed at Mainaguri, Falakata, and Alipur Duars. Because of the administrative necessity, people from outside the district were encouraged to come to and settle in Jalpaiguri district. It is no exaggeration to remark that Jalpai-

[12]The geographical boundary of the former Jalpaiguri subdivision was set by the river Mahananda in the west and Teesta in the east. This portion was part of Rungpur district of British Bengal. Its headquarters station was first at Sukhani, and from there it was shifted to Jalpaiguri. This tract was known as regulation area. The area lying between the river Teesta in the west and Sonkosh in the east was the western part of the Duars, known as the Western Duars. It was under the control of Bhutan. This portion was annexed to the British Bengal in 1864-65 by proclamation. This portion is known as the non-regulated portion. This non-regulated portion, or Western Duars, is the area of tea plantation in Jalpaiguri. See A. Bari, "Birth of a District," *Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir*, Centenary Committee, Jalpaiguri, 1970.

[13]The Raikot family has a long history, as the only zamindar family of Jalpaiguri district. They had accumulated large surplus from their rent-income—Prasanna Deb Raikot become interested in tea, and invested part of his rentier income in tea. When availability of land was restricted by prohibiting jotelands' conversion into tea in the Duars area after 1914, the Raikot family alone, having zamindari rights, could offer lands for tea cultivation. For a history of Raikots, see D.H.E. Sunders, *Survey and Settlement Report of Western Duars (1889-1895)*, Chapter II, Section II on Raikot; K. C. Amanutullah Ahmed, *History of Coochbehar* (in Bengali), Coochbehar State Press, Cooch Behar, 1940.

guri was a settlers' district as its population increased more by immigration than by natural growth.[14] The settlers came from various parts of Bengal, as well as from outside Bengal. Of them, those belonging to the cultivator class came mainly from the adjacent districts of Dinajpur, Rungpore, and the feudatory state of Cooch-Behar. They resided in villages. The employees of the government offices came from remoter districts of Bengal. The professional class engaged mainly in legal practice. They came from Rajshahi, Pabna, Dacca, Faridpur and Jessore though other districts' share was not absent. The professional group was mainly concentrated in the district headquarters and in the subdivisional town of Alipur Duars.

Among the agricultural people, there were the rent-receivers or jotedars, intermediate tenancy holders like chukanidar, dar-chukanidar, etc., and the ryots.[15] Broadly, there were two divisions—jotedars

[14]The following table shows the growth of immigrant population in Jalpaiguri:

	1891	*1901*	*1911*	*1921*	*1931*
Actual population	433334	544906	661282	694056	739160
Immigration from outside state of Bengal	44329 (10.23%)	95899 (17.60%)	152174 (23.01%)	163024 (23.49%)	158024
Immigration from contiguous districts of Bengal	58755 (13.56%)	48210 (8.85%)	33000 (4.99%)	40000 (5.76%)	
Immigration from other districts of Bengal	20072 (4.63%)	113908 (20.94%)	25000 (3.78%)	9000 (1.30%)	

SOURCE: Census of India, Vol. VI, Part IA. Report, relevant years. The figures in bracket show percentage of immigrants from respective areas to total district population.

[15]The land tenure system of Jalpaiguri was as follows: The total area was divided into reserved forest, culturable waste, unculturable waste, arable land, and tea grants. The culturable waste arable land and tea grants were divided into several *jotes* or plots of lands. A *jote* was directly farmed out to a jotedar who was to pay revenue to the government. The lowest tenant was the ryot or *praja* who actually cultivated the land. In between them, the subinfeudation ranked like chukanidar, dar-chukanidar, dar-adar-chukanidar, etc. The resident jotedars or intermediate tenancy holders were themselves cultivators, whereas absentee jotedars or absentee intermediate tenancy holders farmed out the land to ryots or *prajas*. A *praja* was an agricultural labourer whom the jotedar provided with homestead, ploughs, live stock, seeds and ration during lean months to live on. A ryot had more independent status. The following was the structure in 1895: Jotedar, 23,339 persons; Adhiar (share-cropper) under jotedar, 15,618; Chukanidar under jotedar, 14,016; Adhiar under chukanidar, 6,552; Dar-chukanidar, 3,739. See D.H.E. Sunder's *Survey and Settlement Report of Western Duars (1889-1895)*, Calcutta, 1896.

and ryots. In most cases, the two classes belonged to the same caste, i.e., Rajbanshis and Muslims; but their economic conditions differed. The professional group was more or less homogeneous. They belonged to the upper-caste Hindu society—the Brahmins, the Kayasthas, and the Baidyas.

The merchant community consisted of the Marwaris, Muslim Sowdagars, and a few Bengalees.[16] Sowdagars were mainly retail traders. Marwaris were engaged in trade and commerce both in retail and wholesale business. The Bengalees were the timber-traders. The marketing of jute and tobacco was monopolized by the Marwaris with whom many small middlemen were attached. The latter's primary role was to supply the articles from the interior local markets to the godowns of the merchants. From the point of view of occupation, there were three major classes: (*i*) those engaged in agricultural pursuits, (*ii*) those engaged in professions and service, and (*iii*) those engaged in trade and commerce. The agricultural class chiefly consisted of Muslims, Rajbanshis (a scheduled caste today), and the Meches (a scheduled tribe). Though landholding brought wealth to the Rajbanshi and Muslim jotedars and raised their economic status among the masses of Rajbanshi and Muslim ryots, their social position and educational background were low enough to inhibit the rise of aspiration or achievement above their limited horizon. Their economic activity was mostly confined to the acquisition of more and more lands. Even, here, they did not have to undertake any capital expenditure. Lands were plenty, and at a nominal cost large areas could be brought under the ownership of the local jotedars. The Rajbanshi and Muslim jotedars were local residents. Rajbanshis and Muslim ryots were mostly those people who came to Jalpaiguri to clear up jungles and to extend the frontiers of cultivation. As compared to neighbouring districts they had to pay much lower rent. The virgin land was fertile, rainfall adequate, and the opening up of local markets in the tea estates made cultivation and realization of the produce feasible without capital or marketing expenditures. Neither the jotedars nor the ryots did possess the requisite quality to develop entrepreneurial activity in other fields in which they had hardly any experience.

The merchant class had the same psychological restraints which deterred them from undertaking risk in a relatively new field. They were, as a class, interested in the distribution aspect of manufacture. Seldom did they undertake production and its concommitant risks. They would prefer quick turnover rather than the prospective yield

[16]Muslim sowdagars were the petty businessmen (having sowdagar title) conducting trade on consumable stores. They constituted a very influential group of investors and joined with the immigrant Muslim community in the floatation of a number of tea companies.

of a present investment in future. Therefore, they were not likely to come for investment in tea planting and manufacturing as pioneers, though as short-term financiers they had often been involved therein from the very beginning of the Indian companies.[17] The social background of the professional and service holders' class was comparatively more congenial to the aspiration for investment in new fields than that of the jotedar and merchant classes. The professional and the service holders of the Jalpaiguri district, as in other districts of Bengal, had more or less homogeneous caste and economic background. Most of them belonged to upper-caste Hindu community and economically belonged to the middle class. Muslim planters also had similar educational and economic background. They were comparatively high placed in the native society. Their educational background, social position, and economic status contributed to their aspiration for achievement.

Within the middle class again those belonging to the liberal professions like legal practice had been better placed to seize any new opportunity in the society. The legal profession was at that time the most important independent profession. Entrepreneurship could come only from those social classes whose economic status, educational background, and social position made them aspire for achievement. Only the professional class could satisfy that condition. Even among them, the employees in the government and private sector could not generally seize the opportunities because of many restraints imposed by their service conditions. Others outside legal practice, e.g., those in the medical profession, were very few in number. This is why Bengalee pioneers in the field of tea planting and manufacturing came primarily from the legal profession, followed by the service holders.[18] It was evident from the social and economic situation of the late nineteenth century that the leadership in the society would emerge from the upper-caste Hindus and well-to-do Muslims engaged in the liberal professions in general, and the legal profession in particular.

[17]In the absence of institutional financing, the moneylending business was undertaken in Jalpaiguri largely by the jotedars, shopkeepers, and Marwari traders. The Marwari traders were the source of short-term advances to the Indian tea companies against the handnotes of the directors. The personal security of the directors was quite adequate to cover the risk. This is the way the Marwari traders entered into Indian tea companies. Later on advances against hypothecation of crops were made by them.

See B. Mukhopadhyaya, *Jogesh Jiban* (in Bengali), Gopaipur House, Jalpaiguri, 1965, p. 10; W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. X: Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and state of Kuchbehar, Trubner & Co. (London, 1876), reprinted in India in 1974 by D.K. Publishing House, Delhi.

[18]The emergence of the professional group was the most important social factor in the mid-nineteenth century. Among this class, the legal progressionals were the vanguard. This professional group (or the middle class) had acquired the social leadership. The spirit of their discipline and their understanding of the rule of law naturally placed them in the first position. This professional elite was the social elite of Bengal. See A. Seal, *Emergence of Nationalism in India*, Cambridge, 1967, Chapter 2; B.M. Bhatia, *History and Social Development*, Delhi, 1974, Vol. I, pp. 182-83.

The eminence of the legal practitioners in the society was a general phenomenon in all the districts of Bengal. Civil suits and the settlement cases provided them enough opportunity to earn a surplus. This surplus income of the legal practitioners had been partly channelled into land holding through the purchase of intermediate tenancy rights. Partly their savings also found way into the portfolio investment. They were not only the leaders of the society, but also pioneers in the economic field. Jalpaiguri was no exception to this general picture of Bengal society.

III

The next question which remains to be answered is: Why did they choose investment in tea planting and manufacturing?

Any investment comes from the savings. Savings is a surplus of income over consumption expenditures. In the Jalpaiguri society, the three classes of people who had the ability to save were the jotedars, the merchants, and the professionals. The salaried group was comparatively low-placed as savers. The lawyers who had established their practice had good earnings, though supporting quantitative data are not available.[19] The utilization of savings is an important economic decision. Because of low social position, low educa-

[19]The income earned by the legal professionals and service holders of Jalpaiguri society is difficult to estimate. The salary structure of the lower cadre of the government employees ranged between Rs 25 to Rs 60 per month, with the maximum spread in between Rs 30 to Rs 40 p.m. On the other hand, the income tax payers of Jalpaiguri mainly belonged to the category I, having an annual income of Rs 500 and over. This category covered the salaried group and professionals, majority of them being the legal professionals. See *Twenty Years Statistics—Income Tax Returns 1901-1921*, Govt. of Bengal, Jalpaiguri District.

Years	*Minimum income assessed*	*Persons assessed*
1902-03	Rs 500.00 p.m.	1153 persons
1903-04	Rs 1000.00 p.m.	432 persons
1907-08	—	511 persons

SOURCE: G.F. Grunning, ed., *District Gazetteer, Eastern Bengal and Assam, Jalpaiguri District*, Calcutta, 1911, p. 129.

tional background, and a lack of economic calculation, the jotedar class seldom showed any rational use of their savings except in acquiring more land or in moneylending.[20] This latter field of utilization of savings, either in cash or in kind, was a natural outcome of the jotedari function in rural areas, as in the case of village moneylender class elsewhere. The merchant class utilized their savings in the horizontal expansion of their commercial activity to which they were traditionally attached. Therefore, the first two classes, the jotedars and the merchants, had no serious problem about utilizing their savings according to their traditional thinking.

The professional class was in a different position. Though they had no commercial background, yet they were able to make choice regarding the field of investment in which they could utilize their savings. It should be borne in mind that the savings institutions were very few in the mufussil areas, and the habit of institutional savings had hardly developed in the people residing far from the metropolitan and commercial centre, Calcutta. Hoarding was the only substitution of the institutional savings.

The professional class of Jalpaiguri could have three alternatives —either (*i*) to hoard the savings, or (*ii*) to convert it into assets, or (*iii*) direct investment in any field of economic activity. Hoarding being unproductive, our Jalpaiguri middle-class savers looked for assets that would yield additional income. The choice for such assets was however highly limited. Most of the companies engaged in industry or trade were private companies with their head offices in Calcutta. The stocks of the railway companies or the government securities had their market in Calcutta. Geographically these financial assets of the companies were out of their reach. The physical asset available in the districts of Bengal was land. The professional class

[20]The transfer of *jotes* registered up to 1916 is given below:

Category of persons acquiring jotes	*No.*
Jotedar	3444
Chukanidar	1278
Mahajan	637
Lawyer	21
Tea garden manager	60
Tea garden director	34
Tea companies	5
Pleaders	62

SOURCE: J.A. Milligan, I.C.S., *Final Report on the Surveys and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District (1906-1916)*, Calcutta, 1916, Appendix XIX, p. 17.

and the service holders of the Jalpaiguri society had acquired land. But the acquisition of land was more for social prestige than for an income. Besides, investment in land in Jalpaiguri did not require much capital in the late nineteenth century. Large areas of cultivable wastelands were settled by the government at a very nominal price only to bring them into cultivation and to spread settlement in the sparsely populated area of the Duars. This easy chance of getting *jotes* was not missed by the Jalpaigurians.

A class of absentee jotedars, who had estates in rural areas of the district but were residing at Jalpaiguri town, developed quickly. They did not primarily live on rent. Nevertheless their possession of *jotes* definitely widened their capacity to save, to invest, and to undertake economic risk. The social status of the Jalpaiguri middle class did not permit them to be engaged in trade or commerce. They came from the respectable non-trading castes, and to them engagement in trade and commerce was as derogatory as the cultivation of land by themselves. The upper-caste Hindus or the well-to-do Muslims of Jalpaiguri did not therefore avail themselves of these opportunities.

An important field of investment by the professional class of mufussil Bengal in the late nineteenth century was the loan companies.[21] Since 1861, in many district towns and rural centres, loan companies were set up by the legal practitioners in collaboration with the landholding class. But the land relations in Jalpaiguri were different from that of the rest of Bengal. In the Duars area, the Bengal Tenancy Act did not come into effect until 1895, and from 1864 to 1895, the land relation was governed by a special act known as the Bhutan Duars Act. The rural indebtedness was very low.[22] The jotedars cultivated their lands by two systems—share-cropping and *praja* system. In the first system, the ryot cultivated the land with the help of his own capital and equipment and shared the product with the jotedar. The *praja* system was typical to the jotedari

[21]About the functions of the loan companies, see Govt. of Bengal, *Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*, Calcutta, 1929, Vol. I, Report, Chapter XIV. The pleaders and petty landlords joined together to raise loan companies after 1861. This is one step to institutionalize the supply of loans to rural society against the mortgage of lands or promisory notes. The Bengal Moneylending Act was responsible for their mushroom growth in some areas.

[22]Land was plenty, and the market was also there—the tea gardens. In fact, Jalpaiguri was a deficit area for foodgrains. The rent was low, and the demand horizon of cultivators remained very low. As a result, the Jalpaiguri cultivators had not to undergo indebtedness. The other factor is the land tenure system, *Praja* system, in which the losses were insured by the jotedars. This land-tenure institution together with plenty of culturable waste made it possible for the cultivators to be free from rural indebtedness.

system. A *praja* was settled by the jotedar by providing him capital and equipment. In either case, rent was very nominal and the opening up of the plantations created new markets. The socio-economic condition did not allow for large-scale rural indebtedness. The rural society was speedily monetized. Because of this structural relation among the people engaged in agricultural pursuits, investment in loan companies had not been popular among the Jalpaiguri professionals. In the absence of reliable data and information, this point cannot be dealt with here in greater details.

Thus it is seen that the social background of the Jalpaiguri middle class did not allow them to be attracted to trade and commerce. The scope for portfolio investment was highly limited. A land relation, developed in the special condition, did not favour the rise of the loan companies. The reasons stated above show that the Jalpaiguri professionals could not utilize their savings either in the assets formation or in the portfolio investment as done by their counterparts in Calcutta or in other districts of Bengal.

Let us now come to analyze what factors helped this class to invest in tea. The factors were both economic and psychological. Investment in tea was mainly done by Europeans. Because of this association with Europeans, investment in tea had a special charm of its own for Indians. As in the case of Cachar, the legal practitioners of Jalpaiguri also acted as local attorneys and solicitors for tea companies.[23] By 1879 several grants of khasmahal lands were issued at virtually little costs to European planters.[24] The pleaders and the government employees of Jalpaiguri noticed it. At the same time, the emerging sentiment of nationalism played its role. Every tea estate had a European manager or assistant manager. Below that rank, everyone was Indian. Indians were denied the superior management posts.[25] Had Indians confidence in their ability to manage the affairs of a tea estate, the requirement of a non-Indian manager

[23]D. Dutta, "Tea Industry in Cachar—Its Origin," *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. 84, 1965, pp. 1-9.

[24]Altogether 33 grants were issued to leaseholders for tea cultivation in the Duars from 1875 to 20.5.1879. Leaseholder Register, Divisional Commissioners Office, Jalpaiguri, cited in B. C. Ghosh n. 3.

[25]"It is said that the Head Clerk of a Cachar Sterling Company—Mr. D.N. Dutta—was recommended by the manager of the estate for the position of assistant managership; but the proposal was turned down by the London Head Office on the ground that a native could not be appointed in the managerial cadre." See B.C. Ghose and K.K. Chakraborty, "History of the Tea Industry in Jalpaiguri," *Assam Review and Tea News*, Vol. 51, No. 10, December 1962, p. 562. D.N. Dutta was the promoter-director and the manager of the first joint stock tea company in Cachar in 1876—Cachar Native Joint Stock Company.

could be dispensed with. The experienced subordinate staff of the European estates gladly came forward to lend their service for managerial cadre. A feeling that "the natives were not inferior to the whites" worked behind this confidence. The contact with European planters, experience gained in the process of securing grants of wastelands, and the emerging nationalist sentiment bringing confidence into the Indians' ability to share the responsibility with Europeans—created the psychological environment for the Jalpaiguri professionals for their entry into industry.

On the economic side, the factors could be arranged in the order of production, and distribution. The distribution aspect of tea trade was no problem. Since the humble appearance of the first small consignment of Indian tea in 1839, the export of Indian tea was increasing fast over decades.[26] By 1880s the export from India overtook Chinese tea in the United Kingdom. The Chinese competition was replaced by competition from Ceylon. But a new direction of export was found out. The realization was no problem to the growers.

The important inputs in tea plantation, as in case of other plantations, were land and labour. The expenditures on capital equipment were comparatively low, and the process of manufacturing simple. And, both these factors—land and labour—were quite elastic in supply in those days. The wastelands were settled at a very low rate of rent with the intending planters. No heavy capital outlay was needed until 1910 to procure land for tea plantation.[27] It is the

[26]The export figures of Indian tea (taking into consideration that all tea produced was exported) are given below:

Year	*lbs.*
1867 - 68	7811429
1871 - 72	17187328 (220%)
1881 - 82	48591725 (282%)
1891 - 92	120149407 (247%)
1901 - 02	179684032 (149%)

SOURCE: Detailed Report of the General Committee of the Indian Tea Association, Calcutta, for 1905, p. 303.

[27]Rules for settlement of wasteland for tea cultivation was originally meant for the Assam Plantation. The first rule was the Assam rules of 1838, followed by a revision in 1854, 1861, and 1876. The Bengal Presidency had its first rule in 1878 which was subsequently revised by the "Rules for the grant of lease of waste lands for tea cultivation in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling 1888." Its major revision took place in 1919 by incorporating the conversion of jotelands for tea cultivation in the Western Duars. See S.K. Bose, *Capital*

limitation of resources in bringing such wasteland into cultivation which stood in the way of securing a larger grant for the companies raised by Indians. Hence land was no problem. When the wastelands were exhausted, the entrepreneurs took the cultivable *jotes* for opening up tea estates.

Next comes labour. The labour force in the Duars Plantation was free in the sense that it was not indentured labour subject to special, protective legislation. The cost of recruiting was low, because of the proximity of the Duars to the recruiting area of Chotanagpur. As it has been gathered from the old Indian planters, Indian estates in the early period had another cheap source of labour.[28] In those days not all the labourers had work every day in the plantation. Whenever a new estate was opened, the surplus labour of one estate arrived there in the hope of a regular employment for all the preliminary works to plantation as well as for raising the plantation. This, later on, developed into the evil practice of enticing labour of each other, which became a big issue. Special agreements were signed by the managements of the estates to stop this evil practice. Unfortunately local inhabitants were never found to be interested in the plantation work in the Duars[29] and except some hill people, almost all the labour force in the Duars plantation was composed of the immigrant tribals from Chotanagpur and Central Province (Madhya Pradesh).

The primary motive of investment in the private sector was profit. In fact, this is the rationale of all private investment. Hence, in general, the Indian entrepreneurs in the plantation were guided by the profit motive. But a question arises: To what extent were the pioneers profit-conscious? There are sufficient reasons to throw doubt on the point raised. The economic calculations of profitability of an investment depend on various factors. The marginal efficiency of capital is theoretically a sound concept for guiding such calculations. Even this concept, to a large extent, depends on subjective

and Labour in Indian Tea Industry, All India Trade Union Congress, Bombay, 1954, Chapter III. For Jalpaiguri rules see *Calcutta Gazette*, Part I, 16 May 1888, and Part I, 16 May 1919.

28This information is gathered from the personal interview with the following ex-secretaries of Gurzongjhorha Tea Company.

(1) Sri Bazlur Raham interviewed on 21 May 1975 } both at Jalpaiguri at Nabab palace and

(2) Sri A. Mukherjee interviewed on 22 May 1975 } Babupara respectively.

29The agricultural activity was so profitable that the local labourers, all agriculturists, would not like to leave cultivation. The local labourer was always non-attractive to plantation work. See the observation by C.A. Bruce on Assam local labour in P. Griffiths, n. 5, p. 55.

factors not amenable to quantification and objectivization. One may ask: How far the pioneer Indian planters were profit-conscious? Did they know what was the cost per pound of tea and what was the selling price per pound? Did they realize that the MEC in tea was higher than any other field of investment? What was their source of information about the cost and revenue aspect of the investment? What did they know about the expanding market of Indian tea? What was their estimated income over expenditure in the future from the initial capital expenditure?

These questions are complicated enough to be solved easily. No information or documentary evidences are available to enlighten us for the period prior to 1910. From 1879 to 1910 we have to rely on indirect evidences and conjectures. No printed prospectus of the early companies are available,[30] and no information about their estimates of profit is to be found. The annual budgets were framed up in an elementary way only showing the expenditures of the company for bringing into cultivation the minimum area required by rules. In those budgets, provisions were made for non-recurring expenditures like clearing of jungles, building of thatched huts and sheds for the labourers and workers, purchase of tools and equipment for clearing jungles, purchase of sheds for nursery, and recurring expenditures of establishment for the garden as well as for the head offices. The revenue side is conspicuously absent.

How are these estimates made? Of course, there exist various indirect sources. To begin with, the first experimental garden was set up in 1875. The first land grant to an Indian for tea was to Peshker Rahim Buksh in 1877.[31] From the expenditures incurred by the Peshker Sahib, other Indian entrepreneurs could gather information about the initial costs. Next came the Indian employees in the European estates. Because of their domicile in the district headquarters, the Bengalee pleaders of Jalpaiguri represented the European companies locally in all legal matters. In course of their business, they came in

30It was not, until 1913, imperative on the part of the companies to issue prospectus. About Jalpaiguri Tea Companies, there was no printing press before 1885 at Jalpaiguri. All printing works were done at Berhampur in Murshidabad. The companies printed their memoranda and articles of associations at that place, and all of them in Bengali language. See Radha Shyam Rungta, *Rise of Business Corporation in India 1851-1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 37.

31Lease-holders Register at the Divisional Commissioner's Office Jalpaiguri cited in B.C. Ghose, n. 3. First non-Indian lease—Fu[illegible] lease of 502 acres to L.W. Barantee on 1.4.1875; first Indian lease — Jaldhaka lease of 728 acres to L.W. Barantee on 1.4.1875; first Indian lease — Jaldhaka lease of 728 acres to Munshi Rahim Buksh on 17.8.77.

contact with the Indian employees who had first-hand knowledge about the expenditure sides of the European concerns. Therefore, these links and information provided the basis of cost estimation. These sources also supplied the marketing intelligence to the Indian entrepreneurs. The personal contact might be the single important source for the cost and revenue estimation.

The nature of investment also helped to a great extent. The land was taken first, as grants of wasteland were distributed simply on application. During the five years of the preliminary lease, only 15 per cent of the total grant was to be planted to show that the leaseholder had the intention as well as the means of bringing the plot into tea cultivation. It took five years for a plant to bear the leaves fit for manufacturing. Until the manufacturing stage was reached at the end of the fifth year, expenditures on factory shed and manufacturing plants were not required. Only the maintenance staff was required to rear the nursery. The establishment cost was very low once the non-recurring expenditures were incurred. As soon as the plants grew up to the size of plucking, short-term advances for the completion of manufacturing processes were obtainable by hypothecation of crops. This solved the problem of working capital.

It was thus quite evident that a small amount of initial capital could be the basis for a moderate investment which was self-feeding once the stage of plucking was reached. Calls to the shareholders for their share money could be spread over two to three years so that the shareholders also took it easy. In this procedure, risk of investment was highly minimized. Even in case of the failure, the real estate, the land on lease, could be transferred in the name of an intending buyer who could "pay" for it, and part of the investment was recoverable. Thus it could be gathered that the pioneers could get some information about the cost and revenue, and the comparatively low risk in the investment, in case the venture proved to be a failure. It is quite interesting that the early four joint stock companies were founded by the same group of entrepreneurs without inter-locking the funds of one company with another's. Each company was run on its own financial resources though they were managed and controlled by the common members of their respective boards of directors.

At the same time, it is known that the first attempt was not so much based on profitability as on subjective appeal. The promoters themselves were not so confident about their attempt, and a very close group of shareholders were selected who had confidence in the individual promoters rather than in their investment. This personal factor is contrary to the impersonal judgement based on the rationality of profit motive. The success of these early ventures was limelighted by 1890s, and confidence in the Indian investment gradually began to develop.

IV

The rationality of profit was quite evident since 1910. Prospectuses of several companies demonstrated these features,[32] and we could

[32]The Taripur Tea Company issued its prospectus in 1919 — tea was supposed to be the most profitable of all investments. The best advantage of tea over other agro-industries, the prospectus claimed, was this that the raw materials for tea were manufactured into finished product on the spot, and high dividend was forthcoming (200 to 250 per cent). They pointed out that land unsuitable for paddy and jute was found suitable for tea. They further pointed out that the native planters had a relatively small share in total investment, and comparatively low operational cost. This cost advantage would add more to the dividend of the Indian companies. The Darjeeling Duars Tea Company was promoted in 1915. The promoters considered the demand for tea in future would go up since international demand was vastly expanding. Prices rose 30 to 40 per cent above the last ten years' average. This rise in investment opportunity of Indian planters was considered to be permanent. The investment opportunity of Indian planters was widened because British capitalists were not able to cope with this rising demand. A rough estimate was made of expected profit. The area under tea was supposed to be 800 acres. At the rate of estimated yield of eight pounds per acre, the gross output would be 6,400 lbs. Estimated cost was 5 as. per lb.: and going market price (in 1915) was 7½ as. per lb. Thus profit was 2½ as. per lb. or Rs 12-8 as. per md. The gross profit will be 6,400 x 12½ = Rs 80,000. If the company raised capital of Rs 1,50,000, then it was 50 per cent return over yield. The prospectus assured that the cost of Indian management was comparatively low in relation to British management, and hence the dividend would be more than 50 per cent, as estimated. The Bengal Duars National Tea Co. (1912) Ltd. issued the prospectus as follows: The unusually large profit which the tea industry has been fetching in this country for the last few years have turned the attention of many to the cultivation and manufacture of tea, and it is a matter of supreme satisfaction to feel that our countrymen have been found to be fully well able to manage such concerns with a percentage of profit which is thought to be exceptional in this and other branches of industry. This particular prospectus is noteworthy in other respects also, specially in respect of the class of people they want to attract. The gentlemen who promoted the company had long experience in tea cultivation and manufacture. These gentlemen were aware that most of their supporters would come from those who were actually engaged in tea gardens, and had thus a thorough idea of large profits that a tea garden is likely to fetch. They also fully knew that the resources of such men were not very large. Hence the promoters took care to fix the value of shares at an amount which might be within the reach of the middle class. The Monkhoosi Tea Company Ltd. was floated in 1914. Its prospectus runs as follows: It has now come to be recognized that tea industry is one of the most profitable concerns. Tea industry has excellent and bright future before

assume that profit was their guiding motive. To corroborate our remarks, let us put forward the contents of some such prospectuses. In the twentieth century, the informations about the dividends declared by the Indian companies of Jalpaiguri were available.[33] The shareholders also had the printed publications about the working of their companies, and the promoters of the new companies easily cited them. The commercial journals like *Capital* published the results of the working of the European companies in India as early as 1884. The Indian Tea Association also described the general condition of tea trade at home and abroad in their annual general reports since 1880s. It is difficult to say whether the Indian entrepreneurs were in touch with publications like the annual report of the Indian Tea Association or the weekly issues of *Capital*. Yet, a general impression about the expansion of the tea investment in tea plantation was not difficult to get. The local press of Jalpaiguri published the news and comments on the tea trade.[34] But such local periodicals and journals appeared in the second decade of the present century.

That the Indian entrepreneurs were quite conscious about the future of tea trade and confident about their investment in tea plantation in the late nineteenth century was evident from one fact—the setting up of the Jalpaiguri Trading and Banking Corporation in 1888, the year when the first dividend of the Jalpaiguri Tea Company was declared.[35] This was a landmark, and from that time onwards profit motive might be said to be a considerable factor in investment choice. The first eleven companies with purely Indian ownership formed during the years 1879 to 1910 in Jalpaiguri with an initial total capital of Rs 1.1 million were all formed primarily at the initiative of local Bengalee entrepreneurs like Rahim Buksh,

it, and investment in tea concerns is bound to be productive of high profits. They also supplied an estimated calculation. The total area under tea would be 800 acres. Estimated yield was ten maunds per acre. The cost per lb. is four as under Indian management whereas price per lb. would be eight as. The estimated profit was Rs 1,20,000 on a capital of Rs 2,00,000 or 60 per cent return over investment. The promoters declared that the calculations were based on all sorts of unfavourable condition to safeguard the profits. But such a rush led to wild speculation as was in the 1860s and many companies were nipped in the bud. One such example was the Aliporduar Tea Company with Banchukamari Tea Estate. The Company was floated in 1921 and liquidated in 1923. See H. Ganguli, *Cha Baganer Rahasya* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1927. (Privately published).

33 Jalpaiguri Tea Company declared its dividend first on 1888. See Ghose and Chakraborty, n. 25.

34 The first local journal was *Janamat* (Bengali), and of the local journals *Trissota* (Bengali) voiced the opinion of the Indian planters most vigorously.

35 See n. 33.

Joy Chandra Sanyal, Gopal Chandra Ghose, Jadav Chandra Chakraborty, Beharilal Ganguli, Tarini Prasad Roy, Nawab Musharruf Hossain, etc. (Annexure III). This investment activity was primarily undertaken by the legal practitioners, and this control they maintained until recently when the ownership and control began to change hands.[36]

36 *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, Indian Tea Planters Association, Jalpaiguri, 1965, p. 11.

ANNEXURE I

TABLE 1

NO. OF JOINT STOCK TEA COMPANIES RAISED BY THE INDIAN COMMUNITY—CENSUS DECADEWISE—OF JALPAIGURI

Census decade	*No. of Indian-controlled Joint Stock Companies of Jalpaiguri having registered office at*			
	Jalpaiguri	*Alipur Duars*	*Total of (2) + (3)*	*Cumulative Total*
1872-1881	1	—	1	
1882-1891	5	—	5	6
1892-1900	3	—	3	9
1901-1910	6	—	6	15
1911-1920	45	4	49	64
1921-1930	22	1	23	87
1931-1941	1	—	1	88
Total	83	5	88	—

SOURCE: Alphabetical list of Joint Stock Companies in India, compiled from the annual issues from 1861 to 1933, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, Govt. of India, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta.

NOTE: Excluding one undated, i.e., Hillmen's Tea and Trading Co.

TABLE 2

INDIAN-CONTROLLED JOINT STOCK TEA COMPANIES HAVING REGISTERED OFFICE IN JALPAIGURI SADAR SUB-DIVISION BUT OUTSIDE JALPAIGURI TOWN

Name of the Company	*Date of Registration*	*Regd. office at*
Bengal Tea Company	11.11.1912	Sibkata, Jalpaiguri
Nagenganj Tea Co.	16. 6.1916	Debpur, Jalpaiguri
Batabari Tea Co.	19.12.1924	Chalsa, Jalpaiguri
Madhapur Tea Co.	21. 4.1925	— Jalpaiguri
Hillmen's Tea & Trading Co.	—	Matially, Jalpaiguri

SOURCE: *Ibid.*

TABLE 3

INDIAN-CONTROLLED JOINT STOCK TEA COMPANIES HAVING REGISTERED OFFICE OUTSIDE JALPAIGURI, WITH ESTATES IN JALPAIGURI

Name of the Group	*Name of the Company*	*Date of Registration*	*Registered Head Office up to 1933*
Saha family of Amal Sadarpur of Nadia	1. Nuddea Tea Co. 2. Ambari Tea Co. 3. Sahabad Tea Co.	30. 9.1890 21.11.1907 20. 3.1920	Amal Sadarpur Nadia (now in Bangladesh)
Palchowdhury of Natudah Boira, Nadia	1. Radharani Tea & Estates (P) Ltd.	1912	Calcutta
Rungpore group	1. Rungpore Tea Association	14. 5.1917	Rungpore

SOURCE: *Ibid.*

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF ESTATES OF JALPAIGURI TEA COMPANIES LOCATIONWISE AND CENSUS DECADEWISE

Census decade	*Jalpaiguri*		*Darjeeling*		*Total*
	Sadar	*Alipur Duars*	*Tarai*	*Assam*	
1872 - 1881	1	—	—	—	1
1881 - 1891	5	—	—	—	5
1892 - 1900	2	1	—	—	3
1901 - 1910	3	2	1	—	6
1911 - 1920	15	6	16	8	45
1921 - 1930	10	2	7	3	22
1931 - 1941	—	—	1	—	1

SOURCE: Private paper relating to the informations about Jalpaiguri tea companies, and privately circulated, by M/S. Das & Co., Jalpaiguri (undated).

TABLE 5

OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE PROMOTERS AND/OR DIRECTORS OF JOINT STOCK TEA COMPANIES OF JALPAIGURI, 1879-1933

Source	Total No.	Legal Profession	Service	Merchants	Jotedar Zamindar	Rest
1. Golden Jubilee Souvenir of Indian Tea Planters Association, 1965, published from Jalpaiguri	77 (100)	44 (57%)	8 (10%)	15 (19%)	5 (.06%)	5 (06%)
2. Manual of Jalpaiguri Tea Companies—M/S. Das & Co. Share Broker and Banker, Jalpaiguri Chart for 1933*	128 (100)	90 (70%)	24 (18%)	5 (03%)	9 (07%)	—

*Provides information of about 54 companies of Jalpaiguri town. This important source of private papers relating to Jalpaiguri Companies is still available. Figures within brackets indicate percentage to the total number.

ANNEXURE II

TEA PLANTING COMPANIES IN INDIA, THEIR NO. AND CAPITAL AT WORK AT THE END OF 1933-34

Provinces	No. of companies*	Authorized Capital (Rs)	Subscribed Capital (Rs)	Paid up Capital (Rs,
Madras	17	11282500	9021870	8824650
Bombay	1	100000	70000	70000
Bengal	412	161926774	125190860	120835316
United Province	2	2192000	1070000	1070000
Bihar & Orissa	1	100000	100000	10000
Assam	52	12107000	7019730	6336510
India Total	485	187708274	142472460	137236476

*With registered offices in the province.

SOURCE: Alphabetical list of Joint Stock Companies in British India 1933-34, 20th issue, Govt. of India, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, India.

PAID UP CAPITAL OF JOINT STOCK TEA COMPANIES AS ON 31.3.1933 IN RUPEES

Paid up Capital (Rs)	India	Bengal	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri Indian sector	Jalpaiguri European sector
Paid up Capital of tea planting and manufactures companies as on 31.3.1933 (Rs)	137236476	120835316	20067579	7388029	12679550
Percentage of paid up capital of:					
India to:	100	88.05	14.62	5.38	9.24
Bengal to:		100	16.61	6.11	10.50
Jalpaiguri to:			100	36.79	63.21

NOTE: The Joint Stock Companies managed by the European Managing Agency Houses have theirregistered head offices in Calcutta. But the companies have estates more in Assam than in Bengal. This is the reason why the share of a district of Bengal proper is so low in relation to Bengal total.

SOURCE: List of Joint Stock Companies in India 1933, Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, Calcutta.

ANNEXURE III

SHORT BIO-DATA OF SOME ENTREPRENEURS OF JALPAIGURI INDIAN COMMUNITY

1. *Khan Bahadur Rahim Buksh* (1830-1910): Born of a landholder family in a Noakhali village in southern Bengal. No English education. Started career as a government employee (as Mohurer in Rungpode collectorate) and retired as peshker of Jalpaiguri collectorate. Earned money in government supply, and acquired landed property in Jalpaiguri.
   Pioneer planter. Four personal grants of 2798.87 acres. Had control over ten companies. First Indian in Jalpaiguri having proprietory estate. No male heir. Two daughters. Elder son-in-law followed his example.

2. *Nawab Musharruf Hossain* (1870-1956): K.B. Rahim Buksh's elder son-in-law. Born to humble parents at a Tipperah village; picked up by R. Buksh as his son-in-law and brought to Jalpaiguri. B.A.B.L.; M.L.C. Given "Nawab" title in 1935. Active political life. Member of the League Ministry of Bengal.
   Expanded the tea-property of his father-in-law. First appearance in Nuxulbari Tea Co. (1910) in Terai. Was the founder-director of 15 companies owned and controlled by the Jalpaiguri Muslims. Had no male heirs. Sons-in-law did not show the same entrepreneurial ability.

3. *Walliur Rahaman* (1880-1950): Nephew of K.B.R. Buksh. Matriculate, pleader. A leading figure in the second generation. Opened large number of gardens in Terai and Assam in cooperation with his Hindu partner, J.M. Chakraborty of Dacca. First venture—Coronation Tea Company (1910). Others—Monmohinipur, Brajapur, Hirajuli, Alimabad, Ushabari and Nagengarj, Tea Cos.

4. *Ibrahim Soudagar:* An upcountry Muslim trader. Started entrepreneurial career right from Gurjongjhora Tea Co. (1882). Was attached to all companies up to 1910. His son, Habibur Rahaman, carried on the father's interest in plantation.

5. *Joychandra Sanyal* (1844-1910): Pabna man, pleader. Elder brother Bhagaban Sanyal came to Mainaguri. Joychandra followed him.
   Promoter-director of Jalpaiguri Tea Co. (1879). From then onwards, he continued to be the promoter-director till 1907. Last venture Ramjhora Tea Co. (1907). A very reputed and respected personality. Two of his sons, Ganesh Sanyal and Charu Chandra Sanyal, carried on investment activity. Ganesh Sanyal died early. Charu Chandra Sanyal has continued to keep his membership in the board of director.

6. *Jyotish Chandra Sanyal* (1861-1931): Younger brother of Joy Chandra Sanyal, B.A.B.L. Noted for his independent spirit, and national character. Promoter of two companies, Kamala Tea Co. (1914) and Durgapur Tea Co (1916). His spirit and inspiration united the Indian planters to form the Indian Tea Planters Association in 1915; he was secretary of the Association until death. His successors did not pursue this line of activity though they continued the political and public activities.

7. *Jadav Chandra Chakraborty* (1856-1928): Pabna man, B.A.B.L. Contemporary of Joy Chandra. Began entrepreneurial career from 1879 as promoter-director of Jalpaiguri Tea Company (1879). Active in all the companies up to 1910. He acquired large landed property, and his son Makhanlal Chakraborty and grandson Rakhal Chakraborty carried on the promotional activities. Makhanlal was a close friend of Raja Prasanna Deb Raikot, and Nawab Musharruf Hossain, was promoter-director of Goodwill, Merryview, Jadavpur, Durgapur, Batabari and Karala Valley Tea companies.

8. *Beharilal Ganguli* (1830-1899): Jessore man. Came on Timber business. Acquired landed property. Had second proprietory estate, Altadanga T.E. (1878). Promoter-director right up from Girjongjhora Tea Co. (1882) to Chamurchi (1896). All his shares and tea properties sold out to R. Buksh. No successor in tea promoters.

9. *Jatindra Mohan Chakraborty* (1861-1939): Dacca man, B.A.B.L. With Walliur Rahaman started companies with the registered office at Jalpaiguri and having estates in Assam. His successors did not pursue the line

10. *Priyanath Banerjee* (1835-1926): 24 Pargana - Barasat. Public prosecutor of Jalpaiguri. Entered tea in 1882 as promoter of Gurjongjhora Tea Co. He was more associated with European planters. His son Bipul Banerjee continued to be retained by the European Tea Companies, whereas, another son, Bhaba Kinkar Banerjee, engaged in the Indian sector.

11. *Gopal Chandra Ghose* (1835-1922): Came from village Barangail, Manikganj, Dacca. Gopal started his career as clerk in the Govt. Office, and later on took certificate for legal practice from the collectorate in 1871. He was founder-director of Jalpaiguri Tea Co., Anjuman Tea Co., Northern Bengal Tea Corporation, Kathalguri Tea Co., Atiabari Tea Co., Ranijhora Tea Co., and Gopalpur Tea Co. Gopalpur Tea Co. was named after him.

12. *Jogesh Chandra Ghose* (1879-1934): Only son of Gopal Chandra Ghose, and one of the most illustrious of the Bengalee entrepreneurs of the second batch. He was responsible for the promotion of quite a large number of tea companies. The companies he promoted were: Gopalpur Tea Co., Bijoynagar Tea Co., Malhatty Tea Syndicate, Kadambini Tea Co., Luxmikanta Tea Co.. and Soudamini Tea Co. Jogesh Ghose's sons are all engaged in tea and, of them, Birendra Chandra and Debesh Chandra were noted members of the Indian planters community. The successors of Debesh Chandra had wider interests than that in tea in comparison to that of Birendra Chandra. The Ghose family had closer relation with the Britishers, specially the tea-broker houses.

13. *Tarini Prasad Roy* (1864-1948): Only son of widowed mother; born at village Diabari, in Manikganj in Dacca, near Barangail, the native

village of the Ghose family; a meritorious student, obtained his B.A. and B.L. from Calcutta University; class friend of Sir Nilratan Sarker. TPR was picked up as the elder son-in-law of Gopal Ghose, and was brought to Jalpaiguri by him to join the bar. TPR's first wife died without any issue and he married Sorojini Debi with whom Sir Nilratan Sarker took jointly a grant of land in the Western Duars.

TPR's first entry into tea started with Anjuman Tea Company (1889), as a promoter; but he entered the board only in 1895. From then onwards until his death in 1948, he was the managing director of sixteen companies. For a long time he was the Chairman of the ITPA.

The Roys and Ghoses were split up in 1912 on the issue of distribution of shares of the Gopalpur Tea Company (1913). TPR came out of the group with his followers and formed the group of his own. So high was his reputation that the contemporary company prospectuses mentioned the names of the companies under him and the lucrative dividends they distributed. His successors continued in tea. Companies promoted by and managed by TPR: Anjuman, Kathalguri, Chamurchi, Atiabari, Ramjhora, Kamala, Saroda, Diabari, Chandmoni, Roypur, Khyaerbari, Bramhaputra-Himalaya, Amarawati, Amritpur, Debijhore, Jainti and Duars Assam Unions Tea Cos.

14. *Prasanna Deb Raikot:* Son of Phanindra Deb Raikot, B.A. Brought into Tea by Makhanlal Chakrabarty. He offered his zamindari land in Baikunthapur area for tea in 1910-20. Promoter-director of a large number of companies. Bhanderpur and Shikarpur were his proprietory estates (see n. 13).

15. *Nepucha Mohammud:* Local Jotedar and izaradar of hats or local markets. Founder-director of Nepuchapur Tea Co. (1925).

16. *Laxmikanta Das:* Local Jotedar. Founder-director of Luxmikanta Tea Company (1925).

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Source Material for the Study of Village Communities in Maharashtra

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A fruitful study of village communities can be made only with the help of regional records preserved either in the State Archives or research institutes which have collected records of historical families. The family papers are valuable for understanding some intricate problems of social relations, functioning of village institutions, means of livelihood of people, and several other things connected with village life. However, the archival material pertaining to the village accounts available in the State Archives is more valuable than the family records for analyzing the conditions of social and economic life of village communities. As these records are fairly continuous covering a long period of history, it is possible to show the changes in the village life caused by a number of factors such as social, religious, economic, and political.

Historians, however, have not paid much attention to this category of source material. Harold H. Mann in his *Social Framework of Agriculture* made an attempt to study the economics of a Deccan village in the early nineteen-thirties. He selected two villages, Pimpla Saudagar, nine miles west to Poona and Jategao Budruk, 23 miles to the north of Poona for this purpose. But it was essentially a sample survey and not an intensive study of continuous village records. Dr S. N. Sen in his *Administrative System of the Marathas* wrote a brief chapter on village communities which describes mainly their structure.

The Peshwa Daftar or Alienation Office (now known as Pune Archives) possesses extensive records of certain villages in Maharashtra which would enable us to understand the structure and functioning of village communities in the past. An attempt is made in this article to examine the village records of Indapur, a *qasaba* in the Poona district, situated between the Nira and Bhima rivers.

Indapur is selected for this case study for various reasons. It had earned a prominent place in the history of the Marathas, as it was a part of Shahaji's original Jagir, which he bequeathed to his son Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha kingdom. Shivaji started his early activities in this region. It retained its Maratha character as it did not witness Muslim domination for a long time. It was held by the Mughals between 1682 or 1686 and 1718 or 1733. According to a *kaulnama* (an agreement granted to the cultivators) of Shahu Chhatrapati issued in 1718, the Deshmukhi rights of Indapur were enjoyed by the king himself. The Deshmukhi and Patilki Watans of Indapur belonged to the Bhonsales, but perhaps they were discontinued during the Mughal rule and restored when the Marathas regained control over Indapur. The sanads issued in 1733 mention Shahu as Chhatrapati, which means that this region was firmly under the Maratha control from 1733 onwards. During the period of Peshwa Madhavrao II and his manager Nana Phadnis, a considerable portion of the Maratha cavalry was stationed in the Indapur *pargana*. It fell into the hands of the British when Elphinstone conquered the territories from the Peshwa in 1818. Thus it was under the Maratha domination for a continuous period of a century or so. Originally the *pargana* was in the Ahmednagar district but the British transferred it to the Poona district in 1825.

Secondly, we get extensive and fairly continuous records of this village in the Pune Archives. There are 16 *rumals* (bundles), each containing about a thousand documents of varying sizes, dealing exclusively with this region. Information dating as far back as 1649 A.D. is available in these records. This abundance of source material is very tempting to research scholars of socio-economic history.

Thirdly, the British made their first experiments in revenue administration in this region, and their surveys and reports are available to the scholars. Pringle was appointed in 1825 to survey and report on the fiscal obligation of cultivators to the state. The subsequent reports of Goldsmid and Wingate (1850), Waddington (1867) and Francis (1872) also refer to Indapur. The recent studies on Maharashtra are based on these reports. It was, therefore, felt that an attempt should be made to go to the original indigenous records and get the correct picture of the working of village communities.

As far back as 1937-38, late Professor C. B. Joshi of Wadia College, Poona, wrote a preliminary paper on Indapur for the Historical Records Commission held at Poona in 1938. This paper also induced the pursuit of the study on a more elaborate scale.

* * *

The Maratha State was divided into several administrative units

for assessment purposes such as village, *pargana*, *sabha*, etc. The village was the smallest administrative unit, and its revenue administration was entrusted by tradition to the hereditary officers called *Watandars*. *Pargana* was a bigger unit consisting of a number of villages. Administration units are generally formed on the basis of their certain minimum revenue-paying capacity. The *pargana* of Indapur contained 85 villages according to a document of 1684 A.D. A *dehazada* (a statement of villages) of 1818 adds one *wadi* (suburb) to this list and makes the total 86. The very fact that the status of a village was given to a *wadi* in 1818 or earlier proves that the revenue assessment of that village had exceeded its normal collection, and the necessity was felt to create separate arrangements for the collection of the revenue of the *wadi*. Pringle who surveyed this *pargana* in 1825 also gives the same number of villages in his report. It should be also noted that according to the present system, Indapur is a taluq in Poona district containing only 86 villages, which leads us to believe that the revenue-paying capacity of this region has not varied much since 1684. Had the revenue-paying capacity of this region increased during the course of years, there would have been some reshuffling of villages between Indapur and some other neighbouring regions with a view to getting efficient revenue administration. The *talebands* (abstracts of the receipt and expenditure of the revenue) of the various years of this taluq available in the Peshwa Daftar do not show much variations in the collection of revenue.

A distinction is made between a *dehe* and a *mouja* in a document of 1684 A.D., though it is generally believed that they are synonyms. The villages in this *pargana* are grouped under five broad heads: *khalsagao*, *ijafatgao*, *inamgao*, *dumalagao*, and *mokasagao*. The *khalsagao* is a village held immediately from the government who is the sole proprietor of its revenue. Of course, a part of its revenue is shared by the *watandars* and *inamdars*, but the bulk of it goes to the royal treasury. *Ijafat* or *isafat* literally means more or additional, and *ijafatgao* means a village held in permanent farm by a *watandar*. It is added to his original *watan* and hence it is called *ijafatgao*. The Deshmukh of Indapur had two and a half villages as *ijafatgao* and was entitled to receive the tanakha (an assignment on the revenues) of these villages. *Inam* is a grant of land to a person in perpetuity without any condition of service, and *inamgao* is thus a village held in perpetuity by a family. In a document of 1684, four villages—two of Deshmukh and one each of Deshpande and Qazi—are shown as *inamgaons*, and are thus excluded from the revenue accounts of the *pargana*. The *dumalgao* signifies double proprietorship or rule of the grantor and the grantee. It is a reversionary village, the revenue of which is granted for life or for a specific period, after which it may revert to the state. *Mokasa* is a well-known military tenure created by an assignment on the revenue of a village to an individual in lieu of his military service. Thus the *mokasagao* was a conditional grant of a village to a person for military service, whereas the *dumalgao* was a grant not for any specific service. However, both the grants were not hereditary.

We get a variety of documents describing the socio-economic life of the village communities, such as *talebands* (abstracts of the receipt and expenditure of the revenue), *kaifiyats* (statements), *thalzadas* (rolls of holdings), *jamabandis* (village rent-rolls), *khatawanis* (accounts), *yads* (notes), *nemnuks* (documents showing allowances, salaries, etc.), *goshwaras* (summaries or abstracts), *ajmas* (estimates), *sanads* (grant deeds), *dehazada* or *gaozada* (village lists), *kaulnamas* (aggreements), *varshasanas* (allowances or religious pensions), *ajnapatras* (royal orders), *inampatras* (about *inam* grants), *watanpatras* (about *watan* grants), *botkhata* (district accounts). Of these the *thalzadas* and the *talebands* are the two most important sources of information for understanding the socio-economic transactions of village communities. It is, therefore, proposed to examine the nature of these two sources only in this article.

The importance of accounts papers for constructing socio-economic history of a region could hardly be exaggerated. Other sources such as the family papers, the *sanads*, are no doubt useful for such studies, but they are sometimes too general and vague. For instance, we find a number of privileges and perquisites of the *watandars* mentioned in the *sanads*, but we are not certain whether all these privileges were actually enjoyed by them. The *sanads* mention these privileges in vague terms such as *hali pati* (current taxes), *pester pati* (future taxes), and *baje patiya* (other taxes, not already enumerated), which do not enable us in estimating the actual receipts of these *watandars*. As against this, the accounts papers are more exact and precise from which we get information about the rates of the privileges, the persons from whom they were collected, the prices of certain commodities, the remissions, if any, granted and their reasons, etc. From the Indapur records we get a detailed account of the privileges of the Deshmukhs of that *qasaba*.

Similarly we get certain documents of *jizya*, a poll-tax imposed by Aurangzeb during 1699, 1702, and 1706. Generally, it is believed that all Hindus, except some invalids and the government officials, were brought under the jurisdiction of *jizya*. But the statistical information that we get in these documents shows that neither were all Hindus taxed nor were all government officials exempted from this tax. A number of documents of *gavakharcha* (village expenses) throw much light on the working of the villages.

Land was the basis of village organization. The colonization of the village was mainly done by the *patil* (the village headman, also called *mokadam*), and according to the *Rajvyavahar Kosh*, a handbook of political terms prepared in the seventeenth century at the instance of Shivaji, the *patil* was to induce the people to bring the uncultivated land of the village under cultivation. His official insignia, therefore, was a plough which is found on many documents pertaining to village organization. The village land was shared by a number of persons such as the *watandars*, the *inamdars*, the peasant proprietors, and the village servants. The landless class was referred to as *uparis* (strangers) or people who had no *locus standi* in the village. The *thalzada*, or a statement showing the details of village holdings, gives a picture of this sharing of the village land.

A growing village needs the services of a number of people who are absorbed in village communities in course of time by assigning some land to them from the village. A village requires, for instance, the services of a *brahmana* or a *mulana* to satisfy the spiritual needs of the village communities, or a dancer to participate in the village festivities. These people get *sanads* from the state and thus establish themselves as permanent residents of the village and become a part of the village community. For instance, a *brahman* named Abaji Pathak, well versed in the Vedas and Puranas, received one *chavar* (120 bighas; a bigha being half of an acre or 25,000 square yards) of land from Shivaji, and his family continued to enjoy it along with its perquisites even during the British period. A copy of the original *sanad* issued in 1649 is found in these records and the *thalzadas* of the subsequent years show this holding against the name of Pathak. The statement submitted by the Pathaks before the Inam Commission, set by the government in 1852 to settle the claims over lands, also traces the history of this land grant. Similarly, the *watan* received by the family of a *mulana*, from Ibrahim Adilshah in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, continued in that family in perpetuity. A dancer called Shyama received 60 bighas of land from Chhatrapati Shahu for her dance performances in the Sidheshwar temple and the mosque of the Pir Chand Khan. It must be noted here that the changes in political power hardly disturbed these grants which were held by those families in perpetuity.

The major items of *thalzada* are as follows:

(1) After deducting the wasteland from the total area of the village, the rest of the land was broadly classified under two heads: *khalsa* and *inam*. The *khalsa* land means the land which was open to assessment by the state officials. The *inam* land was further divided into *darobasta* (absolute *inam*) and *ajamarhamat* (land grant by the

grace of the government). The term *inam* is used here in a very comprehensive sense signifying all land grants.

(2) The land under the title *darobasta* was held by the Deshmukh, the Deshpande, and the Mokadam, who were the hereditary village officers, and who enjoyed privileged position in the village. The fourth incumbent of this category of *inam* was the keeper of Maloji's tomb. Maloji, the grandfather of Shivaji, fell in a battle of Indapur while defending the Nizamshahi territories against the Bijapurians in 1606. His tomb was erected, perhaps by his son Shahaji and a special grant was given by him to a person for the upkeep of this tomb. This perpetual grant of 7½ *chavars* was an absolute grant and continued in that family throughout the course of history.

(3) The *aja marhamat inam* was enjoyed by the grantee during the pleasure of the king. In this category were included lands held by the Deshpande (who perhaps did not belong to the Deshpande family referred to in the *darobasta* class), the Kulkarni, the Chougula (the assistant of the *patil*), the Shete (the officer of the market), the Joshi (the village astrologer), the Shahir (the ballad singer), the Mahar (the village watchman), and a few *brahmanas*. The land grants made to certain temples and mosques were also included in this class. The holders of this grant were exempted from land tax.

(4) Lastly, the details of the *khalsa* land are given. It is divided into *jirayat* and *bagait* land, and then names of all the holders called *thalkaris* are given. For instance, the *thalzada* of Indapur of 1690 mentions 42 *thalkaris* of *jirayat* land and 14 of the *bagait* land. The extent of the *jirayat* holding varied from one *chavar* to 14 *chavars*, and that of the *bagait* from 7½ bighas to 30 bighas. The sub-division and fragmentation of land in course of time increased the number of sharers, and we find in a document of 1819, 102 ordinary cultivators, 85 *inamdars*, and five *patils*, sharing the land of Indapur.

We get several such *thalzadas* which enable us to understand the structural changes in the village. These changes may be due to political or economic factors. A change in political power may bring in some new *inamdars*, a few more land grants, and some confiscations. Changes may be also due to natural calamities like famines, bad seasons forcing people to desert their homes and dispose of their holdings. The number of sharers increases because of the divisions of family properties. A study of these *thalzadas*, arranged chronologically, would show the increase in the land under cultivation under different classes, as well as the increase in the number of holders. With the help of these *thalzadas*, as they give the names of *thalkaris*, a castewise distribution of village land can also be attempted.

The next important document for the study of village economy is the *taleband*, giving details of actual receipts and disbursements

of the village revenue. It may be a monthly or an annual statement of accounts. We get a number of such *talebands* of Indapur covering a longer period of history. The variations in the actual collection of revenue from Indapur during the course of years throw much light on the political and economic conditions of this region. In 1683, an amount of Rs 4,481 was collected from Indapur, but it fell to Rs 766 in 1689 and Rs 600 in 1690. The year 1689 was a critical one in the history of this region. A *kaulnama* of this year issued by the Padshah mentions that most of the tenants had left the village and so the Deshmukhs and the Deshpandes were called upon to induce the tenants to return to their lands, by making the revenue settlement at a lower level for the next year.

In 1683, Indapur was perhaps still in the hands of the Marathas but it definitely passed into the possession of the Mughals by 1686. The execution of Sambhaji, the king of the Marathas, by Aurangazeb in 1689 might have also affected the collection of revenue. The situation did not improve much till the death of Rajaram, the successor of Sambhaji in 1700 as the country was involved in a death-struggle between the Mughals and the Marathas which had begun in 1689. The years from 1700 to 1708 show maximum revenue collection, which might be due to heavy levies as well as the rigorous imposition of the *jizya*. Shahu, the son of Sambhaji, was released from the Mughal camp after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, but the civil war which ensued in the Maratha country after his return must have affected adversely the collection of revenue for some years. The *talebands* of the years 1715 and 1717 show the collection of Rs 610 and Rs 540 respectively. Shahu consolidated his position soon and the *talebands* from 1718 onwards show a steady improvement in the collection with occasional falls due to famines or political disturbances.

The sallient features of the *taleband* are as below:

(1) It is divided into two parts: the first dealing with the receipts and the second with the expenses of the village.

(2) The income side first shows the receipts of last year's arrears, and the collection of the current year. The arrears collected from each village are shown. It is possible to find out the cause of the arrears by studying the political or economic situation in that area previous to the year of the *talebands*.

(3) A village used to get some income from various taxes. A number of burdens imposed on the villagers are mentioned in these talebands. *Dharmadayapati* (religious cess), *darbarkharchapati*, (court expenses), *utasavapati* (festival tax), *dasarapati patdam* (marriage tax) are some of the taxes mentioned in these records.

The *watandars*, the privileged persons in village community, used to collect articles from the weavers (garment), the shepherd (blanket) the oil-presser (oil), the shopkeeper (betelnuts), etc.

Dahakpati and *patilki* were irregular type of taxes collected once in a decade or during the period of economic strain from the peasant proprietors and *watandars* of the *pargana*. It was not levied on all villages, or on all Patils. For instance, we find that the peasant proprietors of villages and the Patils of 43 villages only paid this tax in 1776. It was proposed that 10 per cent on the *kamal* assessment be collected as *dahakpati*. But it seems that the cultivators did not agree with this proposal and suggested that the rate of assessment should be Rs 5 per *chavar*. The government ultimately yielded to this public demand.

The *patilki* was a tax on the village *watandars* like the Patil, the Kulkarni, the Chougula, the Shete, and the Mahajan, who were enjoying certain perquisites, emoluments and revenue from the *inam* lands. The rate of assessment of the *patilki* remained to be 10 per cent on their income. An *agarhar* village, or the village granted to a *brahmana*, was excluded from this levy. A tax called *miraspati* was in vogue in the seventeenth century, and was collected from all peasant proprietors once in ten years. The *dahak* and *patilki* seem to be analogous to the *miraspati* of Shivaji's period. An analysis of the collection of this tax indicates the economic position of a particular village. For instance, Indapur, a *qasaba* town paid Rs 538-12-0 as *dahakpati* and Rs 110 as *patilki* in 1776, whereas another village, called Gagargaon, paid only Rs 19 and Rs 55 respectively in the same year.

(4) The actual collections of the current year are shown separately. Besides showing the regular income villagewise the *taleband* mentions the item of extra revenue called *siwaye jama*, a miscellaneous source of income. It includes collections from customs, presents, legal fees called *khanda phuroi*, *masala* (service charges), etc.

The item *khanda phuroi* is an interesting one to a student of social history, as it shows the types of crimes committed in a village. The legal fee called *gunhegari* is collected by the government from the parties involved in the criminal acts. A few examples may be cited here.

A person convicted of theft of a pony was made to pay Rs 225, which included Rs 150 as fine, Rs 25 as service charges, called *masala*, and Rs 50 as the price of pony which was found in his house. A person who beat the village *mahar* was fined Rs 50 for this crime. A blacksmith who beat an elderly woman with a shoe had to pay Rs 5. A person paid Rs 75 for the crime of branding his son. A vegetable-thief was fined Rs 5. An amount of Rs 40 was collected from a person who was purified by the community. The cases of adultery were numerous. If the adultery was committed within the caste, the fine was less than one committed outside the caste. A woman having illicit relations with a person of lower caste had to pay heavily. These fines are mentioned in a document of the year 1772-73.

An interesting dispute between the two priests of a temple is mentioned in a *taleband*. The point of dispute was who should get the dried dates put by the devotees in the plate placed before the deity. The Foujdar settled this dispute in favour of one *pujari* who paid a *nazar* of Rs 40 to the state. These and many other items under *khand phuroi* throw much light on the moral life of village communities.

(5) *Ijafatjama* is another source of income, and two items—*jama karja* and *tasalmat*—are shown under this head. *Jama karja* means the advances made earlier and collected during the current year. *Tasalmat* means, as per the entry in the *talebands*, donations received as well as recovery of past arrears. *Ijafatjama* has been defined as additional or extra receipts of various kinds as from money realized by the government from the sale of presents, or from the sequestration of estates and appropriation of the revenue, and also money received into the treasury of one district and credited to another.

(6) The next item in the *taleband* on the income side was the *pharokta jama*. Land revenue was collected both in cash and kind, but sometimes the amount collected in kind was sold, and the proceeds of this sale were credited to the state. This was called *pharokta jama*.

(7) The income from *ghasdana* was separately shown in the *taleband*. This levy of grass and grain was essentially a military cess, and was collected for the maintenance of the state cavalry. It was not necessarily collected from each village.

This list of items completes the first part, namely the "revenue" side of the *taleband*.

The second part of the *taleband* deals with the expenditure side. It indicates the functions of the state towards village communities. The total amount spent is mentioned first, and it is sub-divided into two parts: the amount spent during the current year, and that which was spent last year, which was perhaps not included in the earlier *taleband*.

(1) The major item of expenditure is the government establishment. It mentions the remittance of *rasad* in the form of *hundi*. *Rasad* is money paid into the treasury by the *kamavisdar* raised from his district. The state cavalry stationed in the *pargana* was maintained out of the village revenues. A list of individuals receiving money on this account is given. Similarly there were a few

camels and eleven elephants stationed in the *pargana*. The names of elephants such as Raibagan, Hanamant gaj, Gajraj, Ratan, etc., are given as well as the details of amount spent on each elephant.

(2) *Varshasana* means annual allowances paid to learned *brahmanas*. Sometimes a list of *brahmanas* with their emoluments is given in the *taleband*.

(3) The state used to purchase *bajra*, *jawar*, *gram*, fodder, etc., in the open market. This was mainly for the consumption of the army. The amount spent on this procurement called *kharid kharcha* is mentioned separately in the *taleband*.

(4) *Mushahira* means salaries paid to the state officials employed in the *pargana* out of the revenues of the *pargana*. A document of 1776-77 gives a few details of salaries of such officials. A *kamavisdar*, for instance, got Rs 2,000 as his annual salary. Besides this, he was entitled to get Rs 800 per annum as transport allowance for maintaining a palanquin and Rs 121 per annum for engaging attendants for holding umbrella and torches for him. The salaries of clerks helping the *kamavisdar* varied from Rs 150 to 400 per year. These salaries must be quite satisfactory in view of the low prices of commodities prevailing in the eighteenth century. However, it would be difficult to translate them into current exchange value of rupees. These administrative posts were generally held by the *brahmanas* and *prabhus*, i.e. *kayasthas*.

A village had to maintain its own police force called *shibandi*, divided into batches, varying in number from four to 25. Each batch was headed by one chief *shibandi*. The annual salary of a policeman on an average was Rs 44 as at one place Rs 3,300 is shown as salary of 75 *shibandis*. The *pargana* had 85 villages, but the *shibandis* were only 75, which means some small villages too must have been included in the jurisdiction of nearby big villages for the purpose of law and order. The list of *shibandis* gives the names as well as their salaries. A castewise distribution of the *shibandi* force can be attempted with the help of this list. It shows some names of persons from other regions.

(5) Besides the expenditure on services there were many charges on the revenue of the village such as *sardeshmukhi* (an exaction of 10 per cent imposed on the whole revenue of the region), *savotra* of Pant Sachiv (6 per cent of the total collection after setting aside the claims of the Peshwa given to the Pant Sachiv, an officer of the Maratha State), *deshmukhi* (the perquisites of the Deshmukh), etc.

(6) A part of the revenue was spent mainly on cultural activities of the village. It is referred to as *kherij mushahira* (other than salaries) or *gaokarcha*. It includes such items as *daftar* (village record), *bhojan* (village feasts), *pir*, *deepavali*, *fakir khairat* (alms to the fakirs), *roshnai* (illuminations), *shimaga* (holi), *dasara*, *sirpav* (presents), etc.

(7) *Muzafat kharcha* means additional expenditure. This is a counterpart of the *ijafatjama*, shown in the first part of the *taleband*. This includes advances as well as gifts and donations made to certain persons.

The *taleband* gives details of expenditure on the government and on the village separately from the total revenue collection of the village. Only a few major items are indicated in this article. A study of the relative proportion of the expenditure on individual items to the total revenue of the village would be interesting. For instance, the revenue collection of Indapur *pargana* in 1776-77 was Rs 123,652. This includes last year's arrears as well. Out of this, the total amount spent on the *pargana* was Rs 89,387. The major item of expenditure was the state government as it took the largest slice of Rs 51,995. The government purchased grains for the military on which Rs 15,510 were spent. Thus, one-third of the total expenditure was devoted to this item only.

The salaries of the *kamavisdar*, his staff and the *shibandi*, are shown separately and not as a part of government expenditure. The total amount shown under *mushahira* is Rs 9,770, which amounts to one-ninth of the total expenditure of that year. Of this, the share of the *kamavisdar* was Rs 2,921, i.e., slightly more than one-third of the amount spent on salaries. There were 14 clerks who together received Rs 1,975, and the *shibandis* received Rs 3,875 or less than half of the amount spent on salaries.

Rs 10,904 were spent on *gaokharcha*, an interesting item. This was one-eighth of the amount spent on that village from its total collections.

Thus, in short, the *thalzadas* and the *talebands* are two valuable documents for the study of the structure and socio-economic activities of village communities. A chronological arrangement of these documents would enable us to know the changing pattern of the village community in the historical period in a particular region.

The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. XIII, No. 4

The Bihar Famine of 1770

NIKHIL SUR

The acquisition of the diwani by the East India Company made them responsible, according to the Indian tradition, for the welfare of the people of Bengal. The famine of 1770 was the first occasion when the Company had to face up to this role.

The famine of 1770 seriously affected Bihar. As the Select Committee (Home Public) admitted, "Bihar has more particularly and severely felt its influence."[1] The forecast of the Bihar famine came first from Rumbold, Resident in Bihar, who wrote that he apprehended that revenue collection would not be promising on account of the unusual scantiness of rain.[2] The 1768 harvests were poor: in August several parts of Bihar were inundated by heavy rain but there was no rain from the middle of August 1768 until the beginning of January 1769.[3] The general failure of the December crop in 1769 was thus caused by an uncommon drought.[4] In Champaran there was not a single drop of rain till August. As a result the seeds of the *bhadai*[5] crop did not germinate. In addition to the severe drought, dreadful fires occurred at various places. The stores of grain in Purnea were destroyed by fire.[6] In spite of Rumbold's serious apprehensions,[7] the danger did not take a tangible form and the outgoing governor, Verelest, did not communicate with the Court of Directors on the subject until the end of 1769.

[1]SC letter to the CD, 4 February 1770, FWIH. (For abbreviations used in this paper, see p. 531).

[2]Letter from Rumbold, (no date) February, 1769, *Extracts from Records in the India Office relating to Famines in India, 1769-1788*, compiled by George Campbell, 1868. (Hereafter *Extracts from Records.*)

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]"There has not been known for many years so great a drought as prevailed throughout the province of Bengal and Bihar, but more particularly in the province of the latter." (Rumbold to the SC, SCC, 7 December 1769).

[5]There were two harvests: one in August-September, the other one was in December. The *bhadai* is the early autumn crop. It is sown in the month of June and harvested in *Bhado* (August-September).

[6]CPC, Vol. 3, No. 209.

[7]Rumbold to SC, 1 August 1769. SCC, 11 August 1769.

In Bhagalpur, the desolate condition was due to the depredations of the troops passing through the villages.[8] We are told that this district "being in the direct road of the [sic] march of our troops to and from Patna, has been liable to many inconveniences and losses which have reduced this fine country to a miserable state, and incapacitated the inhabitants to pay their usual revenues."[9]

Most regions in Bihar presented an awful picture of death and irremediable starvation. Yet on 24 December 1769, Verelest laid down his office without indicating any apprehension for the coming year. John Cartier, who took over on the same day, felt no anxiety until late in January 1770.

By the second week of May 1770, the famine took a heavy toll of 2,00,000 lives.[10] The survivors were unable to produce anything for want of seeds and the other necessary materials for cultivation. The most severely affected part in Bihar was Serris Kotomba.[11] Champaran, Bettiah, Sahabad, and Tirhut also suffered seriously. Every day hundreds of people in Champaran were found dead under the trees.[12] Tirhut was virtually ruined. Golding, Supervisor of Bettiah, observed that the district offered him a scene of extreme poverty, distress, and uncultivated lands.[13] The scene in Patna was no better: due to the scarcity of grain about 50 people died of starvation every day in the streets of Patna in January 1770.[14]

The condition of Purnea was also severe. Ducarel, Supervisor of Purnea, narrates a shocking tale in his letter of 28 April 1770.[15] In the autumn, the rains being unusually abundant, epidemic broke out. The ryots were even ready to sell their children but none could be found to buy them. Yet in the midst of universal starvation, Ducarel issued orders to remove all obstacles to the free export of

8Progs, CCRM, 23 April 1770.

9SCC, 28 April 1770.

10SC progs, 9 June 1770.

11Reporting on the Bihar famine, James Alexander, Chief at Patna, wrote "The depopulation in the interior parts of the country [Serris Kotomba] is more rapid than will be imagined by any person who has not been witness to it, and such is the disposition of the people that they seem rather inclined to submit to death than extricate themselves from the misery of hunger by industry and labour." (SC progs, 29 March 1770.)

12CPC, Vol. 2, No. 1513.

13Copy book of letters received by the CCRP, p. 7.

14CPC, Vol. 3, No. 17.

15"The first object I have had to attend to was to guard against the Horror of Pestilence being added to those of Famine; by providing for the removal of the number of dead bodies, which were laying [sic] in different parts of the town, and with which the Air was infected to a very great degree." (M. E. Monckton Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal, 1772-1774*, Oxford, 1918, p. 9. Hereafter *Hastings in Bengal.*)

grain from his district and thus gave the death blow to the starving people of Purnea.[16]

The Company, however, did take some measures to alleviate the distress of the people of Bihar.[17] In Sarkar Tirhut a gift of *nankar*[18] land was made to the zamindars to enable them to relieve the distress of the people.[19] Duties on every article of grain were struck off and severe punishments inflicted on persons who were found to be obstructing the import of grain to Bihar province.[20] Moreover, orders were issued to the supervisors to be careful to prevent any set of men from combining together and forming a monopoly.[21] Granting a large *tuckavy*[22] was the only useful assistance that could be rendered to a ryot.[23] But the government felt the measure would be used injudiciously. However, it was declared that no rent should be collected on the lands producing *arzum*[24] for a period of six months.

Fortunately, Bulwand Singh, Raja of Benaras, helped the Company to feed the people of Bihar.[25] Since Benaras enjoyed a plentiful season, Raja Shitab Roy sent a number of boats, divided into three squadrons, to Benaras to bring[26] grain which was sold to the people of Bihar at a very moderate price.[27]

Mohommed Reja Khan described the famine as "the decrees of Providence,"[28] and the Council at Patna considered it "an accidental evil."[29] The Court of Directors piously claimed: "We will not admit a thought that our Superior Servants have not afforded every deed which humanity could dictate and employed every means in their power to prevent such a calamity from having worse than its natural effects."[30]

16Progs, CCRM, 28 November 1770.

17CPC, Vol. 2, No. 1339.

18"A term applied to an assignment of a portion of land or revenue of an estate, made to the occupant or Zamindar, usually amounting to about five or sometimes ten percent on the assessment payable to the state." (H. H. Wilson, *Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms.*)

19Copy book of letters received by CCRP, 21 May 1771.

20SC progs, 9 June 1770.

21Letters issued by CCRP, 8 January 1771, No. 17.

22Balance allowed to remain in the hands of the Aumils to assist the ryots in cultivating their lands. It is to be repaid in the ensuing months with interest.

23SC progs, 9 June 1770.

24A particular kind of grain.

25SC progs, 15 September, 1770.

26*Seir-ul-Mutakkerin*, Vol. 3, Calcutta, 1903, p. 56.

27N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. 2, Calcutta, 1965, p. 55.

28Muir, *The Making of British India*, London, 1917, p. 97.

29Progs, CCRP, 4 June 1771.

30*Ibid.*, 29 January 1772.

Yet the Company did not spend more than Rs 90,000[31] for famine which took a toll of one third of Bengal's population. Nor did they pay any attention to Raja Shitab Roy's demand for two lakhs of rupees for the assistance of the poor.[32] The Company did not consider all the measures pointed out by their servants.[33] Forwarding a plan,[34] proposed by Reja Khan and Shitab Roy for making a settlement in Bihar, James Alexander wrote to the Select Committee on 26 December 1769, but the plan was not accepted by them.

The Company also rejected the humane appeal of Alexander that the brigade stationed at Patna should be moved beyond the Karmanasa river as the army consumed a great deal of grain.[35] This appeared to him the only method of affording immediate relief to the Bihar province and saving thousands of lives. Even on 23 October 1769, Rumbold reported that the Company had a complete brigade at Bankipore and a large part of military force at Monghyr. He apprehended dreadful consequences if some measures were not taken to supply them with provision.[36] But the Select Committee did not agree to remove the brigade beyond the Karmanasa river.[37]

It is therefore evident that the East India Company did not provide extensive relief measures. Moreover, the Company was not liberal in following the policy of large-scale remission of revenue. They did not grant the deductions proposed by Rumbold,[38] because the principal concern of the Company continued to be one of revenue, not the welfare of the people.

With the acquisition of the diwani the Court of Directors had hoped for higher revenue, but were, they claimed, "deeply affected

[31]"In the beginning of the famine a Public Charity was instituted, towards which, agreeably to calculated estimate for six months:

Rs 40,000 were to be contributed by the Company.

Rs 21,000 by Nawab Mobarek-ud-Dowlah.

Rs 15,200 by Naib Dewan.

Rs 6,000 by Maharaja Myhimdeo.

Rs 5,000 by Jagat Seth." (*Extracts from Records*, p. 36.)

[32]SC progs, 28 January 1770.

[33]Muir, *The Marking of British India*, p. 98.

[34]"Let the third part of the present year's crops of grain, and the fourth part of other productions, such as sugar, poppies & C be given to the ryot for his stock and subsistence, and let the remainder be received by Government in payment and sold by commissioners." (SCC, 7 December 1769.)

[35]SCC, 3 May 1770.

[36]*Extracts from Records*, Vol. 2, p. 40.

[37]SC progs, 3 May 1770.

[38]For 1176

	Original agreement	*Deduction proposed*	*Deduction allowed*
Havely Azimabad	Rs 38,000	Rs 3,000	Rs 2,300
Sarkar Saran	Rs 8,65,003	Rs 1,25,002	Rs 1,00,000

to see ourselves disappointed in that reasonable expectation and to experience such reverse as now appears by the great diminution of these provinces, particularly in the province of Bihar."[39] To answer the pressing demands from the Court, the Company adopted a destructive plan to procure large sums from the country. Ramsay Muir rightly observed: "There is reason to believe that the sufferings of the population were increased both by severity with which the land revenue was collected, and by the unscrupulous profits which some of the Company's servants made out of the needs of the people."[40] When the zamindars were not able to pay the sums required, Aumils[41] were sent. There was no check on them during the time of their employment; their power was absolute, and their oppression often forced the ryots to quit their lands. For example, the ryots of Sahabad took shelter in Oudh.[42]

J. J. Keighly, Supervisor of Tirhut, reported that very exorbitant collections from the ryots impoverished the district.[43] Bhagalpur was also oppressed by Aumils.[44] The picture of oppression was clearly depicted by the Supervisor of Sarkar Tirhut in his letter of 21 May 1771.[45] Even the Council at Patna felt that it was the nature of the settlement which was responsible for the oppression of the ryots.[46]

Although James Alexander, Supervisor of Bihar, maintained in his report on Bihar: "I did not think it advisable in this season of calamity to intimidate the Zamindars by insisting on larger agreements,"[47] the government did not assume a very liberal attitude in its dealing with the farmers and the zamindars who could not settle the revenue. A large number of zamindars and farmers lost their lands owing to their failure to pay stipulated amount. The zamindar of Serris Kotomba, having left a balance and not being able to find security for the year 1179 (1771 A.D.), lost his zamindari and the estate was entrusted to Sher Ally Khan.[48] A number of parganas were handed over to the new farmers on the ground that, "the new farmers are obliged to make the cutlivation of the Pargana the principal object of their attention."[49]

[39]Public letters from CD, 28 August 1771, para 20, FWIH, Vol. 5.

[40]Muir, *The Making of British India*, p. 81.

[41]Govt. contractor for revenue.

[42]Progs, CCRP, 2 December 1771.

[43]Letter dated 21 May 1771. Progs, CCRP, 4 June 1771.

[44]SCC, 28 April 1770.

[45]*Ibid.*

[46]Progs, CCRP, 4 June 1771.

[47]SC progs, 29 March 1770.

[48]Progs, CCRP, 2 November 1771.

[49]*Ibid.*, 4 June 1771.

It is indeed remarkable that the amount of revenue actually collected in 1770 and 1771 was not much less than the settlement of those years.[50] Besides this, the collection in the worst affected area in Bihar, Serris Kotomba, yielded much more than was expected in the famine year. The collection of revenue in the year following the famine, in many areas, was even higher than in the year of famine.

TABLE I

TOTAL COLLECTION OF REVENUE IN HAVELY AZIMABAD, PHOOLWAREL, TIRHUT, SUNNOOT, ARWAL MUSSORA AND BIHAR, 1769-70, 1770-71, 1771-72

Place	*Fasli year 1117 (1769-70 A.D.)* Rs	*Famine year Fasli year 1178 (1770-71 A.D.)* Rs	*Fasli year 1179 (1771-72 A.D.)* Rs	*Percentage increase over 1769-72* 1770-71	1771-72
Havely Azimabad	38,600	46,700	49,700	20.98	28.75
Phoolwarel	22,870-9-15	29,000	32,000	26.80	39.91
Tirhut	2,33,699-13-5	2,83,072-11-15	3,36,766-14-15	21.10	54.07
Sunnoot	2,55,573-4-5	2,57,789-10-5	3,02,000	.85	18.14
Arwal Mussora	52,086-1-15	85,000	90,000	63.19	72.79
Bihar	41,19,138-9-10	45,08,959-12-10	45,54,967-10-0	9.22	11.23

The revenue of Bihar province as a whole in 1770-71 did not decrease in spite of the uncultivated lands and the distress of the people. It was at first imagined that the sum of Rs 25 lakhs was the utmost that could be collected from the province of Bihar. But by June 1770, more than that amount was brought into the treasury and the Council at Patna expected that by the close of the year nearly Rs 38 or 39 lakhs would be collected.[51] The collection actually exceeded the expected amount and a total collection of Rs 41,19,138-9-10[52] was made in a year in which in many villages which had 100 inhabitants, not more than ten or 20 survived.[53] The Council at Patna was glad to inform the government that the collection of revenue in 1771 showed an increase of Rs 3,39,821-3-0.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that in England the aspect of the diwani which attracted most attention was the immense wealth the Company was expected to derive from the revenues of Bengal. But the Carnatic

[50]Misc. Records (Rev) Account of the land revenue of Bihar.

War followed by the failure of the Dual Government produced disastrous results throughout the province. Within five years of the great triumph of the diwani the East India Company seemed on the verge of ruin. The Court of Directors wanted more revenue. Hence nothing was permitted to impede the collection of revenue. At the same time, by the grant of the Mughal the Company received not only the diwani but also the responsibility of ensuring the welfare of the people of the Bengal province. The Company did not recognize the latter duty and made the collection of revenue principal concern even in the years of famine. In this, they ignored the precedents set by Mughals who had followed a policy of large-scale remission of revenue in cases of famine. The Company managed to increase the collection of revenue in the year following the great famine. This reveals their relentless pursuit of revenue even at the cost of the sufferings of the people facing natural calamities.

ABBREVIATIONS

FWIH — Fort William Indian House Correspondence.
SCC — Select Committee Consultations.
CPC — Calendar of Persian Correspondence.
CD — Court of Directors.
CCRP — Comptrolling Council of Revenue at Patna.
SC — Select Committee.
CCRM — Comptrolling Council of Revenue at Mursidabad.

BOOK REVIEWS

Baldev Raj Nayar, *Violence and Crime in India*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1975, Pp. 144.

The subject of violence has attracted attention of sociologists, journalists, and political scientists. While journalists focus on the current state of violence sociologists try to find out the underlying social explanation of violence. A political scientist is interested in analyzing economic aspects and political implications of violence. Baldev Nayar sets for himself the task of answering two fundamental questions: (1) what is the record in respect of violence and crime?; and (2) what is the explanation for the patterns and trends that the record reveals?

The motivation to the study was provided by the author's concern of the impact of economic performance on social disorder. "It is the higher concern with the performance of the political system in India that has led to the present study rather than academic interest per se in violence and crime" (Preface, p. x). As a result of this higher concern the study examines the Indian crime situation in a historical perspective in Chapter 1 and the specific purposes of the study are established in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 embodies the discussion of trends in the post-independence period in respect of several major crimes and various hypotheses are empirically tested in Chapter 4. It is asserted that Chapters 3 and 4 constitute a significant empirical and theoretical contribution on the subject. Regional and temporal patterns of crimes are analyzed using regression analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 and results and conclusions are summarized in Chapter 7.

Quantitative information on riots, kidnapping and abduction, murder, cheating, counterfeiting, criminal breach of trust, house-breaking, theft, robbery have been classified in three major groups, namely, offences against public tranquility, offences against the person, and offences against the property. Using time series data on these variables the author has arrived at two conclusions. First, there is a high level of persistence in the ranking of states on a given crime implying thereby that the incidence of violence and crime is a cultural reflection of a given state. Second, the incidence of violence and crime has a regional distribution suggesting thereby that the eastern India, where the incidence of riots is the highest, is at a different level of political awakening. Using regression analysis, Baldev Nayar has demonstrated that, "in the ultimate analysis, violence and crime are human responses to economic distress or progress and political discontent or satisfaction."

This is a study of "violence" and "crime" as defined and recorded by the existing institutional system in India. Such crimes represent disaffection or alienation from the society and take place in response to an intense exploitation and regression of the down-trodden by the society. This implies that there are cases of real crime and violence the extent and spread of which is many times that of the recorded crimes. The latter in its various manifestations is only a mild response to the existing exploitative forces.

DALIP S. SWAMY

Emily C. Brown. Hardayal: *Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, The University of Arizona Press, Tuscan, Arizona, USA, 1975, Pp. 321, $ 7.95 (paperback). Reprinted by Manohar Book Service, Daryaganj, New Delhi, Rs 60.00 (hardcover).

Hardayal, a Kayastha of Delhi, became a legend in his life-time. This need not surprise anyone. He was exceptionally intelligent, a voracious reader and had a phenomenal memory. These qualities, though a boon, were also his bane. They resulted in his undoing in the end. He was never consistent either in his thought processes or in his political behaviour. If his intellectual convictions moved all the time like a pendulum, his political career was bedevilled with frequent leap-frogging.

Hardayal's intellectual arrogance and mercurial temperament had largely to do with his somewhat enigmatic career and lifestyle. These two basic traits of his personality rendered him unfit to work for long with any group—social, political, cultural or academic. His magnetic personality attracted to him a large and invariably a motley crowd of admirers holding divergent, if not diametrically opposed, views. But his scarcely veiled superiority complex repelled them sooner than later. Sir Francis Younghusband, an old India hand, with whom Hardayal worked in close collaboration in the World Fellowship of Faiths, aptly described him thus: "I found him in his philosophic and religious activities to be brilliant but very unattractive." He was, therefore, generally constrained to plough a lonely furrow all his life.

If Hardayal did not have any life-long friends but only distant devotees and chance admirers, he did not also have any permanent philosophy of life or political conviction. He started as a terrorist in his youth. He was regarded as one of those who inspired, if not

actually organized, what has come to be known as the Delhi Bomb Case. A country-made bomb was hurled at the then British viceroy, Lord Hardinge, in Chandni Chowk when he was making his ceremonial entrance into the traditional Indian capital in pursuance of Whitehall's decision to shift the headquarters of the government of India from Calcutta to Delhi. Hardayal became a confirmed anarchist-cum-socialist in his middle age during his stay in Berkeley in the United States on the eve and in the early years of World War I. He turned a pacifist Buddhist for spiritual solace in later years. At the fag end of his life, Hardayal came out in the true colours of a Hindu chauvinist. He wrote: "I declare that the future of the Hindu race, of Hindustan and the Punjab, rests on these four pillars: (*i*) Hindu *Sanghathan* (unity); (*ii*) Hindu Raj; (*iii*) *Shuddhi* (conversion) of Muslims; and (*iv*) Conquest and *Shuddhi* of Afghanistan and the frontiers. So long as the Hindu nation does not accomplish these four things, the safety of our children and grandchildren will be ever in danger, and the safety of the Hindu race will be impossible."

Hardayal also did not suffer from any qualms of conscience either when he, along with his other Indian compatriots of the Ghadar party, received monetary aid and material assistance from Kaiser's Germany during World War I for avowedly organizing an armed revolt against the British in India or when he wrote *Forty-Four Months in Germany and Turkey* to denounce his former Prussian and Turkish friends and benefactors. In her book, Ms. Brown aptly remarks: "Hardayal's most vicious denunciation of the English never approached his indictment of 'Junkertum'. His praise of the English Empire was so effusive that the India Office, London, saw to it that the book was translated into Hindi and distributed free of charge in India." Some years later, Hardayal wrote that the British empire was a "fundamentally beneficent and necessary institution" and that "All Britishers—Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, Indians, Egyptians, Burmese, Zulus, Baluchis, and others—should work and fight together."

It is, therefore, no wonder that the British government, after some bureaucratic dilly-dallying, finally condescended to grant Hardayal's request for a safe return to India on condition that he would not take part in politics. He readily gave the undertaking, an abject apology will be a correct description. Presumably to make a public show of his deep gratitute, Hardayal participated in the United States in a dinner given in New York on 20 January 1939, by the "Friends of the Duke of Windsor in America," wearing a white tie, tails and a milkwhite turban, instead of the traditional top hat. But Hardayal was not allowed to enjoy the "fruits" of his humiliation by a merciful quirk of fate: he died in the United States on his way to India where he was to take up the principalship of Dyal Singh College, Lahore, now in Pakistan.

Because of Hardayal's chequered and enigmatic career, the reviewer expected an exciting book on his life and times. But much to her chagrin and disappointment, Ms. Brown's biography of Hardayal is, to use a mild term, insipid, mainly because of three reasons: *(i)* the treatment is chronological; *(ii)* the writing is generally indifferent and at times sloppy; and *(iii)* her failure to tap any fresh or worthwhile source. She has followed with a frightening fidelity the "treatment" and "sources" already exhausted by Dharmavira in his biography of Hardayal, published some six years before. What is even worse, the new sources she has tapped do not throw any fresh light on Hardayal's waywardness and the few persons she has interviewed for the first time to have a "feel" of her subject are of somewhat dubious significance. Govind Bihari Lal is a case in point. He is not only a relation of Hardayal but also his devotee. And historical truth has always been the first casualty of devotion and blind faith.

The biographer also has not even cared to enlighten the reader on four other pertinent points: Who supported Hardayal during his nearly two and a half decades of self-exile? Why did he suddenly go to Martinique and Algiers in Africa and to Hawaii in the United States later on the eve of World War I? Was he specially sent to America by the German intelligence service? For, his post-haste dash to California to organize the Indian settlers, mostly illiterate and gullible Sikhs, into the Ghadar Party (the party of rebellion) cannot be dismissed as lightly. His main argument, which appealed to them, was that in the war that was imminent, the Germans would help Indians in every possible manner to free their motherland from the British yoke! And, lastly, why did he eschew his revolutionary past and tender an abject apology to his arch enemies, the British?

Ms. Brown would have done well had she not written the book at all as she has produced an utterly dull, drab, bald and bland biography of a person whose life was replete with dramatic moments, international intrigues, mysterious movements and a clandestine wedlock with a Swedish woman.

PRABHA DIXIT

Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, London, Sussex University Press, 1976.

This is a well-documented study of the social history of a region in Kerala (Travancore). It portrays vividly the interplay of economic, political, religious and caste factors in the decline of Nayar dominance. The author shows that until 1847 Nayars were in comfort, the distribution of all the resources—land, education and political power—being in their favour. He then discusses the growth of Christian missionary activities which had adverse implications for Nayar dominance in certain fields. The missionaries opened up new educational and economic opportunities for the low castes who began to challenge the supremacy of the Nayars.

Besides the missionaries, Dewan Madhava Rao played a significant part in widening the educational, occupational and political opportunities for lower castes. He was responsible for ushering in many reforms in different directions—reforming caste disabilities, opening of a network of educational institutions, and building of roads, railways and public buildings. However, the new gains of educational and occupational opportunities accrued more to the non-Malayali Brahmins (mostly immigrant Tamil Brahmins called Pattars) than to the Nayars. The former occupied key positions bringing more and more of their kind. Hence they were a source of threat to the dominant position of Nayars. Other sections which also held out a threat were the Christians who were coming up educationally, and the Izhavas (Toddy Tappers) who by the 1880s were beginning to raise their voice.

All these changes led to conflicting relationships between Nayars and others on the one hand, and reformatory activities among the Nayars themselves on the other. The author shows that in 1884 Nayars formed the Malayali Sabha and worked for reforming their marital customs. The Sabha took a lead in organizing the Nayars to submit a Malayali Memorial to the Maharaja in 1891 stating the grievances of Nayars against non-Malayali Brahmins who had monopolized the gains of modern educational and employment opportunities.

While Nayars were organizing themselves to fight against the monopoly of non-Malayali Brahmins, the ambitious Izhavas rose against the conservative Nayars. The Izhavas established the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903, and in mid 1904 there were many Izhava-Nayar riots.

The competition from the Syrian Christians and the conflict with Izhavas provided the external forces which led to the decline of Nayar dominance. However, there was a powerful internal force which contributed to their decline, namely, the break-up of large matrilineal joint families (*tarawads*). This coupled with a population "explosion" impoverished the Nayars and hastened their decline.

Although the author has examined in detail the external forces such as missionary activities, cash economy, growth of educational and employment opportunities and the rise of the Syrian Christians and the Izhavas, he has not grasped the inner contradictions involved in the breakup of the traditional pattern of family, marriage and kinship which held different castes together. The Nambutiris through their Yogakshema movement (in 1908) did not favour the liaison relationship that the Nambutiri males had with Nayar women. Similarly the Nayars also insisted that Nayar women should marry Nayar men. The conflict between mother's brother (*karanavan*) and the other male members in the *tarawad* had reached a climax, and this led to the legislation of 1912 legalizing partition of *tarawad*.

The author is of the opinion that by 1908 the Nayar dominance had declined. However, the process of decline had only begun but had not actually occurred, for the Nayars still had a monopoly position in public service, education and the Assembly. It was only in the 1930s when political representation in the Assembly was granted on the basis of castes and religious groups the decline of Nayar dominance was certain. This was the result of the joint council action by the Izhavas, Christians and Muslims against the Nayars.

While the author's documentation is impressive, his analysis is somewhat simplistic. He adopts the model of stability and decline. Historical changes, however, are oscillating and dialectical with opposition and conflict built into them. Thus while the Nayars succeeded in attacking the monopoly of non-Malayali Brahmins, they were fighting a losing battle with the Izhavas, as the latter were challenging the monopoly of the Nayars. Although the book is theoretically not very stimulating, it provides a valuable account of the regional history of Kerala.

M. S. A. RAO

Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1975, Pp. 70, Rs 5.

This little book presents the text of the Sardar Patel Memorial Lectures delivered over All India Radio in January 1972 by Romila Thapar. The book consists of three lectures in which the author systematically sets out the kinds of attitudes and theories about India's past which have influenced the study of Indian history. The major stereotypes which she examines are: the Aryan theory of race, the concept of an unchanging Indian society, the "other worldliness" and spirituality associated with the Hindu religion and the theory of oriental despotism. Next, she tries to bring together different types of historical evidences to counter the fallacies in these stereotypes.

Thapar attributes the reluctance of historians to trace the origins of the Indian civilization to the Harappan culture, partly to the hesitation to use archeological evidence and partly to the wish to present the Aryan peoples as the founders of Indian culture. She shows that there is evidence in the later Vedic texts of the cultural intermingling of the Aryans with the native populations of the Doad and Middle Ganges Valley. Though the Aryan theory of race presented an important stereotype to Hindu social reformers, its use by historians was based on slender historical evidence and a misunderstanding of the categories of discourse of Vedic texts.

The conception of an unchanging Indian society is also questioned in the book. The author uses literary evidences with skill, to show the variations in the status of Brahmans in different regions and different periods. She also shows how Ksatriya dynasties were a rarity in the pre-Gupta period but the pressures on rulers to claim Ksatriya status increased after the 5th century A.D. Similarly, the Vaisyas from a nondescript category came to figure prominently in the texts after the establishment of guilds of traders and craftsmen. All this shows that Indian society was not as rigid and inflexible as the stereotypes built by Hindu social reformers and some nationalist historians suggested.

In a similar vein the "other worldliness" attributed to Hindus is questioned when Thapar shows the varieties of religious beliefs at the popular level which contrasted or directly contradicted the views found in classical texts. She briefly points to the economic role of religious institutions to show that Hinduism was not an impediment to rational economic activity. Finally, the theory of oriental despotism is examined against available historical records and Thapar argues that contrary to this theory, the development of irrigation led to greater decentralization in certain regions. She also pleads for a proper study of trade and banking activities in different periods of pre-British India, as these played an important role in laying the material foundations for certain social formations.

The great merit of this book is that it makes history alive and relevant to the layman. Despite some interesting suggestions, such as the one that the four *varnas* are not necessarily homologous categories, the social scientist will not find much that is new. For instance, the distinction between Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic Hinduism or the view that limited mobility was possible within traditional Indian society are now so well established that they are taught in graduate courses. To this reviewer, the treatment of certain issues is almost cavalier as, for example, the summary treatment of Weber's views on Hinduism which is completely divorced from his general sociology of religion. It is hoped that many of the issues which are discussed rather casually in this book will be rigorously argued out by Romila Thapar elsewhere. Lastly, it seems to me that among the stereotypes discussed and demolished by Thapar there are surely some of those proverbial old horses which were in no further need of flogging.

VEENA DAS

INDEX
(Vol. XIII, 1976)

ARTICLES

BOOKS REVIEWED