

Speaking of Peasants

**ESSAYS ON INDIAN HISTORY AND
POLITICS IN HONOR OF WALTER HAUSER**



MANOHAR

Edited by
WILLIAM R. PINCH



The study of Indian peasant movements.

Because Hauser's work focuses on Bihar and the peasant leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, some of the authors, such as the late Arvind Narayan Das, Christopher Hill, and Sho Kuwajima, are concerned directly with peasant politics in Bihar. Other authors, such as Harry Blair, Majid Siddiqi, Harold Gould, and the late James R. Hagen, contrast agrarian history and politics in Bihar to other parts of India. A third group, including Stuart Corbridge, Ron Herring, and Ruhi Grover, investigate related questions in agrarian history and politics from regions formally outside of Bihar. A fourth group of authors, including Peter Rabb, Ajay Skaria, and William R. Pinch, examine culture, religion, and meaning that inform (and are informed by) peasant politics. A fifth set of authors, Frederick H. Damon, Peter Gottschalk, and Mathew Schmalz, provide ethnographic context. Damon takes readers from Bihar to Melanesia and many points in between, with a focus on ethno-botany over three millennia; Gottschalk and Schmalz provide a closely detailed examination of a Bihari village, focusing in particular on the problem of religion.

(Contd. on back flap)

For Worth =
Dirt is almost good
worth, over many years.
= Walter
Jan 15, 2008

SPEAKING OF PEASANTS
ESSAYS ON INDIAN HISTORY AND POLITICS
IN HONOR OF WALTER HAUSER



Group photo of participants in the Hauserfest symposium at the University of Virginia in May 1997.

Front row, left to right: Rohi Grover, Dharma Kumar, Philip McIlroy, Anand Ying, Richard Barnett, Harry Blair; Second row, left to right: Arvind Das, Harold Gould, Paul Brans, Walter Hauser, Ajay Skaria, Edith Turner, Wendy Singer, Prem Shankar Jha, Majid Siskioglu, Ian Barrow; Back row, left to right: Peter Reeves, Christopher V. Hill, Tom Tomlinson, Peter Rohr, James R. Hagen, Ronald Herron, Vijay Phach, Kailash Chandra Jha, John Echeverri-Garcia. Photo credit: Deej Baker

SPEAKING OF PEASANTS
Essays on Indian History
and Politics in Honor of
Walter Hauser

Edited by
WILLIAM R. PINCH



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Preface

This volume honors Walter Hauser, since 1995 Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Virginia. Walter is many things to many people. For the contributors to this volume, he is first and foremost an eloquent and energetic promoter of Bihar. Some of us work, or have worked, on Bihar for no other reason than the simple fact that Walter somehow persuaded us to do so. Bihar's reputation as—to put it gently—the 'wild west' of India is evidence enough that Walter can be very persuasive. Walter also introduced Bihari peasants and their struggles—as well as their remarkable leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati—to the academy, both in India and the West; he built from scratch the University of Virginia's Center for South Asian Studies; and he trained a small army of graduate students, some of whom are represented in this volume.

In 1997, two years after Walter's retirement from full-time teaching, the Center for South Asian Studies hosted a celebration of Walter's career. Most of the contributors to this volume presented their essays in lecture form at that gathering, held between 23 and 25 May. As is always the case in Charlottesville, the weather was perfect, the food delicious, and the libations abundant. It was a happy time, made profoundly bittersweet in retrospect by the remembered presence of Rosemary, Walter's wife, who left this world in 2001. This volume also honors her memory.

The 1997 'Hauserfest' and the current volume, though much delayed, were the products of considerable individual and institutional labor. Richard B. Barnett in History at Virginia organized the gathering, and Daniel J. Ehnbom in Art History has offered patient encouragement of the volume over the past ten years. The conference was made possible with institutional support from the Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Raymond Nelson), the Center for South Asian Studies,

the Office of International Studies, and the Bhatta Urdu Studies Fund. Cindy Benton-Groter at the Center for South Asian Studies provided key administrative support on occasions too numerous to mention. More recently, the production of the volume was made possible by Manohar in New Delhi, led by Ramesh Jain, by the editorial labors of Justin Schaeffer Duffy, and by generous funds from the Office of the Vice President for Research (Professor Ariel R. Gomez) at the University of Virginia and the Deans' Fund (Professor J. Donald Moon) at Wesleyan University. The in-house editor and copy editor at Manohar deserve special recognition for their painstaking and perspicacious work. Philip McEldowney, South Asia & Middle East Librarian at the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia, prepared the bibliography at the end of this volume and responded graciously to too many stray bibliographic queries over the past two years, often late at night. The photograph of Walter that graces this volume was taken by Florence Hauser; the group photo from the 1997 gathering is provided courtesy of Deej Baker. I thank all of these individuals and institutions for their help, encouragement, and support.

Thanks are due as well to the additional participants beyond those listed as essay authors in the table of contents, who served as discussants and paper givers. They include, from the University of Virginia, Murray Milner, Jr., and Sukirti Sahay, Sociology; Edith L. B. Turner, Anthropology; and John Echeverri-Gent, Government. From farther afield came Anand Yang, formerly in History at the University of Utah, presently Director of the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington; the late Dharma Kumar of the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University; Ian Barrow in History at Middlebury College; Paul R. Brass in Political Science at the University of Washington; Kailash C. Jha in the Political Section at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi; Wendy Singer in History at Kenyon College; Peter Reeves, formerly of the Curtin Institute of Technology, Perth, Australia, and now Coordinator of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore; Prem Shankar Jha, distinguished columnist with *The Hindu* and *Business Standard*; and Tom Tomlinson, formerly in History at the University of Strathclyde, now at the School of Oriental and

African Studies, London. Bernard S. Cohn in History and Anthropology at the University of Chicago, was unable to attend at the last minute; Frederick H. Damon served as a discussant in his stead.

Four contributors to the volume were not among the original presenters, but the relevance of their work to Walter's wider concerns prompted the solicitation of their contributions. Peter Gottschalk in Religious Studies at Wesleyan University and Mathew Schmalz in Religious Studies at The College of the Holy Cross kindly agreed to author a reflection on their remarkable teaching and research tool, 'The Virtual Village', <http://virtualvillage.wesleyan.edu/>, which enables web-users to wander through a living and breathing rural hamlet in south-western Bihar. Stuart Corbridge in Development Studies at the London School of Economics graciously allowed us to include an essay on the politics of 'reservations' in Jharkhand. Frederick H. Damon, who (as noted above) took part in the conference as a discussant, was inspired by the proceedings (and by the late James R. Hagen's paper in particular) to probe the cultural-ecological connections between Bihar and Melanesia for a later gathering in Patna. I am pleased that he has allowed us to include his elegant and stimulating essay in the volume as well.

Finally, for permissions to publish previously committed essays, I thank Oxford University Press, Delhi (for Peter Robb); *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (Ajay Skaria); *Indian Social Science Review* (Harold Gould); *The New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* (Ruhi Grover); *The Journal of Asian Studies* (Stuart Corbridge); and *Past & Present* (William R. Pinch).

As will be evident from the shifting institutional ties of many of the 'Hauserfest' participants and volume contributors, much has changed since 1997. Some of us are no more. In addition to Rosemary Hauser, we mourn the loss of three conference participants: in 2000, Arvind Narayan Das, journalist, social scientist, activist, and founding editor of *Biblio*; in 2001, Dharma Kumar, Professor of Economic History at the Delhi School of Economics; and in 2006, James R. Hagen, Professor of History at Frostburg State University. Clearly too many years have come and gone while this volume was gestating. Hopefully it will prove to have been worth the wait. What matters in the

end is not the delay, but the fact that the names and institutional origins of the conference participants and essay contributors are evidence of the wide-ranging—and continuing—impact of Walter's energy, good will, and intellect. We are, each of us, indebted to him in different ways.

Walter prepared the ground—always figuratively, often literally—upon which many of us have trod on our own intellectual journeys. And those of us who came to Walter after coming to Bihar now see Bihar in a new, brighter light. On behalf of all of us, I offer him our collective thanks.

21 January 2007

VIJAY PINCH

Introduction: Walter and Friends

William R. Pinch

The essays in this volume range widely, in terms of scope and approach as well as temporal and geographic coverage. Some, such as Das and Kuwajima, and Hill and Corbridge, deal directly with Bihar. Others do not limit themselves to matters Bihari, but have much to say to Bihar nonetheless. Damon sees the imprint of landlocked Bihar in maritime South-East Asia; Hagen compares the agrarian ecosystem of Bihar (and India) to China; Blair compares social and economic development in Bihar to Maharashtra and Bangladesh; Grover investigates the business of timber in what is now Uttarakhand; Siddiqi and Gould take us on very different tours of peasant politics in India; Pinch begins and ends in Bihar, with interludes in religio-intellectual retreats in Ayodhya and London; Herring introduces us to the rise and demise of land reform in Kerala; and Skaria takes us inside the mind of a sometime Gandhian Gujarati peasant activist. Corbridge and Hill's Jharkhand was in earlier days a large part of Bihar. Much of what Gottschalk and Schmalz tell us about south-western Bihar is true as well for the wider Bhojpur region extending into eastern UP. And Robb offers us a magisterial theoretical reflection that applies equally to Bihar and India and Britain, and their collective engagement with the modern, 'colonial' state.

It must be emphasized that all the essays illuminate, each in its own way, the world of the peasant in South Asia. That world that has been central to the thinking, writing, and teaching of Walter Hauser since the 1950s. A quick glance at the 1991 census reveals why: nearly 70 per cent of India's population then derived its livelihood from farming, fishing, hunting, logging, or related work with the land and its products. Of that

population, the vast majority, well over 90 per cent, was directly engaged in agriculture.¹ These figures have not changed dramatically since 1991. In the 2001 census, nearly 75 per cent of India's population was classed as 'rural'.² Nearly 60 per cent of the total workforce was listed either as 'cultivators' or as 'agricultural labourers'. In Bihar, that figure was over 77 per cent.³ Each contributor to this volume weaves his or her way through a series of investigations to uncover and, to some degree, explain some dimensions of the history that mattered to that 'rural', agriculturalist majority of India's population, living in village, forest, or in *ashram*—and sometimes even in cities and towns.⁴ Each of the authors heeds, I think, Herring's advice to balance the desire to generalize about a 'peasantry' against the reality that the 'peasantry' is beset with class stratifications and 'multiple identifications'—not least among them, caste and religion. Several of the essays explore the question of leadership and its cultural and religious dimensions; others investigate commerce and commercialization, agrarian struggle, religious belief and practice, artisanship and human ecology, and colonial-imperial epistemology. What glues these essays together is the conviction, for the most part unstated, that it is the world of those who extract sustenance from the land that we should be trying to understand.

This was the central problematic that preoccupied Walter Hauser for nearly half a century. Happily it preoccupies him still. My most vivid image of Walter is of him exhorting us around the seminar table to probe more deeply: to understand what precisely, religion, nationalism, imperialism, socialism, capitalism, caste-ism—and any other analytical abstraction, whether suffixed with an 'ism' or not—meant for the people on the ground who put the tiller to the soil. And for Walter, the person who best articulated the implications of those 'isms' for India's *kisans* was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the 'Hindu' ascetic-turned-caste-reformer-turned-socialist-radical. Indeed, since the early 1960s and the completion of his Chicago PhD dissertation on the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, it has been Walter's quest to present Sahajanand Saraswati's struggle—ideological, political, social, and, it should be said, religious—to the English-speaking and reading public. That quest was a long

one, interrupted in the late 1960s by a sudden illness that robbed Walter of two or three years and much bodily strength. However, the wait was worth it: we have, since the mid-1990s, begun to see the fruits of his painstaking labours. It is no exaggeration to say that historians of the Indian subcontinent are in Walter's debt for *Sahajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor* (1994) and *Swami Sahajanand and the Peasants of Jharkhand* (1995). We know too that Kailash Jha was instrumental not only in the successful delivery of those books, but to their production and gestation—so we are in Kailash's debt as well. However, the capstone of the Hauser-Jha partnership is yet to come: their forthcoming translation of Sahajanand's autobiography, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh*, 'My Life Struggle'. This work is eagerly awaited. It will make an excellent primary source text for modern Indian history, to supplement, and in some ways correct, Mohandas K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

'The Swami' presides over this volume in the same way that Walter does. The convictions that drove Sahajanand, and transformed him from a Saiva *samnyasi* to social reformer to socialist radical, are not far removed from those that have transformed the discipline of history over the course of the twentieth century and drew Walter and many others into the study of peasants and peasant politics. That such a large proportion of our scholarly resources could be aimed at the uncovering of the history and culture of ordinary agrarian 'subalterns' in India speaks, in the final analysis, to the degree to which the political and intellectual concerns of Marx remain central to Western social science. That said, the varied nature of the essays here demonstrates that the frameworks brought to bear, and the understandings and explanations offered, go beyond (and sometimes against the grain of) Marx.

Given the legacy of the Swami as a tireless organizer on behalf of peasants, and given the nature of Walter's pioneering work on the Swami (and as a tireless institutional rainmaker, and mentor of students), it is not surprising that many of the essays that make up this volume are concerned in one way or another with mobilization. Majid Siddiqi offers a typology of peasant mobilization and concludes that the 'historicity of peasant

insurgency in modern India has come full circle'—from the caste and religious networks that produced the more modern political associations like the Kisan Sabha of the 1930s, to the caste and communal and class warfare that bedevils the Indian present. This cycle reappears in various forms in the essays that follow, though there will doubtless be disagreement as to whether Indian agrarian activism is simply running in circles or spiralling upward—or, for that matter, downward. Where the historian Siddiqi proposes a schematic outline, the political anthropologist Gould retraces the regional evolution of north-Indian peasant politics, both as those regional movements evolved but also as they were inflected through the national political positioning of leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Charan Singh. Gould is particularly interested in the problem of class formation, and sees the rise of Charan Singh and analogous figures in the late 1960s and 1970s as a 'breakthrough point' for the 'reclassification' of the middle castes. For Gould, there is much to celebrate here, since caste and religious divisions seem to be giving way to a variety of regional, class-oriented unions. They may not have produced a 'single class thesis' for all of India, but they did evince common class 'threads'.

For Arvind Das, who covered similar temporal ground but focused primarily on peasant radicalism in Bihar, beginning with the Swami and ending with the rise of the 'Naxalite Movement' and its aftermath, the picture was less rosy. The agrarian armies on the right and left, and the language of violence that emerged with a vengeance in the 1970s and thereafter, seemed to reinforce the sharp caste divisions on the ground. Das still managed to end on an optimistic note, however: if violence has become the language of peasant politics, at least those at the bottom are now better armed. These stories share much with Ron Herring's, particularly when it comes to the combustible tension between the 'conservatizing' beneficiaries of land reform and those agricultural labourers for whom land reform always remains just out of reach. One lesson to be taken from Herring's account is that land reform, depending on how it is enacted, can take the radical wind out of agrarian politics. Herring's arena of investigation is the objectively successful (especially in comparison to Bihar) history of communism and land reform in Kerala; of

particular concern for him is the history of the religious and caste dimensions of class division, and what they mean in terms of agrarian structure and individual agency.

Herring argues, *contra* much classical 'peasantist' theory, that the personal political theory of individual leaders matters, that structure cannot be understood independent of agency. We get an up-close-and-personal look at individual agency coming to terms with agrarian structure in Sho Kuwajima's compelling account of the 1939 Reora Satyagraha in Gaya District, based on the writings and speeches of a wide array of activists and leaders, including Sahajanand, Jayaprakash Narayan, Rahul Sankrityayan, A.N. Sinha, and, most importantly, Jadunandan Sharma, the leader of the movement. Kuwajima provides a fascinating transcript of an interview with Sharma conducted in Gaya in 1966, in which the latter describes the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of key players. And Ajay Skaria introduces us to the ambivalences and ambiguities of personal agency, as on public display in the life of that conflicted Gandhian, the erstwhile Kisan Sabha leader, Indulal Yagnik. Yagnik's 'homelessness', which is enacted in the no-man's land between ideological 'transcendence' and pragmatic 'neighbourliness', or leadership and fellowship, is a homelessness felt by many if not all the political radicals described here (certainly it is evoked in Jadunandan Sharma's remarks, quoted in Kuwajima's essay, and as Skaria suggests it emerges at multiple levels in Sahajanand's writings)—and perhaps by those who write about them as well. Hence Skaria's call to 'engage more seriously with the subaltern politics that we have often failed to even recognize in our midst'.

Where there is mobilization and political radicalism, and the angst of homelessness, the state cannot be far behind. Rohi Grover and Christopher Hill seek to bring the state out of the shadows and show how it managed (whether in its imperial or national incarnation) to control, manage, and understand local communities. Hill focuses on the experience of the Santals in what is now the state of Jharkhand, and examines in particular the ways that European understanding of 'nature' and 'the wild' structured British assumptions about the non-sedentary people with whom they were dealing. If the Santals—and 'adivasis' generally—were seen as different, Hill argues, it was not because

the British simply constructed them as such in a desire to displace them from the forest resources for which they (the British) hungered. Rather, it was because they *were* different: they were wild. And to be wild was to be wasteful, in the European way of thinking. Hence they had to be either eradicated or transformed. If Hill's lens is focused on the ways in which the British managed forest populations, Grover is focused on the state's efforts (in the Forest Department) to manage the forest. What is remarkable here is the ability of some timber merchants to, in effect, manage the state. Unsatisfied with the 'resistance' model, Grover argues for the existence of a shadow economy, 'nestled within' and overlapping with the official, state-run economy. We are left with a more complex understanding of both state and society—each responded to subgroups in the other, and in so doing were 'mutually constituted'. Reading Grover after Hill prompts questions about whether the British construction of tribalism and nature was simply European. To what degree was the discourse, and the epistemology that sustained them, also Indian?⁵ And what does that say about the nature of the 'colonial' state?

The relation of state to society and the ways in which the 'colonial' context informed and structured social, economic, cultural, even eco-systemic change—and agrarian struggle—are concerns close to the heart of Peter Robb's powerful and wide-ranging reflection on imperial state-formation and the production of knowledge. In seeking to relate the British understanding of India to the evolution of the Indian identities, political organization, and ultimately the state, Robb makes clear that an interactive British-Indian 'govern-mentality', intent on improvement and regulation, laid the ontological foundation for peasant politics, even as that 'govern-mentality' aided in the exacerbation of the harsh agrarian realities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that necessitated those politics. Whereas many of the essays focus on specific examples of peasant mobilization, Robb's essay shows how the very possibility of that mobilization depended upon an evolving colonial understanding of rights, status, and profit. Thus, Robb argues, Sahajanand was remarkable not because his agrarian-political diagnoses were original, but because of the degree to which his goals, theories,

and tactics emerged out of the circumstances of the colonial state. Indeed, Robb shows that to understand Sahajanand's significance we should see him as a product of his times: Because he was embedded in, and largely produced by, the British-Indian intellectual climate, Sahajanand was able to be an effective mobilizer and ideologue whose pleas for justice, whose 'diagnoses', resonated at the highest echelons of state power. Robb cautions against privileging either external (colonial) or 'internal' (indigenous) categories in understanding Indian social, cultural, and political change, and argues instead that it is more productive to see the ways in which borrowings occur to produce new understandings.

The desire to avoid primordialism and an essentializing of either British or Indian understandings is also at the heart of my own essay on *bhakti* and empire. But while I am only too willing to agree that Indian understandings drank deep from the well of British (and European) systems of meaning, I endeavour to show that the reverse was often true as well: British understandings were themselves transformed by the British-Indian interaction, however unequal it may have been. More broadly, the long interpenetration of Hindu and Christian religious thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries calls into question the utility of the term 'colonial' for describing the political, social, and cultural formation that was British India. Given that George Grierson, of *Bihar Peasant Life* (Calcutta 1885) fame, was one of those engaged in the act of interpenetration, it stands to reason that this dialogical evolutionary process was not irrelevant to the world of the north Indian peasant. Possibly Robb would agree that the term 'colonial'—and all that it implies—confounds more than it clarifies with respect to the period 1757–1947. What term we should then use to characterize India's British experience remains an open question. Clearly, however, true understanding can only be achieved if it is grounded in semantic precision: words have a way of leading us astray.

Where the term 'colonial' clearly possesses functional utility, however, is in the *longue durée* context of Indian agriculture and its environmental constraints. This is where the steady macro-historical hand of James R. Hagen enters, to paint for us a portrait of the distinctive features of 'agricultural intensification'

as it was undertaken on the Gangetic plain from western UP to Bengal over the very long term. Hagen argued that intensification here was achieved mainly through a gradual extension of cultivation *in tandem* with biomass (including forest) depletion, and an increase in labour inputs from the rising population. In retrospect, the beginning of the eighteenth century may be seen to have witnessed the initiation of a range of agricultural practices that signaled increasing stress on the system; the point of no return seems to have been the late nineteenth century, when, Hagen argued, population began a rapid growth phase just as new cultivable lands were no longer available. Peasants found themselves up against a resource wall, as it were, which created the conditions for the stressed agrarian relations of the early twentieth century and the rise, especially in Bihar, a zone of particular vulnerability because it shared features of its wet- and dry-agriculture regions to its east and west respectively, of contentious peasant movements. If, as Robb argues, Sahajanand was a product of the colonial times in which he lived, right down to the language of rights that he deployed on behalf of peasants, he was also, for Hagen, a product of shifts in long-term patterns of human agricultural resource exploitation and population change.

Central to Hagen's thinking is the symbiotic connection between forest biomass and agricultural production. Damon too focuses on the ecosystem production/resource nexus, and—inspired by Hagen's essay and subsequent conversations with him—draws particular attention to shared botanical meanings evinced by ancient Biharis, especially as articulated through the flora of Buddhism, and modern Melanesians, as enacted in the culture of boat production. There is an important lesson here, Damon suggests, about religion: that it is embedded in things that the modern academy has long tended to regard as ordinary and mechanistic, particularly (in the case of Melanesians) in boats and in the tools and trees used to construct them. In so far as Indian understandings adapted themselves to and were displaced by 'colonial' norms, *pace* Robb, including modern post-Industrial (and post-Enlightenment) European religious norms, the deeper meanings embedded in things retreated into the shadows of history. Closer attention to the quotidian and

mechanistic affords startling continuities—or, at least, the possibility of continuities (Damon is reluctant to make narrative claims that smack of the 'dispersal' school of Austronesian studies)—that link southern Asia (Bihar and Kerala especially) to the western edge of Oceania, and enable us to cross our own oceans of understanding. We should not, Damon argues, discuss religion simply in terms of belief and practice, and as something opposed to 'science', but in terms of production—the production of things and of people, nested in a watered-landscape, whether oceanic or agrarian. Our inability to appreciate Melanesian understandings, as both ethnobotanically religious and scientific, has more to do, Damon suggests, with the failure of our own words—disfigured as they are by the rise of disembodied technical language over embodied thought-action—than with any failure on the part of Melanesian culture. Once again, our words have led us astray.

Damon's essay traverses immense geographic as well as temporal ground. As such it serves as a useful transition to the three concluding essays in the volume, by Corbridge, Blair, and Gottschalk and Schmalz, which bring us firmly into the present with three distinct visions of social, religious, and economic reality in Bihar, and beyond Bihar. Corbridge investigates the fate of tribal people in Jharkhand, and tracks in particular the expanding influence of a 'tribal elite' that has benefitted disproportionately from the positive discrimination programmes known generically as 'reservation'. Corbridge does not dispute that the state has deployed an 'invented' category of *adivasi* and 'tribal' for development purposes, but he does caution against the notion that such classifications only serve to further embed inequalities in Indian society. To the contrary, he argues that a new 'tribal middle class' has emerged in Jharkhand, even if its fate is tied to a continued insistence on difference and a resistance to assimilation and 'normalization' into the broader body politic. In other words, reservation works, even if it works unevenly. While there is good reason, then, to feel optimistic about social development in Jharkhand, Bihar itself makes us less sanguine. Blair compares the track record of rural development in Bihar with Bangladesh to the east and Maharashtra (and to some extent Gujarat) to the west, and asks why rural development

has proceeded so successfully in western Maharashtra in particular, whereas it has failed in Bihar and, to a large extent, in Bangladesh. For answers Blair turns to history, caste demography, political culture, and social relations; his narrative is engaging and is sure to be provocative—nowhere more so perhaps than when he suggests that western Maharashtra has a martial culture of resistance to foreign rule (e.g. Shivaji) that seems lacking in Bihar.

Development is more than electricity, roads, jobs, and politics. Gottschalk and Schmalz afford us a different and perhaps more comforting image of Bihar, and of that 70 per cent of India that is 'rural', as seen from the ground up via their 'Virtual Village' website (<http://virtualvillage.wesleyan.edu>). Their essay, and the website, are graceful reminders of the artificiality of the scholar's analytic categories. We are afforded, in the 'virtual village', a glimpse into the richly contextualized lives of ordinary people, and the ways in which they navigate their way through religion, economics, politics, identity, history, and gender. A particular concern of the authors has been to challenge received notions of Indian religion, on two levels: first, that India is a place that is defined, in some core, essential way, by its religious traditions; and second, that Hinduism and Islam are mutually exclusive and antagonistic religious traditions, hermetically sealed off one from the other. The website offers a way out of the all-too-familiar heuristic challenge that many of us have faced when seeking to complicate our students' understanding of religion in the lives of ordinary villagers, namely, that one is constrained at the outset to point to the fact of difference: that one person, party, or group is Muslim, while the other is Hindu. As they put it, 'It has proven difficult to directly emphasize interrelations without emphasizing Hindu and Muslim identities.' The 'virtual village' circumvents this problem by allowing the visitor to gradually get to know the residents of 'Arampur' through a series of interviews, by wandering around and seeing the sights. One is never presented with a decontextualized view of religion, in isolation.

Gottschalk and Schmalz make a larger hermeneutic point in

their essay, that assumptions about the world in which we live govern the kinds of questions we ask about it. This is reminiscent of Robb's argument concerning the evolving concept of rights and its deployment by Sahajanand and others in the work of agrarian reform. It hardly need be said that the lesson here, that the explanatory narratives that result from scholarly inquiry should not be read independent of the complex intellectual-cum-institutional-cum-epistemological structures that produce and enable them, is one that Edward Said urged upon the Western academy nearly three decades ago. Gottschalk and Schmalz's answer to this lesson is twofold: first they foreground the problem of their 'authority' as Western academics as a 'perspectivalist' 'teaching moment', based upon which students (and teachers) are prompted to reflect not only on the designers' inherited biases, whether conscious or unconscious, but also on their own—perhaps more raw—assumptions as they attempt to come to grips with 'the other' that confronts them on their computer screens; second they relinquish control of the camera, and the 'virtual village', to the inhabitants of 'Arampur', so as to begin to hear and see them on their own terms. This latter move is only a momentary 'turning of the tables', true, but a valuable one nonetheless, not least because it allows us—as viewers—to see ourselves (and the designers) through new eyes. Thus Gottschalk and Schmalz cut a postmodern escape from the thicket of deconstructionist irony.

It is partly in this reflexive spirit that the final section of the volume is presented to the reader. The academic world that we, the authors, inhabit is an immensely powerful and privileged one, even if it occasionally finds itself under siege. In order to fully appreciate the fruits of our intellectual labors, it is necessary to be cognizant of not simply the power of the institutions that stand behind us, but the enormous power of the institutions, and governments, that stand behind them. And we must also be cognizant of the long years of individual and collective labor that went into shaping those institutions and governments. The chapter on 'South Asian Studies at Virginia' seeks to do precisely this work. Together with Philip McEldowney's bibliography, it constitutes a professional (auto)-biography of Walter Hauser; but this individual story is also emblematic of an important

chapter of the larger, collective institutional biography that all 'Asianists' working in the West—even the West in the East, and especially in the USA—possess. In a sense, this section of *Speaking of Peasants* may be read as a coda to the obligatory first footnote or preface that distinguishes much scholarly writing, concerning the funding agencies and institutional support that made such writing possible. As such, the hope is that it will afford a more thoughtful reading of the intellectual projects on display in the volume. It is also a way of affirming the obvious, namely, that without the institutionalization of Asian Studies, and South Asian Studies as its most lively theoretical and methodological corner, and without the generosity of spirit that distinguished the generation of scholar-builders to which Walter belonged and which made such institutionalization possible, the American academic world would be a flat, dull, and colorless place to work.

NOTES

1. Table C-1, *Census of India 1991*, Part B19(F)—Economic Tables, and Part II B—Primary Census Abstract. Portions of the Indian census may be viewed online at <<http://www.censusindia.net/cendat/index.html>>.
2. 'Urban' and 'rural' are, of course, terms that denote the two ends of a spectrum. Indian 'towns' are defined as 'places with a municipal corporation, municipal area committee, town committee, notified area committee, or cantonment board'—as well as 'places having 5,000 or more inhabitants, a density of not less than 1,000 persons per square mile (390 per sq km), pronounced urban characteristics, and at least three fourths of the adult male population employed in pursuits other than agriculture.' John F. Long, David R. Rain, and Michael R. Ratcliffe, 'Population Density vs. Urban Population: Comparative GIS Studies in China, India, and the United States', paper presented in session S68 on 'Population Applications of Spatial Analysis Systems (SIS)' at the International Union for the Scientific Study in Population Conference, Salvador, Brazil, 18-25 August, p. 6.
3. *Census of India Online* <http://www.censusindia.net/results/wrk_statement2.html>, 'Statement 2—Total workers (main + marginal) and their categories—India: 2001 (Provisional)'.

4. Over seven million cultivators and agricultural labourers were classed as 'urban' in the 2001 census.
5. I attempt an answer to this question in *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Gandhi, Marx and Charan Singh: Class and *Gemeinschaft* in Peasant Mobilization*

Harold A. Gould

When Mahatma Gandhi returned to India in 1915 from his long sojourn in South Africa, he was a man with a revolutionary idea but no political vehicle through which he could put it into practice. That idea, of course, was Satyagraha, the application of the concept of *ahimsa* (whose conceptual roots lay in both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions) to political action. The logical setting for promulgating his doctrine was the Indian National Congress, the only major political organization in India which was under the control of local leaders. However, the Indian National Congress, since its inception in 1885, had, up to the point where Gandhi entered the Indian political scene, failed to evolve an ideology and mobilization strategy capable of generating a genuinely mass-based political movement to cut across the vast congeries of cultures, nationalities, castes, classes, and religions into which the people of India were subdivided. While not exerting a negligible influence on British policies toward India, Congress had remained essentially an instrumentality of the country's urban and professional classes. It seemed reluctant to go beyond trying to exert 'gentlemanly persuasion' on the colonial power in the form of resolutions urging increased scope for native participation in the political process.

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True, there were times when Congress immersed itself in real political agitation of sufficient magnitude to put the Raj on the defensive, as during the furore over the Partition of Bengal in 1905. But such confrontations were rare and of comparatively short duration. Jawaharlal Nehru, in fact, had scoffingly characterized the pre-Gandhian Indian National Congress as essentially a 'debating society'¹¹

Once he achieved a dominant position in the Indian National Congress, Mahatma Gandhi successfully transformed it into a mass-based organization able to translate his ideology into political action on the grand scale. The main reason he was able to make this transition was Gandhi's imaginative invention and manipulation of symbols that resonated in the minds and hearts of Indians from all walks of life. Especially important in this regard was the ability of Gandhi's charisma and symbolic creativity to draw the country's peasantry into the political arena and persuade them that their increasingly vocal demands for social and economic justice would be fostered by the political party in whose name the Mahatma spoke. To achieve this connectedness with the country's rural masses, Gandhi essentially took on the persona of a political *sadhu*. It was an imagery that successfully captured the imagination of so-called *sadharan janata* (ordinary folk) in the countryside whose social consciousness was pervaded by the morality and mythology of rustic Hinduism.

This was a fundamentally important linkage not merely because it was the way political discourse had always been expressed in the *dehat*. It was also fundamentally important at this juncture—from the end of World War I into the 1920s—in Indian political history because there were pockets of agrarian unrest simmering in many parts of the subcontinent. These had been generated by fluctuating economic conditions in the aftermath of the war, as well as by social stress and the country's various agrarian problems. These 'contradictions', in Marxist parlance, were always present in India's caste-structured, rigidly hierarchical social system. But they were especially significant in the early stages of the transition from East India Company rule to the establishment of the Raj. In their pursuit of land revenues to finance the imperial enterprise, the British steadily undermined the stability of the traditional agrarian systems (i.e. the *jajmani-*

like interdependence between landholding elite-pure castes, cultivator castes, artisans and menial-impure castes) by commodification of land which then changed hands in response to market forces.²

The rapid acceleration of modernity intensified the processes of class differentiation. By the time Gandhi came onto the scene, however, they had still not reached the level of 'class-conscious' conflict that would have met the criteria for class formation adumbrated by Marx. (That would come later and only then for a very specified period of time, as we shall see.) On the contrary, the socio-political eruptions that had thus far occurred had few universal features; they were confined within the administrative and cultural ambit of princely states and regional territories directly under the suzerainty of the Raj. In terms of political expression, their ideologies and mobilization styles displayed a mélange of both 'modern' and nativistic or chiliastic characteristics. This ambiguity played into the Gandhians' hands, of course, by enabling the Mahatma's symbolisms to resonate with traditional imagery, such as *Ram Raj*, which had historically legitimized collective action among the peasantry.

There were many pockets of agrarian discontent of this half-way-house variety in every part of India that may be characterized as simmering insurrections waiting to happen, ripe to be catalysed by higher-order organization with political legitimacy. Thus, when Gandhi entered the picture there was social unrest everywhere and he had a mix of symbolic material with which to address it. Equally important, from the standpoint of agrarian radicalism, there were, despite the verticalities of regional cultural diversity, some basic structural properties which the various agrarian systems throughout the country shared. By whatever vernacular name they were designated, there were 'landlords' who owned and/or controlled most of the land; there were partially or wholly tenureless cultivators (*kisans*) who grew the crops on modest plots of land which they rented from or sharecropped for these land-controllers; and there were landless labourers who performed the most menial agricultural tasks for pittances. And tensions always existed between them at the grass-roots level.

These 'class-categories' closely approximated the traditional

caste hierarchy of elite, backward and scheduled castes, which added continuity and legitimacy to their antipathies. And with the growing commoditization of land, wide fluctuations in the market economy, the frenzied pursuit of revenue by the colonial government, and the equally frantic pursuit of rents by landlords in order to stay ahead of government revenue demands, these differing relationships to the means of production and the sources of power, all against the background of escalating nationalism, everywhere provided ample bases for political confrontations.

Through Gandhi, Congress had successfully established a political image that quickly encompassed the entire subcontinent. The party was able to make major inroads into the peasantry through the 1920s and early 1930s by taking advantage of existing patterns of agrarian unrest. As a national organization, it could provide local and regional grass-roots peasant agitations with a body of organizational and ideological raw material upon which local peasant leaders could draw. Gandhi, as noted, with his 'political-holy-man' style, functioned as the role model for this scalar amplification of agrarian ferment.

The problem for both Congress and the kisan agitations during this Gandhian phase, as it turned out, was that the overarching goals of the two were not wholly congruent. The former were groping for ways to move the Freedom Movement from the parlour to the streets. The latter were groping for ways to call attention to their economic plight. The former's agenda was primarily political—building a national consensus against the perpetuation of British rule—and only nominally economic. The latter's agenda was primarily socio-economic—achieving social and economic justice—and 'political' only in the sense of wanting to arouse as much public support as possible for agrarian reform. For the peasantry, their struggles were driven by implicit class concerns (kisans versus landlords), even though at this stage of their struggle, little more than incipient 'class-consciousness' had as yet crystallized. For the Congress, their struggle was not only lacking a class thesis but indeed was antithetical to it. Under Gandhi, the Congress *modus operandi* was to incite so-called non-violent resistance to the Raj wherever possible by co-opting whatever peasant restiveness was 'out there' regardless of its class/caste locus. Once co-opted, however, the peasantry

were dissuaded from pursuing any class-specific (i.e. anti-landlord) interests they might have and instead urged to focus their energies on supporting Congress's nationalist agenda. The message of the Gandhi-led Congress to the peasantry was that they were made for each other as long as the peasantry eschewed class conflict in favour Gandhi's concept of 'trusteeship'.³

As a prelude to our analysis of this pivotal aspect of Indian political development at the start of the inter-war years, it is interesting to see how the developing convergence between peasant and non-cooperator was perceived by those who were on the spot. A letter written by J.C. Faunthorpe, the Commissioner of Lucknow District, to the Chief Secretary of UP on 14 January 1921, illustrates official perceptions of what was taking place. Having returned from home leave, he declares:

I am not well informed on the history of the non-cooperation movement, but I have formed the opinion that the non-cooperators, finding their efforts to stir up trouble among students and the general public unsuccessful, had to look round for some more promising field for their operations . . . They have succeeded in stirring up the cultivators of Oudh to a state of considerable excitement because the cultivators have in many cases considerable grievances against the landlords.⁴

Although accurately depicting the magnitude of agrarian unrest in Awadh at this time, and even hinting at the disparity between the motives of the parties involved, Faunthorpe's conception of cause and effect was too simplistic. Nehru understood the situation better. While he saw that non-cooperation was 'reaching the remotest village', he also realized that Congress was by no means the instigator of agrarian unrest. While *Swaraj* 'was an all-embracing word to cover everything', he wrote, 'the two movements—non-cooperation and the agrarian—were quite separate, though they overlapped and influenced each other greatly in our province', and indeed everywhere else as well.⁵

At the grass-roots interface between these two streams of political ferment there was by no means either an identity of ideological intent, or clarity as to who was co-opting whom. This came out clearly in the famous Bardoli satyagraha of 1928 that followed a number of what Dhanagare calls 'small-scale dress rehearsals' that 'involved only local grievances'. These

were the Champaran movement of 1917, the Kheda satyagraha of 1918, the Ahmedabad mill workers' strike of 1918, and the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919. These were 'the chief landmarks in Gandhi's preparation for a massive but non-violent anti-imperialist struggle throughout the length and breadth of the country'.⁶

What is important about them, particularly as prelude, is that each (except for the Rowlatt agitation) was an event with distinct economic overtones which the Gandhian Congress tried to transform into a predominantly political expression of its nationalist agenda. In each instance, Dhanagare rightly declares: 'More fundamental questions relating to land control and antagonistic class relations, whether in Champaran district of Bihar or in the Kheda district of Gujarat, were carefully left untouched by Gandhi'.⁷ One major result was that by playing down the class implications of these situations, Gandhi, in order to maximize support and public visibility for his cause, ended up implicitly favouring the economic interests of the landholding classes (and thus of the higher castes to which most of them belonged) at the expense of the middle and lower castes (as tenants and menials) who suffered greatly at the hands of the landholding classes. At whatever point his agitations threatened to unleash the forces of class-conflict (i.e. address the economic inequities inherent in the structure of India's agrarian systems), Gandhi would back down, 'compromise with the authorities (and) . . . terminate the movement just when it began to gather momentum'.⁸ Under these conditions, understandably, ' . . . the main support to Gandhi came primarily from the better-off sections of the Indian peasantry'.⁹ What induced the less privileged sections of rural society to remain loyal to Gandhi was not any significant improvement in living standards or a right to the unencumbered enjoyment of the fruits of their labour, but his charismatic status as a political saint and his appeal to their religious sensibilities.¹⁰

The Bardoli satyagraha illustrates these points well, because in the end the principal beneficiaries of this movement were the local Patidar megacaste in that *taluk*, who were the largest group of landholders and, along with Brahmins and Banias, among the richest. Their complaint had nothing to do with

economic exploitation, rack-renting or absence of secure tenures. It pertained to increased revenue demands which the government had instituted following a land reassessment in 1925. Revenue demand, which had been steadily rising for years anyway, underwent a further jump of 30 per cent following the resettlement. This set-off protest and resistance among the Patidars and other elite castes which escalated into a 'no-rent' campaign. Patidars took the lead because they were the numerically dominant caste, because, as landholders, it was predominantly their ox that was being gored, and because several Patidars had participated in Gandhi's South African satyagrahas. They were schooled in the technique and, of course, had special entree to the Mahatma himself. In this sense, Gandhi and the Bardoli Patidars were made for each other.

There is another sense in which Gandhi's choice of the Patidars fitted well into his evolving style of political mobilization. By focusing on a category of 'victims of the system' whose grievance was revenue demanded by government and not rent demanded by 'landlords', he was recruiting into the Congress those sections of rural society who would be the most amenable to the party's nationalist agenda—those most willing to make the Raj the target of their non-violent resistance to 'tyranny' because it was in their economic interest to do so, rather than others whose economic interests lay in demanding major structural changes in the agrarian system itself.

Patidars and other high castes in Bardoli were themselves essentially landlords who exploited the labour of lower castes. Dhanagare notes that in Gujarat there was what we would call today a racialist distinction drawn between *Ujla lok* (the fair complexioned upper castes) and *Kaliparaj lok* (the dark lower castes, untouchables, tribal people, etc.). This cleavage was particularly significant in Gujarat where a high proportion of the peasant population was owner-cultivators. There were proportionately fewer 'intermediary classes' such as sub-proprietors and cultivating tenants and thus proportionately more landless agricultural labourers than in many other parts of India. The gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' was therefore especially pronounced.¹¹ Most of the latter (especially the *Dublas*) lived in virtual slavery, so much so that Gandhi himself pressured

the land-controlling castes in Bardoli to pursue his 'constructive programme' for improving the lot of the downtrodden sections of rural society as a condition of his supporting the no-rent agitation. However, while he did successfully induce his Patidar followers to undertake some improvements in the lot of the *Kaliparaj lok*, structural change in the underlying agrarian system formed no part of the final settlement between the government and the peasantry.

It will be recalled that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel rose to national prominence on the wings of the Bardoli satyagraha. He and Kunvarji Mehta of the Patidar *Yuvak Mandal*, were major forces in developing the no-rent campaign and then melding Patidar class interests with the Gandhi-ized Congress. It was 'Kunvarji Mehta and other workers of the Patidar Mandal', according to Dhanagare who 'formed a cadre of leaders at the grass-roots level, and were mainly responsible for forging alliances with the *Kaliparaj lok*'. Otherwise, these segments of rural society might have been mobilized as class enemies of the Patidars. This linkage was achieved by conveying 'the new urban and elitist political culture' to the 'politically docile (tribals, untouchables, and other backwards in Bardoli) in a moral and religious idiom'.¹²

Dhanagare concludes that the Bardoli satyagraha 'symbolized agrarian class alliance against the government . . . only insofar as it did not give rise to consciousness along class lines, and only to the extent that it did not disturb the traditional social structure.' (The emphasis here is mine.) The aim was to establish a ' . . . *gemeinschaft* solidarity among the various castes and classes' as an anti-imperialist device. Finally: 'The whole range of agrarian or peasant movements of the Gandhian variety must be seen partly as an ingredient of Gandhi's power politics and partly as an instrument used by rich and middle-caste peasants to maintain their power in the rural hierarchy while collaborating with the urban bourgeoisie and middle-class intellectuals who led the national movement.'¹³

This process of selective co-optation and ideological manipulation is, key to understanding how Congress interfaced with agrarian unrest in the Gandhian phase—'roped the peasantry in', as it were—but then risked losing its hold on the peasantry

had the Congress Socialist faction not forced the party leadership to at least tacitly adopt a semblance of a Marxist orientation to peasant mobilization.

BABAS, NON-COOPERATORS AND REVOLUTIONARIES

Let us turn now to agrarian unrest among the Awadh and Bihar peasantries. As elsewhere in India, political dissent from the turn of the century through the rise of the Gandhi-ized Congress typically had taken on nativistic overtones, a sort of class warfare pursued in the name of *Raja Ram* instead of Karl Marx, against the economic rapacity of taluqdars, and zamindars mainly of the elite Brahman, Rajput (Thakur), Bania and Bhumihar castes.

Since 1919, the Awadh and Bihar countrysides had fallen into forms of political turmoil which the landed elite and many government officials perceived as threatening to the social order. A typical array of economic and demographic factors were feeding into this turmoil.

Agricultural prices were experiencing serious oscillations at a time when population was rapidly increasing and land values were consequently rising. To take advantage of this inflationary situation, the land-monopolizing taluqdari and zamindari classes (mainly Thakurs, Brahmans, Banias, and Kayasthas, plus high-status Muslims and a smattering of castes later known as 'Backwards') were searching for ways to increase their rents and cesses. The pressures they put on their tenants in pursuit of the quest for income-maximization threatened even further the already shaky hold which the cultivating peasantry enjoyed on the land they tilled. Simultaneously, market conditions were causing the prices of the coarser food grains consumed by the tenantry and the landless laborers to rise more rapidly than those of the refined food grains consumed by the elite. Such distress at a time when the country was experiencing rapid and disruptive social change intensified the normal distrust which the peasantry felt toward the pattern of feudal relations in the countryside. Prior to these latter day market- and demographic-driven aberrations there had existed for a long time a modicum of stability in the rural social order, exemplified by the pattern of religiously sanctified *jajmani* relationships to which we alluded

in discussing the background of the Bardoli satyagraha. However, even by the turn of the century, as far as Awadh at least was concerned, factors were at work which laid the foundations for social destabilization. By this time, declares Siddiqi, 'the agrarian structure itself stood changed . . . as a result of proprietary mutations, the intrusion of the *thekedar* (contractor or long-term lease-holder of the land), the impoverishment of small zamindars and the changing nature of the landlord's relationship with the under-proprietors and the tenantry. These were fundamental social changes which in the course of time came to upset the rather precarious relationships of class and caste and, finally, also of power within the colonial framework'.¹⁴

Emergent post-war conditions simply exacerbated this situation until it led to grass-roots political upheavals throughout the region. As Siddiqi puts it, 'By 1920 . . . the development of social tension in Oudh had taken the form of an economic conflict between the different interests of the agrarian classes'.¹⁵ In other words, prototypical class warfare had broken out and was playing a tangible role in political relations between landlords and tenants in a region where tenancy constituted the most pervasive form of economic dependency and social insecurity.

In Awadh particularly, *kisan* uprisings produced an interesting grass-roots leadership whose imagery and *modus operandi* had, as suggested, drawn for political expression upon precedents contained in the rich folk mythologies. Its leaders presented themselves to the rural masses as *babas* or what may be termed 'political sadhus'. They legitimized their political messages by infusing them with a religious content and presenting themselves, the 'messengers', in the saffron garb of holy men. In this sense, the Awadh agitators stood a cut above the oppressed sections in Bardoli taluq in their degree of organizational sophistication and 'class consciousness'. The reason, of course, is that the former were more socially advanced than the landless labourers of Bardoli; the Awadh tenantry were middle-caste cultivators (Kurmis, Koeris, Yadavs, Muraos), in terms of traditional status comparable to the Patidars, with some measure of ethnic pride and self-awareness and with strong emotional attachment to the land they tilled, despite the fact that (unlike the Patidars) they lacked secure title to it. When the Gandhians 'discovered' them,

the tenantry already had upward-evolving proto-organizational resources to interface with the downward devolving Congress political apparatus.

Babas sprang up throughout the Lucknow, Faizabad, and Gorakhpur divisions of Awadh during this period.¹⁶ They rallied large gatherings of peasants who flocked to their standard with cries of *Ram Chandra ki jai* and *Sita-Ram ki jai* and with readings from Tulsi Das's *Ramayana*. Employing the traditional panchayat as their structural model, they organized so-called Kisan Sabhas to articulate grievances with the landlords and press for reforms in the agrarian system.

The most famous of these early political babas was Sridhar Balwant Jodhpurkut, born in Neemuch district of Bombay Presidency.¹⁷ He became an *awara* (wanderer) at age thirteen, and found his way to Fiji at eighteen where he changed his name to Ram Chandra Rao in order to disguise his Maharashtrian Brahman origins (because they were politically suspect). He returned to India in 1904 to avoid prosecution for his agitational activities among the indentured workers in Fiji, became a sadhu in Ayodhya in 1909, settled at Pratapgarh in 1919, and, in the words of the police records of the day, 'almost immediately started spreading disaffection among the peasantry'. By the time he reached Awadh, Ram Chandra had a political agenda and a wealth of experience for carrying it out. Significantly, Jodhpurkut married a woman of the Kurmi caste (one of the major middle castes of this region) and commenced calling himself 'Baba Ram Chandra'. Moving around the region with a copy of the *Ramayana* under his arm, he blended readings from this epic, which combined allegorical denunciations of both the Raj and the landlords, with appeals to the peasantry to act in concert against their exploiters. A legend in his own time, Baba Ram Chandra became the model *par excellence* of the indigenous peasant politician. He was a major force in broadening the political impact of the first formal Kisan Sabha that had been established in 1917 by Jhingury Singh and Sahdev Singh at an underproprietorship village in Gorakhpur district named Rure. V.N. Mehta, the Deputy Commissioner of Pratapgarh district, and a native official with strong sympathies for the plight of the peasantry, includes in his famous *Report* of 11 November, 1920,

an excellent depiction of the elemental conceptualization which went into the formation of this prototypical peasant body of Rure. Inaccurately attributing its founding to Baba Ram Chandra, he states:

The people of Rur[e] were suffering from no disabilities nor had they any grievances. The cause of the selection of Rur[e] as the headquarters of the Sabha is rather interesting. When Rama and Laxmana attended Sita's *Swayamvara*, Tulidas described them as follows: "In the assembly of the Rajas the two brothers shone like two moons in the galaxy of stars. [Raj Samaj Virajat Rure]"

"Rur[e]" means beautiful. "Rure" was constructed to mean "in Rur village."¹⁸

It was into this rural ferment that the Congress entered, much as it had done in Bardoli and elsewhere. As noted above, however, differences in agrarian structure between Bardoli and Awadh made for differences in how it entered the fray even though from a doctrinal standpoint the approach to the class aspects of the situation was essentially the same.

Because land-control in Awadh was predominantly in the hands of taluqdars and zamindars who, on the one hand, were strongly allied with the Raj and, on the other, had a reputation for rapacity which even the colonial authorities recognized was to be a catalyst for tenant unrest, the non-cooperators made the rent-paying tenantry instead of the revenue-paying land-controllers (as in Gujarat) the principal target of their mobilization efforts. Clearly this posed problems that were much more delicate than in Bardoli. The dilemma was how to cope with a multi-tiered agrarian stratification system where the principal mobilizational target was a class composed of 'lower' castes who were already in rebellion against the party's preferred coalitional target, the revenue-paying class above them, without violating the party's rejection of class warfare. This dilemma haunted the Congress throughout its pre-Independence efforts in many parts of the Hindi belt, not only in Awadh, to harness agrarian unrest to the nationalist cause.

As elsewhere in rural India, the non-cooperation movement initially appealed to broad spectra of the peasantry not because the Congress was in sympathy either with the aims or tactics of

those sections of rural society who sought confrontation with the landholding classes in the name of social and economic justice. They emphatically were not. Indeed the Congress leadership seemed to lack much insight into the class aspects of the agrarian social order, mainly because most of them were from urban and small town backgrounds. Their identification with Congress came from the fact that in the eyes of the peasantry Congress was synonymous with Mahatma Gandhi. To the *sadharan janata* Gandhi himself, not his message, was the message. He was seen as the penultimate political saint, a grand-scale holy man whose *darshan*, purported supernatural powers, and promise of *swaraj* was all that mattered. He was a larger than life manifestation of the political sadhus who were already driving the kisan movement. His ubiquitous presence in every corner of Indian society infused struggles against landlords with a millenarian energy and conferred upon such struggle an overarching legitimacy, even though Gandhi himself had never intended to confer any legitimacy whatsoever upon the votaries of class confrontation.

Shahid Amin, in his masterly study of Mahatma Gandhi's impact in Gorakhpur district in 1921, clearly documents this:

... what people thought of the Mahatma were projections of the existing patterns of people's beliefs about the 'worship of the worthies' in rural north India. As William Crooke has observed, the deification of such 'worthies' was based among other things, on the purity of the life they led and on 'approved thaumaturgic powers'. The first of these conditions Gandhi amply satisfied by all those signs of saintliness which a god-fearing rural populace was prone to recognize in his appearance as well as his public conduct. As for thaumaturgy, the stories [which] attribute to him magical and miraculous powers which, in the eyes of villagers nurtured on the lore of Salim Chishti and Sheikh Burhan, put him on a par with other mortals on whom peasant imagination had conferred godliness.¹⁹

There are two senses in which the Gandhi-factor was important to the Kisan Sabha movement. The revivalist atmosphere he generated enabled the numerous babas who sprang up throughout the countryside to wrap themselves in the symbolic mantle of both baba and non-cooperator. 'The "power of a name" was evident again in Awadh in the first years of the 1920s', declares

Gyanendra Pandey, as both Baba Ram Chandra and Gandhi came to 'acquire an extraordinary appeal'. Ram Chandra appeared to develop a 'multiple personality,' says Pandey: '... he was reported to be in Bahraich on the 5th [January 1921] by Nelson, to be in Bara Banki at the same time by Grant, and in Fyzabad by Peters.'²⁰

The other sense in which the Gandhi factor was important is that it drew Congress field workers toward the kisan movement despite the misgivings of Gandhi and other high ranking, urbanized party magnates about its class warfare proclivities. Baba Ram Chandra led a delegation of 500 followers from Gorakhpur to Allahabad in early June of 1920 (allegedly to coincide with a holy bath at Prayag on a *Saptami* day) in an effort to broaden the movement by putting it in touch with 'Mahatma Gandhi and other educated urban leaders'. They were unable to meet Gandhi and Nehru disparaged Baba Ram Chandra's 'lack of a programme'. However, in Kumar's words, 'For three days the marchers propagated their woeful tales in the city.' And most important, I think, 'They came in touch with the U.P. Kisan Sabha people who arranged for their stay.' Despite this, however, 'The urban leadership was... somewhat reluctant to take up the cause of the Pratapgarh peasants.' But in the end it was agreed that P. D. Tandon, Gauri Shankar Mishra, K.K. Malaviya, and Nehru would visit their villages.²¹

This was a breakthrough that helped pave the way for the development of a significant interface between the class-driven concerns of the tenantry and the nationalist concerns of the Congress. It would lead to the incorporation of the agrarian question (i.e. a class agenda) into the designated ideological tasks of the Congress, at first only tentatively, indeed ambiguously, and then much more decisively once the Congress Socialists entered the political picture in the mid-1930s as an organized force. At this time, however, the effect was to catalyse the interplay between the babas in the Kisan Sabha cells scattered throughout Awadh and the local-level operatives in Congress who came in contact with the peasantry at the grass-roots level. It soon led to attempts to create Congress-sponsored peasant organizations designed to encompass and co-opt the spontaneous Kisan Sabhas and exploit their political energy for the party's

benefit.²² The manner in which this occurred, however, exposes the daunting issue of how this could be accomplished in a manner that would reconcile the Gandhian preoccupation with national unity and, the tenantry's materialistic preoccupation with radical change in the agrarian system.

In 1920, two separate Kisan Sabhas were established within the ambit of Congress. The *Oudh Kisan Sabha*, created by Jawaharlal Nehru, embodied the younger, more radical section of the party that wanted to follow a class thesis in its approach to peasant mobilization. The other, established by Purshottamdas Tandon, represented the more conservative wing of the U.P. Congress that supported Gandhi's reluctance to endorse any type of peasant protest that threatened to radically disturb the agrarian *status quo*. The conflict that developed between these two factions resulted, by 1921, in the Congress leadership trying to re-establish party unanimity on agrarian issues by creating a new, consolidated U.P. Kisan Sabha with Motilal Nehru as its president. The Tandon faction lost the most in this transition because Motilal's son, Jawaharlal, and his younger Marxist-oriented followers, gained the upper hand in the new sub-party, and used it to pit the tenantry against the taluqdars and zamindars.²³

In this 'proto-political' stage of Congress's entree into the countryside, many if not most of the party workers who were championing the party's cause at the grass-roots level were not easily distinguishable in their demeanor, dress, and educational level from their non-Congress counterparts. In Faizabad District, for example, there were two highly active Congress field workers, Kedar Nath Arya and Deo Narain Mishra, who exemplified this blurred line. After one of Deo Narain's agitational escapades, the Commissioner of Faizabad Division, was prompted to declare to his boss, Sir Harcourt Butler: 'Deo Narain is a person of at best unbalanced mind if not actually tinged with insanity.'²⁴

Despite the fact that Congress had come round to some kind of organized attempt to co-opt the kisan movements, and that the presence of their grass-roots workers had consequently increased throughout the countryside, strains and disenchantment between Congress and the proto-political kisan leaders soon began to surface. Partly this was because after 1921 . . . the

Congress interest had shifted away from the rural areas'.²⁵ It was also because the U.P. Kisan Sabha's more radical leadership was never able to completely free itself from the constraints imposed by the powerful Gandhian faction. They, of course, continued to take a dim view of class-conflict and did whatever they could to inhibit it.

These divisions opened the way for the Raj to step in and forcefully crush this initial round of peasant unrest in Awadh. As Pandey puts it:

By the winter of 1921-2, the peasant movement in Awadh had overcome many, though by no means all, of its own traditionalist limitations. Yet, its localism and isolation remained. To get over these it needed an ally among other anti-imperialist forces in the country. But the chief candidate for this role, the party of the growing urban and rural petty bourgeoisie [i.e., Congress], had turned its back on the peasant movement long before that time.²⁶

FINAL PHASE: BIRTH AND DEATH OF THE CLASS THESIS

An eventual merger of sorts between non-cooperation and agrarian revolution finally did occur for a limited period. But more than a decade had passed before both sides were ready for each other. This came with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. It was now that the younger generation of Congressmen who had imbibed Marxism and Fabianism in their student days abroad or on the campuses of Banaras Hindu University, Allahabad University, Lucknow University, and Kashi Vidyapith had emerged as a force to be reckoned with. This new breed included Jawaharlal Nehru, Acharya Narendra Dev, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Raghukul Tilak, Sarvjit Lal Varma, and many others. They had been especially effective in UP and Bihar where many young leaders had grown up and had cut their agitational teeth under the tutelage of some of the more noteworthy political sadhus who had built followings among the peasantry in their home districts.

Acharya Narendra Dev is a type-case of this maturation process. The asthmatic son of a rich, Arya Samajist merchant in

Faizabad city, he had become radicalized while a law student at Banaras Hindu University, had returned to the district to become a follower of Lallanji, a founder of the Congress peasant strategy in Faizabad (through his association and identification with Deonarain, Kedar Nath and other rustic revolutionaries), and in turn became one of the founders and principal intellectuals of the Congress socialist movement by the 1930s. Similarly in Bihar, Hauser has shown how the fusion of the cultural, political, and agrarian was quintessentially expressed in the remarkable career of Swami Sahajanand, which was then confirmed at the political level through the formal coming together of the Kisan Sabha and the Congress Socialist Party upon the founding of the CSP at Patna in 1934.²⁷

The turn toward more explicit and aggressive class-conflict actually began in 1930 in the United Provinces and Bihar. Ironically, it occurred in the context of what was perhaps Gandhi's most spectacularly successful nation-wide non-co-operation campaign which included the 'Salt Satyagraha'. It also drew economic impetus from the impact of the Great Depression on rural society, and ideological inspiration from Nehru's identification with what he perceived to be the revolutionary dynamism he witnessed in the Soviet Union during a visit he made there in 1927.

In this period, the better off sections of the peasantry (the middle caste cultivators) were the worst affected by the Depression because they produced for the market, and market prices for food grains were on a roller-coaster. Increasingly unable to either pay their rents or repay the loans they owed to landlords they were ripe for class-based mobilization. And the landlords, in their turn, facing their own financial difficulties, pressed ever harder for settlement of arrears for both. 'By 1932', says Dhanagare, 'only 25 per cent of short-term and 7 per cent of long-term loans had been repaid, and lands therefore passed steadily into the hands of creditors (landlords and moneylenders) as mortgages were foreclosed.'²⁸

In the face of these circumstances it proved relatively easy to involve the tenantry in a 'no-rent' campaign against the taluqdars and zamindars. Technically it was initiated by Rafi Ahmad Kidwai in Rae Bareilly district with Motilal Nehru's blessings.

Jawaharlal Nehru had kicked the campaign off with public addresses around the district urging tenants to withhold their rents from landlords, and both landlords and tenants to refuse to pay their taxes to government. This rather mixed message was consistent with the cleavage that persisted in Congress over the class issue, because it placated the Gandhians by offering the landlords as well as the tenantry the chance to commit themselves to the nationalist cause. When the landlords expressed their 'loyalty' to the Raj by paying their land revenues while the tenantry expressed their commitment to the Freedom Movement by refusing to pay rent, this got the Congress socialists off the hook, so to speak, and enabled them to push ahead with their class-struggle agenda. By rendering the 'no-tax' aspect of the agitation moot, 'The "no-tax" campaign boiled down to a "no-rent" campaign.'²⁹ Henceforth, the Gandhian faction could not oppose it on the grounds that it violated their injunction against pitting one indigenous class against another. By their refusal to go along, the taluqdars and zamindars had shown that they were in the pocket of the Raj. This became even more apparent by 1934 after the government encouraged the landlords to form their own party, the National Agriculturalists Party,³⁰ in order to counter the political inroads the Congress socialists were making with the tenantry. For their part, the Congress had employed a class-criterion to accord the middle-caste tenantry of Awadh a structural status equivalent to that which the Patidars occupied in the Bardoli satyagraha. The ultimate standard for recruitment was not so much whether a given class were tenants or landholders, i.e. revenue-payers or rent-payers, as whether or not their economic situation could be exploited for the benefit of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Moreover, all of the developments in the agrarian sector during the first half of the 1930s must be understood in the context of a major change in constitutional structure that was in the wind and would consummate in the Government of India Act of 1935. In many ways, this piece of legislation was the final chapter in the pattern of constitutional reforms that had provided progressively wider scope for native participation in their own governance at both the central and provincial levels of government. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 had created legislative

bodies based on the elective principle and, most importantly, had formally introduced the ethnic factor into Indian electoral politics by creating separate Muslim constituencies. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 had considerably expanded both the size of the electorate and the number of both general and Muslim constituencies. In the United Provinces, a total of 60 open seats were set aside for 'non-Mohammedans' (52 rural and 8 urban) and 29 for 'Mohammedans' (25 rural and 4 urban), plus six 'special' seats for landlords, Christians, and others, and 23 for government nominees. The 1935 Act not only enormously enlarged the size of legislative councils but significantly altered the demographic structure of the electorate, as well as patterns of party participation in elections and government. In India as a whole, the 1935 Act created an electorate of 35 million for legislative assembly seats and 90,000 for legislative council seats. Most importantly, it also facilitated party structured competition for assembly seats and party-structured government by legislative majorities.³¹ In UP the legislative assembly was expanded to 228 seats (140 General and 64 Mohammedan, plus the usual variety of special seats) and the franchise from 3 to 14 per cent.

These changes in constitutional structure paved the way for what was one of the most purely class-based confrontations that has ever occurred in pre-Independence electoral politics. By the time the first election took place under this Act, Congress had

TABLE 1
Agrarian Categories in UP during the 1930s

Agrarian Category	Number	Per cent
Non-cultivating owners	245,789	1.6
Cultivating owners	1,301,389	8.6
Non-cultivating tenants	167,193	1.1
Total rentiers	1,714,372	11.3
Total cultivating tenants	8,618,814	56.8
Total agricultural laborers	3,138,667	20.7

Source: *Census of India 1931: Provincial Tables: United Provinces*. Allahabad: UP Government. (See endnote 23) Adapted from Table 5.1 in Gould 1994.

had almost seven years to draw the tenantry into the fold with its 'no-rent' campaign. The landlords had had three years to organize themselves into a countervailing political organization, the NAP, designed to defend their class interests. But most of all, for the first time in the country's constitutional history, large sections of the middle-castes who in Awadh and Bihar comprised the tenantry, would have the vote. Two social groups with differing relationships to the means of production and power, which through party-structured mobilization had developed a significant measure of class-consciousness, would for the first time confront one another at the ballot box.

The demographics are striking, as Table 1 indicates. Prior to the 1935 constitution, franchise restrictions limited voter eligibility in the UP countryside, primarily to persons in the first four categories (non-cultivating owners and cultivating owners, non-cultivating tenants and total rentiers), i.e. the landholding class, who together constituted at most 22.5 per cent of the agricultural population.³² Small wonder that Congressmen were, on these grounds alone, rarely able to get elected to provincial legislative councils.

After 1935, however, the rules of the game had been radically altered. A huge proportion (numbering 8.6 million, or more than 56 per cent of the rural population) of those towards whom the Kisan Sabha and the Congress socialists had targeted their 'no-rent' campaign, had now been enfranchised. Their presence in the electorate clearly was the difference in the 1937 elections. In the United Provinces, Congress swept to power in 125 of the 140 General constituencies where middle-caste tenants normally outnumbered all other categories combined. By contrast, the landlord party (NAP), whose pool of potential support came primarily from the mostly Brahman, Rajput, Banis, Kayastha, and Khattri landholding section of rural society (the upper 22 per cent) were annihilated, garnering a total of only 8 seats. A similar pattern prevailed in most of the other provinces where the 1935 Act was in force.

Only cross-cutting ethnicity disrupted the class-structuring of the vote in UP in 1937. In the 64 Muslim constituencies, the communal factor predominated, although there was evidence that class-specific economic issues still played some role in the

outcome. The Muslim League, the most outspoken advocate of Muslim separatism, garnered only 33 per cent of the total vote in these constituencies and less than half (27) of the 64 seats, and proportionately more of these in the urban (48.2 per cent) rather than in the rural constituencies (28.7 per cent). Independents won only one less seat (26) than League candidates, while Muslim landlords running on NAP tickets won more than half as many seats (11) in the rural Muslim constituencies as did the League (19).

Thus the foundation for the powerful support which Congress received from the middle-caste cultivators in the United Provinces and Bihar (the heartland of the Hindi Belt) from the 1930s to Independence and thence onward until the mid-1960s was laid when the party augmented the purely *gemeinschaft* style of political mobilization propounded by Mahatma Gandhi with a class thesis. The impetus for this lay with the emerging, younger Congress activists who had come under the sway of Marxist and Fabian doctrines during their university days and consequently were less convinced than the 'fundamentalist' Gandhians that a purely political agenda was a sufficient basis for attracting the less privileged segments of Indian agrarian society. The Gandhians supplied the energy Congress needed to successfully co-opt the rustic Kisan Sabhas (substituting khadi-capped, dhoti-clad 'field workers' for saffron-clad babas), absorb them into the corpus of its own overarching, more sophisticated peasant organization (Kisan Sabha), and culminate the process of class-based agrarian mobilization through the mechanism of a sub-party structure, the Congress Socialist Party, which one might say was specifically tailored for the purpose.

AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The success of the Congress Socialist Party in bringing the UP and Bihar tenants into the Congress fold enabled them, in UP at least, to become the dominant faction in the provincial party.³³ However, that dominance was short-lived, because their doctrinal naiveté got in the way of political practicality, and because of the hostility of the right wing dominated by Sardar Patel to their Marxist orientation. The refusal of leaders like Acharya Narendra

Dev to accept high political office in the UP government handed over control of the party apparatus to their factional opponents.³⁴ The subsequent passage in 1948 by the Patel-dominated national party of an edict banning sub-parties within the organization was specifically aimed at the socialist group and had the desired effect of driving the most militant of the young socialists out of the Congress. Before this happened, however, the socialists had, as far as UP and Bihar were concerned at any rate, successfully committed the Congress Party to a land reform policy whose centre pieces were the elimination of landlordism and the distribution of agricultural land to the tiller. This commitment held even though the Congress socialists as an organized intra-party force were gone, largely due to Nehru who stayed behind, as it were, and shepherded much of the CSP social agenda through Parliament.³⁵ Because of Nehru's intra-party clout, especially from late 1950 after Sardar Patel's death, the Zamindari Abolition Act was passed by the UP Vidhan Sabha in 1951 (and similar legislation was enacted in other provinces), just in time to benefit the Congress in the first General Election held in 1952. From that point on, Yadavs, Kurmis, Jats, Koeris, and other middle or 'Backward' castes, who now, thanks to the Congress, had ownership rights in the lands they had rented from zamindars and taluqdars, became one of the party's most stalwart sources of support at election time. This had been achieved first by co-opting the old, originally nativistic Kisan Sabha movements in the name of Mahatma Gandhi and then, contrary to Gandhi's wishes, gradually transforming the tenantry, for a time at least, into a class bent upon forcing (and indeed eventually achieving) a major restructuring of the agrarian system.

Ironically, the political success of the kisan movement laid the groundwork for the eventual demise of the class thesis that drove it. With the implementation of Zamindari Abolition, the erstwhile tenant's class enemy had been eliminated. For the next fifteen years this fact did not seriously weaken the ties of the middle-castes³⁶ to the Congress, however. There was gratitude for the role that Congress had played in liberating them from the onus of landlordism and enabling them to own their own plots of land. Once they became landowners, however, they were transformed into a conservative force in the countryside

who were resistant to further radical changes in agrarian structure such as collectivization. In the post-taluqdari/zamindari agrarian social order, the middle-caste former tenantry (Yadavs, Kurmis, Jats, Koeris, etc.) shared the status of land-controllers at the individual village level with those sections of the elite castes (in UP primarily Brahmans and Thakurs) who had retained title to the modest plots of land which they themselves cultivated. This emergent conservatism, coupled with the departure of the socialists from the party, cleared the way for Congress to build its post-Independence rural political machine around these new categories of intra-village landholders. This was the key to the party's ability to amass huge majorities in the Lok Sabha and in most of the country's major provincial legislatures until well into the 1960s.

This admixture of loyalty to the Congress as their class benefactor and attachment to the lands they now owned was clearly exemplified by the former tenantry's reaction to the 1948 by-elections in UP. Following their dissolution as a sub-party and subsequent institutionalization as the Socialist Party of India, the UP branch of the party believed that political integrity required their members who currently held seats in the legislative assembly as Congress MLAs to resign and seek a fresh mandate from the people. Thus a series of by-elections were held in 18 UP assembly constituencies commencing in late June of 1948. The most important and dramatic contests occurred in the nine assembly and one legislative council constituencies. The outcome was a disaster for the Socialists. They lost all of these elections by huge margins. Over the ensuing two years, they lost seven of eight by-elections. Even the single seat they won came later after the by-election held on 11 October 1950 to fill the vacancy created in the Muslim General constituency in Faizabad district by the departure of its Muslim League incumbent, Faiyaz Ali Khan, for Pakistan to become that new nation's first Advocate General.

The question is, why did this happen? The answer is that erstwhile tenants no longer had a collective grievance against the existing *status quo*. They had become part of it. These by-elections were conducted under the rules of the 1935 Government of India Act whose eligibility requirements implicitly limited the

franchise to members of the landed and tenant classes. Virtually none of the more than 3 million landless agricultural laborers (mainly from the Scheduled Castes, and who might on these grounds conceivably have been the most amenable to proletarian ideologies) were qualified to vote.

As socialists, the 18 former Congressmen depicted themselves as the true champions of the *kisans*. The reason they gave for leaving the Congress party was that it was dominated by leaders who favoured the rich and would never bring real socialism to India. 'Freedom has been won and now we have to establish Socialism', declared Acharya Narendra Dev. 'Congress cannot perform that task. We have to do it.'³⁶ Although land-reform had not been implemented in 1948, Congress candidates presented themselves to the peasantry as the party which had brought freedom, which had led the fight against agrarian oppression, and would implement promised land reforms.

As the party in power that had indeed ended colonialism, they had assured both the elite castes that they could keep the land they cultivated themselves and the middle-caste tenantry that they would soon own the land they heretofore had rented from the landlords. In the ten constituencies contested in June 1948, Congress received a total of 1,41,096 votes to the Socialists' 47,439, i.e. about 75 per cent of the votes cast. What this means is that under the 1935 Act's franchise rules, Congress received the same proportion of tenant support as it had in 1937. The tenantry as a class had not been permanently radicalized by the Freedom Movement or by the Congress socialists' impact.

What the cultivating elite and middle castes wanted was not the Marxist millennium but that which the tenantry had consistently wanted since the original spontaneous Kisan Sabhas arose in the 1920s: title to the lands they cultivated. Henceforth, the Socialists in all their subsequent manifestations³⁷ struggled to achieve a mass following for democratic socialist agendas that never really materialized. The cultivating peasantry no longer meaningfully responded to their appeals of Marxist-style class conflict. Even after the universal franchise was adopted with the ratification of the 1950 Constitution, the lower or Scheduled Castes never rushed to their standard either. Until the 1980s, the latter remained with the Congress, it had won their allegiance

during the Freedom Movement through Gandhi's untouchability-removal campaigns and had retained their loyalty through 'affirmative action' programmes, democratic decentralization, and inclusion in the party's patronage system. The greatest successes with the class-conflict thesis, and these never on a national scale, were achieved by the various Communist parties in selected parts of India, such as the CPI (ML) in Bengal and Bihar, the CPM and CPI in Bengal and Kerala, and for a time in the late 1940s and early 1950s the Andhra CPI in Telengana.

Once Congress had extruded the Socialists from its ranks and withstood the challenge of the Left to its political authority and legitimacy, it found itself in virtually exclusive control of the political centre. For almost two decades, all the major interest formations (caste, religious, regional) in the country were encompassed and nurtured by what Kothari termed 'the Congress system'.³⁷ One could say that Congress was able for this period of time to be all things to all classes, a vast democratically structured patronage machine which successfully created and distributed material and status resources with sufficient equity to deter defections and organized political challenges by the major interests it served.

While this broad consensus lasted, class-based competition for the material and status resources which Congress controlled gave way to competition on ethnic lines. The so-called 'casteism' that beset Congress once it was transformed from a movement to a political machine concerned with acquiring and remaining in power, reflects this fact. Once Congress had removed the 'class-enemy', viz., the landlords, with zamindari abolition there was no longer any motivation for the former tenantry to maintain class cohesion. They abandoned the 'lateral integration' that facilitated common action and reverted to the 'vertical integration' of caste differentiation. Under the Congress umbrella this became ethnic competition—Yadavs, Kurmis, Jats, or Bhumihars competing against each other, and against Brahmins, Rajputs, and even Chamars as hereditary status groups attempting to maximize their political and economic advantage.

Toward the end of the 1960s, however, changes in the agrarian system were generating new forms of class-consciousness among the middle-caste former tenantry. Now designated Backward

Castes, the middle-castes had consolidated their position as smaller-scale proprietors producing for the market, to an important extent as the principal beneficiaries of the Green Revolution. Growing crops for an increasingly more dynamic market with increasingly more sophisticated technologies, Jats, Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koeris, were beginning to translate their improved economic status into political clout. This was a process that was abetted by a combination of the effects of democratic decentralization (*Panchayati Raj*) and demographic reality. It was in *gaon panchayats* and *block samitis* that Backward castes first discovered that numbers count in electoral politics, and here that they discovered there were fundamental interest-differences between them and the elite castes. At the village level, the higher castes were numerically weaker, but proportionately stronger in economic terms. The average intra-village land-holdings of upper-caste families were normally several times greater than the average holdings per family among the backward castes—who, however, vastly outnumbered Brahmins, Thakurs, Kayasthas and Vaishyas in most villages. In the village the elite caste households, therefore, behaved as much like landlords as cultivators; they had high ritual status; they had surplus land to rent; they had more money with which to buy political access. Moreover, most higher-level Congress politicians were from such backgrounds which created an implicit affinity between them and the most powerful segment of intra-village landholders. Through local-level elections, a type of class cleavage began to appear again, based this time on the status discrepancies between these two types of agricultural proprietors. This gradually percolated upward through the political system, as more and more politicians from the backward castes were able to use the power of ethnic solidarity and numbers to gain access to the halls of legislative power and to positions of power in the party apparatus, and from these vantages challenge the authority of the long-entrenched upper-caste establishments.

This new class-cleavage began to show up at the ballot box commencing with the fourth General Election in 1967. The strength of the Congress in the Lok Sabha declined dramatically in that election. Having won 76 per cent of the parliamentary seats in 1952, 78 per cent in 1957, and 74 per cent in 1962,

their share of seats shrank to 55 per cent in 1967. The Congress had lost power in several provinces mainly because major segments of the old Congress coalition were beginning to carve out separate political identities for themselves. In many of these instances it was the middle-caste cultivators or their structural equivalents who took the first steps. Between 1967 and 1969, Congress governments fell and were replaced by opposition coalitions in Bihar, Haryana, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. The UP case is seminal in this regard because the principal architect of middle-caste 'reclassification' in that state was the Jat leader Charan Singh.

For years, Chaudhuri Saheb, as he was known, had been a persistent spokesman within the UP Congress for the small cultivators whom he regarded as the productive heart of the post-Independence agrarian system. In the 1950s he had alienated Jawaharlal Nehru by vigorously opposing his efforts to introduce 'joint-farming' (a kind of half-way house toward collectivization) as part of his announced determination to achieve a 'socialist pattern of society' for India. He wrote books analysing India's agrarian situation whose main thesis was that small-scale agriculture performed by peasant proprietors, not mechanization and collectivization, was suited to India's man-land ratios. Like Japan, the scarcity of agricultural land in relation to population required labour-intensive methods of cultivation. This could only be achieved by facilitating in every way possible the productivity of peasant farms by cultivators bound by sentiment and secure tenures to their lands and prepared to employ the labour of family members on an intensive basis to cultivate crops. For the problem in India with its huge population and limited amount of agricultural land, Charan Singh declared, was not productivity per worker but productivity per acre. 'Mechanization helps a farmer in cultivating or controlling a large area of land, rather than increasing per acre production (which is what has to be aimed at in India).' The correct policy, therefore, should be to '... emphasize those elements in modern technology which do not displace labour ... and those forms of capital formation which use a great deal of manpower. . .'.³⁸

Charan Singh's formulations regarding the nature of the contemporary Indian agrarian system and the policies which

government should pursue toward it, were essentially an argument for recognizing and institutionalizing the structural position which the cultivating peasantry (the former tenantry and their middle-caste equivalents elsewhere) had, in his opinion, come to occupy in the agricultural economy. In political terms, of course, it was an implicit call for Backward Castes to demand representation in the system of power consonant with their numbers and economic importance. In other words, it was once again a call for class mobilization.

The first breakthrough came following the 1967 general election. The UP Congress failed for the first time to obtain an absolute majority of seats in the legislative assembly and was compelled to scramble for support from independents and splinter groups in order to retain power. At the point where the C.B. Gupta faction representing the old guard seemed to have succeeded in assembling the necessary support, Charan Singh formed his faction of 16 MLAs into a sub-party called the Samyukt Vidayak Dal (SVD) and threatened to secede from the Congress unless the Gupta faction made concessions to his group. Overtly the demands were for a more equitable distribution of cabinet posts, which the SVD claimed had been 'biased' in favour of the Gupta group. Underlyingly this was a coded statement implying that elite castes had received the lion's share of posts at the expense of the middle and lower castes.

When no solution was found, Charan Singh and his SVD faction left the Congress, thus bringing down the government. All the opposition groups then combined with the SVD to form the first non-Congress government UP had ever known. Charan Singh was chosen by the coalition as UP's first non-Congress and first Backward Caste Chief Minister.

The social composition of this opposition coalition reflected the nascent class-differentiation that was taking place. Although it cut across parties and castes, the leadership demonstrated an interest in affording special recognition to the Backward and Scheduled Caste members in their midst. This was clearly reflected in Charan Singh's cabinet selections. The C.B. Gupta cabinet had 8 (73 per cent) elite caste, 2 (18 per cent) middle caste, 1 (9 per cent) lower caste and 1 (9 per cent) Muslim members. In the Charan Singh cabinet there were 6 members

from Upper Castes. But these constituted only 38 per cent of the total because there were also 6 (38 per cent) middle-caste members, 3 (18 per cent) from the lower castes and one (6 per cent) Muslim.

I consider this the breakthrough of the 'reclassification' of the middle castes. From this point, not only in UP but in many other parts of India, the class attributes of the middle-castes became an increasingly self-conscious basis for differential political mobilization. In Karnataka, for example, Devraj Urs initiated a comparable restructuring of the agrarian social order by enabling peasant farmers and labourers outside the megacastes to enter the Congress system instead of leaving it. In the overall, however, the decline of the party has much to do with this process. From the 1970s onward, the upper castes gravitated toward the BJP for reasons that have definite class implications. This trend facilitated the attempts by the V.P. Singh government to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in the 1980s. Middle-castes have provided the principal class-ingredient in the United Front formations that have attempted to stem the rise of the elite caste-driven socio-religious agenda of the Hindu Right. Gradually these processes of class-differentiation have assumed all India proportions that are evolving as I write. Non-Congress governments have become common place in the Indian states and indeed have manifested themselves with increasing frequency at the centre as well. Their political core has almost invariably been class-structured coalitions of ethnically differentiated, middle-range megacastes which like the former tenantry of Oudh have found their strength in numbers, but unlike the former tenantry have been able to augment their demographic weight with real power over the lands they cultivate. The Jats of Haryana, the Jats, Yadavs, and Kurmis of UP, the Yadavs and Kurmis of Bihar, the Kammas and Reddis of Andhra, the Vokkaligas and Lingayats of Karnataka, the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims of Kerala are all instances of non-elite groups whose political behaviour acquired class implications. The same is true of Other Backward groups who have entered the political arena.

Another form of 'post-Marxist' agrarian mobilization that has arisen in various parts of India in response to the increased

'marketization' of the agricultural economy has been termed 'rural unionism' by Dipankar Gupta.⁴⁰ Structurally as well as ideologically, rural unionism differs both from Marxist styles of peasant mobilization and the Charan Singh mode of Backward Caste politicization in that it purports to be 'apolitical'. Instead of appealing to the peasantry as a general class, such movements focus almost exclusively on a single category within the peasantry, the farmers. They function as pressure groups and target specific economic grievances like taxes, electricity rates, and other measures affecting farmers' productivity, prosperity, and labour relations. We have seen that by contrast Charan Singh and others who followed him pursued essentially conventional political agendas. That is, their strategy was to form parties, or factions within existing parties, among Backward Caste communities, for the purpose of achieving systemic power for *kisans* writ large. Their purpose was to infuse non-elite castes if not with a sense of class-solidarity then at least a willingness to politically co-ordinate their pursuit of common interests arising from their relationship to the means of production and the system of power. Through this 'classification' process, the goal was to enable middle-castes in the Hindi belt—Jats, Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris, and Gujars—to parlay their demographic preponderance and productive capabilities in the agricultural economy into a major political force. Their original venues were Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Their coalitions challenged elite caste dominance in the Congress; they formed the heart of V.P. Singh's United Front alliance; they filled the ranks of regional parties which spun off from Congress (and from each other!). Along with Charan Singh, they spawned leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP, Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar, and Devi Lal Singh in Haryana.

Rural unionism in the Hindi belt began to emerge as a new variation of peasant mobilization toward the end of the 1970s. In the Hindi heartland it took the form of an organization called the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). All over the country comparable formations emerged such as Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra and the Rajya Ryota Sangha in Karnataka. The BKU arose as a more or less spontaneous resistance group by Jat farmers in the Haryana village of Kanjhwala who were

angry about the granting of 120 acres of land to the village's Harijans. This in itself indicates the limited range of economic and status interests which the originators represented—viz., non-elite peasant farmers, mainly Jats. It was the organizational talent and charisma of Mahender Singh Tikait, a Jat farmer from western UP, who by the 1980s had transformed the BKU, for a time at least, into a major agrarian force. Gupta refers to this phenomenon as 'narrow unionism' which confines itself to a single category of producers, the farmers. It has rarely engaged in 'vertical outreach' as the more typical kisan parties have done. As Gupta phrases it, 'Like most other unions the BKU is not very sympathetic to the inclusion of demands other than its own.'⁴¹

In terms of social impact, the BKU's style of rural mobilization reached its climax between 1987 and the early 1990s. During that period a number of mammoth gatherings were organized. In March 1987, Tikait organized a *gherao* (sit-in) at Karmukhera power station by 50,000 farmers to protest against electricity rates. Says Gupta, 'The sheer spectacle of all this immediately gave national prominence to both the BKU and to Tikait.'⁴² It was followed by a 'grand show' in Meerut city in which 'tens of thousands' of protesters camped outside the District Collector's office for three weeks without engaging in any violence or disruption.

What was singular about Tikait's unionism is that it was able to reach across caste and communal lines to incorporate Muslims and those members of other castes who fit the definition of farmers. It was also able to be thoroughly non-violent without being 'Gandhian', that is, without engaging in the type of religiosity that would arouse communal sentiments. It could successfully impel huge numbers of supporters to assemble and focus their collective energies on pressuring government over very specific bread-and-butter issues. In this sense, it was at its height penultimately secular. However, in the end, it would seem that the BKU under Tikait's leadership could not sustain its unionist universalism, and edged toward the threshold of politicization. As it did so it began to acquire a casteist and communalist hue. This process commenced when Tikait decided to '... take a more serious interest in elections'⁴³ and came out

in support first of the Janata Party in 1989 and then the BJP in 1991. The latter decision was the most crucial because after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, Muslims were alienated from the BKU. It sacrificed some of its universalistic, apolitical appeal. The process went deeper as the BKU struggled with its own identity—i.e. whether to remain apolitical or adopt more inclusive strategies which made immersion in conventional politics inevitable. In the end, it was Tikait's decision to move back from politicization. But doing so required resort to some other organizational basis for mobilizing support. His solution was to fall back on a 'traditional' social structure. He employed the Jat caste's clan or *khap* structure as '... the central organizing principle'.⁴⁴ The effect of this was to 'parochialize' the BKU, to limit its scope almost exclusively to Jat farmer-cultivators.

This indicates to me the fact that in the culturally multiplex world of Indian society, perhaps more than any other place on earth, no attempts at interest-based mobilization, no matter how 'universalistic' they purport to be, can forever escape enmeshment in the particularizing power of the ethnically structured social formations that prowl the country's democratically structured political arenas. This is a reality which seems not have been lost on the Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra. While manifesting many of the same unionist characteristics as the BKU, its leader, Sharad Joshi, himself neither a Maratha nor a farmer-cultivator but a Brahman intellectual, imparted a political dimension to this organization by defining it as appealing not only to farmer-cultivators, or *kheduts*, but to *shetkaris* a term embracing all persons who work on the land in any capacity—landless labourers, owner-cultivators, or anyone else, regardless of caste. This, of course, suggests, as my own thesis would indicate, a further variation within the corpus of unionizing patterns of mobilization wherein, unlike the BKU, the pursuit of narrowly constructed economic issues can be combined with more conventional class mobilization principles.

Such differences notwithstanding, I think the importance of these formations is that, on the one hand, they further demonstrate the point that 'class mobilization' in India has never been a monolith. Its forms and consequences have reflected

historical time, social context and, indeed, systemic economic factors for the simple reason that in a socio/cultural/political world as large and diversified as India, no single, uniform 'class thesis' ever has provided or ever will provide basis for understanding these processes.

On the other hand, the Backward Caste mobilizational procedures of the Charan Singhs and the unionist mobilization procedures undertaken by the Mahender Singh Tikaits and Sharad Joshis are indicative of how far rationalizing and marketizing tendencies in the Indian economy, and most particularly their impact on the agrarian system, have gone since the inception of the Green Revolution. If Marxism pertains to class mobilization in relation to the 'means of production', then unionism reflects the changes that have taken place in the relationship of agricultural producers to the rapidly burgeoning post-Cold War industrialization and globalization of the Indian economic system.

CONCLUSION

We may conclude that there has never been a single class thesis that can be applied to a world as large and socially complex as India. There have been periods of class-formation in specific places at specific points in time. The Kisan Sabha movements in Oudh and Bihar from the 1920s until Zamindari Abolition, which spawned indigenous leaders like Baba Ram Chandra and Sahajanand, were one such manifestation. The Bardoli satyagraha in Gujarat in the 1920s was another. So were the Moplah Rebellions in Malabar in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even the uprising of 1857 had prototypical class aspects which, I hope to show in a subsequent study, deserve more recognition than they have received. None of these events produced a single class thesis that could be applied to the whole of India. But there have been certain common threads that have run through all the manifestations of agrarian unrest that have occurred in India at least in modern times. Caste hierarchies have everywhere correlated with differing relationships to the means of production. Land controllers have been concentrated in the higher castes, small-scale cultivators and tenantry have come from middle-range castes, and landless labourers have come from the lower

castes. Therefore, everywhere and at all times there has been the potential for class formation and class conflict whenever inequities in wealth, social condition, and status deprivation have reached critical levels of intolerability. The names of the oppressors have varied depending upon which regional culture and agrarian system one is talking about. But the structural relationships which have led to class-formation and conflict remain underlyingly the same.

NOTES

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, New edition, London: The Bodley Head, 1936 (reprint 1953), p. 57.
2. For an early, trenchant analysis of the sociological impact of the introduction of market forces into India's agrarian economy, see Bernard S. Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: The Banaras Region', *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 82, 1952, pp. 312-20. As Dhanagare notes, '... the land belonged to the peasant who enjoyed hereditary occupancy rights under the Mughal rulers. Land was seldom sold or purchased as a commodity and so long as the peasant paid his rent or revenue (cash or a share of the produce) he could not be evicted by anybody. Cultivation of land was considered a socially vital function, and hence, the peasants' occupancy rights were always respected. There was some zamindari oppression of the peasantry but since the rights of landed aristocracy were not absolute, it was limited to extortion of revenue.' (p. 27) Dhanagare continues: 'In the decades following the 1857 Mutiny ... the landowning and moneylending classes gradually rose to power in the rural areas.' This process cut across all regions, says he: '[It] was a pan-Indian development irrespective of the system—zamindari, raiyatwari or wahalwari. It had immediate and direct social consequences: the courts, police and petty revenue officials now safeguarded the interests of the usurers—the moneylending and rich landowning classes. The new alliances also worked against the interests of small landowners, raiyats and sharecroppers who constituted the poor peasantry.' (D N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 39.)
3. The belief that each varna must perform its hereditary duties with integrity and responsibility toward the others.
4. UP Archives, General Administrative Department, File 50-3, 1921.

5. Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., 1953.
6. Dhanagare, op. cit., p. 88.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 89.
10. In Dhanagare's words: '... we must note that Gandhi did not completely alienate the poorer sections of the peasantry and the landless. Rather through his "constructive programme" he always maintained a semblance of relief for these sections of rural society. Whether latently or manifestly, Gandhi's "constructive programme" helped the Congress sustain its basic liberal, political and economic reformism and to prevent any potential revolutionary activity at the grass-roots level.'
11. Dhanagare presents statistics showing that in Surat district 24 per cent of the agricultural population were owner-cultivators while landless labourers constituted 67 per cent. This contrasts with Faizabad district in Oudh where zamindars and taluqdars were the principal land-controllers. In 1931, agricultural laborers in Faizabad comprised only 19.4 per cent of the agricultural population, owner cultivators comprised a mere 6.0 per cent, and tenants comprised 63.0 per cent.
12. Ibid., p. 95.
13. Ibid., pp. 107-8.
14. M.H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces (1919-22)*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1978, p. 17.
15. Ibid., p. 103.
16. Lucknow Division: Kheri, Sitapur, Hardoi, Lucknow, Unnao, Rae Bareilly; Faizabad Division: Bahraich, Gonda, Bara Banksi, Faizabad, Sultanpur, Pratapgarh; Gorakhpur Division: Basti, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh.
17. Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886-1922*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1984, provides detail on the career of Baba Ram Chandra both prior to and after his arrival in Awadh. In the context of the discussion that follows, Kumar shows that Ram Chandra could not have been the founder of the Rute Kisan Sabha for the simple reason that he did not reach the area until at least a year after its founding. However, his role in publicizing it and ramifying its influence cannot be denied.
18. V.N. Mehta, 'Report to the Commissioner of Fyzabad Division', Pratapgarh, dated 11 November 1920, p. 2.
19. Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma' in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri

- Chakravorty Spivak, ed., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 316.
20. Gyanendra Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-22' in Guha, and Spivak op. cit., p. 255.
 21. Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt*, p. 92.
 22. Somewhat prior to this, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had organized a kisan sabha in Allahabad district that was supposed to address peasant grievances. But Malaviya was even more conservative than Gandhi on agrarian issues and did not promote any agitation that embraced the broad spectrum even of the tenantry. In Dhanagare's (1986) words, '... Malaviya's interest in the agrarian situation was essentially a by-product of his involvement in the Home Rule campaign . . . although its aim was to advance the political interests of the peasantry as a whole, its actual appeal was limited to high-caste Brahmin and Rajput tenants and small zamindars. Hence there was little grass-roots activity. . . .' (p. 117)
 23. Their success in this regard prompted the U.P. government to try and counter this type of class-oriented mobilization by undertaking to mobilize the landlords as a more coherent, 'loyal' opposition to what was perceived as a radicalizing Congress. See Peter Reeves, 'The Politics of Order: "Anti-Non-Cooperation" in the United Provinces, 1921', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. XXV, no. 2, 1996, pp. 261-74—on the *amian sabhas*, or 'anti-revolutionary leagues'. See Harold A. Gould, *Grass-Roots Politics in India: A Century of Political Evolution in Faizabad District*, New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publ. Co., 1994. Chaps. 4 and 5 dealing with landlord politics are especially pertinent.
 24. UP Archives: Commissioner of Faizabad to Sir Harcourt Butler, 24 January 1921.
 25. Dhanagare, op. cit., p. 117.
 26. Pandey, op. cit., p. 281.
 27. See the Introduction to Walter Hauser, ed., *Sabajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1994. See also the review by Peter Reeves of Hauser's *Sabajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor*, in *South Asia*, vol. XIX, no. 1, 1996, pp. 103-6.
 28. Dhanagare, op. cit., p. 120. Dhanagare found that: 'Evictions for arrears of rent were an added burden for tenants. In 1930-1 there were 31,383 suits for eviction in Oudh districts, compared with 24,061 in 1926-7.' He obtained these data from the *Report on the Administration of the U.P., 1926-27*, Allahabad.

29. Ibid., p. 121.
30. Actually, two parties were formed: The National Agriculturalists Party of Oudh and the National Agriculturalists Party of Agra. This reflected the somewhat different agrarian systems that existed in each of these sections of the United Provinces. In Oudh, the taluqdars were the defining landlord class. Agra was a *rasyatwari* area where zamindars were interspersed with peasant cultivators who had alienable ownership rights over their land. In this sense, Agra bore a closer resemblance to the tenurial pattern in Bardoli. For the purposes of this essay, however, it is sufficient to refer to the National Agriculturalists Party as if it were a single entity for which I use the abbreviation NAP.
31. The latter was more a *de facto* than a *de jure* arrangement since technically the provincial governors had the power to veto legislation of which the government did not approve. But a 'gentlemen's agreement' was arrived at whereby the government pledged not to exercise this power in the name of political harmony and responsible representative government. The process worked reasonably well until Congress boycotted the assemblies following the breakdown of negotiations with the British government over India's participation in World War II. See M.V. Pyle, *Constitutional Government*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960.
32. In actuality the politically relevant landholding group were a much smaller proportion of the agricultural population than this, but no means are available to differentiate them within this pool from minor land-controllers.
33. See Gould, op. cit., especially chap. 7, and Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.
34. In the legislative assembly, it went to Pandit Pant who belonged to the anti-CSP Patel faction. See Brass, op. cit.
35. However, Nehru's refusal to leave Congress with his fellow Socialists following the Patel edict left a legacy of bitterness among leaders of the democratic left which lingers to this day. They accused him of opting for expediency over principle—of choosing the power and celebrity he could enjoy by remaining within Congress over the political risks and challenges that would have to be faced by leading his leftist flock into the wilderness, as it were. An old Congress Socialist from Faizabad district once complained to me: 'Jawaharlal Nehru is not a political leader; he is a political star!' See Gould, op. cit., Brass, op. cit., and Myron Weiner, *Party*

- Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
36. *Pioneer*, Lucknow, 22 March 1948.
 37. After the first General Election, the Socialist Party merged with the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). The KMPP was another party-sized group of defectors who broke away from Congress in 1951 in order to contest the first General Election as a separate party. They were a loose alliance of politicians who characterized themselves as 'socialist' but not 'Marxist'. Their president was Acharya J.B. Kripalani, a self-styled Gandhian, who had once been President of the Congress until forced out of office by the Patel group over issues of both ideology and party authority. Brass and Franda say of them: They were largely 'non-Socialist faction leaders who had been defeated at the all-India level and in several states in struggles for power in the Congress. . . .' In 1955, a more militant anti-Congress section of the PSP, led by Ram Manohar Lohia, broke away from the PSP and re-formed the Socialist Party. Brass and Franda continue: 'The two Socialist parties retained a separate existence until 1964, when they merged into a new entity called the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). In January 1965, however, some dissatisfied PSP members split off and revived the PSP, leaving the bulk of the Socialist members in the new SSP. In August 1971, the SSP and PSP leaderships merged the two parties once again into a united Socialist Party (SP) . . . the SP was the only Socialist group with significant national strength in India in 1972.' (Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda, eds., *Radical Politics in South Asia*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973, p. 10.)
 38. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1970.
 39. For a detailed analysis of this process, see Gould, op. cit., and Brass, op. cit.
 40. Charan Singh, *India's Economic Policy: The Gandhian Blueprint*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1977, p. 104. See also his original major work on this subject: *Joint-Farming X-Rayed: The Problem and its Solution*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1959.
 41. Dipankar Gupta, *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of Farmers in Northern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
 42. Ibid., p. 19.
 43. Ibid., p. 32.
 44. Ibid., p. 34.
 45. Ibid., p. 157.

Contd. from front flap)

Importantly, those authors structure their investigations around a reversal of the ethnographer's 'gaze'.

In this spirit of reflexive reversal, the volume concludes with a reflection on the 'project' of South Asian studies in the United States by Hauser himself, focusing on (but not limited to) his experiences at the University of Virginia.

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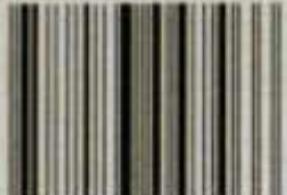
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