CHAPTER III

(PATTERNS OF PROTEST: THE FORMATIVE YEARS /1919-29/)

In this chapter, the nature of working class activity in the early years has been discussed. From an analysis of early individualized protests we move on to discuss the basis and forms of collective protests between 1919-1929. The formation of the Mazdur Sabha and its relationship to the workers' movement has been taken up in the last section.

Protests in the early years

There were no major generalized strikes in Kanpur before 1919. In November that year (1919), the workers were reported to have been "seized" by a "strike fever." Nearly 20,000 workers of Kanpur remained on strike for eight days - "no small matter for surprise," for the hitherto complacent cotton capitalists of the city. However, the element of surprise has quite clearly been exaggerated in the capitalist version of events. The Annual Report of the Upper India Chamber of Commerce makes no mention of any previous trouble. In fact, by portraying the workers as being "constant", "abundant" and "willing"

2 H.P.D., File 189/1920; see also Pratan, 8.12.1919; Leader, 4.12.1919.
earlier in the year, the report completely glosses over a recent major strike in the New Victoria Mills, and some other minor ones in other mills. In any event, the absence of strikes is in itself no evidence of the "willingness" of the workers or their passive acceptance of existing work conditions.

The Kanpur workers had not been unresponsive to their oppressive conditions before organized collective forms of resistance became common, though such protests may have been of a relatively inconspicuous and individualized character. Weary of the tedium of long hours, or exasperated with poor working conditions, the worker sometimes left work altogether, going back to his village, shifting to another mill or just waited for another job. Freemantle, a government nominee to the Indian Factory Labour Commission (1908), was "convinced that long hours prevented many adults from becoming permanent workers in the mills." He reported that the workers, "often left because of the late hours up to which the mills worked." Workers who had got used to the grind did not react in the same way, but, "in the course of the first six months many new recruits left mill work."

Around the turn of the nineteenth century the millowners were showing serious concern about the "loss" and "inconvenience" caused by such desertions by workers. The workers of the North-West Tannery Co.

4 Ibid.
5 Leader, 25.9.1919; Pratap, 1.9.1919.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
millowners stated: "... come to work and stay away as it pleases them
and when any attempt was made to enforce the Breach of Contract Act,
"they simply stay away in a body for a few days, till we are forced
to send for them and practically agree to the aforesaid clause not
being enforced." Many other mills faced a similar problem and the
provisions of the Breach of Contract Act were used in many such cases,
where a contract had been made. In the Elgin Mills for instance, a
carding mistri who gave a notice quitting work, was forcibly disallowed
from doing so. Despite this, when he eventually left his job, he was
convicted under the Breach of Contract Act. A report on labour
supply in 1906, suggested that the "unattractiveness" of mill labour
was one of the reasons for labour turnover.

Though engaged collectively at the work place the former peasant
or artisan did not, as yet, see himself as a part of this collective;
the idea of collective action for his demands was still not integral
to him. In a later period, protest against his conditions of work
usually took the form of a collective struggle within the mill, demand-
ing a redress. In the 1890's and the early years of the twentieth
century, "petty" strikes did occur; but, protest and dissent more

9 Letter No. 703, dated 23.3.1895, from N.H. Tannery Co. Ltd. to
Contract Act XIII of 1859 remained in force till the early twenties.

10 Letter dated 22.4.1895, from Manager, Elgin Mills to U.I.C.C.,

11 Freemantle, "Report on Supply of Labour...", U.P. Rev. Progs., B,
May 1906, Nos. 90-95, p. 91.

12 The Upper India Chamber of Commerce referred to "petty" strikes
by workers, U.I.C.C., Report, 1899, p. 16.
often was expressed through a withdrawal from a particular mill, a shift to another mill, or a flight to the village.\textsuperscript{13}

In the factory, the Cawnpore worker, like the workers in India generally, had a reputation for doing "as little as possible"\textsuperscript{14} and of being "incapable of continuous work."\textsuperscript{15} A witness from the Cawnpore Cotton Mills complained: "Very few of them work the whole time the engine is running; about 10 per cent of our hands may be seen any time of day bathing, washing garments, smoking or otherwise loitering about the mill compound."\textsuperscript{16} Another witness from the same mill: "... during the long hour days the men were slacker..... If the operatives knew they had to work long hours they adapted themselves accordingly, and went out more."\textsuperscript{17} J.B. Sunderland of the North West Tannery stressed: "The operative will do as much work as he thinks fit, and whatever hours your factory runs you will not get more work out of him than he is willing to do."\textsuperscript{18} The worker preferred "... to spin his task to his own time."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13} Instances of a shift from one mill to another or a return to the village occurred even later, but by the 1920's, strikes and other forms of collective action had become a normal mode of expressing protest.


\textsuperscript{15} Ev., Ruir Mills, ibid., p. 204.
\textsuperscript{16} Ev., Cawnpore Cotton Mills, ibid., p. 197.
\textsuperscript{17} Ev., Francis Horsman of Cawnpore Cotton Mills, ibid., p. 200.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{19} Ev., H.D. Allen, ibid., p. 187.
Such instances of "indiscipline", and "easy" work habits were obviously exaggerated by the industrialists as an excuse for running the machines for longer hours. One British official disapproved of these arguments, pointing out that while the workers could occasionally shirk work, they could take very little rest while the machines were running.\(^\text{20}\) Making allowances for some exaggeration, however, the evidence cited above cannot be dismissed as a mere conjuration of the capitalist mind. Taking into account the climatic conditions and the arduous working hours in the factory, some "loitering" and "idling" was to be expected.\(^\text{21}\) This argument was inverted in the capitalist logic. For them, long hours were necessary because of the casual work habits of the "Asiatic", whereas for the worker, "idling" was a necessary relief from his toil.\(^\text{22}\) Some fifty spinners and weavers of the Muir and Campore Cotton Mills in their evidence to the I.F.L.C. corroborate our hypotheses: "At present, especially in the hot weather,\


\(^{21}\) In fact, an official commented: "The operatives take every opportunity of shirking work, because they are physically incapable of working steadily for these long hours..." S.H. Freemantle, Ev., I.F.L.C., Vol. II, 1908, p. 219. Thompson, while discussing the "irregular" habits of workers in the early stages of industrialization, raises a similar point. He refers for instance, to attitudes like that of the labourer on the Cameroon plantation: "How could a man work like that, day after day without being absent? Would he not die?" a labourer queried. E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", Flinn and Smout ed., Essays in Social History (Oxford 1974), p. 65.

\(^{22}\) "Short hours have always failed simply because, however short the hours, the Asiatic will take proportionately similar intervals of idleness and rest as he would if they were long..." Ev., Muir Mills, I.F.L.C., Vol. II, 1908, p. 204. This is a fundamental premise underlying the industrialists argument. Objections to
we have to go out of the mill frequently to get rest as the hours are so long, but if the hours were shorter we would loiter about less...23 Thirty weavers and twenty-five piecers, residing at Chatham's building, similarly, found the long hours "trying."24 If the hours were reduced, they argued: "We would work harder and earn the same as we do now."25 Long hours thus seem to have implied a slackening of work, this being the only means by which the unorganized worker could exert a modicum of control over his work time. "We cannot ask for shorter hours," they lamented, "as we cannot combine, and anyone putting himself forward would be dismissed."26 If a worker could escape the watchful eye of a supervisor, a short rest, or a smoke would perhaps be the only respite for him = his own way of expressing his distaste for the drudgery of work.27

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the argument about the "ingrained" habits of the 'Asiatic' have been raised in an earlier chapter. However, any argument which tends to reject all evidence of the lack of "discipline" of the worker and projects the worker as "committed" to his work is unhistorical as the view (cited above) which talks of his inherent lack of a work ethic.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Such primitive forms of protest were very characteristic of the slaves in the plantations of the American South. Genovese shows how the slaves attempted to define the limits of their subordination. Their actions, he emphasized, could not be judged against the commonly accepted notions of what constituted "political" action. The slaves devised their own peculiar modes of resistance. Forms of "day to day" resistance to slavery included".... stealing, lying, dissembling, shirking, murder infanticide, suicide, arson." They would shirk work by feigning illness or else would slow down the pace of work and set norms of work pace which they considered
More active and "aggressive" forms of protest were not completely unfamiliar to the workers prior to 1919. As far back as 1892, there was a reference to "mild instances of wage disputes", in the Woollen Mills, on the introduction of revised scales of pay. 28 Again in 1908, industrialist complained that "... when the workman finds his wages are less than what he is accustomed to receive there is revolt." 29 The workers had no formal organization bringing together workers of different mills prior to 1919, but embryonic forms of "combination" were present even in 1908. Fremantle felt that workers, "... understood a strike; but as yet they had no organization," and he doubted, "whether they realized their own power." 30 Upto the pre-war period it was reported that, "... there was no organization, mill by mill, over a large area. It might sometimes happen that one or two men had the power to call out the whole staff, and they occasionally demanded an increase in the rates of pay. This, however, was only in individual mills, and there was no organization to consider questions affecting their general interests, such as the restriction of hours." 31

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28 U.I.C.C. Report, 1892, p. 91. "Petty Strikes" in some mills, had been reported in 1889 as well. Ibid., 1889, p. 15.


30 Ev., Fremantle, Ibid., p. 220.

31 Ibid.
By 1919, we come across more numerous instances of strikes. Resentment against inhuman punishments, such as the lashing of their co-workers, could lead to strikes in the departments to which the victims belonged. The police were called in on an occasion when protest in a stronger form was apprehended in one of the mills. In the Cooper Allen Factory there is evidence of a strike prior to 1919; a strike, provoked by a reduction in wages imposed on the workers for their absence without leave. The workers of the Elgin Mills struck work over the question of bonus, in August 1919. In October 1919, the workers of the same mill went on a strike, in protest against deductions from their wages by jobbers. The strike in the New Victoria Mills, in the last week of September 1919, involving nearly 3,000 workers, formed a prelude to the generalized strike later in the same year.

Apart from the more obscure and indeterminate forms of protest escape to the village, "loitering" or "idling" while at work, there were the occasional strikes that have been mentioned above. Yet, the Kanpur workers had in 1919, few memories of mass protest, unlike the

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Pratap, 25.8.1919.
36 Ibid, 27.10.1919.
Bombay workers. The only mass protest in their history was the frenzied, emotional outburst against the implementation of the plague regulations in 1900. A "mob" of around 1500 people armed with lathis and hatchets was reported to have attacked the plague camp; forcibly closing shops, spreading into the city - "stampeding the carts from the great grain market." All work remained suspended, all shops shut, and "general alarm" was reported among "all classes." A large number of mill workers were among the "rioters." In fact, the Chamara and butchers from the tanneries and leather factories who were known for their "turbulent disposition" and the millhands who were believed to be "easily excited" were of special concern to the plague control authorities.

II The strike wave of 1919: the beginnings of organized collective action

Protests by workers had thus, not been absent in the earlier period, but the form and dimensions assumed by the strike in 1919 was


39 Resolution, G.A.D., dated 15.5.1900, Home Public Progs. (G.O.I.), A, June 1900, No. 298; see also U.P. G.A.D., File 486 C/1900, Box 105 (U.P.S.A.). For details on riots see Ch. V.

40 Teleg. dated 16.4.1900, Home Public Progs. (G.O.I.), A, June 1900, No. 293.

41 Resolution, G.A.D., dated 15.5.1900, Home Public Progs. (G.O.I.), A, June 1900, No. 298.
a relatively new feature. In September of the same year, around 3,000 workers of the Victoria Mills had struck work, but this strike did not spread to other mills in the city. In the last week of November 1919, a strike which began in the Woollen Mills, soon spread to the Elgin Mills, and from there on to the Muir, the Victoria and the Caspore Cotton Mills. The workers of the Ganges Flour Mills, the Oswara Dass Jute Mills (both Indian owned concerns), Messrs Cooper Allen and Co., and the Empire Engineering Co. also joined in the strike.

To avoid purely economic explanations as to why and how this new mode of collective protest emerged in 1919, we need to go deeper into the consciousness and activity of the Kanpur working class prior to 1919. However, the limitations on such an enquiry are considerable, as the material on this subject is almost negligible. Such generalizations that one can make are, thus necessarily based on very fragmentary information.

A commonly accepted notion correlates the intensity of strike activity with increased impoverishment of the workers. It is true that in 1919, the economic conditions of the Kanpur workers had worsened. Between 1918 and 1919, the cost of living index increased by 43 per cent, and real wages declined by 31 per cent in the weaving department and 30 per cent in the spinning (mules) department. The increase in the cost of living however, had begun earlier. Between

42 Pratap, 13.10.1919; Leader, 25.9.1919.
43 Leader, 27.11.1919, 3.12.1919.
1911-12 to 1916, the index had risen by 42 per cent and in 1915 by 52 per cent. In comparison with the level in 1911-12, real wages in the weaving department dropped by 30 per cent by 1919 and 27 per cent by 1915; in the spinning department, by 13 per cent and 16.5 per cent, respectively. Apart from these specific empirical considerations there is no necessary logical correlation between strikes and the impoverishment of workers. Strikes may occur in periods of rising real and money wages too. This has been discussed at length by Hobson in the case of England.

Thus, we may argue that the organized protests of the workers in the post 1919 phase cannot be understood solely in terms of the miserable conditions and declining real wages of the workers. This, as we mentioned, has been there earlier. That perhaps is important, in the collective expectation of better conditions after the war.

The increase in production in the war years, we have argued, opened up two processes affecting the activity of the workers in the follow-

44 For index numbers and detailed figures see Chap. II, App. The figures for 1911-12 referred to above are an average for the two years (i.e. 1911 and 1912).

45 Hobson argues that prior to 1890, social movements were greatly affected by "catastrophic and simultaneous increases in misery for most of the working population." After 1890 however, with the closer integration of different countries within the orbit of the capitalist economy, no distinct pattern replaced this phenomenon. "The explosions of the 1870's and 1900's," he argues "appear in secular boom periods, those of the 1930's and 1980-90 in secular depression phases. That of 1872 occurs at the end of a period of probably falling unemployment, rising money and real wages; that of 1889 during one of secular unemployment, stable money and rising real wages; that of 1911 while unemployment falls, money wages remain stable and real wages fall." — in E.J. Hobson, "Economic Fluctuations and Some Social Movements since 1880," in Hobson ed., Labourism, pp. 150-59 and p. 159.
ing period, (i) a growing awareness among the workers of their own economic plight in a situation where the prosperity of the mills was obvious; (ii) an assertion of their self-respect as a reaction to the "arbitrary" forms of discipline imposed upon them.

The war period, as we have noted earlier, was one of "intense activity" in the cotton mills and the Woollen Mill in Kanpur. The production of yarn and cloth, especially the varieties required for military purposes, registered a sharp increase. The production of tent cloth, we noted, increased by almost 300 per cent between 1909 and 1917-18; and drills and jeans by 100-150 per cent. The factory worker who gauged the profitability of the mill from a rough estimate of production in his mill, was aware of the "prosperity" of the industry. Although production had expanded earlier, profits increased sharply after 1910, with a relaxation of war controls on prices.

46 For detailed figures see Chapter I.

47 In a statement published in Leader the workers refer to the "huge profits" which the mills had made during the war. Leader, 14.12.1919. Similar statements are made in Pratap (Kanpur), brought out by individuals, many of whom had close links with the workers movement. In an editorial article in Pratap, G.S. Vidyarthi asks whether any sincere efforts had been made to improve the conditions of factory workers, in a situation when the mills had made considerable profits and all their top officials had enjoyed the fruits of this prosperity. 1.12.1919.

48 A clarification by the Government of India states categorically, that the Government could "... by no means admit ... that the price to be paid for purchases which must be made for war purposes, necessarily in most cases hurriedly, at a time of unprecedented national necessity is to be regulated solely by the consideration of prices prevailing locally and temporarily through abnormal market conditions... The rules as they stand, provide for the payment of a price allowing a normal rate of profit to
Cloth prices shot up in 1919. The profits of textile concerns in Kanpur rose despite the high supply price of raw cotton in this period. The workers expected a share in these expanded profits. During the war they had been told about the primacy of war needs and about the requirements of the "Defense of India." Now, they demanded a remuneration in the form of a bonus out of the profits the mills were making. The mill owners, they argued, had more than doubled the prices of their output. Under these circumstances, the workers emphasized, their existing wages should be doubled.

Not only were their wages low in relation to the increasing profits of the mill owners, but the low rates militated against their ideas of "fairness" and "justice." Their conception of "fair" wages was based on the prevalent bazaar rates of wages. "Outside the mills"

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Cont'd... f.n. 48 merchants who have acquired the goods in a normal manner. They are designed to preclude the payment of extortionate prices, as well as definitely to deter unprincipled persons from a form of speculation, out of the ordinary course of business, which is based solely on the principle that the utmost advantage should be taken of the public necessity for the purposes of private gain." (emphasis added) Weekly Progress Report of the Indian Munitions Board, No. 41, dated 22.2.1918, Com. & Ind. [India], Filed, April 1918, Nos. 49-53.

49 The index of profits of the Muir Mills rose from a base of 100 in 1910 to 630 in 1919; the Cawnpore Cotton Mills profits increased over the 1910 level by 500 per cent in 1919; those of the New Victoria Mills had more than doubled the 1911 level by 1918-19. For details see Chapter I.

50 See for instance file on, "Framing of Rules under the Defense of India Act, 1915 so as to prevent interference with work necessary for the successful prosecution of the war," Com. and Ind. [India], A, July 1919, Nos. 1-9.

they argued, "the wages of workmen have almost doubled, the unskilled labour who used to get 4 as. or 5 as. a day now gets 8 as. a day, while the skilled workman, such as a mason, a carpenter now gets on an average from 9 and 10 as. a day to Rs. 1 and Rs. 1-4 as. a day."

Taking into account "... the hard and long hours of work and other inconveniences incidental to life in the mills," they emphasized that, "the wages earned in the mills, both by skilled and unskilled workmen do not compare very favourably with the wages in the bazaar..."\(^52\)

In addition to this expectation of a "just" remuneration, the Kanpur workers, in their generalized protest of November 1919, were also expressing their dissatisfaction with tighter labour discipline, and intensification of the work process imposed on some sections from the start of the war.\(^53\) The attempt by the millowners to tighten discipline and control, could ensure productive efficiency, to the benefit of the capitalist; but, as we shall discuss below, they could also spark off a counter-process - an aversion to all authority and discipline.

The hours of work were increased to 12 hours a day\(^54\) to meet the pressure of war work; some mills worked even longer.\(^55\) The press-

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\(^52\) Ibid.

\(^53\) See also Chapter I and II.


\(^55\) In some mills the same workers continued working for two shifts, i.e., working almost twenty-four hours - Pratap, 25.8.1919. Often the workers were denied their normal holidays. For instance, the Coopper Allen Co. workers complained: "During the whole period of war, the factory has not been closed even on Sundays" - Statement of the Coopper Allen Factory workers, in Leader, 14.12.1919.
tice of long hours had prevailed earlier too (as discussed in the preceding section), but the greater pressure of work now demanded a closer supervision over the worker and a greater intolerance for any form of slackness. While earlier some amount of "idling" may have been acceptable, now any form of negligence was punished. The rules regarding the imposition of fines were considered arbitrary and inequitable by the workers. Fines, they complained "... are imposed on the slightest mistakes. If a man spends more than 10 minutes in answering the call of nature he is fined." In the Woollen Mills, (engaged in hectic production during the war), a clerk stood at the lavatory keeping count of the minutes. A delay of a single minute meant a fine of one anna. On one occasion, when some workers of this mill were refused permission to go out they were forced to urinate in one drain. For this "crime" they had to pay a fine amounting to more than three-fourths of their fortnightly wages. The workers of the New Victoria Mills voiced their desire for freedom from such controls in September 1919. Among other things, they demanded adequate time for eating, for going to the lavatory, and the removal of "unjust" fines.

During the war, the mills had very stringent regulations for giving a bonus to maintain production. A "minimum output" or "full

56 Leader, 14.12.1919.
57 Some complaints of the Kanpur Workers in Pratap, 24.11.1919.
58 Ibid.
59 Pratap, 1.9.1919, 13.10.1919; Leader, 25.9.1919.
attendance was an essential qualification for receiving a bonus. One
day's absence, even with leave in some cases, meant forfeiting the
bonus. 60

Another mode of control which the workers resented was the
system of corporal punishment. "In the mills", the workers complained
in an address to Annie Besant, "we are inhumanly beaten and abused in
the direct ways and most obscene terms..." 61 To the managers of
industries the workers were not individuals, human beings - they had
no name or identity. A common form of address was "ullu ka patha"
(son of an owl). 62 Workers were physically assaulted - kicked, beaten
or lashed on various pretext. A correspondent for Pratap writes
that, in some mills, "leather thongs were used to lash the workers." 63
Another correspondent for the same paper reported that the Manager of
the Caunpore Cotton Mills used a stick to redress the grievances of
his workers. 64

Under the threat of fines and physical punishment, the worker
often had to submit to the pressure of work; but not "ungrudgingly,"
as the President of the Chamber of Commerce reported. 65 There may not

61 Independent, 4.2.1920.
62 Pratap, 1.12.1919.
63 Ibid., 25.8.1919.
64 Pratap, cited in R.N.P., 22.11.1919.
65 He noted that there was "... not a single instance of anything
approaching insubordination or discontent." U.I.C.C., Report,
1917, p. X.
have been any obvious instances of discontent but below this apparent "subordination", a tightening of work discipline as we have suggested earlier, could also provoke an aversion to authority and discipline. A worker who was deprived of what he considered to be his legitimate rights and was fined and beaten on any minor pretext, could equally well react against this gross "injustice", by demanding that he be treated as an individual with rights that had to be respected. The feelings of the workers are captured in a poem published in Pratap, 1920: 66

The workers' concern with the question of "self-respect" and "fair" treatment and their resentment against the physical assaults referred to in the poem above, was reflected in their complaints against the "inhuman" punishments and the "indignities" to which they were sub-

66 "We are but workers and coolies/And they - the respected Malikas/They claim to dispense justice/But cruelty is their forte/shred-dy their craft/Their insolence knows no bounds/indifference no limits/we toil and grind all day and night/What rewards do we receive?/What love do we get?/We demand something to eat/We get threshings instead." Bhagvati Charan Verma, "Garib Mazdur", Pratap, 26.1.1920 (transl. C.J.).
These complaints were articulated at a generalized level during the strike of November 1919, but embryonic forms of such protest have been noted earlier as well.

For some time preceding the outburst of 1919, the workers of various mills urged the mill authorities to increase their wages. Oral representations were followed by written memoranda by workers in some of the mills. But these went unheeded. Fed up with the indifference of the mill authorities the Victoria Mill workers had gone on a strike on 22nd September 1919. The promise of a wage increase in the mill was not kept. One or two petty strikes followed as a result. The Camporee Cotton Mill managers made promises to placate their workers when the workers of the Victoria Mills struck, but these remained unfulfilled too. The atmosphere was one of general mistrust among millhands against all employers.

This indifference of the mill authorities to the plight of the workers, helped to crystallize discontent. Complete loss of faith in the management's will to do anything to redeem the situation provided

68 The Woollen Mill workers had sent a memorandum to the management, complaining against their low wages, the non-payment of bonus, the system of fines, etc. The only reply the management gave, was that they should wait till 7th November - Pratap, 24.11.1919. The Muir and New Victoria Mill workers, similarly, had complained against low wages in their mills - Pratap, 1.12.
69 Leader, 25.9.1919.
70 The small increase granted was limited to the weaving department - Pratap, 13.10.1919.
71 Pratap, 1.12.1919.
a unifying force, resulting in widespread solidarity between the workers of several mills in the general strike at the close of the year 1919.

The strike began in the Woollen Mills on 22nd November 1919, and spread to other mills later. Actual physical proximity between the first four mills to be affected - the Woollen, Elgin, Muir and Victoria Mills, as we shall discuss, helped in the rapid spread of the strike message. The relative absence of exclusive mill colonies meant that workers of different mills often lived in the same locality. Often, workers coming from the same village, would be working in different mills, but living near each other. A sense of shared oppression prevailed; a realization that the oppressor was not 'this' or 'that' Malik but all Maliks.

The period of emergence of generalized, collective forms of protest in the city, was also one of great social and political ferment in the rural areas of the province. Economic distress, together with other forces - the return of half a million demobilized soldiers with a new awareness of their plight, and the emergence of new peasant leaders - led to a widespread peasant agitation between 1920-21. The first signs of protest could be seen in late November

73 See Section III.
74 On housing provisions see Chapter II.
1919. In Preetapgarh district for instance, barbers, washermen and scavengers organized a "nai dhobi band" (a strike in these services). While the factory workers in the city were rebelling against their oppressor - the millowner - the beginnings of a revolt against the embodiment of authority in the village - the Zamindar - was surfacing.

The workers who had migrated from Faizabad, from Rai Bareli or Preetapgarh, or those coming from Kanpur district itself, who had themselves experienced the exploitation by zamindars, were likely to be moved by the clamourings of peasants in their home districts. The emergence of new forms of peasant protest in their native villages, it may be suggested, lent their own struggles a certain legitimacy in their own eyes, a certain sense of reassurance to their own defiance of authority.

The nature of working class activity underwent a change after the first outburst of November 1919. From a mass collective solidarity, working class protest now retreated into more dispersed forms, located within the confines of individual mills.

The number of strikes and workers involved in each strike dwindled after 1920, reaching its lowest ebb in 1930-31. The largest

76 Siddiqi, op.cit., p. 111.

77 Pratap, 24.2.1919 refers to the establishment of a Kisan Sabha in Kanpur. A meeting in this connection was held on 27th February 1919. See also M.H. Siddiqi, op.cit., Ch. III, for the growth of peasant activity in the period.

78 See Chapter I, for sources of labour supply.
number of strikes was focused around the period from November 1919 to July 1920. Roughly 19 strikes, involving a total of 46,325 workers, occurred in these eight months. Of this total, 20,000 were involved in a single strike in 1919. In the following period (1921-24), there were 16 strikes involving approximately 14,000 workers. Subsequently, after a lull between 1925-1927 there were 9 strikes between 1928-29, involving over 8,000 workers. While in 1919 the number of mandays involved was 160,000, the number declined sharply in the following period [see App. IX.7].

The diminution in the number of strikes and number of workers involved, was not accompanied in all instances, by a decrease in the intensity of strikes, in terms of their duration. The general strike of 1919 was only for 9 days. In 1923, the New Victoria Mill workers sustained a strike for nearly six weeks. Some 80 women workers of the Brushware Factory remained on strike for 11 days in May 1921.

Again, the stay - in strike of the Campore Cotton Mill workers lasted about 20 days. In the Elgin Mills, a strike which started on May

79 The figures are based on "statements showing details of labour strikes which have taken place recently", H.P.D., Part 8, File 182/ April 1920; "Reports on Strikes in U.P.", D.I.L., L-877 (II)/ May 1922, L-877(9)/1924, L-877(6)/1924, L-877(14)/1930; "Weekly Reports on the Labour Situation in India", D.I.L., L-918(2)/1929, L-918(24)/1930; Certain minor gaps in these figures have been filled on the basis of reports in Pioneer, Leader and the Ev., U.P. Govt., ReCal., Ev., Vol. III, Part I, 1931, pp. 190-191.

80 Pioneer, 11.4.1919, 19.4.1919.

81 Copy of Letter No. 2577, dated 10.6.1921, from Collector Campore to Director, Industries (U.P.), D.I.L., L-877(II)/May 1922.

24th, 1928, continued till 18th June. Small departmental strikes were usually of a shorter duration, lasting from half a day to two days. Some such short lived strikes took place in the carding and spinning departments of the Elgin and Camporee Textile Mills in 1929.

The duration of the later strikes however, does not reflect the strength of the strikers. Most of these strikes were isolated ones. The relatively shorter general strike of November 1919 managed to secure more concessions than the individualized, though longer, struggles in the later years. Most of the strikes in 1919-20 were largely successful, or the workers were, at least, promised a redressal of their grievances. In contrast, the later strikes (1921-29) often had to be withdrawn unconditionally. The number of unsuccessful strikes, thus, increased (see App. IX).

III Forms of Collective Action (1919-29)

After the general strike of 1919, working class protest, thus, assumed a fragmented, dispersed and sporadic character. There was little solidarity between workers of different mills. Even the repression against the Camporee Cotton Mill strikers did not lead to any protests by workers of other mills. In such a situation, where solidarity between workers of different mills and sometimes between different departments was not possible, forms of pressure, referred to in official reports as "coercion" and "intimidation" were common.

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83 "Weekly Reports..., D.I.L., L-877(14)/1930.
84 "Strike Reports..., D.I.L., L-877(14)/1930; see also Pionner, 6.1.1929, 19.1.1929, 8.3.1929, 3.4.1929 and 6.4.1929.
85 Further details on the strikes are taken up in sections III and IV.
The weaving department workers as we mentioned in an earlier chapter, were "notorious" for their "aggressive" and "intimidatory" tactics. 86 In the Muir Mills for instance, in an incident reported in 1922, the weavers "...set upon a mistri and thrashed him." When the mill reopened on 15th March and the "ringleaders" were excluded from the mill premises, "a number of weavers rushed to the carding and spinning departments and compelled them to stop work under threat of violence." The management closed down the mill, "in view of the excitement." 87 Earlier, in September 1919, the weavers of the Victoria Mills were reported to have remained "obstinate" even after the mill reopened on 30th September, and other workers had rejoined work. 88

The spinners, lacked the "notoriety" of the weavers or the strong fighting traditions of their English counterparts. 89 Yet, when they were confronted with issues such as maltreatment by their European supervisors, or the victimization of their fellow workers, they were loud in their protests. Moreover, in a situation when the working class movement was fragmented and the Mazdur Sabha generally disapproved of strikes, some amount of intimidation was to be expected.

86 See Chapter I.
87 Copy of letter dated 15.3.22, from Secy, Muir Mills Co. to the D.M. Cawnpore, enclosed by the D.M. in letter No. 2073 dated 15.3.22, to the Director Industries, U.P. In November 1919 too, we hear of the weavers of the Woollen Mills (the first to go on strike) "forcing" and "intimidating" other workers. See Pioneer, 29.12.1919.
88 Prepoc, 13.10.19
In April 1928, the spinners of the Elgin Mills put up a stubborn resistance despite the censorious attitude of the K.M.S. They struck work on 30th April, in protest against the dismissal of some fellow workers. Subsequently, they forced the carders to stop as well, "... a certain small amount of damage being done in the course of this compulsion, straps being removed and windows being broken." Attempts by the district officials and the Managing Director of the mill to induce the workers to return were only partially successful. The carders returned, but "... the spinners again compelled a stoppage and now forced their way into the weaving department, and forced out the weavers also." Neither the indifference of the Mazdur Zabha (K.M.S.), nor its guarantees to the management assuring a speedy resumption of work, could restrain the spinners.

"A few hundred workers in the spinning department", in the same mill, became a source of "trouble" again in May 1928. The spinners successfully persuaded the remaining hands to join them. Whereupon the management declared a lockout. The strike situation remained "serious" for some time, and it was apprehended that the strikers would resort to vigorous picketing and propaganda to bring about a general strike.

90 See below, section V.
91 Pioneer, 3.5.1928.
92 Ibid.
93 See section V.
94 Leader, 31.5.1928; Pioneer, 31.5.1928.
95 Pioneer, 5.6.1928; Leader, 4.6.1928.
Other such instances of intimidation and "violence" could be cited. During the Cawnpore Cotton Mills strike it is reported, that the "excited" crowd started "breaking the windows of the carding room." The workers, it is alleged, brought lathis and bamboo-sticks into the compound, to use as weapons, and some were reported-ly heard shouting that they would set fire to and damage the stocks of cotton before leaving the mill. The "mob" according to some, was "swollen with loafers and bad characters from outside." When the police tried to disperse the "crowd", they were showered with a hail of stones and brickbats.  

Allowance should, of course, be made for exaggeration in the official report. A familiar ploy of such official enquiries was (and is) to put all the onus for the offensive on the workers, portraying the police action as an "unavoidable" and "defensive" measure. The non-official enquiry into the "riot" denied any "violence" on the part of the strikers, but considering the mood of the crowd, 


98 The "offensive" on the part of the workers was similarly exaggerated in the Swadeshi Cotton Mill firing episode in December 1977. The brutality of police action in this case has been exposed in the Report on Kanpur Killing (New Delhi 1978), based on the investigations of a Citizens' Committee for Enquiry into the Kanpur Massacre.  

and their stubborn refusal to move, some "violent" action probably did occur and not always as a defensive measure to resist the police attack.

Within the spontaneous activity in this period, one can discern rudiments of self-organization of the workers and systematized and planned modes of activity, whether peaceful or violent. The general strike of November 1919, was an instance of a spontaneous outbreak which remained "peaceful"; the strike of April 1924, in contrast, was described as a "riot" by officialdom. In 1919, there was no institutionalized intra-factory body which organized the strike. The Elgin Mill workers formed a strike committee on their own initiative and decided to form similar committees in other mills. The efforts to form such organs of action was helped by the fact that some of the important textile mills were concentrated near the Gwaltoli area, around which were located the working class mohallas like Khalesi Lines, and Gwaltoli mohalla, the K.M.S. office, the sabha recreation grounds - the ekhara, the "Mazdur Bal Mandal", and other

100 By spontaneity we are referring to expressions of the self-activity of the working class as distinct from organization and mobilization of workers from above. Such actions are spontaneous in the sense discussed by Gramsci: "... they are not the result of any schematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by 'common sense', i.e., the traditional popular conception of the world - what is unimaginatively called 'instinct', although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition." Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York 1973), p. 198-199.

centres of working class activity. Further, as we mentioned earlier, the communication of ideas was facilitated, since workers of different mills lived together. This, however, did not necessarily weld together a stable class unity. Mohalla life had a contradictory aspect. When workers of different mills lived together, the strike message could spread and intra-factory organizations could be formed more easily in times of struggle. Yet, in the different mohallas, workers of different castes, community and regional backgrounds tended to cluster together. (This could also sustain ties of religion and community which tended to assert themselves especially in periods when the working class movement was weak.) Similarly, caste clusterings within mill departments, we referred to earlier, could help the organization of workers in periods of struggle. The militancy of the workers of the weaving department was linked perhaps to the predominance of two major caste groupings - Koiras and Julahas, while in other there was a greater diversity of castes. Community and familial ties within them could have fostered solidarity and unity in action. But such unity would tend to remain a departmental unity and not a unity of all sections of the workers, and as we shall see later:

102 In the Gwaliori area of Kanpur, around which were located, the Elgin, the Victoria, the Muir and the Cawnpore Woollen Mills, one can perhaps see glimpses of the "northeast quadrant" of Paris, where the headquarters, cafes, meeting halls and residences of labour militants were concentrated - a concentration which "facilitated the communication of socialist ideas in time and space." These became the "geographical centers" of labour activism in Paris. See Bernard H. Moss, The Origins of the French Labour Movement 1870-1914 (California 1976), pp. 16-17. Obviously, one is drawing no comparison between the nature of working class activity in Paris and Kanpur.

103 See Chapter V.
such distinctions, could at other moments divide the workers of the same mill. 104

In 1919, the workers made efforts to come together under unifying symbols, though there was as yet, no common banner. Workers of different mills gathered around symbols they could identify with:

(The workers carried flags of different hues. The red flag was still unfamiliar. The Woollen Mill workers carried a flag of wool. The Tannery workers hung a shoe atop a pole). 105 (The workers of some other mills used their own peculiar peasant symbols, familiar to many - the

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104 See Chap. V. The significance of familial ties in forging workplace solidarity has been emphasized by William Reddy in the case of the linen factories in Armentières (France). This was specially true of the weaving branch in the Armentières factories. In the spinning branch, he argues, the relative absence of familial ties was one of the reasons for the lack of solidarity and the failure of strikes. "Family and Factory: French Linen Weavers in Belle Époque," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 8, 1974-75, pp. 101-112. Such a direct relationship between the family and workplace solidarity however, would be more true in the context of a continuity between the domestic manufacturing industry and the factory industry - a continuity which existed in the linen industry in 19th century France. The significance of community ties in workers' organizations before trade unions became dominant, is evident in Ravinder Kumar's study of the Bombay Textile Strike of 1919. In the absence of a developed class consciousness and working class organization, he argues, the "extraordinary solidarity" during the strike was largely due to the fact that they, the workers, were linked to each other through a variety of institutions: through ties of kinship, through allegiance to jobbers and through sheer physical proximity in which they lived and laboured in the city of Bombay. *I.E.S.H.R.*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1971, p. 27.

soon, the chalni 106 and the like. The collectivity which emerged during the strike was not as yet associated with any party symbol or union flag, whether it was the red flag or the symbol of hammer and sickle.)

The success of the 1919 strike was related to the collective strength of the strikers, and the sympathy and active support of 'city notables' like Murari Lal, Narayan Prasad Nigam and Wahid Yar Khan; this eventually necessitated the intervention of the Provincial Government and compelled the capitalists to concede certain demands. Unlike the situation in 1937, the legitimacy of the workers' demands was widely recognised. The Director of Industries noted in 1920: "It is generally admitted that the men's claims for better wages and other concessions were fully justified and the opinion is expressed fairly widely - that much of the subsequent trouble would have been avoided if this had been recognised when the first isolated cases of discontent showed themselves in September and October." 107

In 1924, one sees the emergence of a novel form of collective protest - the "stay-in" strike by the workers of the Cawnpore Cotton Mills. The strike took a "violent" form. But even in its "violent" form we can see embryonic forms of systematic collective resistance. The main issue around which the strike centred was the demand for a bonus) a demand which had been raised earlier in March, to no avail. On April 4th, the workers from the carding department of the mill struck work and persuaded others to join them. The strikers soon

106 Interview with Raghubir - a worker, 8.12.78, Soon is a winnowing basket, Chalni - a sieve.

assumed a "defiant attitude" and refused to leave the mill premises, nor would they allow anyone to enter the mill. The Official Report describes how, "a railway truck was drawn across the gates to prevent motor cars from entering or leaving the mill premises. Ropes were also tied across the gate to control access to the mill by foot passengers." The men were described as being "obstinate" and "obdurate." Many of them said plainly that they were willing to stay there all night. They did not allow the Superintendent of Police to enter the mill premises, and obstructed his vehicle by "sitting and lying down in front of the wheels." Some of the workers opposed the efforts at negotiation by the Mazdur Sabha leader, Murari Lal. While about two-thirds left the mill compound following his appeals to them, those who remained, insisted that, "they were ready to be killed rather than give way." When the City Magistrate called up sawara and ordered the crowd to leave, they answered, "who can turn us out?" To sustain the zeal for resistance and defiance, an appeal to religion was made. If they ran away they would be seen as traitors to their religion, they were told: "Hindus would be considered to have eaten beef and the Muslims pork," an "agitator" was heard shouting to the strikers. The sawara then advanced on the crowd and pushed them out, using lathis on those who refused to move. Others resisted by pelting stones and brickbats on the police. The resistance was

109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
quelled with several volleys of firing. Even if we make allowances for the limitations of the evidence insofar as the "violent" resistance of the workers was concerned, the firmness and determination of the workers to "stay-in", under the threat of police action, is itself significant.

"Aggressive" and "riotous" forms of action, which we discussed above, have also been a characteristic mode of expression of working class activity in the early stages of the growth of the labour movement in other countries. When the workers scattered over different mills and industries were still not a cohesive force, sabotage, intimidation, and violence were perhaps the only means of paralysing work in the factory. The luddite fury against the introduction of machinery in industrializing Britain, for instance, it has been argued, was not just

112 The shooting, the non-official Committee argued, "was done indiscriminately and absolutely at random irrespective of the consequences. Even some of the peaceful citizens living at a distance were hurt, and the shots reached houses situated at a distance of more than 300 yards..." Most of the injuries, their evidence revealed, were above the waist. One man lost both his eyes. The actual number of dead and wounded remained unestimated. The Official Committee put the number of deaths as 4, and injured as 24. But as this Committee itself admitted, a large number of the Cotton Mill employees naturally concealed their injuries for fear that they would be arrested as "rioters". The Official Committee was satisfied with the "coolness and precision" with which the police carried out their orders. See Reports of the Official and Non-Official Committee in H.P.O., File 153 and 153 (II)/1924.
a blind opposition to machines.113 Instead, as Hobabawm emphasizes, this mode of "collective bargaining by riot" was quite clearly, "well adapted to this stage of industrial warfare."114 Such a method, he suggests, could ensure solidarity among badly paid workers, lacking strike funds, and for whom "blacklegging" was an acute problem during a strike. When the working class was still a "crowd" and not an "army" used to disciplined action, "demonstrations, shouting, cheering and cat calling, intimidation and violence" were the most effective forms of protest.115 A variety of luddism, known as "te-chang" ("hitting at the factories") prevailed in China. This continued to manifest itself in the labour struggles of the 1920s.116 "Te-chang" in China, it has been noted by Chesnauux, was rarely an expression of a resentment against the competition of modern industry, but it was

113 Hobabawm distinguishes between two types of "machine breaking", (1) the first type implied no special hostility to machines, but was a normal means of putting pressure on employers; (2) the second implied a hostility to new machines especially labour saving devices, but this, with local and sectional exceptions, was weak in practice. See E.J. Hobabawm, "The Machine Breakers", Past and Present, No. 1, Feb. 1952, pp. 58, 61. Rude elaborates the same point: "The croppers of the West Riding, and the handloom weavers of Lancashire and Cheshire who attacked steam looms at Stockport, Middleton and Wathoughton in 1812, were certainly hostile to new machinery.... But the Midlands' luddites, who not only launched the movement but did the greatest damage to machines, had no such primary intention; they were merely using attacks upon machinery as a means of coercing their employers to make concessions in wages and in other matters concerning their employment." George Rude, "Luddism", in The Crowd in History - A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1750-1848 (New York 1964), p. 80. See also, E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, pp. 599, 601, 608.


"... much more the expression of the hatred of employers that was felt by a semi-peasant proletariat only recently settled in the cities." Furthermore, in China it was directed mainly against foreign enterprises; thus containing within it some manifestations of an anti-foreign feeling. 

In America, the silk weavers of New Jersey broke looms in 1877, to prevent production during a strike. The Paterson silk weavers regularly left unfinished warps to spoil in looms to "punish" their employers. Other forms of protest, in the early stages of industrialization, included food riots against high food prices and noisy street demonstrations accompanied by horns, whistles and Irish "banjo" calls. In Russia, similarly, new workers were more prone to "turbulent demonstration" than to disciplined action in the form of a strike. The outbursts of the metal-workers in Russia between 1912-14, were related to the absorption of "raw country lads" in the metal industry.

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117 Ibid, p. 376. Chasseaux argues that, as the working class acquired more experience and maturity, such incidents of "tang-chang" declined. Chasseaux, op. cit., pp. 340-376.

118 Ibid, p. 128.


120 Madhavan K. Palat, "Aspects of the Labour Movement in Russia: The Worker as Peasant", (Mimeographed).
The available research on other industrial centres in India, apart from Kanpur, tends to indicate, that sudden outbursts of violence occurred in the early stages of the labour movement in these regions too. In the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras, the young ring-framers would occasionally go on a rampage and attack senior mill personnel. On occasions, when their newly established union was unable to settle their grievances, the workers would resort to direct action on the shop floor. In November 1918, the weavers of the Carnatic Mills threw shuttles at an unpopular spinning master. The weavers in the Buckingham Mills stoned the European Mill Manager on 27th November 1918. In the Bombay general strike of 1919-20, when the workers were still "unorganized", the Jacob Sassoon Mill workers devised their own rough methods of mobilizing workmen from their mills. They marched to the nearby Gokuldas Mills, and induced the workers to join by shouting and by throwing stones at them. They proceeded in a similar way to other mills and by noon 20,000 workers had joined them (1st January). The workers of the Bowreeh Cotton Mills in Calcutta let loose their fury on the management, in November 1899, in protest against a cut in their wages. They attacked the


122 Ibid., p. 305.

123 Morris, The Emergence, p. 180. Ravinder Kumar, in his article on the strike of 1919, however, suggests that such "stone throwing" was rare. R. Kumar, "The Bombay Textile Strike 1919", I.E.S.H.R., Vol. VIII, No. 2, pp. 1-29.
Manager and his European assistants with bamboos, brickbats, and parts of a machine broken for the purpose. In the Kankinara Jute Mills, in 1895, wage cuts provoked a "riot". Iron bolts were thrown at the Manager and his house was attacked by the workers.

We may cite many such instances of "riot" and "violence", but in general, "machine breaking" in the luddite manner was not prevalent in India. To the extent that "machine breaking" in England, was a reaction to the fear of unemployment, in a situation where the expansion of modern industries was eroding "traditional" occupations, it had little basis in India. Here, modern industry did not displace the worker. The erosion of "traditional" occupations had begun earlier (by the late nineteenth century) - deindustrialization in the cities, and the dispossession of peasants in the countryside. Expanding factories in India could not have appeared to the worker as a mechanism for the displacement of their "traditional" occupations, as they did in England.

Yet the factory meant a disruption of the earlier way of life for the peasant and the artisan - a new rhythm of work as opposed to his earlier mode of work and leisure. A poem in Pratap describes:

125  Ibid., p. 90.
126  "Machine Breaking" of the second type, referred to in Note 113.
127  See Chapter I, pp. 47-48
128  "Mazdur ki Holi," Pratap, 1.3.1920.
"Every limb of the worker is crushed with toil/.../they leave in the morning and grind till evening/sweating their labour through the day/when they return in the evening, full of fluff from the mill/there is not enough bread for a belly full."

Their protest against this arduous life, the rigours of long hours and their inadequate wages, was vented in outbursts of rage against their employers.

Spontaneously 'violent' and 'aggressive' methods of struggle, thus, were quite characteristic in the early stages of the working class movement in many parts. From this it would be misleading to draw a necessary link: spontaneity = indisciplined violence; trade unions = disciplined, peaceful action. Spontaneous actions by the workers can occur even in situations where a developed trade union structure has emerged. Spontaneous activity is not necessarily mindless, irrational, immature, totally unplanned and unorganized. Furthermore, "violent" forms of actions can coexist, and occur, even after the growth and development of trade unions; especially in situations where the workers lose faith in the capacity of trade unions to successfully bargain for their demands and the capitalists refuse to concede the legitimacy of the workers' demands. The "violent" picketing used by the strikers in 1957, we discuss later, were related to the ineffectivity of the sabha and its reluctance to support strikes immediately after the installation of the Congress government, together with the extreme recalcitrance of the capitalists.

One can cite instances from a more recent period, when workers were compelled to resort to direct action on the shopfloor: often described
as "coercive" and "intimidatory" action. This was related to the complete ineffectivity of the usual methods of procure - compromise and trade union negotiation and bargaining, either because of internal dissensions and weakness of unions or because of the uncompromising attitude of the capitalist class and state. To sum up, in Kanpur, in the twenties, there was as yet no organization with which the workers could identify. Many of the workers were fresh recruits and most of them were still first generation workers. If one were to use Habibbc's terminology, the workers were still a "crowd" and not "an army used to disciplined action." But, one must not overstretch the question of discipline / indiscipline, violence / non-violence. Such forms could coexist and recur at different times. What strikes one ultimately is the spontaneity of the actions in those early years, though the workers' activities remained often, sporadic, localized, limited to particular departments and often unsuccessful. Such actions occurred in a later period as well, but the K,M,S, was more successful in controlling these.

129 Since 1975, in a situation where the unions had failed to secure the workers' demands, ahanka as a form of struggle, became a regular code through which the workers of the Seedarhi Mills pressed for their basic demand - the immediate payment of their long standing wage arrears. In West Bengal too, ahanka became widespread between 1969-71.

130 The industry expanded primarily after 1900, especially during the war and post-war years. See Chapter I.

131 Habibbc, "The Machine Breakers," Path and Present, No. 1, Feb. 1952, p. 61. The phrase was borrowed by Habibbc from Rinaldo Rigole, a trade union leader (see note 115).
IV The Worker and his Dramata

Within our period of study one can see a change in the nature of demands over time. In 1919, the main demand was for bonus and wage increases, coupled with other subsidiary demands. In the later years, when working class activity was more in the nature of "aggressive" outbursts, the strikes were often centred around issues such as victimization, extortion by jobbers and the like. The change in the nature of demands, we will argue, was reflected in the changing forms of protest.

The two major demands put forward in the strikes around 1919 to 1921, in Kanpur, were the demands for wage increases and bonus. The real and nominal wages of the workers had suffered a decline, as we mentioned earlier, with the rapid rise in the cost of living index during the war. Inadequate wages were all the more resented by the workers, as they became aware of the tremendous profits of the capitalists at the close of the war. Furthermore, promises of wage increases in the Campora Cotton and the New Victoria Mills remained unfulfilled. In November 1919, the workers demanded a 100 per cent increase in their wages. In the settlement following the strike, the Wollon Hill workers secured an increase varying between 15 to 100 per cent. The workers of the Elgin, Muir, New Victoria and Campora Cotton Mills were given a 25 per cent increase in their wages.133

132 See Chapter II.
Throughout the first few months of 1920 however, sporadic strikes continued to recur, centred in most cases, around the question of enforcement of the provisions for wage increase. Concessions were secured by the workers in most of these strikes.

The conditions for granting a bonus, during the war period, had been very stringent. The grant could be withdrawn on very flimsy pretexts. In November 1919, and repeatedly in the following years, the workers asserted their demand for a bonus as their rightful claim. They regarded the rising profits of the millionaires as a product of their labour and therefore, demanded a right to a share. In one statement, for instance, some workers argue that they should be given "a lump sum in the form of bonus", out of the huge profits the mills had made, "by the sweat of their (workmen's) brow." The Director Industries, U.P., in a letter to Caw, Secretary, Department of Industries and Labour, noted that the labourers, "look upon a bonus more or less as deferred pay." They asserted their claim, irrespective of the profits of the individual concern in which they

134 Such strikes took place in the Elgin Mills, the Woollen Mills, the Campore Cotton Mills, the Empire Engineering Co., the Cooper Allen Works, the Harness and Saddlery Factory - H.P.D., Part B, file 189/April 1920.

135 In early 1920, the workers of the Campore Cotton Mills struck work, demanding a bonus. The Cooper Allen Works demanded a bonus, in the same year, and in 1921 the workers of this Company demanded a larger bonus. The bonus demand was raised again by the women workers in the Brushware Factory in May 1921, in the New Victoria Mills in April and December 1923, and in the Elgin Mills in April 1928 - see Table 3.1.

136 Letter, undated, from V.N. Mehta, Director Industries, U.P., to A.G. Caw, Secretary, Department of Industries and Labour (G.O.I.), April 1921, D.I.L., L-877(II)/May 1922.
were employed. In the Empire Engineering Company, for instance, when the employers stated that the mill had made no profit in 1929-22, the workers are reported to have argued as follows: "The Empire Engineering Company is a part of the SIC syndicate and the total profit made by the syndicate was to be considered and not the individual profit made by one of its daughter concerns."\(^{137}\) In 1924, the workers of the Campore Cotton Mills demanded a bonus, on the grounds that the workers in their sister concerns, the Woollen Mills, received a bonus.\(^{138}\) Earlier, in 1921, the workers of this same mill had demanded a bonus, even for those workers who had been employed for less than six months.

Apart from demanding higher wages and bonus, the workers, on some occasions, attempted to secure a more timely payment of wages. A demand for the weekly payment of their wages was raised in November 1919, but to no avail. It was taken up again in the Elgin and New Victoria Mills, early in 1920.\(^{139}\) The failure to redress this grievance led to a major strike in the New Victoria Mills in February 1922.\(^{140}\) The weavers in this mill demanded that they should be paid their wages immediately. The strike however, was called off unconditionally after continuing for four weeks.

\(^{137}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{138}\) *H.P.O., File 153/1924.* Both the Woollen Mills and the Campore Cotton Mills were managed by the British India Corporation.

\(^{139}\) *H.P.O., Part B, File 189/April 1920, Pratap,* 31.5.1920, p. 1. For further details on the period of wage payment see Chapter II.

\(^{140}\) *D.I.L., L.877(II)/1922.*
In the strikes of 1919, the workers took up issues other than bonus and wages - issues relating to their working and living conditions. Protests against long hours in the factory had taken a passive form earlier, consisting of a simple refusal to work the stipulated hours, by "idling" in the factory compound or by taking rests at intervals. The Indian Factory Labour Commission had recommended a limit of twelve hours a day, in order to ensure "efficiency" and to secure a more "stable" labour force.141 (The discomfort of long hours in the factory was intensified during the war. In November 1919, the workers therefore demanded a nine hour limit in the working day. As a compromise, a ten hour day was agreed upon by the employers.142)

Other such demands pertaining to their working conditions were raised in November 1919, a demand for improvement in the hygienic conditions in the factory (especially in the hot summer months), the provision of medical relief where none existed, as well as provisions for the permanently disabled workers, the removal of corporal punishment, a modification of the rules regarding fines, repeal of the workmen's Breach of Contract Act and a provision for Hindu and Muslim festival holidays.143 These demands, together with the demand for a reduction in working hours, have in themselves a special significance, and more so, because they were raised at a time when the form of mass collective protest was first emerging.

141 On working hours see Chapter II.
142 [Date], 8.12.1919.
143 [Date], 14.12.1919.
In such demands, we can possibly see a reflection of the worker's awareness of himself as someone more than the milik'in quila who could be bounded in any manner.\textsuperscript{144} The worker was sensitive to the thrashing by employers, as much as to the heat in the factory. He expected medical facilities if he was injured while the service of the employers. He continued to celebrate his traditional religious festivals and he demanded mill holidays to allow him to do so. In March 1924 quite significantly, the demand for a holiday on Sunday was the central issue of a strike in the Bajnath Balmukund Sugar Factory (Kapur).\textsuperscript{145} The worker was now beginning to define his rights within the oppressive structure in which he worked and lived.

Lost we overstate the implications of these early demands, we must note that these demands were not always taken up independently as the basis for widespread collective action. Such widespread collective action occurred, when there was an intermeshing and coalescence of these demands along with the core pressing demand for wages.

\textsuperscript{144} An interesting suggestion of such an awareness is expressed in a strike of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway workshops in Feb. 1921. Apart from the question of ill-treatment by mistreatment, the workers protested against the unnecessary narrowing down of the entrance to the workshop. The exit one by one in the evening, they said, delayed their departure to their homes - Letter dated 5.3.1921 from Nica to Clay (G.0.L.), O.I.L., L-677(II)/May 1922. The Victoria Mill workers in their strike of Sept. 1919 demanded that they should be given sufficient time for eating and for going to the lavatory, \textit{Protea}, 13,10,19 \textit{London}, 25.9.1919.

\textsuperscript{145} In a statement of demands presented to the factory manager, the workers wrote: "Aane ka ho ek chalo keh nay ki aakhir nahi hai to atheron kyo ek aab locon ko chooti nilna chayga." (If you have
Issues like the victimization of workers, or maltreatment by
men or by European supervisors, provoked immediate violent re-
actions among the workers. While these were raised in 1921 and 1922,
as we shall see below, they became the focal points of strikes in the latter
half of the 1920's (see Table 3.1). The wage demand appears to have
become subsidiary to these issues, although it was on occasions raised
in the course of these strikes.

In February 1921, nearly 1,000 workers of the Woollen Mills, out
of the total 3,300 employed, darned their tools in protest against the
dismissal of an employee who was accused of "stirring up discontent"
among the workers.146 A strike for a similar cause occurred in the
Cəmporo Textile, in March 1929.147 More than half the workers of
the mill went on strike against the dismissal of two workers for
"unruly behaviour." Both these strikes were unsuccessful. In the
latter, the management recruited sufficient new hands to re-start work,
while in the Woollen Mills most of the hands re-joined unconditionally.
But the strikes remain significant in so far as they suggest that, the
workers were defending their right to protest. A muted withdrawal
from work and the very hesitant complaints of the earlier period were
now being replaced by an assertive defence of their right to dissent.

Cont'd... p.145

146 Letter, undated, from Mahito to Cloo, April 1921, D.I.L., L-877
(II)/1922.

In the Muir Mills, in March 1922, the workers reacted against the dismissal of one worker by a mistri. They sought to enforce "justice" in their own peculiar fashion. The weavers set upon the mistri and thrashed him. When the management tried to punish this "audacity" by disallowing the suspect workers from entering the mill, the weavers struck work, subsequently compelling the spinning and carding workers to stop as well. The strike lasted about six days after which the workers had to return unconditionally.

In one instance, the Elgin Mill workers (April 1928) came out in defense of the rights of temporary workers. The strike, which was initiated by spinners, was sparked off by a dismissal notice given to seven extra hands, retained as spares in the spinning department. The strike achieved only partial success. The management agreed to discuss the question of dismissals, only on the condition that all "violence" and "coercion" were to be avoided. Eventually the strike gave the Management, an opportunity to impose new terms and conditions on the workers. The number of workers in the spinning department were reduced, resulting in a heavier work load for those who remained; piece wages were introduced to sustain the level of productivity.

A communion of interests between different workers may explain their solidarity in cases of victimization of a fellow worker. Such


unity was often lacking in the relationship between the *miatri* and the worker. Within the mill, the *miatri* was the agency for enforcing discipline and control on the workers. Yet, there are instances when the workers struck in support of a *miatri*. The workers in the throttle department of the Elgin Mills, struck against the dismissal of their head *miatri* on 25th January 1929.150 The day shift workers of the Atherton West Mills similarly went on a strike against the dismissal of a *miatri* of the weaving department.151

(In the defense of the *miatri* one can see expressions of the workers' primordial links. Workers were often tied to the *miatri* through communal or regional bonds.152 Such cultural affinities provided security to the worker in an alien factory surrounding. The authority of the *miatri* within a department has to be seen in this context. Rather than a dispassionate and indifferent form of authority it was generally interlinked with castes and kin affinities. Moreover, the *miatri* being their benefactor in some ways, who secured them their jobs and was held responsible for their behaviour in the mill, evoked a sense of reciprocal loyalty from the workmen. Seen in this context, their (i.e. the workers) protest against the dismissal of a *miatri* cannot merely be criticized as reflecting a backward looking conscious—

150 D.I.L., L-877(14)/1930.

151 *Pioneer*, 20.7.1929.

152 The *miatri* generally recruited men from his own village, and sometimes his own caste and kinsmen. See chapter II, for further details.
ness. In his defense of the *mistri* the worker was reacting against a possible threat to his sense of "community", his livelihood, and his social existence. Apart from this, the *mistri* was one of "them" in some ways - he was himself oppressed and exploited, while he was making small gains out of his position of authority.

Instances of strikes against exactions by *mistri* indicate that his authority was not an unchallenged one. The demands of the jobber often exceeded the limits of what was accepted as his "fair" share. This was considered as an undue exaction, against which the workers protested. The Elgin Mill workers stopped work for a day, in October 1919, in protest against exactions by jobbers.\(^\text{153}\) There were three successive strikes on the same issue in the Campora Cotton Mills, in January 1929.\(^\text{154}\) Apart from a protest in this form, workers would sometimes lodge complaints against a particular *mistri* in the local paper, *Praten*.\(^\text{155}\)

Yet another "injustice" against which redressal was demanded was the way in which the workers were compelled to buy cloth damaged in the process of manufacture. This was emphasized along with other demand, in a strike in Elgin Mills in May 1928.\(^\text{156}\) Cloth was often damaged through no fault of the worker. It could be a result of overwork and strain, or more often, because of the bad quality of

\(^{153}\) *Praten*, 27.10.1919.


material used in manufacture. The worker had, nonetheless, expanded a great deal of time and energy in its manufacture and the loss of a portion of his precious wage on this was seen as an "unjust" claim.

Two major strikes of the period, one in the Victoria Mills in December 1923 and one in the Elgin Mills in May 1928, were a protest against ill-treatment by European officials in the mills. In the former strike, the workers decided to set up a committee from amongst themselves to settle their grievances. They had finally to return unconditionally without securing the dismissal of C.W. Taylor (a European overseer), which had been their primary demand. In the Elgin Mills a compromise was negotiated by the Mazdur Sabha, the workers being promised a redressal of their grievances. The accused, a European overseer, was however, acquitted.

The dismissal of a worker or a thrashing by a European supervisor provoked an immediate, "violent" outburst. But the solidarity in such cases was often limited to the particular department concerned. These issues did not become the foci for more "organized" and generalized struggles, unlike wage and bonus demands. At one level, extortion, corruption and maltreatment were a part of their daily existence in the factory. Only when these practices exceeded the accepted limits, did they become a subject of protest. The workers demanded redress only on particular issues, but not as yet, an end


158 D.I.L., L-918(2)/1929; Leader, 31.5.1928, 2.6.1928, 16.6.1928.
to such practices altogether. The struggles therefore remained limited.

The form of protest, it may therefore be suggested, was related to the nature of demands raised in the course of a strike. The pressing demand for bonus and wages, provided a unifying force for a generalized struggle in 1919. The workers managed to secure concessions in relation to both these demands: wages and increased, bonus was promised, and the hours of work reduced. In the later strikes, centering around problems of victimization, maltreatment of workers, extortion by mistri, etc., the strikes inevitably more localized and isolated, were largely "unsuccessful" in the immediate sense. They remain significant, however, as a phase in the development of the workers' consciousness of their rights and expectations, and the strivings to obtain them.

The Mazdoor Sabha and the Workers Movement

The K.M.S. came into existence in a little jhuggi in Gwalior Mohalla of Kanpur, in the neighbourhood of which were located two important mills. The exact date of its inception is not clearly established. It appears that the sabha in its institutionalized form had not emerged prior to the strike of November 1919. A correspondent for Pratap, for instance, writing in September 1919, referred

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159 The U.P. Govt. in its evidence to R.C.I. mentions that the Sabha was started in 1919. R.C.I., Evs. Vol. III, Part I, 1931, p. 187. The Director Industries (U.P.) puts the date at 1920. D.O. dated 2.4.1921, from Mehta to Clow, D.I.L. File L-077(II), 1922. Another report of 18.3.1920 also mentions that a mazdoor sabha was started some months back.
to the lack of a strong, organized labour union in Kanpur. Initial attempts to organize workers, however, were made earlier in the year. Certain workers took upon themselves the task of spreading education among other workers and set up a library for the purpose. Kamdatt, a worker in the Elgin Mills, was in charge of this library. The early efforts at organization were primarily the result of the initiative of the workers of the Elgin and New Victoria Mills. Sabha meetings in these days, were held in a clandestine manner. The workers would sometimes meet in a boat on the Ganges, or else they would gather under the guise of a katha (a Hindu religious gathering) or a melood (Muslim religious gathering).

In late November 1919, the workers of the Elgin Mills organized a meeting at Bhaironghat where they took an oath - in the name of Ganga - and decided to form strike committees in other mills. Further details on these committees are not known. But after the strike spread to other mills, the workers organized a meeting at Gwaltoli to which Murari Lal, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi and other local Congress leaders were invited. At this meeting the workers elected

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160 Pratap, 1.9.1919. A similar reference is made in August. A correspondent referring to the coming International Labour Conference (Washington) noted that unlike Madras there was no labour organization in Kanpur. Pratap, 25.8.1919.

161 Pratap, 9.6.1919.

162 Interview with Raghubir Prasad, 10.10.1978.

163 Ibid.


165 Independent, 29.11.1919.
ten representatives from amongst themselves to meet the Lieutenant
Governor of the Province. These included, Ramcharan, Brajkishen,
Mohammad Yakub, Lachman Prasad, Mohammad Shafi, Ramji Lal, Sheodarshen,
Mathura Prasad and Ghedi Lal. Along with these workers, Murari Lal,
Narain Prasad Nigam, Abdul Karim, Wahid Yar Khan and G.S. Vidyarthi
were chosen as the non-worker representatives. 166 While workers like
Kamdatt, Devi Dayal, Ramzan Ali and Ghedi Lal figured prominently in
the early efforts to organize, 167 the sabha leadership in the later
years passed into the hands of 'city notables' like Murari Lal, Ganesh
Shankar Vidyarthi, Wahid Yar Khan and others, who had helped the
strikers' cause. 168

The organizational structure of the sabha was developed after
the strike of November 1919. The executive committee of the sabha
consisted of two representatives from each mill. These representatives
were elected at a meeting of the workers in the mill concerned. 169

166 Dr. Murari Lal, a medical practitioner, was the President of the
local Congress Committee, a member of the Provincial and All
India Local Congress Committees and the Secretary of the Hindu
Sabha. Leader, 1.7.1920. Narain Prasad Nigam was a lawyer in
Civil Lines, Wahid Yar Khan a trader and Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi,
the editor of Pratap, and actively associated with the Kisan
Sabha movement in the Province - Ramesh Mishra and K.K. Sharma
ed., Sri Surya Prasad Awasthi Naerak Jayanti Abhinandan Granth
(Kanpur 1973), p. 12. Some of the ideas of the nationalists
involved in the K.M.S. are discussed in chapter VI.

167 In an address to Annie Bessant, the Sabha expressed its special
gratefulness towards Pt. Kamdatt (President) and Devi Dayal (Secre­
tary), who it said had sprung from their own ranks (workers) and
had devoted themselves unselfishly to the cause of labour -
Independent, 4.2.1920. Also, interview with Raghuvir Prasad,

168 In 1919, these individuals were still not identified with any
workers organized. They are merely referred as "abahar vaals"
(city people) who sympathised with the strikers.

169 D.O. dated 2.4.1921, from Mehta to Clow, D.I.L., L-877(II)/1922.
The office bearers included - a President, two Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, two Joint Secretaries and a Treasurer, elected from amongst the members. Actual workers were enrolled as members of the sabha and sympathisers were enlisted as honorary members.

The K.R.S. was registered in July 1920, with Hurezi Lal as President, Kendatt and N.P. Hiroo as Vice-Presidents, Wahid Yar Khan, as Secretary and G.S. Vidyarthi and Abdul Karim as Joint Secretaries.

In this initial period, the sabha failed to raise adequate funds. Its members were required to pay a subscription of one pice per rupee earned, i.e. the subscription for those earning up to Rs. 30 per month came to 8 annas, and for those earning more, it was Rs. 1/- per month.

In 1921, the total funds at the disposal of the sabha were estimated as Rs. 6,000.

The U.P. Government in its evidence to the Royal Commission in 1929 put the annual income of the sabha as Rs. 1,500. The figures for 1929-30 tend to show that the balance at the disposal of the sabha after meeting its annual expenses was virtually nothing. Its opening balance in 1929 was Rs. 4 and after an income of Rs. 1,033-6-0 during the year, it was left with Rs. 15 only, after meeting its annual expenses.

170 Proctor, 26.7.1920, p. 15.
171 D.O. dated 2.4.1921, from Pachta to Clow, D.I.L., L-877(II)/1922.
172 Proctor, 26.7.1920, p. 15.
D.O. dated 2.4.1921, from Pachta to Clow, D.I.L., L-877(II)/1922.
174 D.O. dated 2.4.1921, from Pachta to Clow, D.I.L., L-877(II)/1922.
expanses. The problem of raising funds would be common to most unions in a backward country with a relatively retarded industrial sector and ill-paid workers. However, other unions, for example the railway unions, appear to have been in a more favourable position in this respect.

Low income tended to restrict the activities of the Sabha and its ability to sustain strikes. With its "slender" resources, the union could not make any provisions for strikers during a "harta". In one instance, we find a reference to efforts at mobilising corn for strikers from the mahalana of Collectorganj. More commonly, the strikers had to look for alternative sources of income on their own. This implied either an exodus to the village, or alternative occupations like vending vegetables, rickshaw pulling etc. Towards the


177 The Bengal and North-Western Railway Men's Assoc. (Gorakhpur) had an opening balance of Rs. 1,403-1-9 in March 1929; and a closing balance of Rs. 1,338-6-6 in March 1930. Similarly, the Eastern India Railway Employes Union, had an opening balance of Rs. 3,632-14-0, and was left with Rs. 3,309-7-3, at the close of the year. Ibid. Given the large number of workers, this is not surprising. Even if a small proportion were unionized, the funds would be large.


179 S.A.I.D., 26.1.1924.

180 During the Elgin Mills strike (June 1928) for instance, nearly 1000 strikers drifted to their villages. Leader, 15.6.1928. The situation remains the same today. The workers drift back to their villages or else take up odd jobs in the city. Even when they remain in the city their preoccupations with earning a living sometimes weakens the agitational strength of the strikers.
close of the one and a half month strike in the Victoria Mills (Dec. 1923 - Feb. 1924) the workers had to even resort to street begging. 181

Another indication of the problem of funds is expressed in a report of the Intelligence Department (U.P.), in reference to some meetings organized by Ramzan Ali, advocating the raising of funds for a strike. We are told that there was an absolute lack of enthusiasm on the part of the workers and that, "this call for large funds is not likely to add to their (meetings') popularity". 182 Again, in 1924, the Intelligence Department reports that Ramzan Ali did not manage to collect enough money to organize a strike. 183 In the initial years of the Sabha, funds for erecting a permanent building for the K.P.S. office had to be raised by getting some workers to sell wood in the Sabha compound. 184

(The K.P.S. funds were, to some extent, restricted because of its small membership. In 1929, its membership was estimated as 3,000, 185 i.e., 16 per cent of the total number of workers. This presents a contrast to Bombay, where, the Ginni Kangarh union membership in 1929, constituted 45 per cent of the total workforce. 186 By March 1930, the

181 Satya Bhakta, "Sranjasan Ka Sondesh" Satya Bhakta paper, file 19(14)1923 (A.C.I.H.N.)
182 S.A.I.D., 23 Dec 1922.
183 Ibid., 29 Nov 1924.
184 Interviews with Raghuraj Prasad
186 Mario, "Emergenccea"., p. 184. Their number fell sharply after 1920 strike.)
K.N.S. was left with only 662 members, as many as 2,776 having left the union in the course of the year. 187

The K.N.S., in the 1920s, adopted all the symbols and slogans of a militant organisation. It had, for instance, a red flag. Instead of a hammer and sickle, which it was to bear later, it carried the following slogan: "Punjivad ka naa sh ha" (capitalism should be destroyed). The walls of the cobra office were pasted with numerous other revolutionary slogans : "Keskheya kie khaa? Pardoodan ka." (Who owns the factories? The workers). "Yamin kie khaa? Kicooon ka." (Who owns the land? The peasants). 188

These revolutionary slogans of the cobra had only a symbolic significance. For all practical purposes its aims were as follows: 1) the promotion of the welfare and the moral, physical, mental and social well being of the workers, and 2) the promotion of goodwill between labourers and their employers. 189

What was significant about the activities of the cobra in its early years, were its efforts to bring together workers of different mills and different communities, whether it was through setting up a library or through common recreation in the cobra grounds or through common meals on Sundays for all workers. A gymnasium was set up in

187 Annual Report on the working of the Trade Union Act, D.I.L., L=424(17)/1930. On the decline of the K.N.S. during the Depression see Chapter IV.

188 Surya Prakash Tripathi, Vishvakaran Sri Gudatthan Chakma (Kanpur 1973) p. 59

189 O.N. dated 24-12-1921, Mehta to Claro, D.I.L., L=877(11)/1922.
the Seba compound, as a part of its physical welfare programme. Here, the workers could learn wrestling and the art of using Jutka and parang. This was of functional importance to the sebas. A gang of strong men was a good defence against "blacklegs". One of the workers interviewed had been a member of a local gang of toughs. When he initially joined the seba, it was primarily in this capacity. His resolve, he swore, was to beat up any strike breaker. Davi Doyal, an Elgin Mill worker and a prominent seba member in the early years, was a well-known "ashaluan" (strong man). Apart from this obvious function, the gymnasium not only offered a source of diversion and relaxation from the monotony of the workers' existence, but was a place where workers could get together.

A seba member, Sudarshan Chakr, also a poet, initiated a child welfare institution known as the "Mazdus Dal Randal," for the children of mill workers. The Randal set up a school, a library and a reading room for children. Its aim was to raise their "political consciousness" at an early age and prepare them for work in the sebas once they were older.

On Sundays, the seba/seba/chris Hindu and Muslims ate together. This was significant because most Hindus, especially those of high castes, rarely ate food touched by Muslims, even if they worked together in the same factory. Sudarshan Chakr, brought up in

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190 E.P. Tripathi, op.cit. p. 2.
191 Interview with Cds. Seiros, 10.10.1978.
192 S.P. Tripathi, op.cit. p. 2.
193 ibid. p. 8.
a working class family in Gultoli, recollects his feelings: 194

Though not as significant today, it was a big occasion in those days. I went along with my father and participated in this attempt to do away with distinctions between people).  

Besides bringing together workers of different communities, these gatherings were big festive occasions. For the worker, with his hundrum existence, such occasions were rare. They looked forward to them and enjoyed them. Another such festive gathering was the annual day celebration of the K.M.S. - the Jalsa, as it was commonly known. 195

This was an occasion when the workers could see, and hear speeches by leaders they had only heard about - Baptista, N.M. Joshi and others.

Perhaps, the initial association between workers of different mills and different communities could be better forged through such informal, recreative activities, without any overt attempt at politicization and organization - gatherings at the Sunday meals and the Jalsa; recreation and education at the akhara and the library. We do not know whether such centres were set up in all areas. Considering that the sabha activities were concentrated around Gultoli, it is likely that these were restricted to this area.

194 Sudarshan Chakr, Communist Katha, p. 227.
195 Pratap, 13.3.1922, 27.3.1922; Aaj, 5.6.1924.
Apart from these activities the K.M.S. held regular meetings at mill gates and in working-class mahallas, some of which attracted large crowds. In March 1922, for instance, Wahid Var Khan addressed a meeting of some 1,000 workers. 197 During the Elgin Mills strike, in May 1928, a K.M.S. meeting again attracted a gathering of this size. 190 These meetings were presumably more frequent around the time of a strike. In the period preceding the Cannara Cotton Mills strike, J.N. Clay, the District Magistrate, "...a marked increase in the amount of agitation among millhands, largely in the form of addresses delivered to small bodies of men at the mill gates, at morning, noon and evening, as they (the workers) enter and leave the mill premises." 199

In January 1924, when the Victoria Mill workers were on strike, the Intelligence Department reported seven meetings in the course of one week, the crowds ranging from 40 to 1,200 workers. 200 While the workers were at meetings and strikes, participation in the organizational activities of the Seche was restricted. A meeting to elect office bearers to the K.M.S. in June 1924, attracted only 350, of whom only 125 were workers. 201

196 Interview with S.P. Avashti, 29.9.1976.
197 S&D, 11.3.1922.
198 L&O, 2.6.1928.
200 S&D, 12.1.1924.
201 Ibid., 7.6.1924, At some meetings Congressmen, like Vidyarthi, lent a distinctly nationalist tone to these meetings, as for instance in Nov. 12, 1922, when he advocated the boycott of foreign cloth. On other occasions leaders like Sanbaji Vijebsand were reported to have provided the "communist touch." He demanded that the mill owners should pay half their income to the workers. S&D, 25.11.1922, 2.12.1922.
The K.M.S. in this period was attempting to develop a framework of trade unionism to channelize working class activity. It wanted, moreover, to ensure that the workers acted only with its sanction. In the Sabha by-laws it was stipulated that there was to be no strike in any mill without its sanction, and then only when 75 per cent of the workers agreed to strike. This decision was to be taken at a meeting specially convened for the purpose.\(^2\) The K.M.S. wished to set up an arbitration board, with representatives of employers and workers, to settle disputes.\(^3\) Such a board, it was felt, could eliminate the need for strikes, and also prevent undue losses to the mill owners. When the Elgin Mill workers struck against the threshing of one of the workers by a European employee, in May 1929, the Sabha recommended the appointment of a tribunal consisting of one representative of the mill authorities, one from the K.M.S., and a third member to be elected by each of these representatives.\(^4\) The emphasis of the K.M.S. in these years appears to have been on maintaining goodwill between employers and workers. It strongly disapproved of "lightning strikes". In a strike in the Campore Cotton Mills in January 1929, the K.M.S. negotiated a settlement in which it promised that "lightning strikes" could not be resorted to in future.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) D.O., dated 2.4.1922, Mehta to CIC, D.I.L., L-977(II)/1922.

\(^3\) Proten, 2.2.1920; Murari Lal's speech at the Kanpur District Conference, London, 22.5.1920.

\(^4\) The mill owners rejected the proposal on the grounds that they alone had the right to hold an enquiry into the conduct of their employees - "Weekly Reports..." D.I.L., L-918(2)/1929.

\(^5\) Pioneer, 19.1.1929.
Note to Map III

### DISTRIBUTION OF HINDUS AND MUSLIMS IN DIFFERENT LOCALITIES

(1931)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindu(s)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Muslim(s)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1 Thatrai</td>
<td>98 M1</td>
<td>Bhusa Toli</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 Lathi Mahal</td>
<td>95.4 M2</td>
<td>Butcher Khana Khurd</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3(a) Bengali Mahal</td>
<td>90 M3</td>
<td>Ansarganj</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Patkapur (chak 24)</td>
<td>90 M4</td>
<td>Patkapur (chak 20)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4 Sabzimandi</td>
<td>89.8 M5</td>
<td>Misri Bazar</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5 Parmat</td>
<td>88.2 M6</td>
<td>Colonelganj</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6 Sisamau (Bhaunana Purwa)</td>
<td>87.6 M7</td>
<td>Talaq Mahal</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7 Patkapur (chak 23)</td>
<td>87 M8</td>
<td>Hirman Purwa</td>
<td>59.7</td>
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<td>86.8 M9</td>
<td>Butcher Khana Kalan</td>
<td>58.6</td>
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<td>H9 Patkapur (chak 26)</td>
<td>85.9 M10</td>
<td>Dalal Purwa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10 Etaiah Bazar</td>
<td>84 M11</td>
<td>Ansarganj(Bansmandi)</td>
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<td>H11 Ansarganj</td>
<td>82.8 M12</td>
<td>Beconganj</td>
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<td>H12 Khalaqi Lines</td>
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<td>H14 Gaderiya Mahal</td>
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<tr>
<td>H16 Coolie Bazar</td>
<td>75.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>H17 Colonelganj</td>
<td>75.6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: (a) Localities with a population of over 75 per cent Hindus have been identified as "Hindu" areas because Hindus constituted over 80 per cent of the total city population, and were spread in almost every part of the city.

(b) Localities with a population of over 50 per cent Muslims have been identified as "Muslim" areas because Muslims formed only 10.8 per cent of the city population. Clearly, it is the concentration of Muslims in only certain areas of the city which is of greater significance.

left in mohallas which are predominantly Hindu. What remains common to all reports, whether Hindu or Muslim, is the fact that, in the murders and arson no distinction was made between various classes within each community.

The mass of mill workers did not become a part of the crowd till the morning of the 25th. The previous evening, the workers returning home from the mills, were victims of attack. Babu Krishna Lal Gupta seemed to recall only the attacks on Hindu workers by Muslim jathas. There seems to be no reason why Muslims were not subject to similar attacks, perhaps in other areas of the city. A. Hoon (M.L.A.) suggested that the quarters attacked were mostly those occupied by mill workers and labourers. In the absence of any other statement showing the number of workers' and non-workers' quarters affected, it is difficult to make any conclusive statements of this nature. It remains important nevertheless, that workers were a part of the rioting - whether Hindu or Muslim.

On the 25th, attendance at the mills was slack, and they were soon closed down. By 10 a.m. that morning, rioting had spread to the area around Gwaliori where the New Victoria, the Elgin, the Woollen

35 Written Evidence of Babu Krishna Lal Gupta, 22 April, 1931, Commission of Inquiry into the riots, H.P.O., File 10/19/Kw./1931.
37 Leader, 14.4.1931.
Mills and the North-West Yarnery were located. Col. Menzies noted that there was "general unseasiness" among the mill workers since the morning, and soon after the mills closed, there was "rioting" on the Mall Road near the Woollen Mills. Bashiruddin Ahmed (Municipal Commissioner) in his account, talked of the "threatening" group of "rioters" emerging from the mill-settlements around the Sisamau - Colonolganj area. At Parmat, Muslim houses were reported to have been surrounded by Hindu millhands, who threatened to kill the inmates.

The mills remained closed for a few days after the riots. They opened gradually after the 29th, though it was only on the 1st of April that a "good attendance" was reported.

The riot left its mark on working class politics in the city. In October 1931, the Muslim mill workers were reported to have plans of starting a Sabha of their own at the office of the Gharib, an Urdu Muslim paper. The absence of any further evidence on the formation of this exclusively Muslim Mazdur Sabha, gives the impression that the plans perhaps did not materialize ultimately. Nevertheless, a feeling of alienation from the K.M.S., was quite general amongst the Muslim workers. Trade unionists of the period admitted that the communal ten-

38 Cmd. 3891, East India, Campute Riots.
39 Leader, 25.4.1931.
40 Written ev., H.P.D., 10/19/K.W., 1931.
41 Leader, 4.5.1931.
42 Telegram from D.M., Kanpur, dated 1.4.1931, H.P.D. File 10/19/1931.
43 S.A.I.D., 31.10.1931.
sion seriously impaired the working of the Sabha for some time. Muslim workers saw the predominantly Congress leadership of the K.M.S. at that time as being unsympathetic towards their interests. The few remaining Muslims in the Sabha, like Ramzan Ali, had little influence over these disgruntled workers. In an effort to placate Muslim feelings, Fazal Husain Hazrat Mohani was made a member of the executive committee of the Sabha. The emerging Communist leadership in the latter half of the thirties had to make special efforts to mobilize Muslim workers in the activities of the K.M.S. In fact, the disaffection of the Muslim workers from the Congress proved to be a source of strength for the Communists - they formed the initial basis of Communist support. Sher Khan, Zakir Akbar, Aliuz Ali and other Communists helped in mobilizing these workers, who were subsequently put in positions of leadership within the mill committees.

Sometimes, situations of conflict and antagonism amongst workers were expressed in communal forms. Strike breakers were always the target of attack and general hatred. In the Elgin Mills in June 1928, those who wanted the strike to be called off happened to be predominantly Muslim. In such a situation, the antagonism towards strike

45 Interview, S.S. Yusuf.
46 S.A.I.O., 21.11.1931.
47 Interviews, Aliuz Ali and Raghubir.
48 See Chapter III.
breakers became mixed up with "communal" feelings. 49 Though the struggle was not a communal struggle to begin with, yet the form which it took, expressed the strength of community identities within the workers. Similarly, disputes with jobbers, who on occasions colluded with the management in breaking up strikes, could acquire a communal colour. Tension between mistri and workers were particularly marked during and after the strikes of 1937 and 1938, when the mill committees were threatening the influence and position of the mistri within the mills. Semi, a Muslim head jobber of the Elgin Mills was the object of general hostility because of his attempt to collaborate with the management in breaking up the month long strike in that mill. The rancour against him culminated in his murder in November 1939. 50 This became an issue around which communal forces mobilized.

Petty conflicts, such as a complaint against a worker for not possessing a mill ticket, could be seen by some as a discriminatory assertion of authority based on a religious prejudice. The softening of authority in relation to those with whom the mistri, or the gate keeper, had cultural and linguistic bonds was missing for others. This

49 Another similar incident, with much graver consequences was the clash between the Pathan "blacklegs" and the workers on the oil installations in Bombay in Dec. 1928. The trouble spread to other mills and on 6th Feb. 1929 the situation was reported to have taken on a "definitely communal" turn. In this case, the Pathans, apart from being strike 'breakers' were also identified as moneylenders, who advanced money to workers at usurious rates. The fact that they belonged to a different faith turned it into a general clash between Hindus and Muslim workers. See H.P.O., File 10/10 X K.W/1930; H.P.O., F.R. File 191/1929, Jan. (1), Bombay; H.P.O., F.R., File 17/2/1929, Feb. (1), Bombay. A brief analysis see K.B. Krishna, The Problem of Minorities or Communal Representation In India (London 1939), p. 268.

50 Leader, 3.12.1937; Pioneer, 30.11.1937.
could unconsciously magnify tensions in a milieu where ties of caste and community were still important in the lives of the workers. In the Muir Mills, a Muslim gate jemadar was attacked by a Hindu worker accused of not having a mill ticket. Stone throwing followed, and the police was called in.  

Raghurir recounted how Chamars being the dominant caste in the Swadeshi Mills in the twenties, asserted their authority over other castes. He felt that the harsh attitude of the mistri, who was a Chamor, towards Raghurir, was related to the fact that the latter was from a higher caste.

The workers were involved in the attack against the local authorities in May 1900, August 1913 and in the communal clashes of March 1931. Here we have tried to understand how these actions were expressions of religious and community feelings in the minds of the workers. Instances of petty disputes between workers, over communal issues were numerous. But, these did not always become general or affect the working class movement as a whole. Such issues could acquire a more general form only in periods of upswings of "communalism", for instance, in 1931 or in 1939; at the same time reflecting also the weakness of the

51 S. A. I. D., 15.4.1939.

52 Interview with Raghurir.

53 In Feb. 1939, labour "agitation" in Kanpur was reported to be "practically non-existent" because of "communal" tensions in the city. The situation continued to remain tense for some months—conflict recurred. In June 1939, an attack on a Rath Jatra procession started off a riot, see S. A. I. D., 25.2.1939, 15.4.19, 22.4.1939, 29.4.1939, 19.6.1939; H. P. D., F. R., File 18/2/1939, Feb. (i), U. P., H. P. D., F. R., File 18/6/1939, June (ii), U. P. The influence of radical propaganda, the strength which the working class movement had acquired in the past decade, the militant and united struggles of the recent past (1937-38), would have had some restraining influence on working class involvement in the riots.
workers' movement and intensifying its fragmentation. These expressions of community consciousness have to be understood in terms of the character of the working class and the milieu in which they lived and worked. As we shall see, such forms of consciousness persisted because the basis of their sustenance continued to be reproduced.

II Rise of religion

Religious symbols, myths, and legends formed a part of the world in which the worker lived. In the early days of the Mazdur Sabha, when it was still in the process of being organized, the Sabha meetings had a religious aura about them. Prominent among the early organizers was an Arya Samajist, Pandit Kedratt, an ex-worker in the Elgin Mills. He and other workers would sometimes call meetings under the guise of a katha or a maulud. This was often necessary for reasons of security, but the choice of the ritual itself, the hawan, and chanting of Vedas was not without significance. Gestures, like the oath in the name of the Ganges to maintain secrecy, suggest a certain reverence and identity with the religious idiom. The hawan and the Vedic rituals were perhaps not as incongruous in such a gathering.

54 Sudeshan Chakr writes:

"Bharat Kand" in Communist Katha, p. 227.
Though it was heavily loaded with a kind of religious symbolism, which could have become the basis of a communal prejudice, we do not find signs of any general "communal" hostility within the workers in the early days of the K. M. S. Muslim workers like Ramzan Ali, Mohammad Gafoor, Sultan Ahmed and others figured in the Sabha of the early twenties. Perhaps it was these Muslims who called clandestine Sabha meetings in the name of a Mawluda. This not only provided a non-political cover, but it presumably held an appeal for the mass of Muslim workers.

The persistence of religious beliefs in the minds of the workers is reflected in the recurring metaphors and allegories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata and various religious myths and legends in the poems of a worker poet like Sudarshan Chakr, on whose writings I have relied heavily. Chakr, like his father, had a working class background. He worked in the Elgin Mills and later in the New Victoria Mills. Like many other fellow workers in Kanpur, Sudarshan Chakr had a rural past - he was brought up by his mother in a village near Kanpur. In the thirties, he worked with socialists like Raja Ram Shastri, and later, in 1940, he joined the Communist Party. If being a Communist, Chakr did not fully share all the ideas of his co-workers, he was aware of


56 Our evidence on this aspect is somewhat limited. We do not have any similar writings by Muslim workers or any allusions to Islam.

It is true that one cannot equate linguistic and literary convention with religious beliefs, but there does exist a close relationship between the two.
their mental attitudes and knew the form and idiom in which he could convey his ideas. One of his major works entitled Communist Katha is modelled entirely on the Ramayana. The chapter heads: "Marx Kend", "Rue Kend", "Chin Kend", "Swapat Kend", etc. are reminiscent of the sectional headings in the Ramayana: "Balkand", "Ayodhyakand", "Aranyskand"... The metrical form, using the doha and chauvery, is again very similar to the Ramayana. To a worker who since childhood listened to recitations of the Ramayana in his village, the rhythm would strike a familiar note. Sudarshan Chakr, a Communist, had also been schooled in this tradition, and this was a form which perhaps came to him quite naturally. Allusions to Rama, Ravana and other legendary figures recur. Names of workers are used metaphorically, symbolising characters from the Ramayana:

(Seeing Shri Ram on the battle field against Ravana, the enemy dispersed and ran away).

In other poems too, similar images are used: The defeat of the capitalist is projected as the burning of Lanka.

57 This was published in 1961 but work on it had begun earlier. It deals with the entire history of the Communist movement and the poet's memories of Kanpur which date back to the twenties. What is significant is that such a language is being used at a time when the Communists were a powerful force in the workers' movement in Kanpur. It is interesting to note that another Communist poet talking of the significance of Communist Katha to the working class wrote: "I can say with full conviction that in future Communist Katha will be as dear to the hearts of the workers as the Ramayana is today," Cited in S.P. Tripathi, Vishyakari Shri Sudarshan Chakr, p. 42.

58 Couplets and four lined rhymes.

59 S. Chakr, Communist Katha, p. 232. Shri Ram was a worker, a K.M.S activist and a member of the Communist party.
Remember this verse, the son of the house, our family has killed these innocent men. 60

A poem on a general strike opens with an invocation to the goddess Saraswati. 61 In "Hamduran Ki Jai Hogi," Chakr refers to the workers as the makers of the Mahabharata, and draws an analogy between the workers' struggle and the battle in the Mahabharata. 62 In another poem he repeatedly urges the workers to struggle for socialism, in order to realize the ultimate desire of Shagun (God). 63

In an environment where religious traditions still had a strong influence, the popularity of slogans like "Bajrang Bali Ki Jai" and "Allah-o-Akbar" amongst the workers in the twenties, 64 does not seem very anachronistic. In the milieu which existed, the religious feelings of the workers sometimes found expression even during moments of struggle. During the Kasimpore Cotton Mills strike of April 1924, when the police was trying to disperse the workers from mill premises, the militants resisted, and some made appeals to the religious sentiments of

60 S. Chakr, "Bonus Lokar Manange", Sachhi Kavitayen (Kanpur 1956), p. 13. This poem was written in the context of a lathi charge on the Muir Mills workers, in 1931. It is significant that such ideas and imagery were used by Communists in Kanpur, even in 1931.

61 S. Chakr, "Kanpur Ki Aam Hartal", Sachhi Kavitayen, p. 79.

62 Ibid., p. 88.

63 S. Chakr, "Bhooke hai Shagun", Ibid., pp. 8-10.

64 Interviews, A. Arora and S.C. Kapoor.
the workers to draw them together and keep up their morale. The workers were told that they would be considered traitors to their religion if they left the mill compounds. Hindus would be considered to have eaten beef and the Muslim pork, if they gave up the struggle. 65 This was at a time when the influence of the Mazdur Sabha in the activities of the workers, was less marked than in late thirties, when radical slogans were popularized by the Communists. Slogans such as "Bajrang Bal Ke Jai" and "Allah-O-Akbar" were familiar to the city populace as a whole, as is evident from the accounts of various witnesses before the Camporee Riots Inquiry Commission 66 (1931). These were not necessarily invoked to express "communal" feelings, but such slogans could not be expressive of a "class" collective - they were exclusive to each community. Slogans like "Inquilab Zindabad" ("Long live Revolution") remained unfamiliar to many, as late as the thirties. When this slogan was raised by some Communist leaders during a procession of the Cooper Allen strikers in 1936, the response about 200 yards away was, "Lankiat Vrindavan". 67 Meaningless as the phrase is, the references to "lankiat" (longcloth) and Vrindavan (birth-place of Krishna) are significant: while the general emotional zeal and rhythm of the slogan "Inquilab Zindabad" is captured, it is expressed in an idiom familiar to the workers.

65 Report of the D.M., Judicial Inquiry into the Cotton Mills Riots (1924), H.P.D., File 153/1924. See also Chapter III.


67 Interview, A. Arora.
The persistence of religious symbols and images in the minds of workers, was related in some ways to the social milieu of the workers in the city. This is not to argue that, the retention of these forms was the cause of "communal" rioting. What we are concerned with is not the phenomenon of "communalism", but the existence or non-existence of a community identity in the minds of the workers. The importance of religious beliefs and ideas in their social life reinforced the community distinctions between them. This did not, as is quite clear from our preceding chapters, come in the way of united actions of the class in periods of struggle, but it could become a real impediment to collective activity when the movement was slack. The process of class formation among the workers, tended to incorporate and integrate these community forms, and did not necessarily negate them.

The most obvious manifestation of the existence of Hindus and Muslims as distinct social and cultural entities, was the geographical distribution of the two communities within Kanpur. The mohalla-wise break-down of population figures of Hindus and Muslims, show a definite concentration of each community in certain areas - a feature which continues to some extent even today. Some of the workers and trade union leaders I interviewed, seemed to believe that such a separation came into being only after the riots of 1931. Though the riots accentuated the geographical barriers between communities, our evidence tends to show that the pattern of concentration of different communities in particular areas had come to exist earlier. The figures in the 1931 Census, which show this quite clearly, were collected before the riots,
and not after. Areas like Butcher Khana, Amarganj and Patkapore had a predominantly Muslim population - Muslims constituting 65 per cent, 76 per cent and 81 per cent of the total population in these areas. Hindus were more spread out and scattered in almost all parts of the city. But certain areas were virtually "Hindu areas" with few Muslims. (see map).

Since there were very few mill settlements where workers of different communities employed in a particular mill could live together, they lived in private bastis and hataks, where regional and community groupings prevailed. Chamars and other 'low caste' workers rarely lived in the same hatak as Brahmins or Thakurs. Even in the fifties, Moshoff's survey shows that despite the difficulties in finding housing accommodation, there is a definite tendency for the different caste groups to keep together as much as possible and keep out, or segregate the less desirable castes. In the occasional hatak where workers from 'low castes' happened to be living with other 'high caste' workers special arrangements for segregation were made. Such hatak usually had some rooms with entrances on the outside, instead of the usual opening into the walled-in courtyard; and it was in these rooms that 'low caste' workers lived.

69 Ibid.
70 In Madras too, E.O. Murphy notes that the "untouchable" Adi-Dравidas lived in chariis, segregated from other "caste Hindus"; Muslims had their own charis or else they lived in a separate portion within the Adi-Dравida chari. E.O. Murphy, op.cit., p. 302.
71 Moshoff, op.cit., p. 49.
72 Ibid., p. 52.
In the mill settlements, workers of different castes and communities lived together in the same settlement, but those from the same community would naturally prefer to live near each other. This, Freemantle stated, had to be taken into account: "men like to live among their own castes-fellows and this is a point to which attention is always drawn when houses are allotted." In the Allenganj settlement, the inhabitants were mostly Chamar, and higher caste clerks were reluctant to go there.

The *Mohalla* would broadly define the geographical limits of a worker's social and cultural activities. He lived and shared his miseries and celebrated his festivals amongst people who quite often had similar cultural traditions. The celebration of festivals like *Dashera*, *Diwali* and *Holi* by Hindus and *Id* by the Muslims, strengthened the social bonds within the communities. *Dashera* for instance, involved various cultural activities. The workers in certain mills organized their own *Jumila mandalas*. Similarly, *Id* invoked a community spirit, the exchange of greetings and general festivity among the Muslim workers. Even the poorest workers could save money to get new clothes for the entire family on *Id*. On one occasion when the Coimbatore Cotton Mills was on strike (October 1937) and the workers lost their wages for the period, Abdul Latif was particularly aggrieved because his family had to go without new clothes for the festival.

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were particular about festival holidays and they protested when these were denied. On Shab-i-Barat, in October 1937, the Elgin Mills workers refused to work because they had customarily received a holiday on this day. Similarly, all mills remained shut on Kartiki Purnima, a day when thousands bathed in the Ganges. When the Maheshwari Devi Jute Mill continued to work on that day (18th November 1937), a number of workers did not attend and the management subsequently declared a lock-out. The K.M.S. was critical of this action: "If a mill works on such an important festival as Kartiki Purnima" it argued, "they [the management] must reckon with a more than usual percentage of absenteeism, and this cannot be made a pretext of declaring a lock-out."78

The mohalla culture was, thus, reinforcing the primordial links of the workers. Those, who (like some of the communist cadres) tried to break out of these community bonds were isolated from their community79 - an isolation which may have meant considerable insecurity for other family members, the women in particular. Women were much more dependent on community relationships, and had a much more deep rooted faith in religious beliefs, ideas and superstitions, as they saw little of the world outside their home and community.80

78 K.M.S. Memos. regarding M.O. Jute Mills lock-out, dated 19.11.1937, ibid.
79 Interview, A. Arora.
80 Some of these problems were raised by Mahadeo, a worker in the Swadeshi Mills, Interview, Mahadeo.
Within the factory, the retention of community ties expressed itself in the caste and community clusterings within mill departments. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Julahas and Kories were predominant in the reeling and weaving departments. Ahirs were concentrated in carding, and the Brahmins in the weaving preparation section. These divisions began to show signs of disintegration in the later years, with the expansion of the industry. But as late as 1929, the Factory Inspector noted a relative concentration of Muslims in the weaving department and the preponderance of Hindus, outside weaving. This could have an impact on the relations between workers, as men in a particular department were more closely in touch with others in their own department. The generalization of a strike could have been difficult, in situations where the grievances related more specifically to one department. The problems of one department could be viewed by some as problems relating to a particular community and not workers in general.

Certain prejudices between castes and communities continued to express themselves in the day to day relationships between workers, within the factory. Higher caste workers were very particular that

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61 See above Chapter 1, for details of the distribution of workers according to caste and community.

62 The U.P. Government in its evidence before the Royal Commission in Labour noted in this context: "The fact that in a particular industry different stages are still in the hands of men of different castes has an important bearing on the relations between the different groups engaged in industry. Purely industrial questions tend to take on the form of disputes between castes and communities." \textit{Report}, Vol. III, Part 1, 1931, p. 202.
their lunch packets were not "defiled" by the touch of any Chamar or Muslim worker. If this misfortune did befall them, then they would consider it their "right" to be paid in cash for their food, in exchange for the "defiled" packets. For most Brahmans, lunch in the factory consisted of dry chappatis because they would not eat any cooked food while they were in contact with other "unclean" castes. The dining shed in the Elgin Mill was used by very few workers. A large section, who were Brahmans, stayed away from it. Mangal Prasad of the Campore Cotton Mill felt, a "common" dining shed was of no use at all. He himself would not eat there, he added, if it was cleaned by a sweeper. He preferred a Kaha for the job. Mangal Prasad, incidentally, was a member of the mill committee and sported a red shirt when he appeared before the Labour Enquiry Committee (1938). Shivadhar, another witness, before the Committee, had no general objection to a common dining shed, provided he did not come into physical contact with any other worker. But Lalloo, of the Elgin Mill, suggested that separate dining sheds should be provided for Hindus. In the Campore

83 Interview with Cda, Shriram. Note that the practice was common enough to have been mentioned by Communists like Shriram, many of whom tended to play down the existence of such beliefs, in their endeavour to show the growth of "class" consciousness. Similar observations were made by Pron Narayan, a clerk in the Swadeshi Mills.

84 Ev., Shoo Shankar and Shoo Audher (workers) I.L.C.C. 1890, Q. Nos. 28 and 29.


86 Ev., Mangal Prasad, ibid.

87 Ev., Shivadhar, ibid.

88 Ev., Lalloo, ibid.
Cotton Mill, the dining shed proved to be more functional, because of a provision for separate places for Hindus and Muslims. Two separate shops for food articles had also been provided - one run by a Hindu and the other by a Muslim. 89

Ties of community, continuity of traditions, were in some ways a source of strength and security to a worker, new to the city world. In Kanpur, where a majority of workers were drawn from neighbouring districts, their traditions and customs often had a broad similarity. The system of recruitment which was prevalent - the mistri system, provided a basis for sustaining caste and community nuclei within the city. 90 The mistri brought men of their own community and region to work in the mills. Many of the immigrant workers came to the city without their families. A group of men from the same village would share the same room, sometimes arranged for by their kin mistri. This, as one worker recollected, drew the limits of the social life of some of the workers - their free time was passed in the company of their own kinmen. The Genarai (from Gararies) would have their own group, living and eating together. 91 Mistris would sometimes organize functions like the katha, where workers from his community or village and others from his department would gather. The workers could contribute funds

89 Evs, Tinker, ibid.
90 On the system of recruitment, see Chapter I.
91 Interview, Prem Narayan, The U.P. Government in its evidence before the Royal Commission stated: "The workman who has left his family behind often clubs together with other workers generally preferring relations, caste men, friends or men from his own village or town." Ref. Evs, Vol. III, Part I, 1931, p. 144.
towards such a function, though most of them were well aware that most of the cash would fill the mistrie's pockets and a very small portion actually reached the Pandits. Such a community association was important to most workers, specially the fresh immigrant. He felt lonely and isolated in the absence of people with whom he could talk the same language and share his thoughts about his village, his customs and traditions. One of the workers interviewed, had left his job in another city out of sheer loneliness, the unfamiliarity of the people and the surroundings.

For a majority of workers, their primordial links were reinforced through their continued ties with the village - periodic visits during festivals, during sowing or harvesting time or otherwise. A large number of workers drifted back to their villages during strikes. During a strike in the Elgin Mills, in June 1928, about a thousand workers were reported to have drifted back to their villages. Similarly, during the general strike of November 1919 or that of 1927 and 1938, a substantial section of the strikers went back to their villages.

The possibility of such an alternative made it easier to sustain strikes.


93 Cds. Shrivast worked in Mills in Amritsar, Delhi but he came back to the familiar surroundings in Kanpur because of the absence of "jan panchayat sankay log" (familiar people) in those cities. Interview, Shrivast. Zawar Husain left his job in Bombay (shodd wages were higher) and joined the Cawnpore Cotton Mills because Kanpur was nearer his home. Shivadhar, K.L.I.C. Progs., U.P. Ind. Dept., File 1145/1937, Bundle 110 (U.P.S.A.).

94 See Chapter I.

95 London, 15.6.1928.
in a situation where union funds were low and provisions for relief meagre. At the same time, the entire experience of the strike - the general excitement, the demonstrations, the meetings, the closer bond of unity between all workers during the period of struggle - all this was to remain outside the experience of those who stayed away during the period. The drift back sustained the "primordial" ties, customs, traditions and regional linkages.

III The worker and the lumpen poor

"Their (casual poor) aims and needs had always been short term. Their past seemed eternally to have been the same - the interminable struggle to get enough to eat, the precarious hold upon a marginal employment, the dreaded anticipation of hard winters, sickness and old age, the final and inevitable assumption into the workhouse. This was not a history in any cumulative or purposive sense. It was an endless and monotonous cycle of hardship punctuated only by the arbitrary and occasional collective outburst when fate had seemed to promise to settle accounts with the rich and respectable - if only for a day."

"The ever pressing demands of the stomach, the chronic uncertainty of employment, the ceaselessly shifting nature of the casual labour market, the pitiful struggle of the worker against worker at the dock gates, the arbitrary sense of destitution, and equally arbitrary cascade of charity provided no focus for any lasting growth of collective loyalty upon which a stable class consciousness could be based" (Stedman Jones).96

That there was a sense of community among workers belonging to a particular religious faith seems evident. But, we need to discuss the context in which these community identities crystallized - the character of the labour market, the frustrations and hopes of the unemployed, the

job seekers and the city poor. The politics of the city poor — the petty traders, vendors, vagrants, beggar and petty "criminals," was closely interwoven with the life of the workers. In a city with a flow of immigrants from the neighbouring villages, and a consequently large population of unemployed, vagrants and the like, the activities of this section were no doubt significant. The despair, the vain hopes and expectations of the job seeker in this dehat ka kendra, (nodal point of the surrounding villages) as one worker characterized it, expressed themselves in a form, which gave the city a reputation for its "turbulence."

Kanpur had the heaviest concentration of large scale industry within the province. Impoverished peasants, dispossessed artisans and other job seekers flocked to the city in the hope of employment. The influx to the city, was specially marked during the depression years, when there was an increase in emigration to Kanpur from districts like Fatehpur, Unnao, Jalaun and Rae Bareilly. 97 The total number of immigrants between 1921-31 was 40,953. 98 It is to be expected that a large proportion must have come to the city after 1929 when the Depression hit agriculture more severely. The number employed in industries on the other hand increased by 7,309 between 1921-31. 99 The depression was not a period of expansion of industry — a position which showed signs of recovery only after 1935. Though retrenchment was not as serious a problem in Kanpur, as it was in Bombay, yet this was not a

97 See Chapter IV.
99 See Table 1.5 Chapter I.
period when the large immigrant population could hope to find jobs.

Industries like sugar, cotton ginning and oil were subject also to seasonal fluctuations; and they employed primarily casual labour. In the cotton industry there was an interchange of workers between mills, though the duration of employment of workers within the industry as a whole was usually quite long. Even this industry with a relatively more permanent labour force, maintained a retinue of _hadil_ workers or substitute workmen, who were employed casually when the need arose. 100

The mass of "floating population" in Kanpur, was continuously replenished through an interminable cycling and re-cycling of those in job, out of job, the immigrants, the casual labourers. Desperately in need of a job - the wait for many was a long and tortuous one. Their conditions were miserable. They knocked at factory gates, in vain, and roamed the streets. Having no fixed abode, hundreds such were to be seen sleeping out every night, on the canal banks or any other space they could find. 101 The death rate among the homeless immigrants was exceedingly high. 102 The fortunate few found jobs, others had to resort to street begging, or just perish. Many may have been absorbed in petty capacities in the network of cocaine smuggling trade in Kanpur. The fresh immigrant could thus find himself flung from the world of the peasant to the "underworld" of the smugglers, the gambling dens and the like.

100 See Chapter I.


102 Census, U.P., 1931, Part I, p. 142. Statistics for the deathrate among immigrants are however not provided.
For the frustrated unemployed, the vagrants, the destitute, there was little difference between the "legal" and "illegal". Petty crimes, and thefts to satisfy hunger were not unknown to them. Their hatred and bitterness against the rich and the prosperous could only be expressed in outbursts of rioting, into which they were easily drawn - swelling the numbers and adding to it their frenzied fury. Some were willing to do anything for a few annas, even murder. Some could be hired by professional goondas to commit the most "heinous" of "crimes." The services of some were regularly employed by rival candidates during Municipal elections and some were often engaged as blacklegs during strikes. Professional goondism could exist and develop within such a social milieu.

The dividing line between what was characteristically labelled as "goonda" activity and the life of the casual poor was often very thin. There was, as we have seen a close structural link between the two. Though the industrial workers as a class did not share the characteristics of the lumpen poor, many workers had individual links with the lumpen population. They were drawn from amongst the city lumpens and some were forced to go back to a lumpen existence. Shri Ram and Kallen Khan were known as goondas before they joined the Communist Party. 104

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103 Note by S.P., Kanpur, 3-4-1930. Commission of Crimes by Goondas in Kanpur, U.P., Home Police, File 412/1931, Box 206 (U.P.S.A.). The Police Superintendent made these observations in the context of the "law and order" situation in Kanpur and quite characteristically labelled them as "bad character" and "lawless folk."

104 Interviews, A. Arora and C/o. Shri Ram. Arora recounted an interesting incident when he narrowly escaped being implicated in a dacoity committed by Kallen Khan, at Deraur (Kanpur Dist.). Arora who was on his way back from Deraur, had to spend the night at the station because he missed the train. The police suspected Arora.
Kallen Khan later reverted to petty dacoities and "goonda" activities. The process of erasing their past was a slow one for most workers. For those who had lived amongst a people, to whom street fights, assaults and murders were familiar occurrences; and who were accustomed to the code of mutual support and revenge in such affairs; it would be difficult to resist joining in the general melee during a riot, such as in March 1931.

In the perception of the state there was little difference between the crimes of the lumpen poor and the professional goondas. Fresh immigrants or the casual labourers, who may have joined in the general tumult of 1931, were all lumped together under the general category—'goonda'. He was looked upon as a "communal bully", a "looter" and a "slayer" along with the "jan par khelnewalas", who included, "kabuli moneylenders, the bully gangsters and the Generals lathiwal, smugglers of opium, cocaine and ganja.105 The police were asked to keep the history sheets of those whom the state considered "desperate" and "dangerous" characters, always ready for mischief.106 The Woolnunj area in particular was considered "a rendezvous for all sorts of bad characters." This was identified as the trouble spot...
where riots generally began. The government was concerned about the preponderance of such "bad characters," who it believed, had added to the massive spats of crimes during the 1931 riots. They feared the effects of their activities on the industrial life of Kanpur. An official committee, which was appointed to inquire into the crimes of goondas, suggested the implementation of special legislative measures to deal with local goondas. A Goonda Act was eventually passed in 1932. The act defined a goonda as "a hooligan, bully, rogue or badmash." The provisions of the act empowered the District Magistrate to recommend action against any person who appeared to be a goonda, and had "committed" or was "likely to commit" or "assist" in committing any non-bailable offence against a person or property, or an offence of "criminal intimidation." In addition, a variety of activities could perhaps be categorized as an "offence" involving a "breach of peace." The unfortunate "accomplices" in a crime, or a non-accomplice falsely identified as a criminal — often just a homeless vagrant with an anonymous status in Kanpur, could in the eyes of the local authorities appear to be a goonda. The term "breach of peace" was wide enough to cover activities of "communists" as well as the activities of strikers. In January 1937, when signs of restlessness and impending trouble among the workers were feared.

107 The notoriety of Moolganj was partly attributed by some officials to concentration of brothels in this area, attracting the "turbulent element" of the populace. There was in fact a prolonged discussion as to whether the removal of prostitutes from this area would help in bringing 'order'. See U.P. Municipal Dept., File 43 (I.T.)/1931, Box 51, (U.P.S.A.).

108 For details of the act see U.P. Home Police, File 412/1931, Box 206 (U.P.S.A.).

109 H.P.D., F.R., File 18/4/1937, Jan (i), U.P.
There were of course, certain "notorious" professional goondas in Kanpur, as distinct from others who were casually linked with such activities and for whom this was no regular mode of earning a living. In 1931 the history sheets maintained by the Kanpur police had a record of 107 "dangerous" goondas, who were chiefly the leaders of "gangs." There were various factions within them, among whom clashes were common: "... the leader of one gang, Billa Singh was shot dead, in one of the main markets of the city during the hot weather and Babu Lal's gang was beaten in return by kantias and ballemas. About the same time, members of Billa Singh's gang were severely assaulted with axes, swords and spears by Baboo Lall (the leader of a rival gang) and his men.

110 Marx's comments on the lumpen poor are brief and somewhat derogatory. The picture one gets is an undifferentiated one - the "vagabonds, the discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lezzarini, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, magnificnent brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, ran pickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars" all constituting the "scum, scum, refuse of all classes" usually constituting the basis of dictatorship. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Moscow 1972, p. 63. One cannot see these sections as a homogeneous, distinct group essentially forming the basis of rightist movements, of dictatorships and fascism. A large part of these sections were ex-peasants or ex-artisans who, as Worley suggests, were "essentially people in process, not a fixed and consolidated, let alone self-conscious and organized social class. They are becoming townsmen - eventually, they hope, a part of the settled urban population." Peter Worley, "Faction and the 'Lumpenproletariat'," Socialist Register, 1972, p. 211. It would be analytically more useful to use Worley's characterization of this section as constituting a "sub-proletariat." While some of them could become professional gangsters, others moved from job to job and could have a more casual links with criminal activity. Politically, this section could be mobilized both by the left and the right.

111 S.P. Kanpur to D.M., Kanpur, 0.O. No. 6-7, dated 14.10.1951, enclosed by the D.M. to Secy., Reclosed, 17.10.51, U.P. Home Police, File 412/1931, Box 206 (U.P.S.A).

The preoccupations of these _goondas_ varied from cocaine trade to keeping gambling dens, brothels and _chandoo khanas_. They were known for giving false evidence in criminal cases and for providing "trouble makers," to rival candidates during elections to the Municipal and District Boards and the Legislative Council. Some extended their activities to moneylending. There were _goondas_, who were men of considerable wealth "enjoying the patronage and support of the rich and respectable." Among the well known _goondas_ were cocaine smugglers like Hamid with his "gang" of twenty, Ajodha of Etawah Bazar, Kanhaiya of Chatri Mohal, Ezaq and Badlu of Patkapur, Ram Charan of Halsey Road, Sankay and Arjun of Parasa and Jugga. The "notorious" _badshah_ gamblers included Billa Singh, Ujaigar, Naina, Babu Lal, Mana Gangaputra, Piercy Mirza, Gajraj Pande and Ram Charan of Nahart Par.

The common vagrants, the immi grants or the unemployed, who fell victim to the _goonda_ legislation would be branded outcasted and condemned to prison as _goondas_ along with the professional _goondas_. Charges sheeted as a _goonda_ and having often lived among professional criminals in prison, there was for him, little choice when out of prison. There were no jobs for him - he had a "criminal" record to his credit - and life as a hardened _goonda_, no matter how bitter it was, may have been

113 A place for smoking _chandoo_ (opium).
115 Statement of Khan Bahadur Syed Ghulam Hussain, Kotwal, Kanpur, ibid.
for him a way of eking out an existence,\textsuperscript{116} while the law sometimes made a goonda of an innocent rural immigrant, the state had the satisfaction of having checked lawlessness, by adding to the numbers of such arrests.

The large number of professional goondas along with the local "rieff-reef", became a part of the general frenzy and added to the intensity of rioting in September 1927 and March 1931. They joined in the looting and arson. In the panic which followed the rioting, the goondas were used as protectors by Hindus and Muslims alike, against the "hooliganism" of "goondas" of the other community. And, the same goondas who acted as "protectors" of one, community looted and killed men and women of the other community.\textsuperscript{117}

There was thus a relationship between the nature of the labour market and the "turbulence" of the casual labourers and the urban poor. In addition, in a situation where there was a huge reserve army of labour, with an almost continuous inflow of rural immigrants, a comparative...

\textsuperscript{116} We are not offering a rationale for the activities of the so-called goondas. We are only suggesting certain possible reasons for the notoriety of Kanpur for the "crimes" of the "badshah" element, a feature which was believed to have added to the gravity of the riots of 1931. The figures for 1929 and 1930, for cases run under Sec. 109 Cr. P.C., which dealt with "bad characters" from outside, were the highest in Kanpur, as compared to all other cities in the province. S.P. Kanpur to D.M. Kanpur, enc. by D.S. to Macleod, 17.10.31, U.P. Home Police, File 412/1931, Box 206 (U.P.S.A).

\textsuperscript{117} See Barrier, op.cit., pp. 297-299. According to the Congress Report, there were both, separate Hindu and Muslim "gange" of goondas and mixed "gange", and even in the midst of the communal fury the mixed "goondas" were seen looting the same houses in perfect harmony. This seems a little doubtful, given the explosive situation existing at that time. The picture of perfect harmony within the mixed ganga, and the emphasis on independent initiative and hooliganism of the goondas tends to play down the participation of many Congressmen in the rioting.
tition for jobs was inevitable. A situation which was aggravated during
the depression. In a labour market where a free and easy sale of
labour power was difficult, the struggle for jobs often took the form
of community cohesion — the maintenance of jobs by a particular com-
munity for men of their own community to the exclusion of others. 118 The
authority of the mistri or jobber, as far as jobs in the mill were
concerned, tended to solidify such loyalties, for a mistri would often
try to push men of his own caste or community. The plight of the
majority of Muslims was particularly difficult. They were predominantly
urban based, with a more "precarious" connection with land than the
rest of the workers. Muslims constituted a significant proportion of
the industrial workforce. In 1931, the percentage of Muslims as a pro-
portion of the total number of industrial workers was 33.9 per cent., a
figure which has greater significance if seen in relation to their pro-
portion in the population of the city/whole (10.9 per cent). 119 The
concentration of Muslim workers in better paid jobs like weaving would
be resented by many non-Muslim workers. On the other hand, the Muslim
workers, given the precariousness of their situation would try to retain
their foothold in the industry. Conflicts and cleavages between com-
nunities were possible in this situation.

118 At Kankinara (Bengal) for instance, Kazi Zahiruddin Ahmed formed
a Mahomedan Labour Association, in 1895, the principal aim of
which was the recruitment of more Muslims to the jute mills. See
Dipeesh Chakravorty, "Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal’s Jute
Mill Hands in the 1890's."

119 Census, U.P., 1931, Part I, App. A, Table III, p. 422, Part II,
Table XVII, Part B, p. 520.
IV The "Communal" Milieu

We have discussed the basis of a community identity within the workers, their participation in communal riots, and the state of the labour market which tended to widen the spectrum of "rioters" in Kanpur. The growth of a communal ideology in the twenties and thirties, led to a crystallization of these community identities and created a situation of general antagonism between communities. The problem was closely linked to the growth of communal politics at a national level. The general basis for the emergence and growth of communal politics and parties in the twenties, though an important problem, is too wide an issue to be taken up within the limits of our study. The question has been analysed by others. Interpretations have varied: from an emphasis on the retreat of the non-cooperation movement and the frustrations and bitterness which resulted; to the nature of political mobilization by the Congress and its predominantly "Hindu" bias; the divide and rule policy of Imperialism; the struggle for jobs and the aspirations of a "minority" community; the reactive responses of different communities to the mutually antagonistic activities of communal organizations. 120

What we are concerned with here, is the impact of the activities of communal organizations on the phenomenon of rioting in general and the working class in particular.

In the latter half of the twenties, the revivalist activities of both Hindu and Muslim communal organizations took on an openly aggressive form. The Arya Samaj carried on Shuddhi with greater zeal.\(^\text{121}\) In addition, a Khatga Mandal was started in Kanpur by those who found the Arya Samaj lacking in sufficient fervour. This body tried to organize Hindus for self-defence and attempted to take non-Hindus into the Hindu fold.\(^\text{122}\) Muslims on the other hand, formed an organization called the \textit{Tehligh-ul-Islam}.\(^\text{123}\) The Maulud Sharifs of the Muslims came to be influenced by the prevailing communal tension. Instead of being simple religious gatherings, they became forums where communal leaders from Kanpur and outside often carried on an attack against the Hindu religion.\(^\text{124}\)

The involvement of several leading Congressmen of the city in the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Sabha activities left its impact on the political climate of the city.\(^\text{125}\) Dr. Harendra Lal Rohatgi and Narain

\(^{121}\) Written statement of Mohammad Fazal Hussain, editor, \textit{Al Barid}, written statement of Hakim Mohammad Abid, Assistant Secretary, Muslim Orphange, Kanpur and other evidence before the Riot Inquiry Commission (1931), H.P.O., File 10/19-K.W./1931.

\(^{122}\) Barrier, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 239.


\(^{124}\) Barrier, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 239-240.

\(^{125}\) For an analysis of the influence of religious ideas on the Congress, see Bipan Chandra, \textit{"The Hindu Tinge in Indian National Leadership and the Growth of Communalism in Modern India"}, Mushirul Hasan, \textit{"Communal and Revivalist Trends in Congress"}, Papers read at Seminar on the Communal Problem.
Prasad Nigam, two Congressmen connected with the Mazdur Sabha, were closely involved with the local Hindu Sabha. In fact, Congressmen themselves admitted that, only a small minority could be described as being above communal feeling. Many of them had joined the Hindu Sabha and were taking an active part in *Shuddhi* activities. A note of dissent appended to the Congress Committee Report by Zafarul Mulk reveals some significant details omitted from the main Report. That Congressmen who were truly secular constituted a "microscopic minority" seemed to be the general belief amongst the nine Congressmen whose answers were reproduced in the note. Four among those interviewed, felt that only four out of the thirty prominent Congressmen were above communal feeling; another felt that the number in this category was less than three. The only person about whose secular credentials there were no two voices, was Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi.126 These communal prejudices surfaced in the politics of the local Municipality. Muslim Municipal Commissioners expressed a general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, and a feeling that interests of the Muslims were not being taken up.

Cont'd... p.n. 125


127 *ibid.*, p. 244. Citing some instances reflecting a "communal" bias in Municipal administration, Mohammed Hanif referred to: the eviction of Muslim timber merchants from Cooperganj, the attempt to evict Muslim fruit sellers, the harassment of meat sellers, the naming of parks and roads after Hindu leaders, the efforts to evict hide merchants from Poch Bagh and the licencing of hide godowns and the increase in octroi rates. Evidence before Riots Inquiry Commission (1931), H.P.No., File 10/19-K.W./1931.
Muslims in Kanpur and in other parts of the Province, who were already quite estranged from the Congress since the retreat of the Non-Cooperation Movement, were embittered further by the early thirties. The Congress came to be seen more and more as a "Hindu organization". The Civil Disobedience Movement, ... had come to be regarded in Kanpur (more definitely) than in any other city of the province, as a Hindu movement, with Muslims actively or passively in opposition." For the average Muslim, it was difficult to distinguish between people who were involved in the Arya Samaj and those in the Congress. On one occasion, a Congress procession was mistaken by some Muslims for an Arya Samaj procession and stoned. The Muslims stood studiously aloof from the Congress activities in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Muslim traders - the cloth merchants and liquor shop owners, resented the attempts at forcible closure of their shops by Congress picketers. The attempts by the Muslims to organize themselves took the form of a revival of the Jangid organization. Though its ostensible purpose was to persuade Muslims to say their namaz five times a day, it almost assumed the form of a political counter to the Congress demonstrations.

Apart from this, public meetings were addressed by "communal" leaders.


130 H.P.O., F.2.R., File 52/4/1927, April (ii), U.P. There were, presumably many common participants in both these processions.

like Sahuik Ali. On the other hand, meetings addressed by Muslim nationalist leaders like Maulana Bakhshi and Maulana Abdul Qadi, under the auspices of the local Congress Committee met with a hostile reaction from the local Muslims.  

The streets of Kanpur lived and expressed the air of tension prevailing. Jannat processions paraded everyday, accompanied by large bodies of men carrying flags, *lathis, *balloons* and *kantas*. They marched along, raising cries of "Allah-O-Akbar" and singing songs full of religious fervour. Note for instance:

"mitane ke liye is kufre ko Islam Kehta hai,  
Shariyat ki tere se din ki talash ben jao,  
Gyumyat phat pans in in mushrikon par nomino qar tum  
Alam-bardeir ke khedai alambardeir ban jao."  

or

"Jhegima sarne sur loote kafir ke jayiz hai,  
Zarazi hata naa mehalle-i-takze ho jao."  

Arya Samaj activitiv continued to be "provocative." The Arya Samajists propagated against the "Musalmans" through songs and leaflets:

"Hindustan" was for the Hindus, they sang militant abuses against the


133 "Islam makes a plea to abolish infidelity:

Turn yourself into the sword of the Din (faith) on behalf of the Shariah (religion)  
Disaster will fall on the idolaters should you 0 the faithful.

The servant of the bearer of the standard, be the bearers of the standard." Barrier, op.cit., p. 257.

134 "It is lawful to quarrel with an infidel, (as also) to kill him and plunder  
Muslims, who were told to flee back to their homeland in Mecca.\textsuperscript{139}

Another such "communal" song entitled, "Arya Bachha Ke Jangi Git" went as follows:

\textquote{Khal-e-Kandhar par, Basra-e-Tatir par, Kabe

ke Minor par, Sahilee-Zanjibar par,

Har Janah lehrae Isharwa Do ke}.\textsuperscript{136}

Many others such verses were cited by witnesses before the Riots Inquiry Commission in 1931.

It is unlikely that the workers remained unmoved by the onslaught of communalist propagandas in Kanpur, in the late twenties. There is evidence of workers being a part of the \\textit{Janazia} procession, which were often taken out on Sundays to enable them to join.\textsuperscript{137} Even if many remained aloof from the religious activities, the continued exposure to a particular kind of religious propagandas, would have left some impact on their minds. Nor were the symbols used by the communists completely alien to the workers. The sanctity of the cow and cow's urine, or the image of Sita and Draupadi were important and familiar images to most "Hindus", and attacks on these symbols could offend the sentiments of many amongst them.\textsuperscript{138} So would any taunts against the \\textit{namak} ritual.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{139} "Yeh Agah hai na Ajam, Fero na Turkistan Hai

  Hindon ka sahna ki jaghal, yeh Hindustan hai

  ... Gez Kusilman hai to fauren chhor Hindustan ko;

  Bhog Hakke ki taraf rak hi deen ko Iman ko...

  \textit{Barrier}, \textit{SPA\textsuperscript{18}} p. 240.


  \item \textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ev. of O.N. Nigan, ibid.} \textit{Statement of Brij Narain Mireatra (sic), Advocate, ibid.}

  \item \textsuperscript{138} The speakers at the Maulu Sharifa were known to have made attacks on Draupadi's polyandry and on Sita's character. At one meeting a speaker warned Muslims against taking sweets from Hindu \\textit{halwa}, as these, he believed, were sprinkled with cow's urine. \textit{Barrier}, \textit{SPA\textsuperscript{18}} p. 245.
\end{itemize}
against the customary beard or against their reverence for Mecca and Medina, infuriate many Muslims. And such symbols were familiar plays of the communalist agitator.

Stories of attacks on "Hindus" in the discourses in Muslim religious gatherings, were repeated in the "Hindu" circles. Apart from local happenings, the situation outside Kanpur worked upon their minds. There was news of rioting in Sandila, Maurefan (Unnao District); and Ballia in 1927, and in Basti, Benares, Muzzafar and Agra in 1931; apart from riots in other provinces, such as Bombay (1929) and Calcutta (1930).

Official reports from Lucknow in September 1927, noted with concern: "... Communal tension overshadows everything and seems to dominate every public act and private opinion." And from Allahabad "... it seems absolutely appalling to what length communal bias has been allowed to enter into the life of the district." In Lohata village, in Benares district, the local Julehas and Thakurs came to blows after the Julehas threw shoes at them. News

139 Listen to this:

"Hzm hastiye Muslim ko dunya se mite dange,
Is Om ko Jhanda ko Kaba pe Chaddhe dange
Dadhi mada ko chutiya rehntay
Baa ho chuka namaz musalle uthlaya.

Statement of Munshi Mahesh Uddin, Hide Merchant, Kanpur, Riots Inquiry Commission(1931), H.P.O., File 10/19 K.W./1931. (We will wipe out the existing Muslims and plant the Hindu banner (banner of Om) atop the Kaaba in Mecca. Shave off your beards and let your chutiya (pigtails) grow, your prayers are over, fold your prayer cloth).

140 H.P.O., F.R., File 32/9/1927, Sept. (ii), U.P. One must caution however, that these official reports are likely to have presented a somewhat exaggerated and alarmist picture.

141 Ibid.

142 H.P.O., F.R., File 32/2/1927, Feb. (1), U.P.
travelled. The further the news travelled, the more alarming it be-
came - suspicion and mutual distrust gave a free play to the "commu-
nalist" imagination. Stories were woven. In Kheri, the arrival by
train of 26 cattle dealers from Bijnor district, started the rumour
that hundreds of Muslims were pouring in from Bareilly, Pilibhit and
Bijnor to kill Hindus. 143 The Calcutta riots led to wild rumours in
Kanpur - a "nervous fear" resulted. The rumours culminated in a panic
over an Arya Samaj procession on 21st April, 1926, because a similar
procession had sparked off a riot in Calcutta. 144

In a situation where the Muslims were becoming increasingly
alienated from the Congress and the Congress dominated K.M.S., organi-
izations like the Muslim League may have extended their influence amongst
the workers. 145 The Ittihad Millat (Mili Posh) for instance, joined in
support of the strikers during the general strike of May 1938. Volun-
teers from this organization participated actively in the picketing
activities and also helped in organizing relief for the workers. 146

While organizations like this could have mobilized support for the

143 H.P.O., F.R., File 32/9/1927, Sept. (i), U.P.
144 H.P.O., F.R., File 112/4/1926, April (ii), U.P.
145 We have no evidence on the activities of Hindu communal organiza-
tions amongst the workers, apart from stray references to the
involvement of individual members of the Arya Samaj and Hindu
Sabha. There seems to have been a more reasonable basis for the
influence of Muslim communal organizations, because of the feel-
ing of disenchantment with the Congress and the K.R.S., among the
Muslim workers.
146 See Chapter IV.
strikers from the local Muslim populace, their actual working class support was not very significant. The Muslim League had a large following within the city as a whole, but its working class membership appears to have been limited. The League evidently had an influence over a large section of the industrial workers in Kanpur in the early thirties, when there was a general feeling of antagonism and hostility between Hindus and Muslims within the city as a whole. But its influence seems to have waned in the period which followed. There are occasional references to workers attending League meetings in 1938. But, apart from forming a part of the "Muslim" gathering at such meet the workers were not involved in the activities of the League in general. As late as August 1938, the League was trying to bolster up its propaganda among the workers who, the League regretted, had stayed aloof from the organization, despite its efforts to help the strikers during the general strike. Some of the League members then pressed for a clear definition of the League's attitude towards labour and peasant organizations, and the need for a more definite expression of sympathy with them. A resolution expressing "complete sympathy" with Kanpur labour, and congratulating them for their successful struggle was subsequently passed. On the whole however, the Muslim League could not establis

147 Interview, S.S. Yusuf.
148 Leader, 2-7-1938.
149 Pioneer, 16-8-1938. See also K.B. Krishna, op.cit., p. 319.
150 Pioneer, 16-8-1938.
any stable social basis within the working class in Kanpur, or the lower classes in general, because of a lack of any concrete programme for these classes. 151

The community identities which were latent within the working class, could crystallize in situations of general "communal" tension and through the intensified activity of "communal" organizations. Apart from this, the policy of the employers and colonial state often aggravated communal tensions and fostered divisions between communities. There is evidence of specific instances when the millowners resorted to a deliberate discrimination between communities in the recruitment of workers. After the strike of 1938, certain millowners were known to have discriminated against castes which held a dominant position in their factory, the Brahmin workers in the Elgin Mills, the Kasis in the J.K. Mills and the Julahas in the Camporee Cotton Mills. 152 This attempt to ousted workers of one caste, in favour of workers of another caste, could have led to resentment and divisive feelings between workers, thus, weakening the solidarity between the workers of a particular mill. In 1940, the Singhania were reported to have asked the workers for compulsory contributions to the Hindu Mahasabha, and it was only after considerable opposition that the contribution was made voluntary. 153 Manipulations by the employers to break up strikes by encouraging "communal" conflicts or by supporting the activities of

151 See K.B. Krishna, op.cite., p. 319-22.
152 Interview, A. Arora.
153 S.A.I.D., 22.10.1940.
organizations like the Mill Posh were not uncommon. For instance, the attempts to break the strike in the Elgin Mill in June 1928, or in December 1937, and the ensuing communal tension, were believed to have had the support of the employers. The encouragement of divisive tendencies by the colonial state; and the indifference of the colonial bureaucracy, in situations of "communal" tension and conflict, such as in 1931, allowed "communal" rioting to become more widespread. The inactivity and slow response of the police and local officials, was the general complaint of the local population, as far as the riots of March 1931 were concerned, and this was acknowledged to some extent by the Official Inquiry Committee as well.\(^1\)

In this chapter, we have dealt with communal riots and outbursts over religious issues, only in so far as they reflect upon or affect, working class politics and workers consciousness. We have not discussed the reasons for "communal" riots or communal politics in general - questions too wide to be taken up within the limits of this study. The analysis has focussed on the articulation and expression of certain "primordial" forms of religious and community consciousness in the lives

\(^{154}\) Interviews, Aliwa Ali, A. Arora, Shriam, S.S. Yusuf. It must be noted however, that the Communists tended to over emphasize this aspect in order to facilitate anti-communal propaganda.

\(^{155}\) See also G. Pendey, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
and activities of workers. Such forms, we have argued, were characteristic of the working class in the process of its formation. The mohalla, the general social and cultural environment, the link with the village, the recruitment system, the nature of the labour market, all in many ways sustained past traditions and customs, religious and community ties among the workers. "Mob" action on religious issues and clashes between communities tended to crystallize such identities. After the riots of 1931 for instance, the community divisions between mohallas, between the predominantly "Hindu" mohallas and the predominantly "Muslim" mohallas became more pronounced. Many Hindus living in Muslim areas fled to "Hindu" localities. Muslim workers became alienated from what came to be seen by many, as a "Hindu" dominated Mazdur Sabha. In the absence of studies on this aspect for other industrial cities, no broad generalizations can be drawn. But similar observations have been made about the jute mill workers in Calcutta, 156 and the textile workers in Madras. 157

It is true that "crowd" action in situations like the plague riots of 1900, or the mosque riot (1913), involved wider issues, apart from those relating to the social customs and religious traditions of the workers. The outbreak reflected also an attack against the state - against its interference with the religious rights of the people or their customary norms of social relations. Similarly, in a demand for


festival holidays and a protest over this issue one can see an attempt by workers to lay down their own rules of work and leisure and their resistance to factory discipline. Nevertheless, what was significant about these actions, and what distinguished them from other forms of resistance, was the concern expressed by workers over religious issues. Solidarity between workers during strikes or otherwise, united actions of the class, and the intensity of secular and radical propaganda by the communists, in the thirties, created at one level, awareness of class unity. The Muslims who had earlier been alienated from the K.M.S. were drawn into the Sabha activities, and there was general solidarity between all workers in the strikes of 1937 and 1938. But community identities survived and to an extent affected working class politics again in 1939, when working class activity was in a period of decline. With the weakening of the movement and splits within the leadership, communal propaganda of the Muslim League appealed to the workers in the early 1940’s. The existence of such tensions in turn, made it difficult for the Congress and the Communists to mobilize the workers in these periods. Communal organizations like the Muslim League, attempted to attract the workers; but it seems clear from our evidence that the workers, while retaining a community consciousness at one

158 In trying to see all actions of the workers primarily as a kind of resistance to the oppression and exploitation of the factory system and in his attempt to avoid any identification of the working class with what he considers “communal”, Ranajit Das Gupta, tends to blur the distinction between different issues (e.g. between/demand for a holiday as such and the demand for a holiday on a religious occasion) and he underestimates the significance of such forms of religious and community consciousness. "Material Conditions and Behavioural Aspects of the Calcutta Working Classes"
level, were not involved in the activities of these organizations in any sustained and significant way. 159

Many of the Muslims who had turned towards the Muslim League in a period when they were alienated from K.M.S., were increasingly drawn towards the Communists after the mid thirties. The latter not only took up their demands in a more determined way, but encouraged Muslim workers to take up positions of responsibility in the emerging milli-committees. The experience of the struggles of the late thirties and the close interaction with the Communists could obviously have meant an awareness and consolidation of class unity, and a broadening of outlook for those who had earlier been limited by the sectarianism of the League. However the united struggles of the class and the involvement with the Communists did not actually lead to an erosion and negation of community consciousness. In fact, the nature of mobilization of Muslims by the Communists in this period may to some extent have reinforced rather than negated such identities. The close cooperation between the Communists and the Muslim League leader, Hazrat Mohani for instance, could give the former a certain legitimacy in the eyes of those who had been sympathetic to the League earlier. The Communist attempts to draw Muslims together in unity with other sections did not necessarily counteract the conscious and subconscious levels of community consciousness.

159 One must emphasize again, the distinction between the existence of community feelings, and "communal" politics or "communalism" as an ideology of a social movement. The working class in Kanpur, did not form the basis of a "communal" movement. It was drawn into the "communal" males in March 1931, but this it must be noted was a period in which the working class movement itself was going through a slack phase.
consciousness. There was rather an overlapping and interpenetration of different levels of consciousness. The erosion of such identities could possibly occur only through a prolonged experience of united struggles of the workers and a consistent effort by the Communists not only to oppose the existing modes of thought and feeling, but to help in the creation of a counter ideology. Within the existing social context, the subordination of community identities and the crystallization of a more stable basis of class consciousness, was a process which could only be a difficult and protracted one.