CHAPTER I

RESISTANCE TO BRITISH RULE

The Early Phase

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India presented a picture of disunity in the eighteenth century. The Mughal Empire was a shadow of its past. Maratha imperial aspirations failed to hold the country together for long. Everywhere regional forces gained the upper hand. Provinces that had once formed part of the Mughal dominions,—Bengal, Avadh and Hyderabad,—gradually asserted independence. Local movements like those of the Jats, Sikhs and Satnamis gathered strength. Ultimately, the disruption of the country was prevented not by leadership from within its territorial limits but by foreign intervention. The triumphant advance of the Union Jack might have constituted another chapter in the continuous struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces that have through the ages characterised Indian history. But, for a vital difference. While indigenous powers had achieved unity at earlier points of time, the East India Company represented alien interests concerned almost wholly with reaping rewards out of their territorial possessions without providing adequate returns or granting such benefits as helped to make possible further exploitation. As a result, there was resistance from all sides. Nobles stripped of traditional positions, peasants groaning under a staggering weight of taxation, members of disbanded armies and tribals faced with a break-down of age-old social organisation resisted tooth and nail the intrusion of an alien order that jeopardised existing ways.

Although not related to a single chain of events and circumscribed in the sphere of operations, popular resistance movements during the first century of British rule in India reveal some basic trends. Knowledge of these uprisings, mostly ignored in histories written during the country's colonial past, has spread in the period following the independence of the country through investigations by numerous scholars. Still no attempt has been made so far to classify the various insurrections accord-
ing to the nature of their outbreak. Integrating the results of recent research, the present study categorises these upheavals in the hope of drawing attention to some root causes of discontent that persisted throughout the period.

1. Resistance By The Displaced Aristocracy

Plassey did not make the British occupation of Bengal a certainty. The Company's officials may not have been justified in suspecting Mir Jafar to be in league with the Dutch, but there can be no doubt that discontent prevailed for long among the Bengal zemindars. Some wanted to raise to the throne a descendant of Sarfaraz Khan, whom Alivardi had ousted two decades before. The chiefs of Birbhum and Purnea invited Emperor Shah Alam II to invade Bengal at about the same time. The English suspected the Nawab to be in sympathy with the malcontents. Though the situation did not grow as critical for the Company as its officials feared, the apprehensions of the Select Committee at Fort William were expressed in a minute dated September 11, 1760:

'The share of influence we now enjoy in these provinces, however great in appearance, does not carry with it those real advantages, and weighty effects, which are necessary not to leave that power in danger of being disputed and of failing us at a time when we most want it; and nothing is more probable than that.'

Refractoriness on the part of the zemindars of different parts of Bengal—Midnapur, Manbhum, Puchet Hills, Bishnupur, Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum—continued even after Buxar, which proved to be a more decisive engagement than Plassey. In fact, they were not brought firmly under control till 1790. Further north, the imprisonment of Raja Chait Singh of Benares (1780) was opposed by his followers with such vehemence that the Governor-General, Warren Hastings, had to beat a hasty retreat to Chunar, down the Ganges. Benares was again the centre of anti-British plots in 1799 when Wazir Ali, the deposed fifth Nawab of Avadh, placed himself at the head of the zemindars and common people of the place. Extension of
British arms to Orissa was resisted in 1804 by Jayi Rajguru, the dewan (bebarsa) of the Raja of Khurda, who found support among the rulers of the neighbouring principalities of Kujang and Kanika and even entered into correspondence with the Raja of Nagpur to advance his cause. The confederates were overpowered. Rajguru, being imprisoned, accepted full responsibility. Mukundeva II was restored to his Malikana on a pension equivalent to one tenth of the revenue on his Kingdom. Kujang and Kanika were, however, not annexed.

The most widespread struggle against the British government took place in south India. Described by a recent authority as the ‘First Indian War of Independence’, it involved the local chieftains (called poligurs), whose estates (palyams) being situated in the wilderness encouraged a spirit of independence and offered means of natural defence. They resorted to force at first to resist the increasing demands of the Nawab of Arcot, who enjoyed the support of the British and was their overlord. Kattabomma Nayaka of Panjalam Kurichi took the initiative in organising them against the British in 1783. After his death in 1799 leadership among the poligurs was provided by Maradu Pandyan, the chief minister of Sivaganga. Gopala Nayak of Virupakshi in Dindigul, who had fought alongside Kattabomma Nayaka, came to his assistance. Dhoondia Waugh, an adventurer of Shimoga in north-west Karnataka, raised the standard of revolt in 1800. Although he died in action, the rebels succeeded in maintaining control over most of Ramnad, Madurai, Kallarnadu and Tanjore till June 1801. The Company’s army had to seek shelter above the Kaveri. But with the help of the princes of Tanjore and Padukottai and the appearance of a pretender to the throne of Sivaganga, the British were gradually able to weaken the ranks of the enemies. The rebels took their last stand in the Pagoda of Kalyarkoil. Here they were surprised by treason on 1 October, 1801. On 19 October that year Maradu Pandyan was executed with a few of his associates on the ruins of the fort of Tirupatore in Ramnad. Later, his followers buried his body near the temple of Kal-yarkoil, where a small temple was raised in his honour.

Increasing English demands led to a revolt in Travancore in 1809. Velu Tampi, the dewan of the state, had received English support previously but, finding their claims oppressive,
resigned from office at the end of 1808. Immediately after, he attacked the British Residency. A force numbering not less than 40,000 had been raised by him in south Travancore. The dewan of Cochin supported the insurgents. Help was also sought from the French at Mauritius and the Zamorin of Calicut. After two unsuccessful encounters with the British at the beginning of 1809, Velu Thampi went into hiding. He remained unnoticed for two months giving the Resident cause for belief that the local people were secretly affording him protection. Ultimately, Velu Thampi was discovered through the help of a traitor. Preferring death to humiliation at the hands of the enemy, he welcomed the former course on 20 March, 1809. His dead body was placed on a gibbet and paraded through the streets of Trivandrum,—an act which the Governor-General condemned as repugnant to the dictates of humanity and principles of good government.

Protracted struggles against the British took place in the Vizagapatam District and Kittur on the eastern and western sides of the south Indian peninsula respectively. In the first instance, Vizieram Rauze, the zamindar of the place, marshalled a force of four thousand after the Company had seized his dominions for the realisation of revenue. Though defeated and killed in the battle that followed, the struggle intensified with the assistance of the zamindar of Kasipuram, who had prevented that area from falling into the hands of the Company. The conciliatory policy of Sir Charles Oakeley, the Governor of Madras, however won over most of the insurgents. Narayan Rauze, the son of Vizieram, came to terms with the British and was restored to his dominions, though their size was much reduced and the demands of revenue still high. Demand for increased pension on the one hand and an inflated revenue on the other caused the rebellion of Birabhadra Rauze (1827-33) and disturbances in the Palkonda (1831-32) zamindari of Vizagapatam respectively. Sale of land to an outsider provoked another outburst of discontent during the years 1832-34.

Opposition at Kittur was directed to securing the succession of Shivalingappa, who had been adopted by the queen after the Desai of the place had died childless in 1824. The Company's refusal to recognise the prince led to an encounter which ended in Rani Chennamma's capture at the hands of the British (1824).
She died in jail (1829). Her example was followed by Sangolli Rayanna, a village watchman, who was ultimately made a prisoner by the British through the treachery of some of his friends in 1829. Later, in 1837-38 his friends avenged themselves by murdering one of those who had assisted in his apprehension. To avoid further disturbances, Shivalingappa was held in custody. Still, there were uprisings in his support in 1833 and 1836.

Deposition of the Raja of Coorg in 1834 led to an insurrection first under a jangama (Swamy Aparampura) and then, after his capture by the British, under a prince of the royal family called Kalyanswamy. The latter too was apprehended by the British but his name inspired resistance for two more years in Coorg and the contiguous coastal district of Canara, which had passed through an agrarian uprising in 1831. Though eventually suppressed, the movement gathered such strength at one stage that the Collector of South Canara shifted along with some European families to the north for a time.

Dismemberment of the Maratha Confederacy produced a power vacuum which some chiefs tried to utilise in an independent manner, leading inevitably to conflict with the growing British authority. For instance, the ruler of Cutch, Rao Bharmal II, incurred the displeasure of the Company by supporting the defiant attitude of the Raja of Navnagar at a time (1815) when the subsidiary forces under Gaekwad were trying to root out opposition of any kind. Though restrained immediately, Rao could not tolerate British interference in his affairs for long. His challenge to the Company's authority led to his deposition in 1819.

Ram Durgabai of Savantvadi and Shahaji, who ruled at Kolhapur (1821-1837),—both Maratha leaders,—were severely punished by the company under suspicion of having abetted anti-British forces during the Third Anglo-Maratha War and the Kittur resistance of 1824 respectively. In neither place was the spark of freedom extinguished. The nobles of Savantvadi tried to expel the British, who had assumed the task of governing them, by a surprise attack from Goa in 1839. The expedition failed but a more widespread resistance was put up five years later under the guidance of Anna Sahib, the heir-apparent, and Phond Savant, a leading noble. The rebels met with no greater success than on the earlier occasion. The
British confiscated the territory and the prince was pensioned off. The younger sons of Phond Savant were allowed to return to Savantvadi. Their elders were detained in Goa till 1857, when they managed to escape to Canara from which place they led another abortive rebellion in 1859. Mention may also be made here of a short-lived uprising in Karnataka in 1841 under the leadership of a former official of the dethroned Chhatrapati of Satara.

In north India, the fort of Bharatpur long retained a reputation for invincibility. During the Third Anglo-Maratha War it had repulsed four successive waves of British attack between 9 January and 21 February, 1805.

In 1824 following British reversals during the First Anglo-Burma War, Durjan Sal, the Jat leader, once again unfurled the banner of rebellion on the crest of Bharatpur after a disputed succession. The hopes of rebels all over India once more settled on this Jat citadel and Bharatpur was believed to be receiving aid from the courts of Alwar, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Korauli. But the fort was breached by the British. The people of Aligarh dated their loss of independence from the capture of the fort of Hathras by the British in 1817. Dayaram, the commander of the fort and the most powerful talukdar in Aligarh escaped after a stiff fight. The Company's interference in the affairs of Bundelkhand was resisted in the early years of the nineteenth century by a local chief named Gopal Singh with such determination that his authority had to be recognised in the end.

2. Mutinies

Discontent prevailed in the British Indian army from the very first. Demand for greater rewards in the campaign against Mir Kasim caused the first mutiny among the sepoys in 1764. Major Hector Munro, the commanding officer, punished the offenders by blowing them off from the mouths of the guns. The sepoys, mostly recruited from the Hindus, as Muslims were antagonistic to the Company's rule, were generally reluctant to carry out orders to embark on ship. Physical discomforts on sea-faring vessels, long periods of separation from home and religious injunctions combined to produce this aversion in the
mind of the sepoy. Technically he was right, for the terms of enlistment placed him under no obligation to journey by sea. But insubordination resulted in the disbandment of ranks at the very least and the capital sentence usually for the leaders. Yet, so deep rooted was the prejudice in the mind of the sepoy against sea-voyage that it provided the reason for the disbandment of as many as five regiments between 1782 and 1784 and a whole company in 1795.

Vellore and Barrackpur set the stage for the most important mutinies in the East India Company's army in India during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In January 1806 the Code of Regulations for the Madras army required the wearing of a turban (with a cotton tuft made to resemble a feather and leather cockade). Hide from cows was taboo to the Hindus and from pigs, to the Muslims. Both communities feared that the new turban contained objects of defilement. Moreover, the new Code required the trimming of moustaches in a specified manner and placed prohibitions on caste marks and religious signs, generally adopted by Hindus, and the keeping of whiskers, in vogue among the Muslims. On 6 May, 1806, the sepoys of Vellore refused compliance when first confronted with the implementation of the Code. Peace returned in June with the punishment of the erring sepoys. But, the sons of Tipu Sultan, particularly the third and fourth, who had been settled in Vellore after his fall fanned the flames of discontent, promising leadership, assistance from different quarters and increased wages for the sepoys if they succeeded in an insurrection. Capitalising on the lax vigilance of the English, the sepoys at Vellore opened fire on the European quarters at 2 A.M. on 10 July, 1806. They took care to spare the women and children and hoisted the flag of Tipu Sultan. The descendants of the Mysore ruler did not, however, bestir themselves and the sepoys soon became so busy in plundering the valuables of their former masters that they failed to offer any resistance when English reinforcements arrived from Arcot. The mutiny did not last more than eight hours. The obnoxious regulations were rescinded and the family of Tipu Sultan deported to Calcutta.

The Barrackpur mutiny took place during the first Anglo-Burmese War when the 47th Native Infantry refused to march without receiving double batta (additional allowance for distant
expeditions). The immediate cause of provocation was the ex- orbitant rate at which the sepoys were required to procure bullocks for transport. At the parade held on 30 October, 1824, they appeared without their knapsacks and refused to bring them even after being ordered. The example of the 47th spread and there was open insubordination. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Edward Paget, rushed to the spot from Calcutta. The reinforcements were kept in hiding with orders to fire if the mutiny continued. The sepoys of the 47th regiment were paraded and given the option of marching or grounding their arms. They continued in defiance and were massacred from behind.

The Report of the Enquiry Committee dated 24 November, 1824 listed the causes that aggrieved the sepoys. Many of these grievances were not satisfied for long. The Bengal army, being recruited mainly from Bihar, Benares and Avadh often complained of the uncongeniality of the climate of Bengal and areas further east. Their pay of rupees 7/- a month was never upgraded during the entire period from 1796 to 1857. Out of a pittance therefore, the sepoys had to provide for their food and lodging, uniform and transport, and maintain the line clean. The Report admitted: 'In no service in the world (was) the soldier required to contribute so much towards his own equipments.' Not till 1847 did the Directors of the Company provide for compensatory allowance to the sepoys when the price of grain exceeded three-and-a-half rupees per maund, —that is, an increase of nearly five times compared to the cost of rice in 1796. In 1849 the price limit of grain for the grant of compensation was lowered to fifteen seers. Many of the sepoys of the 47th regiment did not have knapsacks at the time of the mutiny and the ones that existed were beyond repair. Nor could the sepoys leave behind their small possessions unharmed. There was, therefore, no question of disobedience on this point.

The Enquiry Report also drew attention to the extremely slow process of promotion within the army. It observed: 'did quicker promotion exist a spirit would be revived in all classes of our native troops' and the sepoys became 'what he once was, a soldier.' While European army officers had other career opportunities and received much better pay, service in the army had no incentive for Indians. There was a perceptible decline
in the relationship between the English officials and the sepoys. It was observed that the commanding officers during every mutiny were comparatively new men, the more experienced having sought employment elsewhere. Over and above this, were charges of negligence and corruption, being abetted in the case of the 47th regiment at Barrackpur by the personal interest of the Subadar.

Memories of the Barrackpur mutiny continued for more than a quarter of a century. A letter published in the *Englishman* during the Great Revolt testified to the fact that the articles used during worship by a Brahmin leader of the mutiny were carefully preserved by the sepoys of the place.

"These relics, worshipped by the sepoys, have been for thirty-two years in the safe keeping of Regiments, having by the operation of the daily relief of the quarter-guard, passed through the hands of 233,600 men, and have served to keep alive, in the breasts of many, the recollection of a period of trouble, scene of Mutiny and its accompanying swift and terrible punishment which, had these utensils not been present to their sight as confirmation, would probably have been looked upon as fables, or at the most as very doubtful stories."

A year after the Barrackpur mutiny there was a short-lived conspiracy (14 October, 1825) when the Grenadier Company in Assam refused to march after complaining about the weather. Once again the ringleaders were sentenced to death and the others discharged.

Dissatisfaction about the terms of payments led to the disgrace of a native regiment at Sholapur when it refused to turn out for parade on 24 November, 1838. Non-payment of *batta* led to the mutiny of sepoys in Secunderbad, Hyderabad and Malligaum in 1848; some of the regiments were disbanded and others pardoned.

The religious sentiments of the sepoys were ruffled during the First Afghan War (1838-42). The Muslims resented the idea of fighting their co-religionists. Hindus feared that they
would lose caste by receiving food from Muslims in a foreign country. Moreover, they were short of provisions and often had to go without their daily bath. They also resented having to wear jackets made of sheep-skins. A Hindu and a Muslim subadar were in fact, shot dead for articulating grievances. The sepoys carried out orders in sullen discontent.

The 64th Regiment at Sind in 1844 turned violent when denied the full benefits of the First Afghan War. They failed to realise that their service had become less paying because Sind had meanwhile been annexed to the British Empire. All the ringleaders were executed barring one who was imprisoned for life: the others meeting with lesser sentences. Though the Commanding Officer of the regiment was discharged for not having explained the situation clearly to his soldiers, the breach of trust was irreparable. The credibility gap widened when sepoys from Madras, after having been assured by the Governor of the Presidency that they would receive payment for marching to Sind on terms equal to what was granted during the First Anglo-Burmese War, realised that this was not possible under the Bengal Regulations. Their protest only met with punishment from the authorities. Ultimately, the sepoys could be marched to Sind only after the disbanding of two more regiments for refusing to comply with orders.

The 6th Madras cavalry was aggrieved in 1843 when they were permanently posted at Jabulpur on reduced allowance after having been brought to the place on an understanding that they would be quartered there for a short time.

In 1849 Sir Charles Napier discovered that twenty-four regiments were awaiting an opportunity to rise in the Punjab. There was, in fact, a mutiny at Govindgarh on 1 February, 1850. Though quelled, Napier took the opportunity to raise the dearness allowance of the soldiers. This was disfavoured by the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, whereupon Napier resigned in protest. The smouldering discontent of the sepoys burst forth in the Great Revolt seven years later.

3. Peasant Uprisings

Peasant uprisings were a regular feature of medieval Indian history contributing largely to the downfall of the Mughal
Empire. Under the rigorous and watchful realisation of revenue by the Company and the exorbitant rates of payment, cultivators often had little alternative but to resort to arms out of ultimate desperation. At Sandwip (1769) and Rangpur (1783) popular fury was directed against rackrenters,—Gokul Ghoshal and Devi Singh respectively,—during the early period of the Company's administration in Bengal. Revision of rent rolls in Birbhum to meet increased revenue demands in 1786-87 led to the cancellation of benefits enjoyed by migrant labourers as reward for extending cultivation in the area. The resultant uprising (1787-1790) was suppressed by the Government without sympathetic consideration of the causes of discontent.

Disturbances in Bengal were caused on a large scale by wandering bands of Hindu and Muslim mendicants in the garb of Sannyasis and Fakirs. The former included Gosains of the Maratha community, Nangas of Saiva faith, Purbias and Bhojpuri etc., while the latter were mostly recruited from the Madari and Burhana sects. Though there are references to their military exploits during the middle ages, they spread alarm in the countryside in the period following 1760 and were not really suppressed till the end of the century. Resenting the imposition of taxes on pilgrims and taking advantage of the confusion caused by the Company's maladministration, they laid waste large parts of north and east Bengal during the first half of each year, that is, till the arrival of the monsoons. Their numbers, according to information gleaned from English sources, were swollen by the rural poor and their activities received support from the local people, generally respectful of monks. Sometimes these bands worked in cooperation but instances of mutual hostility were not rare. Manju Shah, who ranged over Bengal from 1770 to 1787, was the most redoubtable Fakir leader. His brother Musa was only less famous.

On the Malabar coast the problems of the British resulted from the struggle for the possession of land between Moplahs, who had been favourably treated by Tipu Sultan, and Nairs and Namboodiris, who had earlier enjoyed ascendancy and rushed to take advantage of the reduction of the Mysore state. Unni Mutta Muppan, one of the leaders of the Moplah insurrection in 1802, had earlier maintained a show of loyalty to the Company while receiving money from the Sultan and realising revenue
on his own. The year 1799, however, marked a clear parting of ways between the Moplahs and the Company's administration. A brother of Unni Mutta was executed that year on the charge of sheltering an outlaw. Another leader of the uprising, Manjeri Athan Kurrikul, who had served as a revenue official in the Ernad district before being imprisoned on charge of corruption, escaped from his Palghat fortress also in that year. Appropriation of his property and burning of his house by the Company's men were said to have been the immediate reasons for the outbreak of the rebellion. His brother-in-law was executed before his eyes on the charge of murdering a Nayar. The leaders of the rebellion made no attempt to rouse the religious passions of the Moplah community but explained their campaign as necessary to protect their interest in the changed conditions following the defeat of the Mysore kingdom at the hands of the British. The quelling of disturbances strengthened the Nairs and Namboodiris in their possession of land.

Extension of the Company's revenue system involved consideration of privileged landholding. In south India, distribution of inams by Sir Thomas Munro as the Governor of Madras (1820-27) helped to conciliate the leaders of society.

As noted by Frykenberg: 'Through the Inam Settlement, the Company secured the allegiance and loyalty of so many local elite groups that, thereafter, only pockets of rebellion or occasional disturbances from small groups or from transient or superficial forces ever ruffled the peace; moreover, each localised instance of unrest could be carefully isolated and its causes studied and then effectively remedied.'

A different picture prevailed in Midnapur. Members of a warrior community called the Nayeks, who had long been settled as cultivators on lands granted by the Bagri Raj on condition that they would offer military service in case of war, rebelled against the Company's revenue demands and were divested of their land. The disturbances that continued from 1806 to 1816 ended only after complete annihilation of the insurgents.

Resumption of paikan lands provoked a rising of the local militia (paiks) in Orissa in 1817. Led by Jagabandhu, the dewan of the Raja of Khurda who had been dispossessed of
his ancestral property by a fraudulent sale, the insurrection gained the support of neighbouring zamindars, whose estates had been similarly ruined or threatened by auction. The movement spread because of the hardships incurred by the people due to a sudden increase in the price of salt, sharp depreciation in the medium of exchange (cowrie) and a considerable slump in the grain trade of the area following imposition of British rule. In some places the rent rates of the resident ryots (thani) had also increased. Though the rebellion was crushed, errors of assessment and distress of the people provided causes for an uprising of the Ramosis, who occupied the inferior ranks of police in the Maratha administration, only five years later. The government was reduced to a policy of moderation. The outrages, which continued till 1828, were condoned on several occasions. The Ramosis were employed as hill police and land grants were liberally distributed. The Gadkaris, who manned the defences of the Maratha forts, rebelled in 1844 against the Satara land settlement which took away their rent-free tenures and placed their lands under the supervision of the mamladars of adjacent sub-divisions. Peace was restored only after a fierce fight.

Although surveyors were held in odium always, the toughest resistance to their work was perhaps offered by the cultivators of Savda and Chopda in Khandesh who totally boycotted them in 1852. Both the people and the government took recourse to force and peace was not restored till some time. The local revenue officials (desmukhs, despandes and patels) were taken by administration under custody, but the clash between the old and new systems had been dramatically revealed.

4. Tribal Insurrections

Expansion of the Company’s territory led to contact and friction with tribal society. After the occupation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1760, collection of cotton taxes on behalf of the government was entrusted to middlemen, who soon discovered the profitability of securing more than the quantity stipulated. The Chakmas who inhabited these areas became the object of their exploitation. In 1776 they rebelled for the first time. Undeterred by the punishments, they again stood
up in 1782 and were never thoroughly reduced till the cotton tax was withdrawn in 1789 on the assurance that the demand would not be increased if the headmen regularly submitted the amount due.

The Chuars of south-west Bengal were of a martial nature. They served in the armies of the local Rajas, who were often at feud, and rewarded their service with land grants. The resumption of jagir lands (ex. of the Rani of Karnagarh near Midnapur) and the eviction of former zemindars (like Durjan Singh, the Chuar leader) unable to meet the Company's revenue demands led to the eruption of violence (1779-1800) in course of which the Chuars laid the country waste. The indebtedness of the people in general, the exactions of mahajans and the sale of estates for debt were referred to in contemporary records as the chief reasons for the outbreak of Chuar predatory activities in Manbhum in 1832.

The Company's administration impinged heavily on tribal society in the absence of any intervening power structure. Unrest among the Bhils was spread by Trimbakji Dangle, an important minister of Peshwa Baji Rao II, on the eve of the Third Anglo-Maratha War. Forged documents from the Raja of Satara were distributed among the tribesmen in 1825, when they were already engaged in war with the British. Uchet Singh, the Bhil leader in the province of Dhar, claimed descent from a family that had played an important role in the power politics of the area at the time of the Third Battle of Panipat. His depredations in 1831 represented an attempt to emulate past adventurers in carving out a kingdom. Success on the part of the English in reducing the Bhils to submission was as much due to Outram's attempt to win over their hearts as to the traditional method of meeting force by force.

The Kolis, who lived in the area between Cutch and the Western Ghats, first resisted the government in 1828 out of frustration at failing to find employment. They were later impelled by a desire to restore the Peshwa's government (1839). The example of Ramosis was also before them in 1828 and 1845, when the famous Ramosi leader Umaji and his sons, in fact, led the resistance, though without success.

Tribal rebellions in eastern India were born out of the conflict of traditional society and money economy. The partners
of the zemindari of Sherpur in the Mymensingh district of east Bengal wasted their energies in fighting each other, while grossly understating revenue collections. In reality, however, they amassed huge profits from illegal imposts on the tenants in the form of khurcha and abwahs. The people were pressurised more when during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) the government asked the zemindars to provide the basic requirements of the army, including labour for the rapid construction of boats and roads for transport. Inevitably, these demands were passed on to the masses. The Garos and Hajongs, who lived in the hills north of Mymensingh, had meanwhile been denied access to the local markets of Sherpur by Mahendra Narayan, the zemindar of Karaihuri. Sufferings brought the hill people close to the Muslim peasants of the plains. A religious dimension was lent to the struggle by the fact that the mountaineers had come under the sway of a Muslim preacher, Karam Shah, whose second son Tipu had consolidated his hold over the Gird Garo (land of the Garos) in the company of his father’s disciples known as Pagal Panthis. At the beginning of 1825 the mountain people espoused the cause of the oppressed peasantry and refused to pay land rent beyond four annas per khud. Though the rebellion was soon suppressed the Pagal Panthis were not reconciled to the Company’s administration. They revolted again in 1833 but met with no better success.

Tribal discontent in Chota Nagpur was directed against the outsiders (suds), who were doubly odious, first, because they represented an alien civilization and, second, because they gained increasing control over the economy. The chiefs were alienated from the common people by adoption of Hinduism. Tribal feelings were exacerbated by ignorance or/and indifference on the part of the Company’s officials, who lost further support in trying to reform Hinduism. Moreover, the administration had no sympathy for the original settlers (the Bhunhars or Khur-khattidars) who paid quit-rent or no rent at all in recognition of the fact that they had first brought the soil under cultivation. After the introduction of the Bengal Regulations, however, began the practice of sub-letting villages in groups of twos and threes to thikadars, usually Muslims, who gradually replaced the tribal proprietors of land and also gained notoriety for violating the honour of tribal women. The basic cause of the in-
surrection was in the opinion of the acting Magistrate of Ramgarh, W. Blunt, dispossession of the Mankees and Moondas of Sonepoor and the adjacent Parganas from their hereditary lands. Hindus functioned as traders and moneylenders and soon held the Kols in debt at usurious rates of interest (70% and more). The tribal people were often forced to sign Sewuk-pattas by which they were obliged to serve or render the fruits of labour to the moneylenders. Their position thus was frequently no better than that of serfs. The courts of law held no hope for the Kols because of their ignorance of the judicial process. Besides those dispensing justice had a poor opinion of them.

The authority of the Maharaja of Chota Nagpur had suffered steady diminution over the years and he relinquished office in 1826. Though his complicity in the outbreak of the insurrection was never definitely proved, there is reason to believe that he secretly fanned the flames of discontent. The real reasons for the Kol insurrection of 1832 were, however, indicated by the seven cuts that the rebels inflicted on the bodies of their victims in protest against the exactions to which they were subject.

(1) Payment of batta on changing copper for silver. This involved a net increase of 35% in land revenue and provided opportunities for malpractice by the traders and moneylenders.

(2) Excise tax (pacha or hanria) at the rate of four annas per house for brewing rice beer. This tax, levied since 1839, had no precedent in Kol experience. The village headmen, in fact, charged householders at a higher rate. Rice beer was an essential part of Kol life and imposition of a tax upon it was particularly resented.

(3) Fines for supposed or real crimes (Gunahgiri) which gave ample scope to darogas and peadehs to wax rich at the cost of the tribe.

(4) Village salamis at the annual rate of one-and-a-half rupee from each village.

(5) Forced labour without any remuneration on the roads and fields.

(6) Postal (Dak) collection, a contribution of Rs. 4½ on certain villages, which resented being singled out for payment of the impost.
(7) Forced poppy cultivation, of which the Kols had no previous experience.

The insurrection, which began in the Sonapur pargana bordering Singhbhum in December, 1831 was joined by Larka (fighting) Kols of Kolhan, who took advantage of the estrangement between the Bamanghati chief and his overlord the Raja of Mayurbhanj to push forward their activities. Differences between the chiefs of north Singhbhum and the Raja of Porhat also rendered the region vulnerable to attacks by the Kols. The rebellion spread rapidly over the district of Ranchi and extended to Hazaribagh, the Tori pargana of Palamau and western Manbhum. The Raja of Palamau had tried to meet the revenue demands of the Company by taxing his subjects. This had caused an uprising in 1801. The Cheros, who inhabited this part of the country, had rebelled with the support of the jagirdars in 1817 and 1823 against the high revenue rates that had been imposed after the estates of the Raja of Palamau had been sold. The Kol insurrection of 1832 brought these discontented elements together under the flag of rebellion. The entire area from Chota Nagpur to Avadh was plunged in commotion. Blacksmiths and carpenters in the villages were required to produce arrows and battle-axes for the rebels. Value of the service of cattle grazers (Goalas) was also recognised.

A similar set of circumstances—oppression by landlords and moneylenders, demands for forced labour by European railway contractors and increase in revenue demands by the state, along with the problems caused by the local police and courts of law,—caused the collapse of the traditional Santal community. The tribal people looked with indignation at the appearance of foreigners, whom they called dikkus—mostly Bengalis from the east and Utkal Brahmans from Orissa in the west—whose fortunes gained through usury and trade ruined the traditional order. At last in June 1855 the call of rebellion was sounded by two brothers—Sidhu and Kanu, who invited support from the lower castes like the Doms, the Bauris, the Lohars and the Goalas, etc. But, as in the case of the Kols, the Santals did not meet with success in attempting to swim against the tide. Instead, the monetary noose settled more firmly about their necks as they were deprived of many of their
leaders.

With the extension of the Company’s dominions to the north-east, conflict with many tribes became inevitable. The people of Sylhet were the first in the Company’s dominions to have a brush with the Khasis in 1783, but it was the Company’s desire to open up communication between the Brahmaputra and Surma rivers that led to an outrage by the Khasis (the ‘Nungklow massacre’) of 1829 and the consequent reduction of the tribe by English soldiers. Among the tribes of Assam brought under heel in the next twenty years were the Singphos (1830), Sadiyas (1839), Kapaschor Akas (1835-42) and the Nagas (1839). The Kukis, who lived in the Lushai and Tipperah hills and in Manipur, followed from the mid-nineteenth century, after having a conciliatory policy towards the Company raided Sylhet in 1844 to chastise the Bengalis who had earned a bad name in commercial dealings on the eastern frontier of India. Ghumsar, a small estate in the Ganjam district of Orissa, was occupied in 1834 to ensure regularity of revenue and the Khonds sternly dealt with to prevent human sacrifice (1846). Even the Mers in the remote desert of Rajputana in 1820 refused to submit to the British after the surrender of Ajmer, where they lived, to the Company by Daulat Rao Sindhia in 1818.

5. Fundamentalist Movements

The Muslims attributed all their adversities to deviation from the path of true religion. Preachers laying claim to divine and the exalted status of prophets appeared in parts of the country as far removed from each other as Sylhet (1800) and Surat (1810). The main thrust of their teachings was against the imposition of British rule. They left only a temporary mark. Of much greater importance was the Wahabi message first preached in India by Sayyid Ahmad Sirhindi, a contemporary of the Mughul Emperor Akbar. He asked his followers to abide closely by the teachings of Muhammed and wage jihad, when necessary, for upholding the Faith. A seditious character was imparted to these ideas by Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786-1831). He appealed to all Muslims to prevent India from being converted into a dar-ul-harb (land of the in-
In Bengal the message was preached by his disciple Titu Mian in Barasat, 24 Parganas. The Hindu zemindars viewed the religious sentiments of their Muslim tenants with disfavour. Krishna Roy, a large landowner on the banks of the Icchamati, subjected them to a special tax. The Wahabi crusade, which broke out in protest extended to Nadia and Faridpur. Attack was directed against zemindars and men of property irrespective of their religious affiliations. At length, the British over-powered Titu in his bamboo stockade in the village of Narkelberia in the 24 Parganas (November 1831). The Faraizi movement founded by Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840) of Faridpur in East Bengal combined religious zeal with economic campaign against the Hindu landlords and European indigo-planters (1831) under the leadership of Dudu Mian (1819-1862), the second religious head of the sect, the movement gained much following but declined after his death.

Two of Barelvi's principal disciples, Wilayct Ali and Maulavi Saleem, carried the Wahabi teachings to the Deccan. Mubariz-ud-daulah, a brother of the Nizam, came under their influence. He was a popular prince of daring means and independent in spirit. He first attracted attention in 1815 when his men threw back an attack on his palace at the Resident's order. After a short period of imprisonment, he organised an insurrection with the help of the Arabs and Afghans of Hyderabad. He was confined and sent to the fort of Golconda; on release from confinement he tried to win over the garrison and carry off the Nizam's treasures. His intentions were foiled by Col. Meadows Taylor, the Resident, in person.

About a decade later in October 1837, the administration's suspicions were first roused by the arrival of several persons from north India and regions beyond (Kabul, Egypt and Persia) to the Madras Presidency. Investigations revealed the existence of certain news-writers in the pay of Mubariz-ud-daulah near the river Krishna, which formed the frontier of the Hyderabad State. The Nawab of Kurnool was active at the same time in gathering arms and ammunitions. The jagirdar of Udaigiri allowed use of his fort as the fittest place for maintaining stores and rice for the army. The Nawabs of Tonk, Banda, Bhopal and Rampur were also involved in war preparations. Among Hindu nobles the leading part was played
by the Raja of Satara, who was deposed for treasonable activities in August 1839, and of Jodhpur on whose territories the British army camped for five months from September 1839 following plunder of the residence of a British medical officer in the kingdom. The Gaekwad was also disaffected. Mubarez-ud-daulah carried the responsibility of winning over the allegiance of the subsidiary force stationed at Secunderabad and the Hyderabad army. He was also believed to be in contact with Nasir-ud-din, the Wahabi leader of Sind.

The Wahabis of India planned to rise in arms the moment the Russians from Central Asia and the Persians crossed the Indus in support of Ranjit Singh (1798-1839), the Sikh leader of the Punjab. One informer said, ‘Mubarez-ud-daulah and the Raja of Satara were said to have aspirations to the positions of the Nizam and the Peshwa respectively. It was also arranged that Mubarez-ud-daulah was to become the Khalif or temporal head of the Muslims in India and a seal with the title of Ra’isul Muslimin was engraved to that effect.

The discovery of the seal gave the Resident opportunity to argue that Mubarez-ud-daulah’s connections with the Wahabis were of a political nature and not simply limited to religious considerations in which case it was the policy of the Company not to interfere. On 15 June, 1839 the prince was taken prisoner after a raid on his palace. He was pronounced guilty by a Board of Commission with which three Muslim jagirdars of Hyderabad were associated to avoid the impression that he was indicted by the British alone. Although no specific charge could be proved against him, Mubarez-ud-daulah was held a prisoner in the fort of Gwalior for reasons of security till his death in 1854. Those of his followers who had followed him to jail were released before this date. The Nawab of Kurnool was dispossessed of his territory. Some of the English newspapers commented adversely against the policy of holding those Wahabi prisoners whose guilt could not be proved at all.

6. Production And Property Dispute

To maximise profits from trade and revenue, the Company had sought from an early date to monopolise production and sale of certain commodities. This affected the interests of local
producers and suppliers and led to conflict in certain cases. The cotton weavers of Bengal did not want to be engaged in the Company's service because private merchants offered higher prices and were not so fastidious about the quality of cloth produced. However, they did not break out in open revolt from fear of the drastic punishments that would follow defeat and also because the Company offered them interest-free loans for weaving. Resistance to government control of salt was headed by the zemindars, particularly in East Bengal, Midnapur and 24 Parganas. There were armed clashes, obstructions to attempts by the Company's agents to procure salt and illicit production and smuggling of the article with secret connivance of the zemindars. Imposition of government monopoly on opium cultivation in 1780 led to an increase of smuggling and fall in the output of the commodity as opium cultivators chose to grow cereals. The Company's ruthlessness caused the ruin of silk weaving in Bengal as many weavers cut off their thumbs being unable to withstand the pressure of work.

The imposition of a house tax in Benares in 1810 led to non-cooperation by the people with the government. A petition to the magistrate fell on deaf ears. A second petition pointed to the fact that Hindus regarded the house as sacred and not disposable property. The citizens argued moreover that what they paid by way of mint and stamp duties, along with charges for living in the town and transit, were adequate to pay for their defence. The petition achieved its aim for the tax was withdrawn. In 1824 an impost on shops and dwellings for maintaining the expense of chaukidars led to a protest in Bareilly. The demonstrations began peacefully but soon turned violent after a woman was injured by the police. The magistrate's indifference to her sufferings led to a protest from the mufti, who was sought to be apprehended. Escaping with the support of the local people, he raised the standard of revolt at Shahdara. Force was needed to bring an end to the disturbances. The regulations remained in force and the mufti was not allowed to return to his country. The people of Surat demonstrated against an additional increase of tax on salt from eight annas to a rupee in 1844 and expressed resentment at the introduction of weights and measures according to the Bengal standard four years later.
7. **Conclusion**

The above classification of the various kinds of resistance to the East India Company's rule in India is intended to reveal similarities in the nature of their outbreak all over the subcontinent against pressures mounted by the colonial administration from the first. The fight put up by the Indian states against imperial penetration is too well-known to need recapitulation. Instances of large-scale political unrest in South India, as of the *polygars* and Wahabis deserve special mention, however, because impression still persists that peninsular India presented, on the whole, a picture of peace. Restrictions of space also do not permit detailed description of the encounters between the Company's soldiers and roving bands of armed men,—referred to in official documents as 'bandits', 'thugs' and 'Pindaris',—who derived strength from the same causes of discontent as those leading to the wave of popular upheavals. For example, the Jat peasantry provided much of the leadership and following during the Pindari raids of 1809-16. Raja Kalishankar Roy of Narail inspired the local cultivators to defend themselves so stubbornly that the Company was forced to set him free, even after holding him a prisoner for some time, and acceded to his demands in 1796.

Spontaneous outbursts of indignation are due to a variety of causes, which cannot be effectively disentangled. The typology developed in the present paper may not, therefore, be said to be strictly in conformity to facts. Distinctions between the several forms of insurrection (as noted above) were blurred in practice by the presence of some common factors. For instance, mutinies among the Company's Indian soldiers resulted as much from problems of military discipline as from pecuniary difficulties and affront to their religious and caste prejudices. Recent efforts to identify autonomous elements in the attitude of the submerged sections of the population have been exposed to criticism on the ground that social stratification in India was not so pronounced as to enable us to study the rule of the 'subalterns' in isolation. Besides, there was a long-standing tradition of landlords leading the struggle against the demands of the state. No rigid line of demarcation can similarly be drawn between uprisings by tribals and non-tribals. For, as
in the case of the Chuars, the former often espoused the cause of some territorial overlord from whom in the past they had received sustenance. The Kols and Santals appreciated the services of village artisans and craftsmen and utilised their services for the production of weaponry.

Religious fundamentalism could strike roots far and deep because the masses had already begun to explore means of escape from their insufferable conditions. The same could be said of the millenarian faith expressed by some of the insurgents. For instance, the Kol rebellion was prompted by a belief that the rule of the East India Company had come to an end and that water would flow from English guns. The Santals campaigned out of a conviction that their cause carried divine support and that fire would rain from the heavens. However, we need to remind ourselves that millenarian beliefs ignited the soul of a population that had already been disillusioned by existing condition. The method adopted by the rebels to communicate among themselves was ingenious, though primitive. The drum beat signalled the defiance of the Santals. The Kols conveyed their message by sending branches, generally of mango trees (called dhauri). The group receiving such a branch had to join action before the leaves of the bough withered, or was liable to punishment.

Primacy cannot always be given to economic factors in explaining the causes of unrest. Micro-level analysis of the relationship between the social composition of the insurgents during the cataclysmic events of 1857-58 and the consequences of the land revenue settlement in Avadh during the preceding two decades show that, contrary to earlier assumptions, the two were not inevitably linked. Decline in the power and position of a talukdar did not automatically tip the scales against the British as those who profited from transactions tended by and large to support the new administration. Even here, however, there could be exceptions. Increased production on reduced acreage and the opportunity to diversify output in cash crops like indigo and cotton could boost up profits in such a manner that the resulting gains more than compensated losses due to the sale of property. Where such was the case, as in Hathras and Musran, the landed magnate remained loyal to the Company. A host of other factors—like kinship ties, Jat-
Rajput rivalries and the degree of homogeneity with which the village held land in joint ownership,—were of consequence in determining participant behaviour during the Revolt of 1857. As was the every other case with uprising the thunderclaps of political unrest in this case were born out of a host of factors.

If the insurrections noted above are to be viewed in a historical perspective, giving full consideration to local factors, we may do no better than regard these as attempts to break out of the grip of a centralised state. 'For', as a recent analyst of peasant uprising in colonial India concludes, 'by building a highly centralized state in the subcontinent the British had unified and brought into focus the refracted moments of semi-feudalism in the countryside in a manner unprecedented in Indian history. And one of its direct consequences, that is the fusion of the landlord's and the moneylender's authority with that of the sarkar, was what provided insurgency with the objective conditions of its development and transmission.'

Reduction in the number of troops and news of reversal in the Company's fortunes provided opportunities of breaking out in rebellion. The disastrous start to the English campaign during the First Anglo-Burmese War was followed by defiance on the part of the Jhareja chiefs of Gujrart, the Raja of Bharatpur, the Jat and Gujar tribes of north India and the troops stationed at Barrackpur. The Bundela chiefs revolted in 1842 on hearing of the discomfiture of the British forces during the First Anglo-Afghan War. The outbreak of contumacy was rendered easier by the fact that the Company had systematically reduced the number of its troops in the region since annexing it in 1817-18. The tradition of resistance continued in unbroken succession in several parts of the country (ex. Kittoor, Vizagapatnam and Gumsur). The sense of tribal identity intensified in the face of colonial pressure. The Chuars, Kols and Santals participated in large numbers during the Revolt of 1857-58.

The difference, between the attitude of Company's officials in India before and after the establishment of British Paramountcy in 1817 cannot be explained simply in terms of a pragmatic generation succeeding Romantics of an earlier era, as Eric Stokes would have us believe. 'The Empire-builders of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries went through the heat of the battle and showed greater concern for Indian sensibilities'.

The point may be illustrated with reference to the opinions expressed by prominent administrators of the Company in a single year, 1824. Metcalfe, Malcolm and Elphinstone, for instance, voiced apprehensions to the following effect—

‘all India at all times is looking out for our downfall.’

‘Circular letters and proclamations are dispersed over the country with celerity that is incredible (and) are read with avidity.’

‘I used to think our Empire made of glass but when one considers the rough usage it has stood both in old times and recent, one is apt to think it made of iron. I believe it is of steel which cuts through everything if you carry the edge even but is very apt to snap short if its falls into unskilful hands.’

British administrators in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, who found themselves in possession of farflung empire, had showed less regard for local opinion. Their brusque manner in dealing with Indians and brisk pace of reform, contributed to a very large extent to the outbreak of the Revolt that ended the Company’s rule.
CHAPTER II

Engtteen Fifty-seven and India’s Freedom Struggle.

RAJAT SANYAL

1. Divergent Views On The 1857 Upheaval

It will be our main object in this chapter to make an assessment of the Great Indian Uprising of 1857-58 with a view to locating its place in our freedom struggle. The narrative history of the great upheaval, misnamed as Sepoy Mutiny, has been altogether avoided here, and even as an assessment, this piece has no claim to originality. The present author has only highlighted those arguments, already expressed more or less, which appeared to him most convincing among the amazingly divergent views prevalent on the nature of the so-called mutiny by eminent research scholars.

According to R. C. Majumdar, the renowned historian, these divergent views “may be broadly divided into two classes. Some think that the outbreak was really a rebellion of the people rather than merely a mutiny of the soldiers. Others hold that it was primarily and essentially a mutiny of sepoys, though in certain areas it drifted into a revolt of the people”. Interestingly, however, his own narratives of “The Revolt of the People”, if his comments and analysis are not taken into account, establish beyond doubt that the “Mutiny” which “in certain areas drifted into a revolt of the people” was really widespread and covered large areas of northern and central India, and particularly of Avadh where, even in the opinion of an orthodox historian like S. N. Sen, “the revolt assumed a national dimension”.

However, the quantum of popular participation is not R. C. Majumdar’s yardstick for judging the nature of the outbreak. He considers very rightly that the motive behind the participation is the very important factor in this respect. Surprisingly, however, he lays abnormal stress on the sequence of the uprisings—military and civil. To him the very important
question—like the famous chicken and egg conundrum—is which kind of the two uprisings did occur first. His own answer to the question is that it is the mutinies of the sepoys which took place first and the people reacted only when it was clear to them that the administration at a particular place had ceased to exist as a result of the mutiny. According to Majumdar, this very fact of entry of the opportunist people at the second stage of the uprisings weakens the case for the popular character of the outbreak. S. B. Chaudhuri, remarkable for his particular concern for the civil rebellion during the mutinies, however, gives several examples to show that in some instances the people revolted without mutiny or the popular rising preceded the mutiny, and the popular leaders themselves inciting the sepoys to rise. Majumdar, himself, points out an “exception” in the outbreak at Mazaffarnagar, on May 14, when a civil revolt took place without any “mutiny of local troops preceding it”. These examples, however, are not of foremost importance in this regard. What is crucial is to judge the situation as a whole. The mutinies of the sepoys and risings of the civil population so thoroughly merged in 1857-58 that the two can hardly be viewed separately. Both the uprisings were integral parts of the whole war. It has been rightly pointed out that the sepoys “The peasants in uniform”,—were very much part of the people, sharing the same sentiments and even sufferings with them. They had deep roots in the agrarian society which was in turmoil. If the soldiers revolted first in most cases it was because they were organized and armed, and so in a position to strike first. They, in a sense, acted as the vanguard of the people.

2. The Revolt—A War Of Independence?

Thus the really debatable question is not whether the people rose in revolt: the crucial question is why did they revolt? Did they make the war for the independence of their country or for something else? There is a class of historians who raise a battery of objections against considering the war of 1857-58 as a struggle for freedom. The extremists among them, like R. C. Majumdar, even deny the existence of any kind of patriotic or noble motive among the rebels. Their charges may be stated one by one and also answered in order
to suggest the actual nature of the uprising.

Whether a true war of independence should be necessarily planned long in advance of the event is an intriguing question. There is no doubt that it is exactly what a well-organized campaign should be, but a spontaneous action can hardly be regarded as a ground for villifying the motive of the rebels. Regarding facts, the theory of the existence of a feudal conspiracy before the actual rising—in spite of fascinating arguments—remains unestablished. Similarly, the true significance of the mysterious circulation of chapatis or unleavened bread before the “mutiny,”—whether it signalled the impending revolt—remains a matter of opinion. There seems to be some truth in the theory of rumour of the ensuing end of the British authority to coincide with the centenary year of the Battle of Plassey deliberately spread for preparing the people psychologically for an anti-British War. However, persisting factual controversies do not favour drawing firm conclusions regarding the propaganda and secret organization of the rebels before the actual outbreak. Yet even if all the objections regarding this question are upheld, the contention remains that a spontaneous outbreak of the people might well take place on patriotic ground. It is certain that there was a will among the people to rise. This assertion is attested to by the rapidity and alacrity with which the rising spread within a short span of time. In the words of Richard Collier, “All down the valley of the Ganges, the village war-drums were pulsating in the night, bringing news of rebellion spreading so fast, it could be charted now by the up-rush of flames as station after station took fire, on 20th May Azimgarh, on 21st May Bareilly, on 3rd June Fategarh, on 4th June Benares, on 6th June Allahabad, on 7th June Fyzabad, on 9th June Fatehpur. Thus Mutiny had swept across an area a quarter of the size of Europe”.

The dearth of political awareness, not the spontaneity as such, is a grave charge against the rebels. It is true that one cannot conceive of a war of independence without a political objective, and this objective—in the minimum—should be the identification of the ruling power as alien and replacement of that power by the indigenous one. Unfortunately, the question of political consciousness among the rebels has been decided on the basis of the historians’ own value-judgement. It is, how-
ever, important to judge in the first place whether the rebels had any political aim at all, and whether this aim conformed to the required minimum.

The proclamations issued in 1857-58 by the rebel side clearly show that they wanted to destroy the British power in India or to annihilate them physically. They also regarded the British as alien and inimical both as a race and as a religious community. The proclamations also show that the rebels were fighting to achieve "swaraj", a sort of national government. The quick and the momentous decision of the Meerut mutineers to proceed towards Delhi, the traditional capital of India, and to proclaim the pensioned emperor of Delhi, Bahadur Shah II as the emperor of the whole of Hindustan reflects a definite political will on the part of the Meerut mutineers. All the later outbreaks, more or less, either accepted this political position or built up their own political authority, local or regional, normally expressing allegiance to and recognizing the suzerainty of the emperor. The facts cited above appear to fulfil the minimum condition of a war of independence.

3. *Its Strength And Weakness*

It is however, true, that the freedom fighters of 1857-58 had no means to look forward to a political ideal. It is to be noted at the same time that normally, the political ideas of our middle-class-led freedom movements came from the West, may be sometimes in a national garb. But to the rebels of 1857 no western model was acceptable. Only in exceptional cases the rebel leaders borrowed the British methods of administration. Thus the people looked backward for the political alternative. They visualized a situation which had existed in the 18th century when the Mughal empire was weakening but had not disappeared. They wanted to restore the Hindu and Muslim kingdoms of the past and even local autonomous authorities, while accepting the nominal suzerainty of the Mughal emperor. They were, in any case, trying to regain the very independence which was gradually lost to the British in course of a hundred years from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. This however, does not preclude the possibility of many stray people joining the movement with non-political
and vicious motives.

Another series of objectives concern the lack of unity. This charge-sheet can be framed as follows. The greater part of India did not join the revolt. Even in the "worst affected" areas comprising the modern Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Haryana, many groups of people, landlords, feudal chiefs, and even sepoy regiments—remained inert, or expressly loyal to the British and sometimes even their active supporters. Some of those who threw their lot with the rebels at some stage of the war or other were found to be vacillating and inconsistent. The rebel groups had no unity among them. They were jealous of each other, and failed to develop a strong central organization. They remained isolated with their selfish interests in mind. The relation of Hindus and Muslims in the upheaval was marked by communal tension and violence, not by fraternity.

Some of these charges are matters of serious controversy, while others can hardly be denied. It is indisputable that vast areas of India and considerable sections of Indian people remained passive or loyal. A kind of factional rivalry was inherent in the alternative political structure that was sought to be built up. These facts can hardly be used with reason for tarnishing the character of those who fought for independence. S. N. Sen points out that in many revolutions and wars of independence in history, there existed the loyalists, and we also know that communal bitterness, factional feud, vacillation, retreat, loyalist groups and slumberous regions marked the various phases of our middle-class-led freedom movement as well.

Thus while the lack of unity and the existence of loyal and vacillating people is no ground for disputing the theory of the "mutiny" as a war of independence, one should not turn a blind eye to the opposite side of the picture. Cooperation among various rebel groups at various stages of the war and the appeal of Bahadur Shah to the Rajput chiefs to join the war against the English indicate a desire for concerted action.

Regarding communal troubles, most historians are emphatic that the revolt of 1857-58 was remarkable for communal harmony rather than dissension. The united fight of Hindus and Muslims against the English was noted by Karl Marx in his contemporay writings as a positive development, while
the contemporay Englishmen noted the same phenomenon with disappointment failing to profit by the "antagonism of the Asiatic races which had ever been regarded as the main element of our [of the English] strength and safety". This explains why the British efforts failed to incite the Hindu population of Bareilly against the Mahomedan rebels. The rebel proclamations generally made passionate appeal to Hindus and Muslims to fight unitedly against their common foe—the jeringhees. In this connection the following excerpts from the Bareilly proclamations may be quoted: "Hindus and Mahomedans of India! Arise! Brethren arise! Of all the gifts of God, the most gracious is that of Swaraj...God...has inspired in the hearts of the Hindus and Mahomedans the desire to turn the English out of our country."

The gravest charge against the rebels is that they were far from being patriots and freedom-fighters, and were ruffians, the anti-social elements or at best opportunist power-mongers. They have been accused of wanton depredation, indiscriminate killing and plunder. Among the rebel groups there were also criminal tribes like the Gujars and Ranghars. R.C. Majumdar is particularly emphatic on the point that the habitual criminals—the goondas and the budmuses—took advantage of the confusion created by the mutiny and gleefully took part in killing, destruction and looting. These elements were so far held in check by British administration.

It is not necessary to comment upon Majumdar’s great respect for the iron-hand of the British authority. It is not also necessary to deny that in many cases the criminals joined in the upheaval with sinister motive or, as some historians belonging to now famous "subaltern group" point out as changed people. This group of historians also point out that those who appear as dacoits, goondas and budmuses in official records were not necessarily so. More often than not they were armed masses of the countryside and their leaders had grass-root connections. However, long before the "Subaltern Studies" S.B. Chaudhuri pointed out the same mistake committed by historians. He said "The gujars and ranghars described as 'Goondas' actually formed a solid mass of peasantry, many of whom were expropriated peasants."

Regarding indiscriminate killing and plunder, there were
many among the popular leaders who tried to control such activities and restore discipline. In Delhi, “the more reasonable elements in the army”, writes S. N. Sen, “wanted to co-operate with the King and Commander-in-Chief to do away with mismanagement and remove disorder from the civil and military establishment”. It is futile to multiply instances of the so-called sanity shown in a few cases by the people in revolt. It is more important to find a rationale, if any, in the acts of violence which were really widespread. It is to be kept in mind that the massacre of the hated enemy, and the destruction and plunder of their property were in those days an adjunct of war and political violence. Even the “civilized British” repeated the same kind of or even worse atrocities while “restoring the order.”

Significantly, some design is discernible even in the so-called acts of depredation. The destruction and plunder were not so indiscriminate as it is often supposed. The targets of attack, in the first place, were the centres and symbols of the British authority like the government offices, police stations, telegraph poles and even milestones on railway tracks. In Banda they destroyed the records of the law court and “distributed [them] to the winds.” In Rohtak “the rebels torc up all the public records, papers and documents” and “made huge bonfires of whole”. Hostility towards anything governmental was similarly revealed in the mass-actions during the OQuit India Movement. So it is not understandable why only the superstition of the people would be blamed for the attack on the telegraph system and railways. The attack on the court and revenue records is even more instructive. The peasants knew that those were the documents which were used against them for expropriation by the British administration and their Indian henchmen. This reminds us of the destruction of manorial records and burning of chateaux by the French peasants in the agrarian revolts and local jucqueries during the French Revolution. The class-attitude of the Indian rebels was also revealed in the destruction and dismantling of European factories, which, in the words of S. B. Chaudhuri, “may be regarded as the first challenge to the system of exploitation and instrument of production, the primitive demand of the nascent proletariat”.

3
4. Conclusion

The people attacked the Indian expropriators as ruthlessly as their (expropriators') colonial masters. The victims of the plunder were, more often than not, the bankers, traders, money-lenders and auction-purchasers who had dispossessed the peasants and traditional land-holders of their lands, taking advantage of the sufferings and helplessness of the agricultural classes due to the enhancement of rent. These exploiters, as a group, constituted the mainstay of the British authority. Thus the revolt of 1857-58 was not only a war of independence but also a class-war waged by the people. A war of independence becomes more revolutionary when the oppressed people participating in it launch a simultaneous attack not only on the colonial power, but also on the native classes who exploit the people, and support the alien government for their selfish motive of making profit. This is exactly what happened in 1857-58.

The theory of the popular character of the revolt is further strengthened by a recent article written by Gautam Bhadra. He contends that the people in the lower strata of society were conspicuous not only by their participation but by their initiative and leadership, in their efforts to build up an alternative political power from below. Thus S. B. Chaudhuri's contention that the role of the common people was basically as the supporters of "mainly a talukdari movement" is not entirely true. As historians like Gautam Bhadra and Ranajit Guha point out that the leaders often emerged from the grassroot level.

The people who fought heroically against the oppressive colonial system in its entirety can hardly be described as ruffians and self-seekers. The anti-social elements might take advantage of an anarchic situation but they can hardly be expected to wage a prolonged, grim, courageous and class-conscious battle against the enemy. The courage and integrity of many of these freedom-fighters have been praised by even imperial historians. In Awadh, Malleson wrote, "prolonged resistance was put up by those who fought for independence...the survivors often preferred starvation to surrender". We know from Rudrangshu
Mukherjee's work on Awadh that all attempts of the English to pacify, persuade or bribe the people of Awadh for a volte-face or a compromise failed even when it seemed likely that the English might emerge victorious. S. B. Chaudhuri writes, "Very few rebels craved for life or seemed to care to purchase it."

It appears that judgements depend not always on facts themselves, but on how they are viewed. In Jhansi in June, 1857, no policeman could be recruited for service. To R. C. Majumdar this was the symptom of "anarchy and confusion". But this may well be viewed as the description of a precisely revolutionary situation when paid personnel were not available for guarding the establishment. Similarly, Devi Singh, a Jat village rebel leader of Mathura, was found by Thornhill, Magistrate of Mathura, a "very ordinary-looking man" and his seat of power "an ordinary village...a mere collection of mud huts closely huddled together." This ordinariness, to the orthodox historians, is the proof of the base character of the popular leaders. On the other hand, according to Gautam Bhadra, "...it is precisely in this ordinariness...that students of Indian history must learn to identify and acknowledge the hallmark of a popular leadership".

Though unmistakably a war of independence, the upsurge of 1857-58 had its own inherent weakness, and it will be a folly not to point it out. Leaving out organizational weakness which has been too often emphasized, I shall here dwell on the ideological one. The ideological standpoint is more relevant for the purpose of an assessment. The most striking lacuna of the war was that the rebels had no political ideal, though they did have a clear political objective. I deliberately distinguish between an objective and an ideal. The rebels of 1857-58 definitely wanted to get rid of the alien rule. They found a political alternative which was, however, far from ideal, even if we keep in mind the characteristics of the period under discussion. The power of the people sought to be built up in certain cases was sporadic, isolated, fragile and, in all probability, doomed to failure even if the war had succeeded. So far as our present knowledge stands, there was none among the popular leaders who might think of an all India or even a regional peasants' or peoples' state with the programme of
social reconstruction according to peasant’s thinking as seen in many pre-industrial revolution, and popular uprisings of the world. The rebels’ class-consciousness was of a limited nature. They knew their immediate enemies but were incapable of perceiving the danger of a persisting feudal order. On the other hand, though there was no dearth of brave men among fighting chiefs and princes, there was none who thought of a powerful state in the model of a Mughal Empire at its glory, only one which had a chance of survival against a mighty colonial power. What they thought of was a fragmented polity, various regions and localities to be ruled by chiefs of various ranks with the Mughal Emperor as only its nominal head. It was not even realised that it was exactly the situation which had helped the British to conquer India. Islamic revivalism, as many Muslim religious leaders preached, might have been an effective ideological instrument against a Christian government, had India been a country mainly of the Muslims. As a remedy, the slogan for the protection of the religions of both the Hindus and Muslims was raised: but two religious systems, so widely apart, can hardly be expected to lead to a politically strong religious movement.

The war of independence had mixed effects on the course of our nationalist movements. The nineteenth century middle class intelligentsia, generally, did not support the uprising. Often, in tune with their colonial rulers, they regarded it as an undesirable catastrophe. However, some of them agreed that discontent among the people of 1857-58 was genuine. The uprising clearly revealed the disastrous effects of the colonial rule on the people in general. This indirectly helped the anti-colonial sentiments among the middle class to grow. Besides, ruthless suppression of the “mutiny” with terrible vengeance and extreme racial hatred created a cleavage between the Indians in general and the British. The cleavage, then admitted or not, was real and ended all illusions about a collaborative empire. Twentieth century Gandhian leaders showed an ambivalent attitude towards the movement. Jawaharlal Nehru in The Discovery of India recognised the popular character of the “rebellion and War of Indian Independence” and paid respect to the heroic leaders like Feroz Shah, Tantia Topi and Lakshmi Bai, but to him it was “certainly a feudal outburst,” headed by
feudal chiefs and their followers. He and other nationalist and even leftist leaders, while seriously differing from the assessment of the outbreak done by imperial historians, failed to be inspired by it. But the outbreak did not fail to inspire those Indian revolutionary nationalists who thought that an armed uprising was necessary for achieving independence. With such an aim in view V. D. Savarkar, a nationalist revolutionary turned historian, wrote for the first time a history of *The Indian War of Independence* clearly with nationalist political objective. The book described the “War” as work of the brave heroes with the support of the people for the protection of “Swadharma and Swaraj”. This history was published in 1909 and proscribed at once. Yet it did not fail to inspire the revolutionary freedom fighters from the leaders of the Ghadr party to the members of the I. N. A. The heroes of the “War of Independence” had a great appeal for Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the Chief of the I.N.A., who adopted the slogan of the 1857,—“Delhi Cholo” for his own call to the soldiers of freedom.

There might be many things undesirable about the War of Independence of 1857-58 to the modern mind, of every variety, yet it constitutes a unique chapter of our freedom struggle.
CHAPTER III

PRE-Congress Nationalism

The growth of political consciousness up to 1885

Deba Prosad Choudhury

1. The Myth Of Pax Britannica

Ever since the inception of British rule in India there had been numerous movements and uprisings which exposed Pax Britannica as largely as empty rhetoric. But, in spite of having set a worthy tradition of Indian resistance to foreign rule, they did not have the right potentials to defeat British imperialism which was quite unlike any alien rule in the earlier periods of Indian history. Only an all-India movement organized by leaders imbued with modern political consciousness could successfully struggle for liberation from British rule. But modern political consciousness took a long time to evolve through several stages of development. In genesis it was on the whole elitist, in the sense that those who first manifested it mostly belonged to the upper middle class in wealth and intellect. Consequently, the early political associations founded by them had little popular base and reflected a limited class outlook. But they did a lot to awaken political consciousness among the people. And this revolutionized Indian politics in two important ways: first, organizations with a broader popular base were born, and, secondly, there was an increasing urge to rise above regional limits and unite entire India under the leadership of a single organization. All this eventually led to the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885.

The English-educated class in Bengal was the first to manifest modern political consciousness. But it was not critical of the British from the outset. Being largely a product of British rule, this class recognized the obvious benefits of that rule. Men like Raja Rammohun Roy fervently hoped that Britain, the most advanced country of the time, would actively help the
economic, social, and political transformation of India on modern lines. They dreamt of the birth of a new India under British tutelage. But disillusion was not long in coming. They realized the fundamental contradiction between Indian and British interests, and became critical of British rule. But their collaboration with and criticism of British rule were not necessarily successive stages of development. Frequently, these were simultaneous attitudes revealing a deep ambivalence of the English-educated intelligentsia towards British rule. This was nothing surprising in an age of transition, especially as the benefits and evils of British rule were equally evident. It was the growing awareness of the evils like the steady impoverishment of the country, British racism, and denial of elementary rights to Indians, which induced the Indian intellectuals to finally challenge British rule.

But of the entire spectrum of causation the most potent factor responsible for the growth of political consciousness was the spread of western education. Indian enthusiasm for it was largely guided by its expected material benefits. The British also, by imparting it, hoped to recruit much-needed clerks and petty public servants at cheap salaries from among the English-educated Indians. Tainted at source though it was by such earthly motives, this new education opened to the receptive Indian mind the brave new world of western social, political and cultural ideas much to the embarrassment of the British rulers. Drinking deep of the fountain of western philosophy, the Indians were inspired by great thinkers like Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, and moved by stirring events like the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Stimulated by this intellectual impact the Indians turned to agitation for their rights.

Certain administrative measures of the British unwittingly fostered a sense of Indian unity. Of them the most important were a highly centralized administration and modern methods of rapid communication like the railways. They, along with the adoption of English as the common medium of communication, generated a sense of national unity.

Some of the evils of British rule, painful to the contemporary Indians but blessings in disguise in the long run, also promoted national unity. One such evil was the naked racial
arrogance of the British. Racial discrimination against Indians, which was unmistakably present in the *Cornwallis Code* at the end of the eighteenth century, rapidly crystallized in the nineteenth century. Racial doctrines openly preached the destined superiority of the whites and the permanent subjugation of the non-whites like Indians to the white supremacy. As a result not only did the British enjoy numerous exemptions and privileges, but also they were so far brutalized as to insult, assault and even murder Indians with impunity. This naturally moved self-respecting Indians to challenge the odious alien rule.

But perhaps far worse than racial arrogance was British exploitation which rapidly impoverished India, ruining her indigenous trade and industry, throwing artisans and craftsmen out of employment, leaving the rack-rented peasantry with hardly enough for bare subsistence, and subjecting the country to repeated famines. The sufferings of the people did not go unnoticed by Indian intellectuals who gradually realized that British rule was the root cause of all this misery, and consequently began to criticize it.

The two most important vehicles of Indian political consciousness were the contemporary Indian press and Indian literature. Some of the leading Indian papers and journals which voiced Indian public opinion were the *Hindu Patriot, Indian Mirror, Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Bengalee* in Bengal, *The Voice of India, Indu Prakash, Mahratta* and *Kesari* in Maharashtra, the *Hindu* and *Swadeshamitram* in Madras, the *Advocate* in Lucknow, and the *Tribune* in Lahore. Also Indian literatures like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, author of the famous *Ananda Math* and composer of ‘Bande Mataram’, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, Dina-bandhu Mitra, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, and Rabindranath Tagore—to mention only a few—in Bengali, Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi, Subramania Bharati in Tamil, and G. H. Deshmukh, Vishnusastri Chiplunkar, and S. M. Paranjpe in Marathi, immensely contributed to the emergence of nationalism.

Another factor which powerfully, albeit indirectly, helped the growth of nationalism was the growing trend of antiquarian research into the past history and civilization of India. The activities of the Asiatic Society, founded in Calcutta in 1784, and the researches of devoted European and Indian scholars
like Sir William Jones, Wilson, Max Muller and Rajendralal Mitra convincingly revealed the glories of India's past history. Here was a fitting refutation of the racist British propaganda that there was nothing in India's past to be proud of. The patriotic Indian was given back his self-respect and was filled with the hope that from her abysmal depth of humiliation India would again rise to take her rightful place among the nations of the world. This national self-respect was further encouraged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society.

Political consciousness in modern India, like many other positive trends, began with Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833). Although an admirer of British rule, he was critical of its drawbacks and even envisaged a distant future when India would win freedom. He was the first Indian to recognize that in spite of British rule, the Indians were entitled to certain rights. And he was the first Indian to organize political agitation on constitutional lines in defence of such rights as the freedom of the press, trial by jury, separation of the executive and the judiciary, appointment of Indians to higher administrative offices and protection of the peasants from oppression.

The first important political agitation led by him was a protest movement against a Press Ordinance issued in 1823 by the officiating Governor-General Adam. Two days after the Ordinance was issued, five distinguished citizens of Calcutta—Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Dwarkanath Tagore, Chandra Kumar Tagore, Harachandra Ghose, and Gauri Chandra Banerjee—led by Rammohun submitted a memorial to the Supreme Court. For its cogency of reasoning and appeal to political principles, this memorial has been rightly eulogized by Rammohun's biographer, Sophia Dobson Collet, as the "Arcopagita of Indian History". When the Supreme Court dismissed the memorial, the undaunted Raja sent an appeal to the King-in-Council, but to no effect. Although Rammohun failed in his immediate objective, his effort in defence of the freedom of the press is a landmark in the history of Indian nationalism, since it marked the beginning of constitutional agitation for political rights which was to characterize the Indian struggle for freedom for many years to come.

In 1826 a Jury Act was passed which introduced religious
discrimination in the law courts. Under it Hindus and Muslims could be tried by European or Indian Christians, but no Christian, whether European or Indian, could be tried by Hindu or Muslim jurors. Rammohun submitted petitions against the Act signed by both Hindus and Muslims to the British Parliament. In Bombay and Madras also there was public protest against the Act. Under this pressure of Indian public opinion the Jury Act was amended in 1832, abolishing the discriminatory provisions of the Act of 1826.

When Rammohun visited England, he submitted before the Parliamentary Select Committee, appointed to consider the question of the renewal of the East India Company’s Charter, a number of important demands like the separation of the judicial and executive functions in the administration of criminal justice and the consultation of Indian public opinion before enacting legislation. Although his demands did not bear fruit immediately, they surely focussed public attention on important public issues. He was also keenly aware of the miserable condition of the peasants and the serious drain on India’s economy.

Rammohun’s mantle fell on a band of young students of the famous Hindu College, Calcutta. They were usually called the Young Bengal for their youthful radicalism, and Derozians after their mentor, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. An unusually gifted young Anglo-Indian, Derozio (1809-1831) was the very embodiment of European radicalism of the day. Deeply imbued with the ideas of the French Revolution, Tom Paine, Hume, and Bentham, Derozio inspired his pupils with a deep love of liberty and an urge for truth. Prominent among them were Tarachand Chakravarty, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Ramgopal Ghose, and Pearychand Mitra. Their patriotism and radicalism, which they had imbibed from their mentor, led them to start numerous public associations, journals and newspapers through which they propagated their ideas. From 1830 to 1843 they were the leading protagonists of India’s social and political progress.

There were also others in the field like Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Radhakanta Deb, and Ramkamal Sen. Though not radicals like the Derozians, they were nevertheless conscious of their rights, to protect which they continued Rammohun’s tradition of political agitation. They were the
moving spirits behind the foundation of the first important political association, the Landholders’ Society, in Calcutta in 1838.

2. The Politics of Associations

The Landholders’ Society came into existence in the context of the Government’s policy, initiated by Lord Bentinck, of resuming rent-free (lakhira) lands in Bengal as a new source of revenue. It affected the class interest of the zamindars who strongly protested against it in a number of newspapers and journals like the Reformer, Bengal Herald, India Gazette, and Bengal Hurkaru. But mere paper criticism was not enough to stay the hand of the Government. To exert pressure on the Government the need for a permanent organization was felt. Hence in 1836 a society was formed in Calcutta, called the Bangabhasa Prakashika Sabha. It did not last long, but it was the nucleus of the Landholders’ Society founded two years later. Although primarily meant to safeguard landlord interests, the Landholders’ Society deserves special mention for several reasons. It was undoubtedly the first prominent organization set up to fight for rights against the Government. As such its activities were a model for others to emulate. Its organizers were aware of the value of wide support and hence aimed at establishing branches in other parts of British India. They also enlisted the support of Englishmen who sympathized with the political aspirations of the Indians. Hence they cooperated with the British India Society founded in London in 1839 by William Adam, a close associate of Rammohun, to create English public interest in Indian affairs.

When in 1843 George Thompson, a prominent member of the British India Society, and noted for his campaign for free trade and the abolition of slavery, visited India, a close link was established between the Landholders’ Society and the British sympathizers of the Indian cause. Thompson addressed a number of meetings in Calcutta. His oratory and fervour thrilled the Calcutta public, especially the Derozians, who at his suggestion came forward to found the Bengal British India Society in April 1843, with Thompson as its president and Pearychand Mitra, its secretary. The two-fold purpose of the Society was to criticize and propose amendments to the administrative,
legal, social and political measures of the Government, and to supply the British India Society in England with all the available information on Indian affairs in order to enable the latter organization to agitate in favour of India. The Bengal British India Society was more of an intellectual forum to enlighten public opinion than an exclusively political association. As S. R. Mehrotra has pointed out, Ramgopal Ghose, who became president of the Society in December 1845, himself repudiated the idea that its activities were exclusively political in character.

By 1843 there were thus two political associations in Bengal neither of which enjoyed any mass character. If the Landholders’ Society represented the aristocracy of wealth, the Bengal British India Society represented the aristocracy of intelligence. Neither played any distinguished role in securing the rights of the Indian people. One reason for this was that the European and Indian communities had not yet parted company in public life; both the above societies had British members. Another reason was the prevailing atmosphere of general apathy. But from 1849 events began to take place which sharply shook this apathy and drove Indians and Europeans into two enemy camps.

The turning point came with the proposal of four bills in 1849 by J. D. Bethune, Law Member of the Governor-General’s Council.

The main purpose of the bills was to extend the jurisdiction of the East India Company’s criminal courts over British-born subjects. Till then they had been only subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in Calcutta, with the result that Indian villagers had practically no protection from their oppression. Bethune’s attempt, an eminently reasonable one, was meant to abolish this harmful distinction and put Indians on a footing of equality with Europeans before the law. But the European community living in Bengal violently reacted against the bills, branded them as Black Acts, and organized a stiff opposition to them. Although the Indians fully supported the bills in favour of which Ramgopal Ghose delivered moving speeches, the Government wilted under concerted European pressure and withdrew the bills.

In two important respects the Black Acts controversy had an abiding impact on the Indian mind. It greatly embittered
the race relations between the Indian and European communities in India. But what was more important was the spectacle of the Government's abject surrender to the organized pressure of the small white community over an indisputably justified issue which had been supported by the large Indian community. The lesson was not lost upon the English-educated Bengalis who realized that their weakness lay in their own disunity and disability to exert pressure on the Government through an effective political organization. Hence, to safeguard Indian interests by every legitimate means, and especially to represent Indian views to the British Parliament in connection with the approaching renewal of the Company's Charter, the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society were amalgamated so as to set up the British Indian Association which was founded in October 1851.

From its very inception the British Indian Association exhibited two important characteristics which clearly indicated that Indian political consciousness had reached a new stage. First, the membership of the Association was exclusively Indian. Naked European racism had thus definitely alienated the educated Indians. Secondly, instead of confining its attention to Bengal, the Association took an all-India outlook from the beginning. Immediately after the foundation of the Association, its secretary Debendranath Tagore addressed letters to the leading citizens of Madras, Bombay and Poona, calling upon them to establish either branches of the British Indian Association or independent associations in their respective regions with a view to making representations in unison on behalf of every part of British India to the British Parliament on the eve of the approaching renewal of the Company's Charter.

Poona was the first town to follow the lead of Calcutta. On 1 February, 1852 the Deccan Association was founded at Poona with a view to sending a mission to England with a petition to the British Parliament listing Indian grievances. It also opened correspondence with the British Indian Association of Calcutta. But the Deccan Association did not live long enough to either send a mission or even a petition to Britain. Madras acted next by establishing on 26 February, 1852 the Madras Branch of the British Indian Association. Within a few months, however, it decided to act independently of the parent Calcutta
body and changed its name to the Madras Native Association. The split between the Calcutta and Madras associations was unfortunate since it wrecked the possibility of presenting a joint Indian petition to Parliament. Bombay was the last to act; in August 1852 the Bombay Association was established with the primary purpose of petitioning the British Parliament.

The attempt of the British Indian Association to build an inter-provincial cooperation in political agitation was the first of its kind. Unfortunately it failed, perhaps because it was premature. But it was sure to be attempted again. In 1852-1853 the three associations of the three Presidencies presented separate petitions to Parliament. Though widely separated by distance, the three associations put forward demands which were largely similar. However the petition of the British Indian Association was the most ambitious and it was most severely criticized by Anglo-Indian newspapers. Some of its more important demands were the separation of the legislative from the executive or political power, the establishment of a Legislative Council with a popular character and composed of 17 members of whom three Indian members would represent the people of the three Presidencies, the reduction of exorbitant salaries of the higher officials and the expenditure of the money thus saved on public works, and the abolition of the practical exclusion of Indians from the higher public offices by throwing them open to competition in both India and Britain.

Most of the demands of the British Indian Association were turned down by the British authorities. In the subsequent years the Association continued the agitation for the inclusion of Indians in the Legislative Council, demanded the equality of all before the law, urged for the opening of all offices including the Civil Service to Indians, pleaded for increased Government aid to education, sympathized with the oppressed peasants against the indigo planters, and requested the Government to appoint a Commission of Enquiry for solving the problem of indigo cultivation. In a word, the Association ably voiced Indian public opinion on a wide range of issues, both local and all-India in character. Some of the most distinguished leaders of the Association were Radhakanta Deb, Debendranath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Ramgopal Ghose, Pearychand Mitra, Kishorichand Mitra, and Harishchandra Mukherjee, who were
a cross-section of the contemporary Bengali intelligentsia—both conservative and modern.

Although the British Indian Association did not achieve anything remarkable in concrete terms, there is no denying the fact that it rendered an invaluable service to the growth of political consciousness in Bengal at the time. But it was this rising political consciousness of the people, largely shaped by the Association, which finally overtook it, and the Association began to lose its importance. Being essentially an elitist organization, the Association failed to develop a popular base and its once-radical but now ageing members, increasingly caring for landlord interests, failed to attract in the 1870s the rising generation of young men with more radical political aspirations.

While modern political consciousness was thus taking a definite shape and the Indians were slowly learning the modern techniques of political agitation by means of Associations, public discussions and petitions, India was tremendously shaken by the Revolt of 1857. There was little in common between the rebels of 1857 and the intelligentsia of the three Presidencies. While the latter desired a gradual regeneration of India and constitutional self-government mainly under British protection, the former wanted to expel the British altogether by violent means. There was no meeting point between the intellectuals and the rebels with dated ideas. Consequently, the English-educated class supported the Government and condemned the revolt. In the long run, however, especially between the two World Wars, Indian revolutionaries, most of whom were English-educated, were inspired by the memory of the revolt to take up arms against the British.

Quite different was the impact of the Indigo Agitation in Bengal which broke out on the heels of the Revolt of 1857. Ceaseless inhuman tortures at the hands of European indigo planters drove the oppressed peasantry of Bengal into a spontaneous mass movement often characterized by violence during 1858-60. Unlike the rebels of 1857 the indigo cultivators received the sympathy and support of the middle class Bengali intellectuals, the foremost among whom were Harischandra Mukherjee, editor of the Hindu Patriot, Sisir Kumar Ghose, and Dinabandhu Mitra, author of the famous Neel Darpan. Owing mainly to the efforts of Harischandra, the Government
appointed the Indigo Commission in 1860. The Commission condemned the system of indigo cultivation and the peasants at long last received considerable relief. The impact of the agitation on the political development of Bengal was profound. It was truly a mass movement led and organized by peasants, and its triumph was an object lesson in the potency of a properly directed mass upsurge against the British rulers.

While associations, petitions and mass uprisings were directly and indirectly promoting the growth of nationalism, a novel and very powerful dimension—mainly Hindu, though not parochial or communal, in content—was added to it in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was largely a direct consequence of the scholarly researches carried out mainly by European savants, ever since the foundation of the Asiatic Society (1784) in Calcutta, into the history and civilization of ancient India. These researches revealed the priceless heritage of India and filled the educated Indians, who had so long been dazzled by the western civilization, with a deep pride for their country which is an indispensable element of nationalism in any country. The man who, more than anyone else, was responsible for fostering nationalism on this foundation was Rajnarayan Bose.

Himself a radical and a great devotee of the West in his youthful days, Rajnarayan decided to promote national awareness for the Indian culture. In 1866 he established the Society for the Promotion of National Feeling (Jatiya Gaurab Sampa-dani Sabha). The purpose of the Society, as he clearly mentioned it, was not political agitation or religious movement; it was to encourage the growth of the nation’s cultural life in its various manifestations. Inspired by his ideas, Nabagopal Mitra established the Jatiya Mela, later, renamed Hindu Mela, in 1867.

The Hindu Mela was a fair which was held every year up to 1880. Although an annual fair, it was pretty much different from an ordinary fair, since its purpose was to promote national progress by encouraging the development of national literature, national sports and national arts and crafts. It created a profound impression among the people and inspired them with a deep nationalist fervour. By generating a wide public interest in the varied aspects of national progress, the Hindu
Mela definitely quickened the growth of nationalism. Whatever may have been its limitations as a primarily Hindu organization, there can be no doubt that by systematically emphasizing the importance of the history, culture and civilization of India as a whole, the Hindu Mela very effectively fostered an all-India outlook in a way that none had done till then. It was this outlook which became the moving spirit behind the foundation of the famous Indian Association (1876).

Two other contemporary organizations, the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society, were far more responsible than the Hindu Mela for linking resurgent Hinduism with Indian nationalism. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 in Bombay, was a severe critic of the corruptions of Hindu society. He called upon the Hindus to remodel their society on the perennial ideals of the Vedas and told them that their own weakness had been responsible for their subjection to alien rule. His movement became a great success among the people of northern and western India, and his followers with zeal turned to politics as a means of India's salvation. Needless to say, they carried their Hindu conceptions into politics. The Theosophical Society founded in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott extended its activities to India in 1879. Although quite different in character from the Arya Samaj, the Society won many adherents from among educated Indians by its demonstrative enthusiasm for the old Hindu philosophy, its strange faith in esoteric dogmas and practices, and its declared aim of making India the centre of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. Some of its leading members played a major role in the foundation of the Indian National Congress.

All the above developments, both political and apolitical, along with the rapid expansion of English education brought about a qualitative change in Indian politics by the 1870s. Increasing political awareness made more and more people eager to actively participate in nationalist politics. At the same time the national interests of India, transcending all narrow interests of groups and regions, were definitely taking a firm hold of the popular imagination. Existing organizations like the British Indian Association with an elitist character and outlook could hardly cope with the changing situation. The need
of the hour, which had evolved through the years of experiment in politics since Rammohun, was an organization with broader social and regional base and more dynamic goals.

It was this situation which led to the foundation of the Indian League in 1875. Although Sambhu Chandra Mukerjee, editor of Mookerjee’s Magazine became its president, the moving spirit behind the League was Sisir Kumar Ghose, editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, a bitter critic of the British Indian Association for its undemocratic constitution and narrow class interests. The League was intended as a deliberate challenge to the British Indian Association. Unlike the older aristocratic organization, the League hoped to represent the educated middle class and even the masses, and to stimulate nationalism among them. But the League did not last long owing to internal friction among the members. Some of its distinguished members like Surendranath Banerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose, and Manmohan Ghose complained of the high-handed attitude of the League’s president, Sambhu Chandra Mukerjee, and left the League. The secession killed the League, and the seceders went ahead to found the Indian Association in 1876. The birth of the Indian Association definitely marked the beginning of a new era in Indian nationalist movement.

The Indian Association was established at a crowded meeting held in the Albert Hall, Calcutta, on 26 July, 1876. Surendranath Banerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose, Dwarakanath Ganguli and Sibaranath Sastri were among those who were primarily responsible for its foundation. However, the life and soul of the Association was Surendranath who was largely helped by Ananda Mohan Bose. The chief argument behind founding the Association was that there was no political organization in Bengal to represent the middle classes and the ryots. Aristocratic bodies like the British Indian Association had failed to do it, and the chief purpose of the Indian Association was to answer this need. Its other, and no less important, objectives were to create a strong body of public opinion in the country, promote the concept of a united India on the basis of common political interests and aspirations, encourage Hindu-Muslim amity, and involve the masses in the public movements of the day. The composition of the first executive committee of the Association unmistakably shows that in tune with the
primary aim of its founders it was overwhelmingly representa-
tive of the rising generation of English-educated middle class
intelligentsia. Most of the committee members were lawyers and
journalists. On the whole, traders and landlords of substance
were not to be found in the Association.

True to its objectives the Association did not confine its
activities to Calcutta. It planned a network of branches cover-
ing all Bengal and even extending to the rest of India, and with
this aim in view delegates were sent by the Association to differ-
ent parts of the country. As a result, by 1888 there were bran-
ches of the Association in many Bengal districts like Burdwan,
Birbhum, Midnapore, Hooghly, Nadia, Jessore, Rajshahi,
Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra and Faridpur. Outside Bengal, the
Association established branches in Lahore, Ferozepur,
Allahabad, and Assam.

3. The Gathering Storm

Within a year of its foundation, the Association launched its
first national campaign. The Secretary of State for India, Lord
Salisbury, reduced the maximum age-limit from 21 to 19 years
for the Indian Civil Service examination. Since the examina-
tion was held only in England, the Indians were virtually exclu-
ded from the highest civil service in their own country. The
reduction of the upper age-limit by Salisbury was viewed as a
deliberate measure to eliminate whatever little chance the
Indians still had to enter the service. The Indian Association
resolved to organize a nationwide protest movement, and to
utilize the occasion as a means to inspire all the provinces of
India with a sense of solidarity.

An impressive protest meeting held at the Town Hall
Calcutta, on 24 March, 1877, was followed by similar meetings
in different parts of India. As a Special Delegate of the Indian
Association, Surendranath visited Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi,
Meerut, Agra, Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Bombay, Ahme-
dabad, Poona, Madras and other places in 1877-78 to mobi-
lize public opinion on the Civil Service question. The issue
was thus admirably utilized by the leaders of the Indian Asso-
ciation, especially Surendranath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan
Bose, to build an all-India movement. Surendranath's travels
and stirring speeches generated great enthusiasm wherever he went. It was his endeavours which enabled the Indian Association to establish contacts with leading men and organizations all over India which it could utilize for agitational purposes in the future. The Civil Service agitation was indeed the first instance of a political agitation co-ordinated on an all-India basis by the Indians themselves. To climax the agitation, the Indian Association deputed in 1879 one of its most talented members, Lalmohan Ghose, to Britain and lay before the British public the grievance of the Indian people. The deputation met with little success in its immediate objective, but Lalmohan Ghose presented the Indian case so admirably as to create a very favourable public impression in Britain and win the support of many leading British liberals like Gladstone, John Bright, and Charles Dilke.

The next important issue, which the Association took up in 1879, was the demand for local self-government. The demand for representative government for India had been gathering momentum for quite some time, and the leaders of the Indian Association realized that local self-government must precede national self-government. Hence in 1880 the Association, on the one hand, appointed a committee to prepare a scheme of representative government for India, and on the other issued a circular to all the district towns of Bengal inviting them to petition the Government, under the provisions of the Bengal Municipal Act of 1876, for the reorganization of their municipalities on an elective basis. In 1882 the Association's emissaries helped to organize a number of local meetings which called for elected district boards and municipalities. When in 1884 new local government rules came into force in Bengal, the Association urged the educated community in the districts to participate in the elections and to press, wherever possible, for a non-official chairman.

One rather novel feature of the programme of the Indian Association was its active defence of the peasant right which widened its breach with the British Indian Association. It was rather curious for an unmistakably urban group like the Indian Association to act as the mouthpiece of the peasants. But from its inception the Association had claimed to represent the interests of the ryots who were entirely beyond the purview of
the aristocratic British Indian Association. This populist measure provided the Indian Association with a strategic weapon in its battle for leadership with the British Indian Association which had increasingly come to care for the interests of the landlords. The Indian Association expressed deep concern for the vast agricultural community of Bengal whose grievances against the well-organized zamindars went unrepresented. In 1881 the Association's agents tried to sound the opinion of the peasants on the proposed Rent Bill which, in its opinion, sought to confer a substantial boon on the peasantry. The Association organized meetings in support of the Bill where the ryots, attending in large numbers, freely expressed their grievances. In 1885 the Tenancy Bill finally became law. But the Indian Association's efforts to rally the peasantry so angered the zamindars that the British Indian Association tried every means to block the progress of the Indian Association and thereby further lost its already declining popularity.

Another important affair in which the Indian Association took the lead in organizing a serious public protest was the agitation against the Vernacular Press Act (1878) which Lord Lytton passed to gag the vernacular press which, he believed, was seething with seditious writing. The bold stand taken by the Indian Association over the Act, in contrast with the failure of the British Indian Association to join in the agitation, not only highly raised the public prestige of the Indian Association but also indicated that leadership in Calcutta was passing from the landed aristocracy to the educated middle classes. The Indian Association also protested against the other unpopular and reactionary measures of Lord Lytton like the abolition of the tariffs which protected Indian textiles against Lancashire, the diversion of the famine fund to the Afghan War, and the Arms Act (1878). Thus within a few years of its foundation, the Indian Association won for itself an enviable national fame under a group of dynamic leaders who unerringly realized that the Indian political movement must draw its strength from the people's support and accordingly tried every means—contacts with different parts of India, press campaign, rural organizations and meetings—to reach the people.

While the Indian Association was thus busily building a nationwide base for political movement, an event of supreme
importance occurred which proved a turning point in the history of Indian nationalist movement. Lord Lytton's reactionary regime had deeply alienated the people, but at the same time it was a blessing in disguise since it sharply stimulated their political consciousness. In this tense situation any unpopular measure of the Government was bound to unleash trouble on a wide scale. But the arrival of Lord Ripon in India in 1880 and his various enlightened measures like the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act, and the introduction of the Local Self-Government Act did much to assuage Indian public opinion and seemed to herald a period of calm political progress on constitutional lines. Unfortunately, this expectation was rudely shaken by the outbreak of the Ilbert Bill Controversy which, in venom and virulence, far surpassed the Black Acts Controversy of the earlier period.

In February 1883, C. P. Ilbert, the Law Member of the Viceroy's Council introduced a bill to remove the race disqualification of Indian magistrates and empower them to sit in judgement over offending Europeans in the mofussil. The principle involved was nothing new. The so-called Black Acts had also tried to introduce impartial administration of justice. The obvious purpose of the Ilbert Bill was to prevent Europeans from committing tyranny and oppression in the mofussil with impunity. As in the past, the European community started a venomous campaign against the Bill. In an unprecedented manner they condemned the Viceroy, talked of packing him off to England by force, and heaped abuses on Indians. A European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association was formed to conduct and co-ordinate the campaign against the Bill. It soon became obvious that the agitation was not so much against the Ilbert Bill as against the very fundamental liberal principles of government which Ripon had been pursuing ever since his arrival in India. Europeans and Anglo-Indians felt that the reforming measures of Ripon were extremely dangerous and that they must fight against their own ruin and the destruction of British rule in India. Thus the Ilbert Bill was the excuse for, not the cause of, the agitation which rocked India in 1883. Ripon realized that it was not the Bill alone that was in jeopardy but 'the maintenance of a truly liberal policy in India'.

What began as a duel between conservative and liberal
Britons soon developed into a triangular battle when Indians supported the Bill. The Indian reaction was particularly strong in Bengal where the campaign against the Bill had been the fiercest. But in sharp contrast with the shameless exhibition of racial arrogance and bad manners on the part of Europeans, the Indian reaction was one of studied moderation. While in the Viceroy’s Council the Indian members defended the Bill, the Indian press took up the issue with much enthusiasm and sought to rally public opinion in its support. All over India there was spontaneous demand for the enactment of the Bill. But eventually Ripon bowed to the combined pressure from England and in India. The proposed Bill was modified and passed in January 1884.

The modified Bill deeply disappointed the Indian people. But it was a blessing in disguise. They realized how hollow was the protestation of liberalism on the part of the British rulers and what a day-dream it was to expect India’s advancement under their patronage. They were now fully convinced that India must struggle the hard way to win what was her due. And the most effective way to do so was to unite all Indians for a common purpose, since the success of the opponents of the Ilbert Bill had taught the Indian leaders the efficacy of a highly organized agitation even when conducted by a small minority for an unquestionably ignoble end. It was this realization which eventually led to the foundation of the Indian National Congress.

When the political temperature of the country was thus rising as a result of the Ilbert Bill Controversy an important event occurred which unmistakably indicated that a pan-Indian national consciousness, transcending all barriers of race, religion, class and region, had emerged at last. In April 1883 Surendranath Banerjea, in his paper Bengalee, openly criticized Justice J. F. Norris of the Calcutta High Court for his indiscreet comments against Indians and declared him unfit for his high office. Thereupon Surendranath was charged with contempt of court, found guilty, and sentenced to two months’ imprisonment. At that time Surendranath was the most famous Indian politician and the idol of young Indians. His conviction and imprisonment created a profound impression not only in Bengal, but throughout India. There were demonstrations of sympathy for him all over India in which people of all ages, classes and creeds joined.
Probably never before in the history of India had the fate of a single individual caused so much concern to so many throughout the country. The mood of the country clearly signified that India was on the threshold of a new era, the era of Indian national movement to be conducted by a truly all-India political organization.

The Indian Association did not let this opportune moment slip by. It began to raise money for a National Fund which would be indispensable for any successful political movement. Next, the Association held an all-India National Conference in Calcutta in December 1883. This first National Conference, presided over by the veteran educationist, Ramtanu Lahirī, was attended by delegates from different parts of India including Bombay, Madras, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Lahore, and Saugar. The Conference was the fulfillment of the dream of national solidarity which had been cherished by the Indian Association ever since its birth. The conference was, truly speaking, the predecessor of the Indian National Congress, to be started two years later in 1885. Among the subjects discussed at the first National Conference were the employment of Indians, representative government, and the separation of judicial and executive functions, which were also to be taken up at the first session of the Indian National Congress. In 1884, following the Conference, Surendranath Banerjea went on a propaganda tour of upper India to promote the spirit of national unity among the peoples and provinces of India.

While Bengal took the first step in the right direction, the same urge for national solidarity, transcending all regional limits, had clearly come to the surface in the other Presidencies. Gone were the days of local associations. The rapid growth of political consciousness underlined the absolute need for a national forum. In Madras there had been of late a remarkable proliferation of local associations. In May 1884 the Madras Mahajan Sabha was founded to co-ordinate them with the hope of eventually joining hands with the rest of the country. Madras was thus definitely moving out of the traditional isolation of south India.

In the Bombay Presidency Poona had emerged as a centre of Maratha political aspirations. The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, established in April 1870, stimulated political life in the western
Presidency. Until the establishment of the Bombay Presidency Association in 1885, the Sabha was the leading political association in western India and dealt with a wide range of issues like the Vernacular Press Act, the Ilbert Bill and reform of the Legislative Councils. Although it took active interest in agrarian problems, its success in organizing the peasantry was far less than that of the Indian Association in Bengal. It was a moderate, elite organization whose approach was academic rather than tactical until it was captured by the redoubtable Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the 1890s.

As compared with Poona, the commercial city of Bombay was far less politically active. Within two years of its foundation the Bombay Association had been allowed to slumber into torpor. Although it was revived in 1867 by Naoroji Furdoonjee, a Parsi leader, the revived association did not do much. But since 1883 a handful of young leaders like Kashinath Telang, Pherozeshah Mehta, and Badruddin Tyabji began their efforts to found a new association in Bombay. In January 1885 they succeeded in establishing the Bombay Presidency Association. Not only did it quickly prove itself the champion of local interests, but also resolved to work in co-operation with the leading associations of Calcutta, Madras, Poona, etc. Accordingly, within a few months of its foundation, it co-operated with the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, the Indian Association, and the Madras Mahajan Sabha to send three delegates—Manmonhan Ghose, N. G. Chandavarkar, and S. Ramaswami Mudaliar—to England.

Clearly the whole sub-continent was astir with an urge to rise above the merely local level. It was in this situation that the Second National Conference was held in Calcutta in December 1885. This time it was convened by the three leading associations of Calcutta—the British Indian, the Indian, and the Central Mahomcdan Associations. Simultaneously, the Indian National Congress met in Bombay for the first time. Since the Conference and the Congress adopted similar resolutions and similar programmes of action, there was no point in having two separate organizations. Hence, the leaders of the National Conference, in spite of having been the pioneers in the field of an all-India national organization, decided with a true patriotic spirit and broad nationalist outlook to merge their
organization with the Congress. This happened when the Congress met in Calcutta in December 1886.
CHAPTER IV

THE GENESIS AND EARLY ACTIVITIES OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

PRANJAL KUMAR BHATTACHARYYA

1. The Birth of Indian National Congress

The birth of the Indian National Congress, representing the culmination of a long process of evolution of political ideas and associations which had started in the third decade of the nineteenth century, marked the dawn of a new era in the political life of India. It is, however, not an easy task to ascertain precisely the origins of the Indian National Congress. There are several views on the subject. The Delhi Durbar of January 1, 1877, held to mark the assumption of the new title of ‘Empress of India’ (Kaiser-i-Hind) by Queen Victoria, and attended by princes and rulers of the land, is said to have first suggested the idea of a periodical national conference of representative men from all parts of the country. But, according to Surendranath Banerjea, it was rather the All-India Conference of 1883 to which the origin of the Congress may be traced. It anticipated the Congress by full two years, and in a large measure prepared the ground for it. Some of the organizers of the first National Congress had obtained notes of the first National Conference, and it provided an example and inspiration for a similar move in Bombay. The Hindu wrote on 18 January, 1883, that it had information that the Indian Association of Calcutta was “maturing a scheme of an annual National Congress to be held in some central city such as Delhi to which native gentlemen from different parts of the country were to be invited.” Warmly welcoming the idea the Hindu wrote, “Time had come when the people of India should assert their rights with all the strength of a national movement”.

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O’Donnell, an Irish member of the House of Commons, published a letter reproduced in the Bombay Native Opinion
on 4 February, 1883, suggesting the establishment of a national association. Several newspapers in India published the letter and welcomed O'Donnell's proposal.\(^2\)

Mention may be made of some other events and efforts to which the idea of the Indian National Congress has been traced. Tarapada Banerjee, a young lawyer of Krishnagar, suggested the foundation of a national assembly to agitate for the introduction of representative institutions in India—a suggestion which was published in the *Indian Mirror* on 4 July, 1883.\(^3\) G. Subramania Iyer, one of the members of the first Congress, held the view that the origin of the Congress should be traced to the International Exhibition held in Calcutta in 1883. The idea of the Congress has also been attributed to the farewell of Viceroy Lord Ripon in December, 1884. The occasion provided an opportunity for a meeting and consultation of leading Indians from different parts of the country, and for the first time the idea of a common assemblage of patriotic men from all parts of India took a practical shape. Colonel H. S. Olcott, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society in India, asserted in 1886 that the idea of an organization like the National Congress was first conceived at a meeting of some Theosophists, held in Madras in December, 1884. Theosophists like Dewan Bahadur Raghunath Rao and Narendra Nath Sen reiterated the assertion of Olcott. Even Mrs. Annie Besant wrote in 1915 that the decision to summon the Congress was first taken at the time of the annual convention of the Theosophical Society at an informal meeting of seventeen persons held at the residence of Raghunath Rao towards the end of December, 1884.\(^4\) But, as Dr. S. R. Mehrotra has pointed out, the idea of holding annual conferences of representatives from different parts of the country in order to promote national objectives had been current in India long before the founders of the Theosophical Society landed in Bombay in 1870. Moreover, the deliberations at Raghunath Rao's residence were not followed by any practical action, a fact indirectly admitted by Mrs. Besant herself. The organization of the first National Congress, concludes Dr. Mehrotra rightly, was the result of developments which had nothing to do with the Theosophical Society and was on lines very different from those suggested at the meeting held in Madras.\(^5\)
2. The Role of Allan Octavian Hume

Paradoxically, the credit of organizing the Indian National Congress belongs to an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume. He joined the East India Company's Civil Service in 1849, became a Secretary to the Government of India in 1879, retired in 1882 and settled in Simla. As the son of the famous Joseph Hume, he had inherited from his father the creed of radical liberalism, and took a keen interest in Indian progress. He came in contact with Lord Ripon, became enthusiastic about the latter's scheme of self-government, and by late 1883 began to advise him unofficially on Indian public opinion and politics. In his open letter to the graduates of the Calcutta University on 1 March, 1883, Hume made a stirring appeal to them to take the initiative in establishing an Association which would promote "the mental, moral, social and political regeneration of the people of India." The Ilbert Bill agitation of 1883 extended Hume's contacts throughout India. Ripon's compromise over the Bill disappointed and disillusioned the politically conscious Indians, but Hume defended it and also organized a grand farewell demonstration for Ripon. It represented "the first achievement of national India".

Between December, 1884, and March, 1885, Hume had prolonged discussions with eminent nationalist leaders for holding an annual conference of representative men from all parts of India, organizing a central 'national association' with a view to directing political activity throughout the country, preparing a charter of demands to be presented to the British Parliament, setting up a 'telegraphic agency' to send news to the British press giving India's point of view and countering the misrepresentations of the Anglo-Indians, and also forming an 'Indian Party' in the Parliament. In March, 1885, Hume and his friends drew up a plan for an Indian National Union. The Union would take the form of an annual conference, to be attended by leaders of various provincial associations, and decide upon political, social, economic and educational reforms to be undertaken in the coming year. The conference would be associated with the Government and used as a sounding-board for enlightened Indian public opinion. Officials would be encouraged to take part in the conference and the Governor or Lieutenant-Gover-
nor of the province hosting it would be requested to preside over it. B. Martin has aptly remarked that “the key to the entire plan rested upon official sanction and participation.” After his return to Simla in May, 1885, Hume placed his plan before Viceroy Lord Dufferin for his support.  

Dufferin evinced considerable interest in Hume’s plan and welcomed it, as it would furnish the Government with something like an authoritative statement of the views and wishes of the educated and intelligent Indians throughout the country. But he objected to the idea of an official link with the Union as its activities would certainly involve a criticism of the acts or policy of the Government and formulation of demands which, probably, it would be impossible for the Government to grant. In a letter to Lord Reay, Governor of Bombay, dated 17 May, 1885, Dufferin advised him not to serve as the President of the Conference. He felt that it would be a mistake if there was any official identification either with the reforming or the reactionary enthusiasts.  

Hume’s plan of convening a representative gathering of the Indian political leaders with the Viceroy’s approval has given rise to much controversy about his real intentions and also the original character of the Congress organization. Sir William Wedderburn, biographer of Hume, tells us that the latter was deeply impressed by the growing discontent of the Indian people, and believed that the British Government’s grand apparatus would shrivel up. About a year before the end of the Viceroyalty of Lord Lytton Hume obtained very definite information from voluminous secret police reports to which he had access as a high official about the explosive situation in India, caused by the economic sufferings of the masses and the alienation of the intellectuals. The “state of things at the end of Lytton’s reign was bordering upon a revolution.” The peasantry had been impoverished by famines and complaining about the costly and unsuitable civil courts set up by the British Government, the corrupt and oppressive police, the rigid revenue system and the galling administration of the Arms Act and the Forest Acts. The bureaucracy had not only prevented new concessions but also withheld privileges like the liberty of the press, the right to hold public meetings and even the autonomy of the universities. “These ill-starred measures of
reaction, combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought India under Lord Lytton within measurable distance of a revolutionary outbreak”, wrote Wedderburn.\textsuperscript{11} The Faraiizi movement and the Pabna uprising in Bengal, the Kuka movement in the Punjab, the Deccan Riots of 1875 in Poona and Ahmadnagar districts, and the armed rising of peasants in Maharashtra under Wasudeo Balwant Phadke in 1879 clearly indicated the temper of the people. The Indian-owned newspapers were also rapidly growing in number and influence. They publicized the grievances of the people. To restrain them the Government of Lytton passed the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. Hume was thus convinced that some positive action was called for to counteract the growing unrest. The idea of the Congress appeared to him as an effective device to stave off any such danger of violence. In his own words, “A safety-valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our own action, was urgently needed, and no more efficacious safety-valve than our Congress movement could possibly be devised”.\textsuperscript{12} It was also to act as a body for canalising the leading and progressive Indian public opinion along constitutional lines.

3. Was the Congress intended to be a safety-valve?

The above version about the foundation of the Indian National Congress has led Dr. R. C. Majumdar to conclude that the Congress was not intended to subserve the object of securing representative government for India, nor was it actuated by the more moderate desire of training the Indians in the Parliamentary form of government. “It was solely designed to hold back the Indian intelligentsia from joining an apprehended general outbreak against the British.”\textsuperscript{13} R. P. Dutt, a radical critic of the Congress, also argued that the National Congress was brought into existence “through the initiative and under the guidance of direct British governmental policy, on a plan secretly pre-arranged with the Viceroy, as an intended weapon for safeguarding British rule against the rising forces of popular unrest and anti-British feeling.”\textsuperscript{14} This ‘conspiracy theory’, however, has been discredited by the opening of Dufferin’s private papers which reveal that no one in the ruling circles took Hume’s prophesy very seriously. His sole object was to perpetuate the
British Raj in India at any cost. He was obsessed by the apprehension that the Raj was on the brink of destruction. At the same time he was a severe critic of the British bureaucracy in India, one of the few British officials who retained faith in collaboration with educated Indians and wanted to act as a link between the Viceroy and the educated and politically conscious section of the Indian people. Even Dr. Majumdar admits that Hume was inspired by a genuine sympathy for the interest and welfare of India, though he certainly did not have the same national sentiment and patriotic yearning for the freedom of India which characterized the advanced political thinkers of the country. Dr. Bipan Chandra has rightly remarked that whatever might be Hume’s real purpose, the ‘safety-valve’ theory is totally inadequate and misleading as an explanation of the foundation of the National Congress. This, at the most, explains to a limited extent Hume’s role in the episode. But the Congress was not Hume’s handiwork alone. His Indian collaborators who actively worked for the creation of this all-India political organization represented new social forces which were increasingly opposed to the exploitation of India for British interests. They needed an organization that would fight for India’s political and economic advancement. “They were patriotic men of high character and were in no way stooges of the foreign government.” They needed Hume’s support as they did not want to arouse official hostility to their early political efforts. “If Hume wanted to use the Congress as a ‘safety valve’, the early Congress leaders hoped to use him as a ‘lightning conductor’.” Dr. S. R. Mehrotra also points out that Hume did not think of the Congress merely as a safety-valve. In several of his private letters and public pronouncements he referred to the Congress as ‘the national movement’ and ‘the national party’.

4. The Role of Dufferin Re-examined

The role of Dufferin in founding the Indian National Congress has also been misrepresented by some contemporaries. W. C. Bonnerjee informs us that Hume’s original intention was to initiate his reform propaganda on the social side only. His idea was to allow the different provincial organizations to take up political questions. But Dufferin told Hume that there ought
to be a body of persons in this country who would perform the functions which Her Majesty's Opposition did in England, point out to the Government the defects of the existing system of administration and also suggest remedies. He also did not agree with Hume's proposal that the Governor or Lieutenant-Governor of the province hosting the meeting was to preside over it. Hume was eventually convinced by Dufferin's arguments, and the Indian leaders whom he consulted about his plan also endorsed Dufferin's stand. Dufferin, however, had made it a condition with Hume that his name in connection with the scheme of the Congress should not be divulged so long as he remained in India as Viceroy. This condition was faithfully maintained.19

The above account makes Dufferin almost a co-founder of the Congress along with Hume and his Indian associates. But it is hard to reconcile it with Hume's own confession that he wanted the Congress to serve as a 'safety-valve' against an impending revolution. The Congress could not certainly serve his purpose by keeping itself aloof from politics altogether. Moreover, early in 1885, Hume told B. M. Malabari who was trying to enlist his support for a programme of social reform that a national organization would have to leave such matters strictly alone. On the other hand, Dufferin, in his speech delivered at the St. Andrews Day Dinner in Calcutta in November, 1888, advised the Congress to direct its attention only to social questions.20 It is, however, true that Dufferin was acquainted with Hume's plan and acquiesced in the project, though he did not want high officials to have any direct link with the Congress.

In March, 1885, Hume issued a confidential circular to the inner circle of his political collaborators, announcing that a 'Conference of the Indian National Union' would be held at Poona in December, 1885 which would be attended by delegates chosen from leading politicians well acquainted with the English language from all parts of the Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. The direct objects of the Conference would be "to enable all the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress to become personally known to each other and to discuss and decide upon the political operations to be undertaken during the ensuing year". The Conference indirectly would 'form the germ of a Native Parliament', and, if properly conducted, would in a few years constitute an unanswerable
reply to the assertion that India was wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions. Hume also spent the later months of 1885 in England where he established contacts with some leading Liberals, apparently to attract their interest to his project.

5. *The First Congress Meets*

The proposed conference, to which the title Indian National Congress was given, started its first session in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College (above Gowalia Tank), Bombay, on 28 December, 1885, Poona having been found unsuitable on account of the outbreak of cholera there. The President was W. C. Bonnerjee, a leading lawyer of Calcutta. Seventy-two delegates registered their names as 'representatives', the largest number naturally coming from Bombay, and about thirty attended as 'observers', mostly Government servants. A large section of the delegates belonged to the legal profession. Editors of many well-known newspapers also attended the session. The Congress met in camera and only a brief report of its proceedings was supplied to the press every day.

In his Presidential address Bonnerjee stressed the representative and constitutional character of the gathering. He asserted that such an important and comprehensive assemblage had never occurred within historical times on the soil of India. It is true that the members of the Congress were not representatives of the Indian people in the sense the members of the House of Commons were; but, if community of sentiments, feelings and wants enabled any one to speak on behalf of others, then the Congress, Bonnerjee asserted, might justly claim to be representative of the people of India. The four main aims and objects of the Congress, as defined by Bonnerjee, were: (1) promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in the country's cause; (2) eradication by direct friendly intercourse of all possible race, creed or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of the country and the fuller development and consolidation of the sentiments of national unity; (3) recording of the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing social questions of the day; (4) determination of the lines and methods
of action to be pursued by the Indian politicians for public interests during the next twelve months. 23

6. Early Sessions of the Congress

In its early years the Congress had, however, no permanent organization. "There were no paying members, no officials other than a general secretary, no central office, and no funds". Every Christmas a session was held in a different city with a different President, and it was managed by a local Reception Committee with locally collected funds. The Committee arranged the printing and distribution of the Congress proceedings after the session ended. Yet the Congress grew from strength to strength, acquiring a larger significance in Indian political life and it was attended by a steadily growing number of delegates: 72 in 1885, 434 in 1886, 607 in 1887, 1248 in 1888 and 1889 in 1889. Among its Presidents during the first two decades were all nationally respected leaders. The participation of women in the national movement was also anticipated by the address delivered at the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1890 by Kadambini Ganguly, the first woman graduate of the Calcutta University.

The first two decades (1885-1905) in the history of the Indian National Congress, generally described as the Moderate phase, saw a broad uniformity in objectives and methods of work. The Congress met at the end of each year for three days in what turned out to be a great social occasion as well as a political assembly and heard and applauded Presidential addresses as well as other eloquent speeches. Resolutions that were passed dealt broadly with three sorts of grievances caused by alien rule,—political, administrative and economic.

The main political demand was reform of the Legislative Councils in order to give them greater powers and to make them representative in character by including some members elected by local bodies, chambers of commerce, universities, etc. True, the Congress leaders did not demand voting right for all Indian citizens, but universal adult suffrage was unknown even to England at that time. The Congress demand had some influence on the making of the Indian Councils Act of 1892. 24 There was also an expectation that freedom would gradually broaden from
precedent to precedent on the British pattern till India entered the promised but distant land of what Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906 described as "Self-Government or Swaraj like that of United Kingdom or the colonies."  

With regard to the Indian administration, the Congress wanted the British Parliament to take a more keen and lively interest in Indian affairs. That is why they demanded the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India and making the Secretary of State directly responsible to the Parliament. This demand was based upon the idea that the English people were essentially just and fair, and, if properly informed, would never deviate from the right path. It was with this idea that the Congress carried on political propaganda in England, formed a British Committee of the Indian National Congress in 1889, voted a sum of Rs. 45000 per annum for its support, and the journal India with William Digby as the editor was also started for the same purpose in 1890. Among administrative reforms, however, the most important demand was the Indianization of services through simultaneous ICS examinations in England and India. The demand was "raised not really just to satisfy the tiny elite who could hope to get into the ICS, as has been sometimes argued, but connected with much broader themes." Indianization was advocated as a blow against racism. It would also reduce the drain of wealth in so far as much of the fat salaries and pensions enjoyed by Englishmen were being remitted to England, and help to make administration more responsive to Indian needs. Other administrative demands included separation of the judiciary from the executive, extension of trial by jury, repeal of the Arms Act, higher jobs in the army for Indians, and the raising of an Indian volunteer force—demands which combined pleas for racial equality with a concern for civil rights.  

The economic issues raised by the Congress were all bound up with the general poverty of India, viz., the drain of wealth theme. Resolutions were passed, time and again, calling for an enquiry into India's growing poverty and famines, demanding reductions in Home Charges and military expenditure, more funds for technical education to promote Indian industries, and an end to unfair tariffs and excise duties. The demand for extension of the Permanent Settlement was also related to
the drain of wealth argument, for over-assessment was held to be responsible for forced sale by peasants, leading to export surplus. The Lucknow session of the Congress in 1899, presided over by R. C. Dutta, passed a resolution clearly demanding both permanent fixation of revenue in raiyatwari areas and a ceiling on zamindari rent. The Congress was, however, not concerned solely with the interests of the English-educated professional groups, zamindars, or industrialists. There were many resolutions on the lowering of the salt tax, mal-treatment of Indian workers abroad, and the sufferings caused by new forest laws. Resolutions demanding relaxation of the rigidity of forest laws were passed every year between 1891 and 1895. An attempt was made, at Hume’s initiative, to rally peasant support in 1887 through two popular pamphlets translated into no less than twelve regional languages. Hume himself wrote an imaginary dialogue exposing arbitrary administration in villages, while Viraraghavachari’s Tamil Catechism attacked existing Legislative Councils as sham. The Congress believed that through legislatures with elected representatives of the people and invested with larger powers, it would be possible to ameliorate the condition of the people.

The Indian National Congress also took an interest in India’s foreign policy from its very inception and opposed any aggression by the British Government against her neighbours. In the very first session it condemned the aggressive war in Upper Burma and opposed the annexation of that country. The resolution further demanded that the new country, if annexed, should be kept separate from India as a crown colony. The Congress also opposed the attack upon Afghanistan and the suppression of the tribal people in the north-western frontier of India.

As regards the methods and style of functioning of the Moderate Congress which made it a target of criticism, it may be pointed out that the keynote was struck by Naoroji’s phrase ‘un-British rule’. The Congress professed unwavering loyalty to the British Government and dilated upon the blessings of British rule. It demanded political reforms, and stood for orderly political progress along constitutional lines. It felt that a direct challenge to the British rule was bound to meet with failure at that time. So the Moderates concentrated their energies on
building up a strong public opinion in India, arousing the political consciousness and national spirit of the people and educating and uniting them on broad political and economic questions. Meetings were held from time to time where political and academic speeches were made and resolutions passed setting forth popular demands. Numerous memorials and petitions were also sent to high Government officials and the British Parliament. The Press was also used as a critique of the Government.32


A few observations about the nature and social composition of the early Congress will not be out of place here. The members belonged mostly to the new English-educated professional middle class composed of lawyers, doctors, journalists and teachers, and a few merchants and big land-owners. Success in their professions, it is said, left them with little time for political activity. Recent research is also revealing the connections between the early Congress professional intelligentsia and propertied groups, groups that were unlikely to support radical programmes.33 The Moderates lacked political faith in the masses who were only assigned a passive role in the early phase of nationalism. But their narrow social base notwithstanding, they championed the cause of all sections of the Indian people and represented nationwide interests against colonial exploitation. They emphasized from the outset the unity of the Indian nation. The Muslims, it is true, did not join the Congress in large numbers, but the Congress did not discriminate against them or against the followers of any other religion or sect. Social questions and religious issues were intentionally excluded from the deliberations of the Congress as it was felt that these might lead to serious differences amongst members of different castes, sects and religious communities, ultimately resulting in a schism within the national organization.34

8. Reaction of the Government

The reaction of the British Government to the establishment of the Congress and its constitutional demands was not
very favourable. The expectation that the Congress would emerge as 'Her Majesty's Opposition' or, as a 'safety-valve' being belied, Dufferin in a public speech on 30 November, 1888, ridiculed the Congress as taking a 'big jump into the unknown,' and slighted the Congressmen as a 'microscopic minority'. To him the 'pretensions' of the Congress were 'extravagant'. George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, accused the Congress leaders of possessing 'seditious and double-sided character,' Towards the end of 1887 a 'Special Branch' of the Police was created 'with the object of dealing with specially confidential political movements and meetings, excitement, wandering character of a suspicious nature, public feeling, illicit trade in arms and ammunition.' Hume's agitational methods alarmed the bureaucracy, and there was a proposal to deport him from India. The organizers of the fourth session of the Congress at Allahabad in 1888 were obstructed by the local officials in their attempt to procure a suitable site in the city. But as the Congress adhered scrupulously to moderate and constitutional methods, the British Government did not launch any direct attack on it, but took steps to weaken it by indirect methods. In 1888 the Viceroy formally warned some Princely States not to support the Congress. Far more effective was the alienation of the Muslims from the Congress through the policy of 'divide and rule'. The Aligarh Movement owed much to British official encouragement and patronage. The British rulers were hopeful that the Congress would collapse. Lord Curzon wrote to the Secretary of State on 18 November, 1900, 'My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my greatest ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise.' He described the Congress as that 'unclean thing'. Some Englishmen even accused the Congress of receiving Russian gold.

9. Shift in Policy and Bid for New Leadership

Curzon's assessment, however, soon proved to be off the mark. This was mainly due to the fact that the Moderate Congress reflected, as Dr. J. R. McLane remarked, "only a small segment of nationalist sentiment." British unpopularity was on the increase under the impact of famines and plagues,
the countervailing cotton excise and Curzon's package of aggressive measures including the Indian Universities Act (1904). The Congress still continued to be a movement of the English-educated elite. But its methods and style of work soon made it the target of Extremist criticism. The early Congress technique of making petitions, speeches and articles, aimed at convincing British public opinion, was felt to be both futile and dishonourable to a large section of politically conscious Indians. Even this politics of what the Extremists described as 'mendicancy' was tried out in a rather intermittent manner. Thus, the second generation of Congressmen began to question the Moderate leadership, its assumptions and techniques. It was Aurobindo Ghose who in a series of articles, entitled 'New Lamps for Old', written in 1893-94, in the Induprakash, first raised the voice of protest against the Congress policy. He attacked Congress mendicancy as "a little too much talk about the blessings of British rule." To him the Congress which represented a very limited class could not honestly be called national. He emphasized the need of 'Purification by Blood and Fire', and wrote, "In Mr. Hume's formation, the proletariat remained, for any practical purpose, a piece of the board. Yet the proletariat is...the key to the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future." Lala Lajpat Rai of the Punjab also pointed out the weaknesses of the Congress and showed that it had failed to initiate a truly national mass movement. He strongly criticized the Congress policy of mendicancy and the economic exploitation of India. In two articles published in the Kayastha Samachar of 1901 he advocated technical education and industrial self-help in place of the rather useless annual festival of the English-educated elite. Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal criticized the Congress session of Amravati in 1897 as a 'threecday tamasha' (farce). The feeling of dissatisfaction with the gross injustice, corruption and tyranny of the bureaucracy found expression in Rabindranath Tagore's Sadhana (1893-94). Tagore exposed the malaise of the foreign rule and the deteriorating relations between the rulers and the ruled. His Sadhana was "an articulate protest of a new generation against the
Moderate policy of mendicancy." Tagore made repeated calls for atmasakti or self-reliance through swadeshi enterprise and national education. He also made perceptive suggestions for mass contact through melas, jatras, and the use of the mother-tongue in both education and political work. Swami Vivekananda criticized the Congress indifference to the welfare of the masses and tried to rouse the self-respect of the Indian people. The Bengali bhadralok was also turning to swadeshi industrial enterprise, and Satish Mukherjee through his Dawn Society (1902) and Rabindranath Tagore through his Sانت-никетан Brahmacharya-asrama (1901) were experimenting with new forms of education under indigenous control. Bipin Chandra Pal in 1902 condemned the Congress as a 'begging institution.'

In the Punjab, both Harkishan Lal and the Arya Samajists of the 'College' faction were active in swadeshi enterprise from the 1890s. The Congress delegates from the Punjab also pressed from 1893 onwards for a formal constitution, "evidently to reduce the powers of the informal Bombay-Bengal axis which dominated the organization." They also set up a permanent Indian Congress committee at the 1899 session, which was to collapse only two years later.

It was Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra who was the most important exponent of Extremist philosophy and programme. He used religious orthodoxy as a method of mass contact through his alignment against reformers on the Age of Consent issue (1891), followed by the organization of the Ganapatī festival in 1894. He developed a sort of patriotismum-historical cult as a central symbol of nationalism through the organization of the Shivaji festival from 1896 onwards, and experimented with a kind of no-revenue campaign in 1896-1897. The countervailing cotton excise of 1896 produced intense reactions in western India on which Tilak tried to base something like a boycott movement. Tilak, who pointedly declared that "we will not achieve any success in our labours if we croak once a year like a frog", seemed to be groping his way towards the techniques of mass passive resistance or civil disobedience, when, in a speech in 1902, he declared: "Though down-trodden and neglected, you must be conscious of your power of making the administration impossible if you but
choose to make it so.”

Historians of the ‘Cambridge School’ like D. A. Washbrook and C. A. Bayly have tried to present the emergence of Extremism as basically a set of factional conflicts between ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ for the control of the Congress. Speaking about the age of the Moderates, L. A. Gordon also comments that “the Congress in Bengal and nationally, was an organization within which a dominant faction fought off the challenge of competing factions.” The politics of Calcutta was faction-ridden, and Surendranath Banerjea and his newspaper, the Bengalee, had a running quarrel with the Amrita Bazar Patrika group of Motilal Ghosh ever since the former’s Indian Association had overshadowed the Indian League of 1875-1876. Constant and bitter criticism of the Banerjea group was made by the Indian Mirror, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Bangabasi and other papers. Factionalism was also prevalent in the Punjab and Madras. Thus Gordon concludes: “Making a national movement that included real participation by even a smattering of other sections of the population was a task not yet envisioned.” He further remarks that “each Indian who attended one of the Congress sessions carried with him the perception shaped at home. The character of local politics was such that the perceptions of man gained in his home-region often limited or depressed his nationalist aspirations.” Faction-analysis, as Dr. S. Sarkar has rightly remarked, should not however, be pressed too far. It is difficult to understand why dissidents should have been so eager to capture the Congress unless it was because they had certain alternative strategies and ideals to put forward. It also ignores entirely the fairly systematic critique to Moderate politics which was emerging in Bengal, the Punjab and Maharashtra in the 1890s.

10. Achievements of the Indian National Congress (1885-1905)

In spite of the major constraints on the functioning of the Indian National Congress, it had substantial achievements to its credit. “In fact”, as Dr. Bipan Chandra has remarked, “it was their very achievements in the wider sense that lead later to the more advanced stages of the national movement and made their own
approach historically obsolete.” The Moderate method of agitation through meetings, speeches and resolutions, stigmatised as ‘mendicancy’, proved quite effective in bringing together nationalists from all parts of India. It made the people conscious of the bonds of common political, economic and cultural interests and of the existence of a common enemy in imperialism and thus helped to weld them into a common nationality. The Moderates popularized the ideas of democracy and civil liberty. It was in the course of the building up of the Indian National Congress and other popular and nationalist associations that the Indians acquired a practical knowledge of democracy. A large number of nationalist political workers were trained in the art of modern politics, and the people familiarized with the concepts and ideas of modern politics. Most of all, the early Congress leaders, clearly moderate in politics and political methods, exposed the exploitative character of British imperialism in India by a fairly systematic analysis of India’s poverty on the basis of the drain of wealth theory. This economic agitation totally sapped the moral foundation of British rule. “It was to provide the core of the Indian critique of foreign rule throughout the later phases of nationalism,” writes Dr. S. Sarkar.

It can, thereore, be said that in spite of its failures and weaknesses, the Indian National Congress during 1885-1905 laid strong foundations for the national movement to grow upon. In the words of Dr. Tara Chand, “As time passed the Congress became the embodiment of India’s political hopes and aspirations, the instrument of India’s struggle for independence.”
CHAPTER V

THE ORGANIZATION OF SECRET REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETIES IN BENGAL

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This paper, mainly based on available sources, supplemented by some unpublished materials, is divided into the following parts: (1) Earlier Secret Societies of Calcutta; (2) Impact of European Secret Societies; (3) Vasudeva Balwant Phadke’s influence and (4) Rules and principles of the Secret Societies in Bengal. By ‘Secret Revolutionary Societies’ I mean those organizations with which English educated upper and middle class young men were connected for the forcible overthrow of the alien domination in India. The process was, however, started in 1875 when a secret society was founded in Calcutta. Just within one year after that another secret society sprang up in this city. Almost at the same time, i.e., in 1876, Vasudeva Balwant Phadke founded a secret revolutionary organization in Maharashtra.¹ Since then till the first quarter of the twentieth century various secret revolutionary societies came into existence in different parts of the country. As in the official reports and unofficial accounts detailed information is available on the secret revolutionary societies of Bengal, I have confined my study to this particular region though attempts are made here to establish links with other secret societies outside Bengal.

1. Earlier Secret Societies of Calcutta

The educated young mind of Bengal was, of course, galvanized with revolutionary thought from 1861 by Rajnarain Bose (1826-1899). It was under his chairmanship that a secret society was founded in Calcutta at the end of 1876, called Sanjibani Sabha. Jyotirindranath Tagore was the main initiator of this Sabha. Rabindranath Tagore was also a member. But it was short-lived as it existed till May-June 1877. No
detailed information is available on its activities. One of the earliest papers which propagated revolutionary ideals in Bengal was the *Aryadarshan*, a Bengali monthly, published since April 1874 under the editorship of Jogendranath Vidyabhusan. It is quite well-known that discarding Mazzini’s revolutionary teachings as “unsuited to the circumstances of India and as fatal to its normal development along the lines of peaceful and orderly progress”, Surendranath Banerjea popularised Mazzini’s patriotism, dedication and humanitarian activities among young men of Bengal. In this way he ignited patriotic fire among them. At Surendranath’s request an article on *Mazzini and Young Italy* was serially published in the *Aryadarshan* from August 1875. The students of Calcutta were greatly influenced by the saga of Italian patriots. They felt the necessity of founding a secret organization for the emancipation of the country. In some places secret societies were founded and young men took oath with their own blood. Bipin Chandra Pal wrote: “...the new inspiration imparted to young Bengal by Surendranath’s presentation of the life of Mazzini and the Italian freedom led many of us to form secret organisations. Calcutta student community was at that time almost honeycombed with these organisations.” One such organisation was the *Hindusthan Union*, which was perhaps founded at the end of 1875. The necessity of uniting India was emphasised by several leaders and papers of the time. Being influenced by them the students inscribed the word ‘Union’ in their secret society called *Hindusthan Union*. It is not known where it was located. Though we do not get any information about the actual number of its membership, we can form an idea from a contemporary evidence where it was mentioned that it had many members in all the premier cities of Bengal. The students of Metropolitan Institution took a leading part in it. Perhaps Surendranath Banerjea was the President of the *Hindusthan Union* as the students of his Institution were involved in it. We can deduce it from the following statement of Bipin Chandra Pal: “Surendranath was himself, I think, the President of quite a number of these secret societies.” But we could not trace any other such society excepting the *Sanjibani Sabha*.

The *Hindusthan Union* wanted to improve the lot of the people of this country. It made efforts to establish branches