In this study an attempt has been made to probe into the labour agitation — varied modes of protest, violent or non-violent, political or non-political, organised or spontaneous, sectarian or popular, communal or class — created by numerous categories of the laboring man on the railways in colonial India.

Railwaymen formed a cross-section of the colonial Indian society. Recruited from all over India, with varied socio-cultural and economic background, they were truly a modern category. Irrespective of their social tie, rigours of the railway work-operations moulded their personality, way of life and social consciousness; and they in turn imposed on the railways a distinctive mould. Their social and kinship ties with the family, village, caste and class found expression in traditional reverence and acceptance of the authority of the imperial Leviathan — the railways.

The railways administered their domains on sound principles of the management of a 'feudal' estate. Though each of the railways companies was a modern corporate enterprise; it was administered through an hierarchy of technical and financial oligarchy headed by the Agent, who represented the Board of Governors, the Department of Commerce and the Railway Board. Sophisticatedly administered through financial
and technical expertise, its relationship with the work-force bore
the stamp of modern servitude. The workmen employed by the railway
companies were called and treated as railway servants and were recruit-
ted into hierarchical grades such as, superior, subordinate, in-
ferior and menial.

I Outline of the Problem

This research is divided into three sections.

In section I, the early process of formation — the problems of
emergence of the industrial labour force on the railways, its distri-
butution and structure, and its conditions of work and living — has
been examined as to comprehend the formation of an non-Asian labour
aristocracy on the railways in colonial India. In section II, the
problem of forms of labour protest has been studied in two intercon-
nected parts: Firstly, how were the varied forms of labour protest on
the railways a response to those conflicts and tensions emerging in
the process of formation of the labour force; and also to what extent

* In all sections the area of study has been confined to the three
major state-owned and state-managed railways — the Great Indian
Peninsula Railway (G.I.P.R.), East Indian Railway (E.I.R.), and
the North Western Railway (N.W.R.). Here too, the area of
study has been so defined as to highlight some features of the
formation of the railway labour aristocracy and its effect on
the railway labour agitation. This constraint has been imposed
on us partly by the sheer dearth of archival sources and partly
as an exercise to achieve cohesion in our investigation. Where-
ever adequate evidence has not been available, corroborative evidence
has been given from the other company-owned and company-managed
railways.
was it influenced by other anti-colonial social protest movements? In section III, the response of the colonial bureaucracy to the problem of emergence and its forms of protest of railway labour has been examined, so to comprehend the dynamic of interaction of "social protest and social administration" on the railways.

(a) Structure of the Labour Force

The railways, partly as a consequence of historical exigencies and partly as a conscious policy, created a labour force in which the superior and subordinate strata were the non-Asians. In contrast, the Indians were recruited, till 1921 and even after, in the lower subordinate jobs.

This structure of railway labour force, with its community based—whites¹ versus natives²—divisions, had its bearing on the nature

1 Whites as a general category has been used to denote the non-Asians who defined their identity in opposition to the Indians, by their attitude of racial superiority. In particular, the whites or the term 'forenghi', refers to the Anglo-Indian community on the railways, as different from the Europeans on a covenant. The Europeans manned the crucial operations; the Indians worked in the lower grades. The railway bureaucracy encouraged the growth of the Anglo-Indians, as an intermediate community, with the object of creating a gulf between the Europeans and Indian workmen. Racial discrimination was not a historical accident but was consciously promoted as a colonial policy. Racialism, its corollary, however, grew up as a preverco defining sentiment of the Anglo-Indians. In regions, such as Bombay and Punjab where the European workmen predominated, in numbers and created their own labour organizations, racial enmity existed. In the eastern region, however, the Anglo-Indian community's presence was over-bearing. A tradition of opposition to the Raj created during the Swadeshi agitation helped the crystallization of native railwaymen's nationalist consciousness. So by 1919 two countereposed identities of railwaymen were in the process of emergence. The European workmen, often neutral, in times of crisis were compelled to come to the defence of the racialist labour aristocracy, railway bureaucracy and the Raj.

2 Natives was the disparaging category used by the whites, to refer
of the labour agitation. As a consequence this agitation was sharply divided into several sections. The Europeans, linked to the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants' of Britain, conducted successfully an agitation for higher wages and bonus but remained quite isolated from the mainstream of the Indian railwaymen's agitation. The Anglo-Indians and the domiciled Europeans, the intermediate community, did not participate in any industrial protest and remained loyal to the Raj.

The Indian railwaymen - the natives - were segregated into four broad sections: First, the Indian babu \(^3\) employed in the lower clerical and supervisory posts, spearheaded the reformist current of railwaymen's agitation. Secondly, the inferior - lower grade drivers, shunters, signalers and firemen - held crucial positions in the operating department of the railways. It was these categories which were the most reactive anti-colonial Indian railwaymen, who often merged their struggles with the anti-colonial agitation. Thirdly, there existed the industrial proletariat of the workshops - coolies - located in important centres. This category of workmen, supported by lower intensive grade,

Cont'd... fin. 2

to Indians working as lower subordinates in the railway operations. It signified an inferior grade and status. In the post-war phase, during the struggle against racial discrimination, after a continual protest by the colonial railwaymen, the category native was replaced by the category Indian.

\(^3\) Babu is a jocular Indian term used to describe the Indian office going bespectacled white collar clerics who copied the colonial life style. On the railways, it was used for the native clerks, ticket-collectors, station-masters and others employed in the clerical and supervisory establishments.
the inferiors, constituted the backbone of the militant railway labour agitation during 1919-1922 and 1925-1930. Lastly, there existed the numerous grades of menial servants of the railways. An unskilled section of the labour force, employed on a temporary basis, these categories remained peripheral to the main currents of the railwaymen's agitation.

In section I, in the two chapters, an attempt has been made to provide causation for the peculiar anti-British character of the railway labour agitation. Thus in itself the first section is not an elaborate study of the formation of the workforce, but only of those specificities of the formation of the workforce which created conditions for the crystallization of a non-Indian labour aristocracy in the railway work force.

(b) Labour Agitation

In section II an attempt has been made to study the effects of the presence of the non-Asiatic - a racialist labour aristocracy - on varied aspects of the labour agitation. Here again our study is confined to three major railways. Only important strikes on those railways have been studied in depth so to comprehend the entire gamut of issues that cropped up in the course of each of the strikes. This exercise has in a definite way redefined the focus of our investigation. The period of our study stretches between 1919-1937. However, the central thrust of our investigation has not been to chalk out empirical
detailed of the formation of labour force or its agitation over these years, though often this has been attempted. In fact we have chosen focal points, such as, the 1919-1922 and 1925-1930 strike years, and given particular attention to major quasi-political strikes. Similarly, in chapter V, only the reformist programme of three non-political unions, as representative of the entire current railway reformism, has been sketched.

Though the section on the labour aristocracy precedes the section on the labour agitation, the argument in each of the two sections is interdependent. In each chapter other chapters either form the background or the basis for the argument advanced. In fact this interconnected nature of the argument has resulted in necessary repetitions. In the mode of presentation there appears to be a certain a priorism. However, in our analysis abstract or simple historical categories have been the starting point: Our dramatic personae, the railwayman, begin as natives - babus, inferiors, coolies, menials -, and as whites. Through apparently contradictory moments they grow into historical subjects championing desperate causes, such/nationalism, communism, reformism, communalism and colonialism. The growth of self-consciousness of railwayman, an integral part of the Indian people, occurred during the inter-war period. Exacting temporal continuities in the formation of labour force and in its varied forms of protest during those years have been provided, sometimes in detail, sometimes sparsely, where it has been possible or necessary, only to the extent these facts sub-
tantiate our central argument: The existence of the non-Indian labour aristocracy and the anti-colonial mass sentiment in India during 1919–1937, spurred on the railwaymen, apart of the colonized people, to create a current of popular protest directed at colonial rule.

(c) Railway Policy

Section III, on railway policy is explicited in the context of railways as an oligopolistic colonial enterprise: How did the colonial nature of the enterprise condition the structure of railway workforce? With the emergence of anti-colonial protest how did the railway administration attempt to mould this labour agitation? In this section the central question under examination is how did the railway labour agitation drift away from being a part of a popular anti-colonial mass agitation in the early 1920s and became only a current of corporate labour struggle by 1937? Did railway bureaucracy play any role in promoting this drift in the railway labour agitation or was this drift inevitable, as a necessary part of the growth of industrial capitalism in India?