CHAPTER III

POPULAR MOBILIZATION AND POLITICS
IN BOMBAY COUNTRYSIDE: 1934-1942
(UP TO QUIT INDIA)

SECTION - A : DEPRESSED CASTES' STRUGGLES

I. Caste: Structure and its Implication for Polity

The complexity of caste as an institution has evoked several responses from the sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists. Although basic concern of this section is the popular mobilization of the depressed caste people in the province, a few comments about the 'structure' are necessary because it had direct bearing on the political processes. Dumont describes the structure of caste in terms of the binary concept of "purity-pollution" complex. According to him, it is this ideology which encompasses other structural elements like division of labour, distribution of power and resources. This approach perceives caste as a specific form of cultural domination. The political implication of this understanding is that protest against the cultural symbols of domination and oppression - in the form of temple-entry, inter-dining and inter-marriages, has the potential to destroy the structure.

The Marxian approach has tried to understand the structure

in terms of the instruments of class exploitation. The ideology of caste, for them, is simply the rationalisation of surplus appropriation. This approach has led to the denial of the specific nature of caste oppression and its mechanical linkage with class exploitation.² Following this approach, the Congress Socialists and Communists ignored the specificity of the caste-oppression and made caste-liberation dependent on class struggle. The Congress Socialists articulated this approach in this manner - "While asserting them (i.e. for the depressed castes) the right of freedom of conscience and liberty of entering all public places including temples, this Congress believes that most of the untouchables being peasants and workers, the real freedom of these classes can only be achieved by their participating in the broader struggle of the exploited masses for political and social emancipation."³ The Communists also thought that the new forces of production, the new machines, the factory, by assembling the masses of labour power in one place could overthrow the caste relations.⁴

The depressed caste radicals perceived caste oppression as synonymous with exploitation. They failed to see the distinc-

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² According to this viewpoint, caste structure is "institutionalized inequality; guaranteed differential access to the valued things in life." For a lengthy exposition of this view, see Gerald D. Berreman, "The Brahmanical view of caste" in Contribution to Indian Sociology, No.5, 1971.


tion between the instruments of exploitation and the instruments of oppression. For example Ambedkar thought that, "untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation... There is no appeal to public opinion, for whatever public opinion is there, is the opinion of the Hindus who belong to the exploited class and as such favour exploitation." They failed to see that both overlap and coincide but are distinct. The failure to understand that caste structure was organised on principles which created psychic barriers between the various strata of the exploited and oppressed people, easily led the Congress Socialists, Communists and radicals of the depressed castes to isolate themselves from the mainstream of national politics. They failed to see in caste an instrument which was detrimental to the crystallization of both national and class identities. Dumont is partially right when he says that the village in India was an "architectural and demographic entity", while caste was a real "sociological" reality. He, however, ignores another dynamic reality, i.e., the reality

5. The distinction made by Samir Amin between exploitation and oppression can be very helpful in analysis the situation of class-caste interaction, although he discusses it in another context. See Samir Amin, Class and Nation : Historically and in the current crisis, London, 1980, pp.1-20.
of class in whatsoever form it existed. M.N.Srinivas, defending the concept of 'village community' in pre-colonial India, stresses the 'commonality of interests' within the village despite caste-segregations. In his view, exclusion of the depressed castes from wells, temples, etc., was only contextual as even higher castes were excluded in certain rituals. The meaning of exclusion and inclusion in the traditional society was different and acceptable by the whole village community without dissent. This argument is ahistorical as it ignores the protest movements in the forms of devotional cults and Warkari movement in Maharashtra against the caste oppression.

II. The Gandhian response to the structure:

Gandhian ideology has been accused of directing attention away from the "secular inequalities", and subserving the interests of the dominant classes of Indians by defining the interests of different classes of Indians as mutually non-antagonistic. The depressed caste intellectuals have also castigated Gandhi for betraying the interests of the depressed castes. Instead

11. This theme of 'betrayal' has been repeatedly made in N.D.Kamble, Deprived Castes and Their Struggle for Equality, 1983; and in Barbara N. Joshi, Untouchables : Voices of Dalit Liberation Movement, 1986.
of historical debunking in this manner, the context must be scanned through to reach any conclusion about Gandhi's adoption of a less aggressive posture. In Gandhi's political strategy, practical considerations always outweighed impractical, utopian schemes. When Gandhi launched his Anti-untouchability drive in 1933, the high caste Hindus started behaving in a most vicious and vindictive manner. Many cases of harassments of Harijans were reported from the rural areas. The cautious approach adopted by Gandhi has to be seen in the light of this evidence. Although, hundreds of such cases have gone unreported, we can still cite a score of instances. Crops of Harijan cultivators were burnt at Samarkha in Kheda district, and a Harijan who took the liberty of using a public well at Dholka was horse-whipped. At Deopur village in Nasik district, a party of mahar youths secured entry into a temple, at the time of Baba Bhagwat Fair, unobserved. The local Marathas, when later noticed them coming out of the temple, were able to catch one. There were thinking of punishing him when intervention of a police constable saved him. A severe social boycott of Harijans was launched by the high caste Hindus at Kavitha (in Ahmedabad district) because they dared to

13. Times of India, 18 April, 1933.
send their children to the village school. It was complained that boycott was lifted only when Harijans gave an undertaking that they would not send their children to the school. 14 Five Harijans including a woman were assaulted at Kasore in Baroda state by the caste Hindus because of their belief that the Harijans were spreading cattle-disease through black magic. 15 The Harijans of Achegaon in East Khandesh were ill-treated and socially boycotting severely by the caste Hindus who asked them to join the Congress instead of following Ambedkar. 16

At Radhu village in Kheda district, even Harijans were not allowed to shelter a Harijan teacher appointed to the local Harijan school, because he had dared to attend the highest class in the common village school. 17

Even the Secretary of Gujarat Provincial Board of the Harijan Sewak Sangh was not spared. On June 2, 1934 he had gone to village Naroli (in Navasari region) to inspect the construction of Harijan wells. On the way, he took water at a public 'parab', and then went to Harijan Mohalla. Mistaking him for a Harijan, the local police officials gave him blows. 18

17. AICC File No. G-76, 1936; and BC, 14 August, 1936.
18. BC, June 7, 1934.
The President of Palghar Taluka Local Board was ex-communicated by the caste Hindus for declaring all the public wells open to Harijans in village Chatale.\textsuperscript{19} Many Dheds and Chamars complained to A. Thakkar, General Secretary of Harijan Sewak Sangh about their inability to send their children to schools due to stiff opposition of the caste Hindus, when he made a tour of the Gujarat region.\textsuperscript{20}

Such conflicts over the entry of the Harijans in the educational institutions were not new. Even in the late 19th century some pensioned Mahar soldiers had sent a petition to Dapoli Municipality to allow their children entry into the municipal schools. After two years of struggle and with the help of official intervention, they had finally succeeded. But even then their children were to be seated at a distance from other children. Incidentally Ambedkar's father was also one of the signatories to this petition. When faced with persistent opposition, Harijans sometimes established separate schools by the end of 19th century, through their voluntary efforts.\textsuperscript{21}

Gandhi was aware of innumerable hardships caused to these unfortunate people. He was also aware of the practice

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} BC, April 24, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{20} BC, December 1, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Vasant W. Moon, "From Dependence to Protest: The Early Growth of Education and Consciousness among 'Untouchables' of Western India" in N. Barbara Joshi, ed., \textit{op. cit.}, pp.20-25.
\end{itemize}
of "inner untouchability" among the lower castes.\textsuperscript{22} The existence of "inner untouchability" among the lower caste was an indication of the oppression of "minorities-within-minorities".\textsuperscript{23} Gandhi, therefore, treated this contradiction as a case of "contradiction among the people", hence, to be resolved through persuasion, in a non-antagonistic manner, but without yielding to the orthodoxy. Initially Gandhi was very cautious. In an article in \textit{Young India}, he declared: "I am one of those who do not consider caste to be a harmful institution. In its origin, caste was a wholesome custom and promoted national well-being. In my opinion the idea that inter-dining and inter-marrying is necessary for national growth, is a superstition borrowed from the West."\textsuperscript{24} But he had all the audacity to declare that untouchability did not have the sanction of religion but was a device of Satan.\textsuperscript{25} He described it as the "greatest blot on Hinduism".\textsuperscript{26} When he wrote about the \textit{Varna-system} as "fundamental natural and essential",\textsuperscript{27} he was defending not

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ronald Duncan, ed., \textit{The Writings of Gandhi}, 1971, pp. 183-84.
\item The Depressed castes, despite their large number, never constitute majority within the village community due to the existence of a large number of people belonging to the intermediate castes. The \textit{Mahars}, therefore, who were in minority themselves and were oppressed by the caste Hindus, in turn oppressed another minority, say \textit{Mangs} in Maharashtra through the practice of 'inner-untouchability'. See Mahatma Gandhi, \textit{Collected Works}, Vol. LVI, Ahmedabad, 1973, p.130 (taken from \textit{Harijan bandhu}, 12 Nov. 1933)
\item Duncan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.167.
\item See \textit{Collected Works} of Gandhi, Vol.XXXIII, p.58.
\item See Gandhi, \textit{Collected Works}, Vol.XXXIII, p.49 (taken from \textit{Young India}, 17 Feb., 1927).
\end{enumerate}
the rigidity of caste system but division of labour as is clearly
discernible in his following words: "... Inter-dining or inter-
marrige does not affect the Varna. The four-fold division
defines a man's calling, they do not regulate or restrict social
intercourse." Gandhi was also aware that although legislative
action was required to expedite reforms, it would not abolish
caste oppression, because there were moral and religious sanctions
behind it. Despite the vehement opposition of the orthodox
caste Hindus, Gandhi went ahead with his plans of touring
the countryside of Bombay province during the first half of
1934. For his, this was another act of disobedience. Yet
Gandhi's disobedience was not disobedience of the "rebel
without a cause"; it was an act of affirmation of reason and
will. Writing about the temperament of a prophet, Fromm appro-
priately observes that the prophet need not be "aggressive
or rebellious; he needs to have his eyes open; to be fully
awake, and willing to take the responsibility to open the

28. Duncan, op. cit., pp.183-84 and also see Gandhi, Collected
Works, Vol.LXII, pp.121 and 142 (taken Harijan, 16
Nov 1935 and Harijan bandhu, 19 Jan, 1936, for Gandhi's
views in favour of inter-dining and inter-caste marriages.


30. Erich Fromm gives a beautiful description of disobedience.
To quote him - "In order to disobey, one must have
courage to be alone, to err, and to sin. But courage
is not enough. The capacity for courage depends on
a person's state of development. Only if a person has
emerged from mother's lap and father's commands, only
if he has emerged as a fully developing individual and
thus acquired the capacity to think and feel for himself,
only then can one have courage to say 'no' to power,
to disobey". Erich Fromm, Disobedience and Other Essays,
1984, p.6.
eyes of those who are in the danger of perishing because they are half-asleep."\textsuperscript{31}

In the beginning of March, 1934, Gandhi was touring Kanara region for the cause of Harijans. He addressed public meetings at Siddapur, Sirsi, Haveri, Aloor, Devihosur and Byadgi. During this tour he opened local Subramania temple at Sirsi to the Harijans and collected Rs.2,297 for the Harijan Fund.\textsuperscript{32} In Karwar taluka, he visited villages on his way from Karwar to Akola and collected Rs.600 for Harijan work.\textsuperscript{33}

The local Congress leadership was also active in many regions of the province, propagating Anti-untouchability. In June 1934, members of Kheda District Gandhi Purse Committee visited about 12 villages of the district and collected about Rs.1200 for Harijan work. The prominent local leaders, who participated in this drive, were - Bhailal Bhai Patel, Chaturbhai Patel and Chiman Lal Narkhi.\textsuperscript{34} Similarly, more than Rs.10,000 were collected from the Bombay sub-urban villages - Ghatkopar, Santa Cruz, Veraval and Pratashas-patan - for the Harijan Fund.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.33.
\item \textsuperscript{32} BC, March 3, 1934, also Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, Para 250, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{33} BC, March 4, 1934, also Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, Para 277, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{34} BC, June 13, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{35} BC, June 15 and 19, 1934.
\end{itemize}
In Kathiawar region, four Harijan Ashrams were functioning at Wadhwan, Vartij, Chhaya, and Bhavnagar. The Kathiawar Harijan Sewak Sangh was running 19 primary schools. The Harijan Sewak Sangh also constructed wells and tanks to solve the problem of drinking water for the Harijans. The Congress workers were not always successful. They failed to open the temple of Nagnath at Amreli to the Harijans despite repeated persuasions.\(^{36}\) In June 1934, Gandhi toured Gujarat region for the Harijan upliftment movement. He addressed meetings at Bulsar, Billimora, Navasari, Dohad, Sihor, Songadh, Dhola, Nigala, Botad and Ranpur.\(^{37}\) A. Thakkar, accompanied by a number of activists, also visited a number of towns and villages in Gujarat region and realised the difficulty of helping the Dheds and Chamars due to the opposition of the caste Hindus.\(^{38}\)

The overall progress, however, was very very slow. It was very difficult to get the Harijan children admitted to the village schools. The very segregation and distance maintained between the castes necessitated the sinking of new wells, even where public wells existed; and opening of special schools. In 1935, there were only 1,298 such schools all over India with an enrolment of 34,273 boys and 2,816 girls.\(^{39}\)

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36. BC, June 8, 1934.
37. BC, June 27 and 29, July 4, 1934.
38. BC, December 1, 1934.
The persistence of untouchability amongst untouchables, who in each village formed minorities within minorities, offered a major obstacle to the success of the anti-untouchability drive.\(^40\) This problem may have forced Gandhi to adopt a less radical and aggressive course of action.

The existence of a large number of intermediate castes, who, while resenting the social domination of Brahmins, were equally determined to crush any opposition from the lower castes, ruled out the success of a confrontionist line. In such cases of contradictions among the people, persuasion could be the only way of resolving the contradiction in a non-antagonistic way.\(^41\)

Forced by the circumstances, Congress activists preferred to open separate schools, wells, and night schools for Harijans as was done by the village uplift Association of Bagalkot taluka (in Bijapur district) at Sirur and Angodi in April, 1935.\(^42\) In January, 1936, an Arya Samajist, Swami Sadanand, went on a hunger strike to induce the villagers of Bhagpur

\(^{40}\) Ibid.


\(^{42}\) BC, April 8, 1935.
in Poona district to admit Harijans to the local Maruti temple. The local Congress leaders visited the place and persuaded the village elders to admit Harijans into the temple. The quiet work done by young local Congress activists, be it at Hosiriti Ashram in Dharwar district from 1930 onwards, or in Gujarat by the activists of Gujarat Harijan Sewak Sangh, might not have been very impressive. But it has to be judged in its historical context. In the face of the relentless pressure of the caste Hindu orthodoxy, even occasional success, as happened at Neglur in Dharwar district where October 2, 1938, both Suvarna Hindus and Harijans agreed to use the newly inaugurated well by Kaka Kalelkar, acted as a moral booster for the local activists and the Harijans of the area. In the end, to crown its Anti-untouchability drive, Congress ministry passed the Harijan Temple Worship Bill (Removal of Disabilities Act), 1938.

III. Ambedkar: The Road From Nasik to Yeola

The depressed caste people had started asserting themselves quite militantly from 1928, the year when they started organizing

43. BC, January 13, 1936.
44. KPGC Bulletin No.12, in AICC File No.P-10, 1940-41.
46. AICC File No.P-10, 1940-41.
47. Bombay Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol.II, 1938, pp.357-79. Under the Act, a trustee of a temple or a majority of trustees in case there were more than one trustees, could declare a temple open to the Harijans.
Satyagraha at Kalaram Temple at Nasik demanding their entry into the temple and participation in the Rath Procession during Ram Navmi festivities. From 1930 to 1935, the Government of Bombay banned the Rath procession due to the fear of a clash between the caste Hindus and the "untouchables". By 1933, however, some differences started surfacing in the movement. Ambedkar expressed himself against such stray attempts to acquire religious equality. But B.R. Gaekwad, the local leader of the Nasik depressed castes, favoured resumption of the Satyagraha. On 29 March, 1933, a large number of Harijans assembled at Nandurdi village in Niphad taluka of Nasik district to celebrate a fair in honour of Ambedkar. As it coincided with the Annual Fair of a local deity, Hari Bhuse Bhuwa, the District Magistrate banned the Fair. Despite the ban, Harijans took out a procession and, instead of the usual celebrations, they proceeded to the Samadhi of Hari Bhuse Bhuwa. This was allowed by the caste Hindus and the police. At night, a meeting was held in Maharwada which urged the Satyagraha Committee to resume Kalaram Temple entry Satyagraha. The caste Hindus were boycotting Harijans in the village and had stopped giving 'Balutas' (traditional service-charges in kind) to them for their participation in the Satyagraha.

49. Times of India, March 28, 1933.
50. Times of India, March 30, 1933; and Home/Special File No.355 (64) IV-A-Part IV, 1934.
The Satyagraha was not resumed but Harijans insisted on their participation in the Rath procession. In view of the prevailing tension, the District Magistrate banned the Rath procession. 51

Next year again, when Ram Navmi festival was approaching, the depressed castes planned to revive the Satyagraha. At a meeting at Mandsamgu near Nasik, they decided to protest by prostrating before the chariot. 52 As Harijans were flooding the city and its neighbouring vilages with the intention of joining in the Rath Yatra, the District Magistrate of Nasik again banned it. This move angered the caste Hindus, who assembled in large number (nearly 25,000) on April 1, 1934, and stoned the police party. 53 In a number of meeting at Bhadwan (taluka Kalwan) on 8th April, at Kalwan on 9th April, and at Ambe-Vane in Dindori taluka on 16th April (all in Poona district), Pandurang Nathu Rajbhog urged the Mahars and Chamars to resort to Satyagraha if they were not allowed to drag the Rath. 54

Ambedkar now realised the futility of such exercises. Before a large gathering of 15,000 Harijans at Vinchur, who had assembled had assembled to observe the 11th day death

51. Times of India, April 5 and 6, 1933.
52. Time of India, February 21, 1934.
53. Times of India, 23 and 27 March, and 2 April, 1934; Home/Special File No.355 (64)IV-A-Part IV, 1934.
54. Ibid.
ceremonies of the local Harijan leader, Dhondiba Run Kambe, Ambedkar said that temple entry issue had performed its role of making the depressed castes conscious and was no longer needed. He further urged them to concentrate their resources on politics. The more radical stream, however, continued to favour such activities under the leadership of B.R. Gaekwad. In a meeting at Samangaon (district Nasik) decision was taken by this faction to continue Kalaram Temple entry Satyagraha. It is significant to note that Harijans had assembled at Samangaon to observe the death ceremony (Shradh) of Ghayawate, a political activist of the movement. The selection of such occasions for the mobilization and politicisation of the depressed castes was very important. The decision of the Nasik District Harijan Youth League to resume the movement to join the Rath Procession on Ekadashi Day (14 April, 1935) was also announced at the meeting of Harijans attended by over 10,000 at Nandur Vaidya in Igatpuri taluka on the occasion of the funeral ceremonies of their leader, Rokade. The same night, a meeting of 4,000 Mahars was addressed by B.R. Gaekwad and Deoram Sitaram Dangle, which agreed

55. Times of India, 21 November, 1934.
56. BC, March 22 and 24, 1934, and Home/Special File No.355 (64)IV-A-Part IV, 1934.
57. Sigmund Freud had described the significance of death because of the following psychic tendencies - "Our unconscious inaccessibility to the idea of our own death of man's belief in self-immortality, our death-wishes towards stranger and alien, and ambivalence towards the death of the loved ones". in his Collected Papers, Vol.IV, London, 1971, p.316.
58. Times of India, 4 April, 1935.
to implement the decision of the Youth League. More meetings were held at Nandurdi on 4 April, 1935 and at Sinnar on 6th May, 1935 in which decision was taken to implement the Satyagraha.

Considering the significance of the death ceremonies among Mahars, it must be noted that Mari-Ai (the Goddess of death) was mainly worshipped by the Mahars, Mangs and the low caste people for protection from death. Sacrifices of he-goats, he-buffalos and he-cocks were made occasionally. In some cases male children were offered to the goddess as life-time devotees. However, the attitude towards Mari-Ai was ambivalent and she was attributed both evil and good qualities. The selection of death ceremonies was, it seems, deliberately made by the depressed caste intellectuals. The frequency of deaths may have been very high among the depressed castes due to poverty, un-hygienic conditions of living, and prevalence of epidemics and deaths. By attributing these to the displeasure of Mari-Ai, these people relieved some of their inner anxieties and psychic stress. Thus, the worship

59. Home/Special File No. 355 (64) IV-A-Part IV, 1934.
60. Home/Special File No. 355(64) IV-A-Part V, 1935.
of Mari-Ai acquired a psychological function. 62

Meanwhile, Ambedkar was undergoing inner transformation. At a huge conference of 10,000 Harijans at Yeola, Ambedkar advised them to sever their connections with Hinduism and choose a new religion which would offer them equality of treatment, status and opportunities. He hinted that such provisions were found in Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Instead of temple entry, he advised them to direct their energies to establish their civic rights and status. 63 Gradually, after 1936, Ambedkar moved away from organizing radical symbolic protests to taking up socio-economic issues like Khoti-problem. This partially ended his self-imposed isolation from the other caste Hindus. The problem of Khoti-tenants was an agrarian issue which involved not only Mahars but Kunbis, Marathas, Telis, Bhadaris and other caste tenants also. 64

The decision of Ambedkar to withdraw himself from the temple entry Satyagraha was resented by the Chambar leader, P.N. Rajbhoj, who contemplated it resumption. 65 But, as the

63. Times of India, 16 October, 1935.
main force led by Ambedkar had decided to stay away, the authorities allowed the Rath procession at Nasik after a gap of five years. Trouble from Rajbhog's followers was averted by simply issuing an order under Section 144 on 9th December, 1935.66

The radical depressed caste youths usually protested in a more militant fashion. At Nasik, where nearly 1,000 youths from all over the district had assembled under the leadership of Nasik District Untouchable Youth's League, they burnt such Hindu scriptures as Manu Smriti, Shivalilamrit and Ravijya, which recognized untouchability.67 Similarly, several images of the Hindu gods, including the local deities Khandero Mhasaba and Pandharlal, were trampled with and Hindu scriptures were burnt by Harijans at a meeting held at village Sukhene in Niphad taluka of Nasik district in the middle of month of November, 1935. The Harjan Gosavis tore off their sacred bead necklaces at the meeting.68 Around the same time, Hindu scripture and images of Hindu Gods were burnt by 'untouchables' at village Sai Kheda in Nasik district.69

Withdrawal of Satyagraha by Ambedkar forced Chambar leader, R.N. Rajbhong, to compromise. In March, 1936, nearly

67. Prabhat, October 1, 1935.
68. BC, Nov. 19, 1935.
69. Secret Abstract of Intelligence, Para 1215, 1935.
200 Harijans led by him obtained 'Diksha' from Pandit Malaviya in the presence of a large number of caste Hindus and the Pujari of Kalaram temple. They bathed in the Godavari chanting 'Mantras' and smeared their forehead and arms with caste marks. A chambar conference near Nasik at Makhmalabad under the leadership of Rajbhog later asserted the rights of those Harijans who had obtained 'Diksha' from Pandit Malaviya to participate in the Rath procession of Kalaram temple. In that year, the caste Hindu procession of 30,000 allowed these people to participate in the Rath procession. The Mahars followed a different path. A large Mahar meeting at Satana on 21 March, 1936 passed a resolution to leave Hinduism and celebrate Ambedkar's birthday (14th April) as a festival. The meeting also discussed the problems of Mahars in respect of grant of waste lands and deliberate official delay by clerks in this matter.

A permanent gap had, however, been created between Mahars and Chambars. At a meeting of 200 Chambers at Khond in Ratnagiri district on 24th October, 1937, Sitaram Narayan Shrivtarkar criticized Ambedkar for working for the benefit of his own caste, i.e. Mahars; and ignoring other depressed castes. The first Ratnagiri Chambar Conference, chaired

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72. *Times of India*, 3 April, 1936.
by S.G. Songaonkar on 26th December, 1937, also echoed this resentment against Ambedkar. Narayan Rao Kajrolkar criticised Ambedkar for spending thousands of rupees received from the Government grant for patronizing the Mahar students only and ignoring Chambar and Mang students in the depressed class boarding houses. He urged the Chambars to join the Congress as it was willing to take measures for tenant relief like checking of arbitrary evictions and forced labour, and removal of restrictions on the use of tanks, wells and grazing grounds by means of legal provisions. The conference also opposed Ambedkar’s idea of conversion to avoid disabilities and demanded equal treatment within Hindu community. The problem of sub-castes among Chambars and use of free tanning material from the forests were also discussed by the conference.

To conclude, while Gandhi tried to link the issues of cultural oppression and domination with socio-economic betterment of the life of Harijans, Ambedkar because of his radical leanings shifted from one form of radicalism, i.e., the radical symbolic protests against cultural oppression to another form of radicalism, i.e., conversion and economic struggle. He envisaged through his Anti-Khoti agitation to end the socio-economic exploitation. Gandhi was aware that, while tackling the

77. A thorough exposition of this has been provided in Bipan Chandra, Indian National Movement: The Long-term Dynamics, New Delhi, 1988.

issue of untouchability, he was dealing with the situation of cultural oppression of "minorities-within-minorities". He, therefore, adopted the middle path of moderation, of persuasion to avoid unnecessary isolation from the caste Hindu majority. Moreover, as a leader of a national liberation struggle against colonial oppression, he tried to combine the issues of caste oppression, class-exploitation and national oppression in a subtle way, although always giving primary importance it deserved, to the national issue during the colonial era. In Ambedkar, cultural radicalism gave way to economic radicalism. Although, his Anti-Khoti Agitation removed his isolation partially, his failure lay in not combining caste, class and national issue.

Some of the Congress Socialist workers must have been active as part of the Congress campaign against untouchability but generally the Congress Socialists and Communists did not organise any struggle on the issue of caste-oppression.

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76. After the failure of Kalaram Temple Satyagraha, the only Mahar based issue taken up by the radical Mahar leaders, was agitation against the increased Judi (Quit rent on watan lands charged by the Government) in the Sinnar taluka. The Mahar watandars stopped payment of increased Judi during 1940-41. The agitation subsided only when government order suspended the collection of enhanced Judi. (see Land Revenue Administration Report, Bombay, 1940-41, p.36.)
SECTION - B : AGRARIAN CONFLICTS IN KHOTI AREAS

In 1930's Congress was in the process of expanding its rural base. In 1933 some form of systematic and planned action for gradual removal of intermediaries between peasants and the state was contemplated. Such intermediaries included the Khots in Kolaba and Ratnagiri districts, the Taluqdars in Ahmedabad and the Inamdars in Bombay's Karnataka region. In 1936, the Peasant Enquiry Committee of MPCC had recommended elimination of Khoti tenurial system within a period of 20 years. The election campaign of the Congress also raised the hopes of of the rural people by promises of a golden age. As a result of emphasis on wide-ranging agrarian reforms and anti-landlord propaganda, many villagers came to look upon the Congress box as invested with supernatural qualities. In some instances, prayers were made to the box, and letters and petitions to Gandhi, and even sums of money were found in the box.

The MPCC endorsement of the recommendations of Peasant Enquiry Committee on 23 May, 1936 at its general meeting.

78. AICC File No.7, 1933.
79. MPCC, op. cit., p.104
81. Ibid., pp.542-57 from "Cabinet Papers No.24/269, May, 1937."
and advice the Parliamentary Committee to make them the basis for the election manifesto created more hopes among the people. The Khots and Zamindars perceived in these measures "an attack on their legitimate rights and interests".

In another letter, Ratnagiri District Khot and Zamindar Sabha complained to the President of the All India Congress Committee on August 11, 1936: "The programme of abolishing Khoti is a confiscatory programme. It looks very much like socialism or communism... If in the coming election, Congress appeal to the tenant-voters, on the programme of abolition of Khoti, the situation that would be created, can be easily understood. A class war would immediately begin, in which passions would run high, leading perhaps even to riots with extremely undesirable consequences."

The Congress leadership now felt that it had gone too far. At the annual meeting of the MPCC, held in December, 1936, a resolution on Khoti system was passed. The resolution made it clear that the abolition of Khoti had not been mentioned in the election manifesto which would govern Congress policy in the province. The MPCC accepted the explanation given

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83. President, Khed taluka Zamindar Sabha to the Secretary, AICC, 19 August 1936 in AICC File No.P-16, 1936.

84. Ibid.
earlier by Sardar Patel that abolition of Khoti would not be included in the Congress policy in the forthcoming elections; notwithstanding the earlier views held by the MPCC. Even earlier, the Peasant Enquiry Committee had clarified to the Konkan Congressmen that the Committee had not meant by abolition of Khoti-expropriation of the property rights of Khots in their personal capacity as individual holders but abolition of their 'extra-rights' of collection and share in land revenue.

The confusion regarding Congress policy toward Khoti, however, was widespread and Congress leaders had a hard time in persuading the Konkan tenantry. Morarji Desai tried to convince the crowds of peasants at Mahad, Indapur, Nagthna, Pen and Dhokwada in Kolaba district that revolutionary changes were not possible due to constraints imposed by working of Congress ministeries under colonial constitution, but also promised that his government would introduce certain reforms to better their lives. Even opinion within the Congress was divided. N.V.Gadgil and K.M.Jedhe regarded the Khoti system as an anachronism and urged for its abolition. They asked the district organizations of the Congress in Konkan to put their views frankly before the Revenue Minister or at least to demand permanent hereditary

85. BC, Dec. 8, 1936.
86. BC, July 29, 1936.
87. BC, Dec. 2 and 3, 1937.
rights of occupancy before its abolition within 20 years as recommended by the Peasant Enquiry Committee. The general meeting of the Ratnagiri District Congress Committee passed a resolution on December 4, 1937, demanding abolition of the Khoti tenure.

The Congress's decision to retreat was, however, not because of pressures generated by the Khots. To some intellectuals, every retreat would appear a proof of 'collaboration', or "a betrayal of elite leadership". As far as the pressure of Khots and Zamindars is concerned, the Congress had nothing to lose by alienating them because they were never supporters of Congress. On the other hand, Congress would have considerably expanded its social base by the abolition of Khoti. The Congress was eager to acquire some influence in the Konkan region as Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party had considerable

88. BC, Nov. 25, 1937.
89. BC, Dec. 9, 1937.
90. This theme, first hinted by Ranjit Guha in his book, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, New Delhi, 1983, where he described organized nationalism, barring some small militant groups, as "elitist and collaborationist" (p.331), has been repeated by all the followers of "Subaltern-militancy" school. This attempt to generalise from isolated facts and observation without placing them in the historical context, leads them to de-historicize "peasant-consciousness", "subaltern-militancy", "nationalism" and other such concepts. As a result of this exercise, they are turning living historical reality into concept-mummies.
hold on the tenants and the depressed castes in the region. Moreover, if Congress was so prone to the pressure of Khots and Zamindars, why did it not yield to the combined pressure of Khots, Zamindars, Inamdars, and Taluqdarsof the whole province in respect of the tenancy legislation. Rani Dhavan Shankar Dass has demonstrated that, despite considerable opposition from the various sections of landlords, the Congress ministry went ahead with its tenancy legislation for giving relief to the peasants, and this action of Congress considerably widened its rural base. The tenancy legislation not only angered landlords, even the privileged hereditary occupancy tenants known as Dharekaris in the Konkan region, were opposed to it.

There was an important practical consideration which compelled the congress leadership to change its stand regarding the Khoti issue. Under the Government of India Act (1935), Zamindars and Khots could not be expropriated without compensation. Moreover, abolition of Khoti would have required a similar

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action against Inamda rs, Taluqdars and Zamindars in other areas as well. In such a situation, the provincial government was not in a position to provide compensation because of limited finances.  

Therefore, the Congress ministry preferred a tenancy protection bill to protect the inferior holders from the harassment of Khots.

Even without outside political intervention, the Konkan region was prone to sporadic strikes by tenants. For instance, the Agri tenants of Chari village in Kolaba district had refused to pay excessive rents from 1932 to 1934. When Khots failed to readjust their demands, cultivators went on strike from 1934, refusing to cultivate about 700 acres of land owned by 14 Khots. The strike continued for three years. When Khots tried to cultivate land with the help of tenants from the surrounding villages, caste sanctions were used by the Agris to make the infringement of caste-solidarity impossible. A settlement giving the tenants some concessions could be reached only at the end of 1937, after the intervention of Morarji Desai.

In such a volatile situation, presence of Ambedkar, S.V. Parulekar and other activists of Independent Labour Party fueled the fire of discontent resulting in a number of cases of violence in the villages of Ratnagiri district. Some of

95. BC, Nov. 13, 1937.
97. T.E.Streatfield (Secretary to the Governor of Bombay) to Laithwaite, Aug.21, 1939, in Linlithgow Papers, Vol.53.
these incidents of clashes were reported and scores of them probably went unreported. Whatever may be the exact number of cases, the situation was symptomatic of general discontent. A Khot of Natu village in Khed taluka complained of theft of trees from his field and, suspecting some Mahar tenants, went with search warrants to their houses on 22 May, 1938, along with a small police party. Around 20 Mahars of the village assaulted them. In the riot 10 persons including the head constable were injured severely. The Police Sub-Inspector of Khed thought that the incident was the result of a speech delivered by Ambedkar at Khed. How far this accusation was true cannot be ascertained. However, a meeting of 500 Mahar men and women was held at Khed on 17th May, 1938. In the meeting G.R. Ghatge, D.V. Pradhan and Ambedkar criticized the Congress for ignoring the Khoti problem. The leaders urged the Mahar tenants to stop payment of Makta or rent to the Khots in case of rejection of the Khoti Abolition Bill in the Legislative Assembly. Besides a number of criminal cases between Khots and tenants, the peace between Khots and tenants was an uneasy one. In some cases, peasants were showing considerable hostility and reluctance to pay rent to


99. Ibid.
The District Magistrate of Ratnagiri reported more than 20 cases of assaults, trespassing on Khot's lands, and thefts of Khot's crops, etc., in his letter dated 2 July, 1938, to the Under Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Home Dept. These cases were spread all over the district. The number of tenants involved in such cases, however, never exceeded 20-25.

In other cases the accumulated tension led to direct collective action by the tenants. The tenants of Adavali village in Sangmeshwar taluka stopped cultivation of Khot's land and payment of Makta believing that Khoti tenure would be abolished by the efforts of the Independent Labour Party. The strike was initiated in December, 1937, and continued till the end of April, 1938. Grievances of tenants included low rate of wages, denial of its right to take water from the village tank, and eviction of some tenants by the Khots. The possibility of settlement arose only when A.S. Patwardhan, the Congress leader, was accepted as arbitrator by both the parties, who agreed to accept his decision as final.

There were meetings of tenants at Shiroda in Peta Vengurla

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102. BC, Feb. 4 and April 26, 1938.
on 30 December, 1937 and at Masura on Jan. 1, 1938 in Malwan taluka. In both meetings, immediate reforms for improving the conditions of tenants were demanded. \(^{103}\) The Mahar tenants of Belari in Deorukh taluka refused to pay their dues of rents to the Japtidar under the influence of the workers of the Independent Labour Party. In another case, in the same taluka, a Japtidar's peon was assaulted at Harpuda when he had gone to collect rent from a tenant. \(^{104}\) A novel method of protest was adopted at Kuvle village in Devgad taluka. The Shetkari Committee collected the Khot's dues equal to the assessment and kept them with the treasurer of the committee instead of paying it either to the Khot or Government. Later the Shetkari Sangh paid Rs.175 to the Japtidar and its president Pandurang Sabaji Masurkar resigned when police investigation began. \(^{105}\)

The tenants of five villages (only three, Kuvale, Chaped and Bharni are mentioned in the sources) stopped payment of rent. The crops in this region of Devgad taluka had been destroyed by excessive rains. The remission of two annas per Rupee had been granted to the Khots by the Government. They, however, refused to transfer the benefit to their tenants. \(^{106}\) This struggle was a collective effort of Mahar, Maratha Kunbi and Brahmin

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105. Ibid.

tenants. Shankar Rao Kode, Pandurang Masurkar and K.G. Dalal were served with notices forbidding them from taking part in peasant activities at Kuval. By June, however, these villages had paid up their dues. The tenants of village Adaoli in Devrukh taluka also stopped working for their Khots and were unwilling to pay off their dues even to the Japtidar. The strike started in May, 1939 and continued up to August, 1939 due to intrasigence of Khots. These incidents of clashes and collective conflicts, however, cannot be attributed to the emergence of 'class-consciousness' in crystallized form. The emerging, nascent class consciousness was still tainted with caste and ethnic consciousness. The symbols of the past continued to appeal to the tenants. For instance, as Maharashtra had a strong sense of anti-Brahmanism, a meeting of tenants from Maratha, Mahar, Teli, Sonar and Bhandri background at Gothane in Malwan taluk, on 20 May, 1939, decided not to co-operate with Brahmins (who were Khots in many cases), who were not treating them well. The kinship relationship within village boundaries also played a significant role in such localised clashes. For instance, in the case of clash between the Maratha Khots and the Kunbi tenants at Talwat


108. Ibid., Weekly Reports, DM, Ratnagiri, 27 May, 26 July and 2 August, 1939.

109. Ibid.
in Khed taluka, both parties mobilized their own 'Bhaubands' over a long-standing land-dispute.\textsuperscript{110}

One pertinent question can be asked here as to why did this chronic and widespread discontent not lead to a large scale class-war? The historical experience of many countries suggests that "semiotic of insurgency".\textsuperscript{111} so much idealized and treated as almost a universal phenomenon by Ranjit Guha, appeals to the peasants only under conditions when all legal, constitutional, and peaceful extra-legal channels of protests are blocked due to existence of an autocratic or authoritarian government.\textsuperscript{112} Under autocratic governments, people's aspirations are suppressed and their frustrations and grievances create an accumulated force which erupts violently and suddenly. Under popular government, as the scope of democratic participation increases, the masses prefer to settle account peacefully. They resort to violence only as a direct response to landlord intra-sigence, and when no other ways - either legal, constitutional or orderly, peaceful, 'extra-legal' - are available


\textsuperscript{111} Ranjit Guha, (1983) \textit{op. cit.}, p.276.

\textsuperscript{112} Guha is generalising on the basis of his research on early colonial struggles when such channels of mass protests had not developed but he stresses "structural similarities between the articulation of 20th century politics and the elementary aspects of insurgency", (\textit{Ibid.}, p.334); thus suggesting their universal application.
to them. The socialization process which produces peasant radicalism and violent upsurge is generally an outcome of "a system of authority that more frequently than not possessed the means to enforce its will through violence - with or without the approval of constitutions and laws." Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, who studied the role of social-milieu in influencing the collective human-psyche in a Mexican village, also reached the same conclusion following a different pathway. It is possible that in an authoritarian society, as people are always at the receiving end, they develop "receptive-submissive orientation" which generates a collective "repressed sadistic potential". By using violence, radicalism, and weapons, peasants try to resolve their destroyed masculinity.


SECTION - III : PEASANT MOBILIZATION, POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MODES OF INTERACTIONS : 1934-41

There is a reductive tendency in Modern Indian history masquerading as history of the silent 'subaltern' groups. It reduces the organised nationalism of Indian people into two separate domains based on their quality of opposition or patterns of attacks. The politics of elite was constitutional, whereas, the 'subaltern' nationalism was more sustained, determined and militant, often assuming violent forms. It is customary method-centred science's objectivism to reduce complex things into simpler elements and then analyse them. But in human science, which involves norms and values and study of aggregates or collectivities, this could lead to utter confusion if the real, mutual interaction among elements is ignored or posited in a wrong manner. Many historians are making use of this dichotomy between the 'elite' and the 'people'. It has been forcefully argued by some that there are in society "two quite different constellation of social, political and cultural forces, involving diametrically opposite responses to the problem of time." It is also argued by these scholars that while


the politics of the popular groups is based on localism rather than on country, colony or empire; the politics of elite groups is based on country, kingdom or such larger loyalties. Our contention is that the 'people' are not a monolithic group and can be divided into innumerable subsets according to the attributes, of class, wealth, resources, age, sex, character-types, status, occupation, ideology and many more variables. The task of historian does not mean reducing 'people' into logical categories which may be quite arbitrary, but to find the real historical collectivities or aggregates which play historically significant role in a given context. In the beginning of his book, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, Hardiman poses a very significant question: "Can a valid distinction be made between 'local village based' grievances of the peasants and the 'wider political' grievances of the elites?" He himself answers: "Such distinctions are hallmark of those in a position of authority." But then he suddenly makes a 180 degree turn


and declares: "To the Bhils, the nationalism of Gujarati babus was meaningless; their reality was their degraded position and poverty in relation to the high castes." Earlier, Hardiman tries to convince us that he is not using the category of elite in the sense of a cultural category like Chitpavan Brahmins, Bengali Bhadralok or Gujarati Patidars, but to denote the class of rentiers, financiers, entrepreneurs, and top officials. Then why does nationalism become "nationalism of Gujarati babus?" By the same logic, there could be nationalism of Kunbis, of Mahars, of Brahmins, of Babus and of Harijans of Gujaratis and Punjabis, etc. This arbitrary classifying, taxonomizing, categorizing, and rubicizing can lead to utter confusion. We are not contesting the distinction between the nationalism of leadership and the nationalism of masses. The former is bound to be more explicit, articulate, verbal, rational, logical, structured compared with the latter which would be inarticulate, sub-verbal, or even mythic, archaic and symbolic. What is the missing link in 'subaltern' historiography is the dialectical relationship between the leader and the led through the mediation

6. Ibid., p.85
8. In this sense, it could be a defence against becoming conscious of deeper ignorance, to use psychodynamic terminology. This de-sacralization of nationalism could also serve as a defence against being flooded by emotions, especially the emotions of humility, reverence, mystery, wonder and awe which big social movements evoke.
of ideology and organisation.  

Spread of Organizational Links from the Urban Centres to the rural hinterland: 1934-36

Despite large scale mobilization of peasants in Bardoli taluka and in Siddapur and Ankola talukas during the Civil Disobedience movement, the organizational links of the Congress with the rural people were very weak at the beginning of 1934. This organizational weakness was probably responsible for the large-scale use of kinship networks during the Civil Disobedience movement.

The Civil Disobedience movement had established a psychic bridge between the Congress and the masses. Now it was the task of the Congress leadership to reinforce the transmission belt through construction of an organizational bridge.


10. In whole Maharashtra region, there were only 14 village primary Congress Committees in 1936, according to the MPCC Report to the AICC Secretary, dated 30 June, 1936, in Rajendra Prasad Papers. In Gujarat and Karnataka (Bombay) also, only a few village Congress Committee had been formed, according to the Bombay Chronicle, June 2, 1934.

11. Patidar Kinship ties were used as supplementary pressure in Bardoli Satyagraha, see Hardiman op. cit., pp.213-18. Similarly, in Kanara region, the kinship ties of the Nadvars and the Vakkals were responsible for no-revenue movement, as indicated in the Bombay Chronicle, August 10, 1934.
Congress organization at this stage could be aptly described as an organization with mass appeal which was not yet a real mass organization. Therefore, in order to develop the congress as a mass peasant organization, formation of village committees and Kisan Sabhas became imperative. There were only 16,578 members of the Congress in rural Maharashtra in a total membership of 28,258 in December, 1936. In rural Gujarat, in December 1936, there were 23,444 members only (in a total provincial membership of 36,659). In Bombay Karnataka, out of a total membership of 21,049 in September, 1936, nearly two-thirds were villagers. While the thinking that the old methods of constructive work, enrolment, Khadi sale, and celebrations of certain National Days and weeks were sufficient to organise the villagers persisted in some circles, most of the Congress committees insisted that new items were needed in the Congress programme which would include struggle against the day-to-day harrassments of the peasants by the moneylenders, landlords

12. There was an apparent contradiction in the Congress self-critical acceptance of its own organizational weakness and the alarmist perception of the colonial administration which can be resolved only in the above mentioned manner. Linlithgow was worried about "the capacity of Bombay province for giving serious trouble" and described Bombay province as "the great stronghold of Congress". Linlithgow to the Marques of Zetland, 8th June, 1936, in Linlithgow Papers. Whereas the Congress was worried about lack of sufficient network in the villages.

and the petty officials of the colonial state.\textsuperscript{14} The MPCC, for instance, believed that the committees which helped the peasants in their struggle for lowering of the 'annewari' valuation of crops, enjoyed considerably more support and prestige among the peasants compared to the committees which were engaged in simple constructive work.\textsuperscript{15} In this period, agrarian question had assumed unprecedented importance in the political calculus of the Congress. The AICC formed a Peasant Subcommittee consisting of Ranjendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Purshottamdas Tandon to investigate peasant problems and advise the Working Committee on this issue.\textsuperscript{16} The MPCC also established a Peasant Enquiry Committee on July 14, 1935.\textsuperscript{17}

After withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience movement, the most important task before the Congressmen was to check demoralisation and maintain confidence of the cultivators who had lost their lands in the 'non-payment of revenue' movement. Two committees - one, consisting of Gangadhar Rao Despande, Narayan Rao Joshi, S.R. Haladipurkar, Siddappa Hosamani,

\textsuperscript{14} Secretary, GPCC to the Convenor Mass Contact Committee (Jairamdas Doulatram), 29 July, 1939, in Rajendra Prasad Papers; and KPCC Correspondence with the AICC, Oct. 21, 1936, in AICC File No. P-14, 1936.

\textsuperscript{15} "MPCC to the Secretary, AICC, June 30, 1936", in Rajendra Prasad Papers.


\textsuperscript{17} BC, July 26, 1935.
Hanumantrao Koujalgi, R.S. Radbidri, D.P. Karmakar and R.S. Hukkerikar, for helping Kanara peasant of Siddapur and Ankola talukas; and another, consisting of Chandulal Desai, Bhogilal Lala, Ravi Shankar Chottallal Puranik, Kaniyalal Desai and Dinkarrao Desai, for helping the Gujarat region farmers were established.  

These committees kept the morale of the suffering peasants high by providing immediate sustenance, cattle, seed, agricultural implements and huts to them.

Congress used every opportunity of coming into contact with the villagers. In November, 1934, many election propaganda meetings were addressed by Bullabhai Desai in Panch Mahal and Ahmedabad villages, by N.V. Gadgil and Govindrao Despande in Nasik villages, and by Hosmani in Kanara villages. In many cases, by airing the grievances of the villagers, Congress organisation came nearer to the heart of people. A mass meeting of rural artisans and residents of Chikili in Surat district protested against the levy of a professional local tax. The meeting was organised under the leadership of Janardan B. Desai and Chottubhai Gulabbhai Desai. Congress activists also stood with the villagers during the period of natural

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19. BC, June 4, July 10, Aug. 6 and 10, Oct. 25 and 30, 1934; and AICC File No. P-14, 1936.
20. BC, November 4, 10, 11, 13 and 14, 1934.
calamities. In January, 1935 relief work was organised for
the Bhil cultivators in Jhalod and Dohad talukas of Panchmahals
under the leadership of Thakhar Bapa. Next year, again,
the cultivators of Dohad and Jhalod were helped during famine.22
Congress activists also provided relief work during the Ratna-
giri floods.23 Sardar Patel sent a number of volunteers to
the villages of Borsad taluka of Kheda to provide help to
the plague-affected people.24 Congress activisits also earned
prestige for protesting against the harassment by petty officials
and police. One local Congress activist, Vagjibhai, was shot
dead by a police constable when he intervened in the case
of harassment of some cultivators of village Madar in Broach
and Panch Mahals district.25 With regard to the common folk,
it may be kept in mind that they are often fascinated not
so much by abstract theories and fanciful dogmas but by these
concrete ideas in flesh.

Congress Socialists also emerged on the political scene
in this period. In 1934, they adopted a radical programme
for the peasant front which included abolition of zamindari
and taluqdari and the distribution of confiscated lands to

23. MPCC to Secretary, AICC, June 30, 1936; in Rajendra
Prasad Papers.
24. BC, April 13 and May 16, 1935.
25. BC, Aug. 11, 1934.
the peasants, abolition of burden of debt and arrears of rent, reduction of rent, complete remission of rents on uneconomic holdings, abolition of forced labour and feudal levies, and encouragement to co-operative farming. The Executive Committee of the Maharashtra CSP held on 14 January 1935 resolved to organise Kisan Sanghas in villages. Kamalashankar Pandya, Secretary, Gujarat CSP and Dinkar Mehta visited Palsana, Vapi, Udwada and other villages of Pardi Mahal in Surat district explaining the CSP programme. At this stage, the political rivalry over the adoption of more radical measures which emerged during 1937-41 period between the Congress and the CSP Kisan activists, had not appeared and both political forces worked harmoniously. Kamalashankar Pandya and Dinkar Mehta, for instance, worked with the President of Bulsar Taluka Congress Committee, Natubhai Desai. They addressed meeting at Bulsar and toured Bardoli, Karadi, Kachholi, Navasari and Billimora in Surat district and Wagra in Panch Mahals. Mrs. Kamala Devi Chattopadhya, CSP leader in Karnataka region, addressed a large crowd of ryots at Jakli village (near Gadag) and appealed to them to support the Congress and make it a mass organization.

27. *Home/Special File No.800(75) A-II*, 1935
She also explained the socialist programme. In her speeches at Chikodi, Kittur, Bail Hongal, Gokak and Khanapur in Belgaum district, in the first week of September, 1935, she advocated formation of Rayat Committees in all the villages.

For the Communists, who had established their trench-works in the industrial towns of Bombay and Sholapur, countryside still remained relatively an unexplored terrain. During 1934-36, they were hardly involved in peasant activities. At Rahuri and Bellapur in Ahmednagar district also, where Dange addressed Kisan meetings on Kisan Day, September 1, 1936, the Communists were engaged in organizing unions of workers of sugar plantations and factory workers in Bellapur and Maharashtra sugar companies.

Both the Congress and Socialist workers organized mass meetings in villages and taluka and district level peasant conferences in which some particular grievances of the locality were combined with the general demands. In many cases, these peasant conferences were simply big peasant meetings drawing large attendance from a group of nearer villages rather than from the whole taluka or district after which they were named.

These conferences were like local Melas which generated much enthusiasm among the peasants. They should also be seen as articulation of Congress mentality by the 'silent and dumb' cultivators. In 1936 alone, nearly 20 such conferences were organised in different parts of Maharashtra. This is also contrary to the belief that Congress 'elites' were interested only in "constitutional concessions". It was this active involvement which increased Congress membership in rural areas. In Gujarat, it increased from 23,444 in 1936 to 65,165 in 1937. In the countryside of Maharashtra the increase was from 29,516 in 1936 to 126,598 in 1937.

In pre-industrial society, when modern political associations and channels of protest were not available, idealization of the past was quite common for the peasant movements. In such traditional rural revolts, they wanted "a return to the good old customs". There is a crop of historians who idealise these traditional sporadic, sudden, catastrophic, violent modes of activities of the peasantry.

It is one thing to trace continuities with the past traditions but altogether a different thing to think them as rigid, fixed and unchangeable entities. Therefore, 'subaltern' historiography fails to see Congress as a modern organisation through which the collective will of a subject people begin to take concrete form.\(^{39}\)

**Peasant Conferences : 1935-36:**

Following is a brief account of peasant conferences during 1935-36.

(1) Anand Taluka Peasant Conference under Abbas Tyabji held in the beginning of February, 1935, appealed to the government to postpone the collection of revenue till the survey of crop-damage.\(^{40}\)

(2) A conference of farmers at Matar in Ahmedbad under Dadubhai Desai, held in the first week of February, 1935, made a representation to the government for complete remission of revenue due

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to crop-damage. 41

(3) A big conference was held at Pali in Alibag taluka of Kolaba on January 5, 1936 under S.K. Bole and N.N. Patil in connection with Chari Peasant Day. The main theme was abolition of Khoti and tenancy legislation. 42

(4) A mass meeting of 1,000 farmers from the villages of Nagar taluka (Ahmedbagar) was held in the last week of January, 1936, at Ukadgaon in which B. Kanilkar and S.R. Bhagwat explained the village uplift scheme. 43

(5) A cultivators' conference was planned to be held at Madha on September 1, 1935; along with a 'Cleaning Week' in Sholapur village during the Navratra festival. 44

(6) Dohad-Jhalod conference at Mirakhedi under Indulal Yagnik, Raman Lal Seth, Matabhai Damor and Kamalashankar Pandya was held on 26 January, 1936. The conferences was attended by 3,000 peasants from 60-70 villages. The main demands advocated at this conference were abolition of existing land revenue code, 50% reduction in land revenue and rent, penalisation of forced labour in law, abolition

41. Ibid.
42. BC, Jan. 9, 1936.
43. BC, Jan. 31, 1936.
44. BC, Aug. 2, 1935.
of other feudal levies, restriction of rate of interest (to be 6% only), fixation of annewaris according to the suggestion of village representatives and Kisan Sanghs; and finally abolition of Taluqdari, Inamdari, etc. 45

(7) Bhusawal taluka conference (February, 1936) demanded 50 per cent reduction in land revenue, writing off of 50% debts, licensing of moneylenders and fixation of annewari after consulting village representatives. 46

(8) Two conferences were held around 20 March, 1936 at Vagra (Broach district); and

(9) Another conference at Dholka (Ahmedabad) held on 15 March, 1936 protested against excessive valuation of crops (i.e. annewari) and demanded suitable remission in revenue. 47

(10) A conference at Satana in Baglan taluka of Nasik was held on 12 April, 1936. 48

(11) A conference of farmers of Mulshi-Peta (Poona) in the first week of April, 1936, under Rao Saheb Patwardhan resolved on the abolition of existing

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45. BC, 27, 29 and 30 Jan. 1936; Dohad Jhalod Cong. Committee to the Secretary, AICC, 11 June, 1936 in Rajendra Prasad Papers.


47. BC, March 24, 1936.

48. BC, April 13, 1936.
revenue system, exemption of uneconomic holdings from payment of revenue, scaling down of debts and legal restrictions on moneylending. 49

(12) Matar taluka conference under Dadubhai Desai was held on Jan. 21, 1936. 50

Other such peasant conferences were held at Masur and Walve in Satara district on 13 and 14 June, 1936 respectively under K.M. Jedhe and N.V. Gadgil; at Rahuri on 11 July, 1936 (district Ahmednagar); at Kalwan and Baglan in Nasik district (in May 1936); at Charholi (Haveli taluka, Poona) on 9th May, 1936; at Bhilwadi (Tasgaon taluka) on 5 and 6 May, 1936; and Manor (Palghar taluka); and at Ghode (near Poona) on 14th May, 1936; at Sinnar attended by 5,000 famine-stricken peasants (Nasik); at Talegaon on November 17, 1936, in Dindori taluka of Nasik; at Hansbhavi in Hirekurur taluka; and at Sanghmeshwar and Chiplun in Ratnagiri district (during November, 1936) 51

49. BC, April 8, 1936.
50. BC, April 27, 1936.
Faizpur, Agrarian Legislation of the Congress Ministry and Consolidation of the rural base:

In mid-1936, Congress activists started visiting distant villages to arouse enthusiasm for the Faizpur Congress session. Appasaheb Altekar, President of Satara District Congress Committee, visited villages like Masure, Indoli, Charegaon, Unibraj Shirgaon, and Kale in Karad taluka, enrolled members in the Congress and lectured on the significance of the Faizpur Congress. In these meetings Congress propaganda, election themes, and local grievances of peasants were taken up by the speakers. Shankarrao Deo, President of the MPCC, addressed crowded meetings at Sawada and Pimprud attended by 3,000 kisans, to mobilize support for the Faizpur session. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyya, Shankar Kurkoti and Andanapa Dodameti toured villages in Dharwar district and addressed thousands of peasants. S.M. Joshi, accompanied by saffron coloured women volunteers, visited Lavare, Kubharkheda, Saikheda, Gaurkheda, Chinaval, Kusambe, Bhalod, and Savda near Faizpur and addressed thousands of peasants on the significance of Faizpur Congress session. K.M. Jedhe, N.V. Gadgil and V.V. Dandekar addressed crowded Kisan meetings at Umbergaon, Wada, Palghar, Mahim, Allyali and Weoor in North Thana, in which they asked the

54. BC, Nov. 4, 1936.
55. BC, Nov. 10 and Nov. 26, 1936.
Kisans to vote for the Congress. Similar crowded election meetings were held at Gundi, Raipur, Bholad and Chawda, etc., in Ahmedabad by Darbar Gopaldass and Iswarlal Vyas. A Kisan March was organized from Manmad village in (Nasik district) to Faizpur covering 200 miles, which came into contact with thousands of villagers on the way. It was the result of this propaganda that Faizpur Congress attracted an estimated crowd of 1.5 lakhs.

During January and early part of February, many election meetings were held. Bhullabhai Desai in Gujarat, Kamala Devi Chattopadhya in Dharwar, Hosmani Diwakar in Bijapur and Sardar Patel in Nasik and other regions had a tight election schedule. The election propaganda, by focussing on Kisan problems, heightened the hopes and expectations of the peasants. Their enthusiasm could be seen from their marching to the polling booths on foot and in bullock carts with Congress flags and shouting Congress slogans.

The earlier form of mobilizing people through taluka and district level conferences continued with more enthusiasm.

56. BC, Nov. 26 and Dec. 16, 1936.
58. Zetland to Linlithgow, dated 8 Feb., 1937.
60. BC, Feb. 19, 1937.
and the attendance of larger crowds, airing the peasant's problems regarding revenue, rent, indebtedness, crop-valuations by revenue officials, relief during crop-failures and problems of irrigation and grazing fee, etc. A Ryot Conference was arranged on 19th January, 1937 at Kardi in Humgund taluka of Bijapur. A big conference of 8,000 peasants organized by Bhutekar was held at Maral in Sinnar taluka (Nasik) on 28th Feb., 1937 to demand relief in famine conditions. A Kisan Conference was also held at Vagjipura (in Godhra taluka) attended by 3,000 peasants of Panch Mahals. Kamaladhankar Pandya, Dinkar Mehta and Yusuf Meherally were organisers of this conference. Another Kisan Conference was held at Asoda in East Khandesh in May, 1937, presided over by J. Bhukari. In May and June, 1937, Congress leaders also addressed many village meetings condemning the 'puppet' interim ministry of Cooper. Daksroi peasant conference at Dami Limbda (in Ahmedabad) and Rahimatpur Peasant Conference in Satara also condemned the interim ministry. We have already noted in an earlier section that the Congress assumption of ministry had an electrifying impact on the masses. On the other hand, it demoralised the local administration, especially the petty

61. _BC_, 26 Jan., 1937.
62. _BC_, March 10, 1937.
63. _BC_, May 4, 1937.
64. _BC_, May 37, 1937.
65. _BC_, May 5, 7, 8, 27 and June 1, 4, 7, 8, 1937.
Revenue officials. A Kisan Day was organised by Kisan Sabha on September 1, 1937 which was celebrated throughout the province by Kisans organising meetings, demonstrations, etc. K.F. Nariman addressed a crowded meeting of 8,000 peasants at Islampur in Satara district on September 3, 1937. Numerous Kisan conferences attended by thousands of peasants were held during the rest of 1937. We list them here briefly:

(1) A crowded conference of 15,000 Ahmednagar peasants at Pengiri in the first week of September was addressed by Senapati Bapat, B.B. Kulkarni, V.B. Bhuskute and Indulal Yagnik.

(2) Sinnar Taluka Conference (Nasik) at Wai in early September, under Bhutekar and Yagnik.

(3) Another divisional conference at Vadhav in Pentaluka (Kolaba) in the month of November, under Yagnik was attended by 1,000 peasants.

(4) A crowded conference of an estimated crowd of 8,000-15,000 on November 21, at Akola including

68. BC, Sept. 4, 1937.
69. BC, Sept. 8, 1937 and Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, Para 630, 1937.
70. BC, Sept. 10, 1937.
hundreds of women addressed by Latthe, the Finance Minister. 72

(5) Peasant Conferences at Wadgaon on November 2 and at Andhani on November 3rd under Bhutekar; at Bhadgaon on November 7th under Lalji Pendse; and at Ghadegaon on November 9th under Abaji Sanab. 73

(6) Peasant conferences at Nandgaon under Atmaram Patil on October 25, and at Amadade (Pachora taluka) on October 25; at Karangaon on October 31, at Kajagaon on November 1st (in Khandesh) under Bhutekar. 74

(7) A large Kisan Conference was also addressed by A.B. Latthe, at Shenoli on October 9. He dealt with the problem of agrarian debt before and audience of 10,000 Kisans. 75

(8) Other such conferences were at Guttal (Dharwar district) on October 27, at Prantiz (Ahmedabad), at Khandari (East Khandesh); and at Manmad in Nasik district. 76


73. Ibid.


76. Home/Special File No.922(2), 1937.
Viramgam taluka peasant conference met at Mandal and was addressed by Bhogilal Lal, Patel and Mridula Sarabhai in November. Other conferences were at Vinchur in Sholapur under S.D. Deo, K.B. Antrolikar and T.S. Jadhav; at Vadala in Khandesh under Rajmal Lakshmichand; at Anniyeri (Dharwar) under A. Dodmeti; at Neri and Marwad in East Khandesh under K.M. Jedhe; and at Bhingar (Ahmednagar) under P.H. Patwardhan. 77

**Congress Ministry Agrarian Legislation:**

After assuming office, the Congress ministry passed a number of ameliorative measures to help the tenants and small peasants in the province. In the second half of 1937, grazing fees to the tune of Rs. 6.25 lakhs were abolished, remissions of land revenue to the extent of Rs. 16 lakh were given to the peasants who were in arrears of land revenue, and Bombay Small Holders Relief Act to help tenants and cultivators temporarily prior to the passage of the Debt Relief Bill and Tenancy legislation was passed. 78 The Small Holders Relief Bill was designed to help all those cultivators who cultivated less than 6 acres of irrigated or 18 acres of dry

77. Ibid., and Home/Special File No.800(53)-B-1, 1937.
78. Congress Ministry and its work : Six monthly Review (From mid 1937 to January, 1938) in Home/Political File No.11, 1938.
land. The Bill envisaged stay of execution of decrees passed against small holders upto 1 April, 1938, for recovery of any debt; and stay of evictions of tenants who were uninterruptedly cultivating lands since 1 January 1938, and who had paid rents regularly and who would pay rents dues upto 30 June, 1938. The criticism of this Bill from left benches was that it did not cover the agricultural labour, did not apply to the holders of annual leases, and stipulated full payment of rent under the old terms and conditions. Another major measure, passed on 25 October, 1939, against the opposition of money-lending interests, the Agricultural Debtors Relief Bill, envisaged licensing of moneylenders, and limited the rate of interest at 9% for a secured loan and 12% for an unsecured loan. The Bill prohibited charging of any extra expense on the loans. But the most important measure which came into heavy attack both from the Left and the Right was the Tenancy Bill. Taluqdar, Inamdar, Khots and Watandars throughout province opposed it. Under the provisions of the Act, any tenant who had held land and personally cultivated it continuously for six years immediately before 1 January, 1938,

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., pp.121-22; and BC, August 17 and 23, 1938.
whose land was situated in alienated land, or Khot's or Taluqdari area, and whose landlord owned 33.33 acres of irrigated or 100 acres or more of dry land, the total assessment of which exceeded Rs.150 was given protection. Protection was extended to those tenants who were evicted after April 1, 1937. However, if a landlord wanted to terminate the tenancy for purpose of personal cultivation, he could do so on a year's notice. 83 People from the Left, especially Kisan Sabha leaders, Yagnik, Pangarkar, Dinkar Mehta and Kamalashaknkar Pandya attacked the bill for not providing substantial reduction in rents, for not remitting arrears of rents, for not exempting uneconomic holdings from rent, for not making its provisions applicable to all tenants throughout the province. 84 S.V. Parulekar and Jamadas Mehta criticised the Bill for the restrictive clause of 'personal cultivation by landlord', and for the rigid condition of termination of tenancy in case of the failure of the tenant to pay rent of a particular year by a specified date. 85

But despite all these weaknesses, Congress relief measures created an atmosphere for mass mobilization by the Kisan Sabhas. 86

84. BC, August 25, 1938.
86. Indulal Yagnik, Atamkatha, Vol.5, Ahmedbad, 1971, p.120.
For the Congress organisation, it secured the support of tenants. 87

Between 1938-1940, a keen rivalry developed between the Kisan Sabha and the Congress organisation in some areas, especially in South Gujarat region. The main form of mobilization during this phase was village level meetings. The peasant conferences continued to be a major instrument of popular mobilization, but a new form of peasant mobilization also emerged during this period. This was organization of peasant marches to the local Mamlatdar Kutcheris, collectors' offices and so on. Some of these aspects have already been discussed in Chapter II.

In January-February, 1938, two taluka conferences—one at Newasa under Shankarrao Deo which was attended by 2,000-3,000 peasants and focussed attention on problem of Annewari, and another at Jamgaon (Parner taluka) — were held in Ahmednagar. The latter was addressed by S.M. Joshi, P.M. Bapat and others. 88 In January, 1938, a peasant conference at Sinnar (Nasik) and another in Badagi taluka and Bilgi Peta (Karnataka region) were organized. The Badagi taluka conference, attended by 3,000 peasants, focussed attention on the problem

of acute water scarcity in 30 villages. In February 1938, a few big meetings were held to mobilize people for the Haripura Congress Session. Yagnik and Pangarkar addressed a number of village meetings in Raniparai villages for mobilizing people for a proposed march to Haripura. At a large conference of Kalol taluka peasants, attended by 5,000 including 1,000 women, B.G. Kher, the Prime Minister criticised the critics the ministry for demanding what Congress had never promised in its election manifesto, i.e. 50% reduction in land revenue.

A big meeting of 10,000 Harijans and other villagers of Bardoli taluka was addressed on 17th February by B.G. Kher, Morarji Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel. A large Kisan March from Tharsada to Haripura was organized by Kisan Sabha with a strength estimated at 1,000 to 10,000 by different sources. The marchers were addressed by Yagnik, Ranchhod Patel, Pangarkar, N.G. Ranga and Swami Sahajanand. The March was opposed by Sardar Patel. Sardar Patel probably felt embarrassed due to the existence of Hali system in the area of his political influence. The Kisan Sabha leaders have decided to raise the issue during the Haripura session and Patel felt that it might embarrass him in the eyes of national leaders.

89. BC, Jan. 29 and 31, 1938.
91. BC, Feb. 12, 1938.
A representative meeting of the peasants around Kalamb in Indapur taluka (Poona) was held on 7 August as Ranamodwadi under the leadership of V.B. Karnik, Vishwasrao Mandhare, and Namdeorao Savant. It was demanded that Kalamb Sugar factory should restore land to the original owners or else make a three-fold increase in the rent, the landholders should be given employment in the factory, and the settlement of wages and conditions of work should be made in consultation with the Peasants' Committee.94

On October 8, 1938, a march of 2,000 peasants was organized to Poona city by the Poona District Congress Committee and the Congress Socialists jointly to demand modifications in Tenancy legislation, and to liquidate opposition from within to agrarian legislation. Shankarrao Deo, the President of the MPCC, criticised the march for showing lack of faith in the Congress.95 A conference of about 30,000 Inamdar farmers in early November was presided by Bhogilal Lala at Vatva in Ahmedabad district. The conference demanded some changes in tenancy legislation.96

In January 1939, Swami Sahajanand made a tour of Gujarat

94. BC, August 11, 1938.
96. BC, Nov. 7, 1939.
region addressed a large number of village meetings along with Yagnik in the villages of Ahmedabad, Surat and Panch Mahals.\textsuperscript{97} In East Khandesh, 1,000 peasants marched to Bhadgaon Mahalkari office under the leadership of Shetkari Sangh and Lalji Pendse.\textsuperscript{98} The Leftists proposed a march of Khandesh peasants to collector's office on 26th January, 1939, for demanding remission of revenue. To mobilize people for the march, they organized preliminary peasant conferences at Phulgaon, Bodwad, and Chalisgaon in East Khandesh under P.S. Sane; and at Devagaon in West Khandesh under S.A. Dange. But because of strong opposition from the District Congress Committee, the march was abandoned and both the Congress Committee and the Leftists agreed to organise a huge conference at Jalgaon on Independence Day. A conference of 50,000 peasants was organised on 26th January, 1939 by the joint efforts of the Congress leaders K.M. Jedhe and Shankarrao Deo, and Kisan March Committee leaders Sane Guruji, Lalji Pendse and S.A.Dange.\textsuperscript{99} In January-February (1939), Yagnik, Pangarkar and other Kisan activists conducted village level propaganda tour in Gujarat region for organizing the Kisans. In these meetings, they made use of provisions of agrarian legislation passed by the popular

\textsuperscript{97} Home/Special File No.800(53)-B-IV, 1939.
\textsuperscript{98} BC, Jan. 14, 1939.
Congress ministry. At Mujkuwa (taluka Borsad in Kaira district), Yagnik explained to an assembly of 2,000 kisans, that under the Small Holders Relief Bill, their lands and agricultural produce were not liable to attachment. Although, the Kisan Sabha workers succeeded in persuading the tenants not to pay rent in some isolated villages, the organization of Kisan Sabha was not very impressive. In February 1939, the membership of the Kisan Sabha was only 6,012 in all the districts of Gujarat, of which 2,850 were in Kaira alone. On April 1 and 2, a well attended Provincial Gujarat Kisan Conference was held at Gusar in Panch Mahals, which discussed problems of land revenue, tenancy rights, forced labour, and debt.

Some agitation was also organised in the villages around sugar factories. Around 500 cultivators of Ahmednagar protested at Muthewadgaon on April 22, 1939 under the leadership of the Communist leaders V.M. Bhuskute and S.S. Mirajkar against waterlogging of lands in the villages near Belapur sugar factory. Led by Bhutekar about 2,000 peasants from the villages of Malegaon taluka in Nasik district protested the discriminating irrigation policy on the Girna Canal against

102. BC, 6 and 8 April 1939, and Home/Special File 800(53)-B-IV, 1939.
farmers in favour of sugar factory plantation. 104

Under the Communist-led Taluka Peasant Union, about 1,000 peasants marched from the villages of Kalyan taluka in Thana district to the camp of the Collector of Thana at Belavli to demand remission and relief from exorbitant rents due to famine conditions. 105 A similar conference of 3,000 agriculturists of Murbad taluka of Thana was organised on 27 Dec. 1939 under the leadership of S.V. Parulekar, which was also attended by Miss Godavari Gokhale, N.V. Phadke and D.K. Desai. The conference took up the grievance against heavy rents and debts, and demanded implementation of the legislation passed by the Congress ministry. 106

Attempts were also made by the Socialist workers in some places in Karnataka region to organise tenants. P.B. Muchadi tried to organize the resistance of tenants at Nidoshi, an Inam village in Hukeri taluka of Belgaum, where there were some differences between the Inamdars and tenants. 107 At a meeting of 300 tenants at Kinner (in Kanara district), on 11 December, 1940, the tenants decided not to cultivate

104. BC, July 29, 1939.
105. BC, Nov. 24, 1939.
the lands of dispossessed tenants.  

From December, 1939 onwards, Congress activists became very active in anti-war propaganda in the villages. Many village level meetings were held to explain Congress attitude towards the war to the villagers. The Kisan Sabha leaders, however, continued to do propaganda in villages against landlords, moneylenders and forest officials during 1940-41 period.

At the surface level, the Individual Satyagraha in late 1940 did not produce any impressive result. The number of active participants was very small. It did not pose any law and order problem for the authorities. But it kept the Congress activists busy and served the purpose of symbolic protest. Although, the actual number of people who offered Satyagraha was not large, at the time of offering of Satyagraha, hundreds of people used to gather to hear the speech of the activists. In big towns, the gathering used to be larger. But in villages, it used to be between 100 to 800. Even in the stronghold of the Congress, it did not arouse much excitement. In Belgaum, where Lingayat Congress

111. Y.B. Chavan, Oral Transcript, NMML, pp.46-47.
leaders were more enthusiastic about arousing villagers, urban-based Congress leaders persuaded them to drop their more intensive agitation. Only at Jalgaon, a crowd of 4,000 clashed with police on 24th Nov. 1940 at the arrest of a Congressmen.

In some cases, the individual Satyagrahis got wide publicity. Between 11 and 18 January, 1941, only 68 Satyagrahis courted arrest. The attendance generally happened to be between 100-150 on these occasions. In one meeting in Bijapur district, however, a Satyagrahi, R.G. Dube addressed a large gathering of 6,000 people, who had gathered for a local fair. There were cases in Kolaba, Satara, and Belgaum districts (Feb-April, 1941) when Satyagrahis were carried in carts drawn by 50, 75 and even 100 pairs of bullocks. In Belgaum district the local initiative organized well-publicized large meetings in the early part of 1941. They even disregarded the instructions of AICC that individual satyagrahis should not take form of organized demonstrations. In this, the organizers also frequently used the local fairs for mobilization purposes. All these activists prepared the villagers for the great volcanic eruption of 1942.

112. Home/Special File No.800(74)(7), III, 1941-43; and File No.800(74)(4)III, 1941-43, Governor of Bombay to Linlithgow, Sept. 18, Nov. 30, Dec. 4 and 16, 1940 and Feb. 4 and 20, Jan. 3 and 20, April 19 and May 1, 1941, in Linlithgow Papers, Vol. 54 and 55.
113. Home/Special F.No.1020(13), 1940.
114. Secret Abstract of Intelligence, Bombay, 1941, para 59.
115. Ibid., paras 131, 238 and 329.
116. Ibid., paras 222, 238 and 260.
Petitioning, Mediation and Settlement of Class Disputes: Congress and Kisan Sabha (1934-42):

Peaceful demand of concessions through sending petitions to the authorities was also part of the peasant's world, along with other forms of struggle. In fact, this has been one of the major modes of expressing their grievances throughout the world. French historian, Mousnier, regards them as "a deed of surrender", as "the moderate demands of defeated men". 117 This understanding of petitioning may be appropriate for a specific context in which a peasant revolt has been crushed recently. But in view of the almost universal occurrence of this phenomenon of petitioning, it is more appropriate to view it as an implied belief in natural order of society, protecting the interests of the rich and the poor alike, which the authorities can be expected to enforce once the misdeeds of individuals are brought to their notice. In other words, petitioning implies a belief in the paternalistic attitude of the authorities. 118 It is acceptance of the legitimacy of the policing functions of the state.

These petitions represented several grievances of the

118. David Underdown, op. cit., p.118.
villagers. The villagers of Beja in Kalwan taluka of Nasik sent a representation in the beginning of 1935, to the collector asking for remission of land revenue.\textsuperscript{119} Some cultivators of Babulwadi in Nandgaon taluka protested in early 1935, against recovery of grazing fee at a higher rate of 12 annas per head of cattle compared to the cultivators of adjoining villages who were paying only 4 annas per head of cattle.\textsuperscript{120} The agriculturists of Igatpuri and some merchants of Nasik sent a petition in January or February, 1935 regarding the use of a wrong measure of 'Adholi' a local measure, by the merchants of Ghoti-Bazar in Nasik.\textsuperscript{121} In another case, the petitioners aired the grievances of the villagers of Sarod, Kardi, Pedudra, and Vedach (in January or February, 1935) in Jambusar taluka of Panch Mahals and Broach regarding encroachment on a public road by the Thakur of Sarod which created obstacle in the movement of their carts.\textsuperscript{122} Sixty three applications were received between February and March, 1936 by the Collector of Ahmedabad from the taluqdari tenants for preparation of special statements of the affected Khatas for the purpose of granting reliefs. The applicants, were informed that this was not possible in the case of \textit{Taluqdar} villages.\textsuperscript{123} In another

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Bombay Legislative Assembly Debate, Vol.XLI, Feb.-March, 1935, p.73.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p.74.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., pp.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., pp.909-10.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid., Vol.XLV, Feb-March,1936, pp. 45-46
\end{itemize}
instance, the villagers of Kaparwadi in Patan taluka of Satara sent applications to the Divisional Forest Officer in September, 1936 about the demands made for grazing fees in case of oxen which did not graze in the forest. A Rayat Conference at Hanasbhavi, on May 1, 1936, in Kod taluka of Dharwar, sent a copy of their resolution asking for the grant of remission of water assessment under third class tanks, to the Commissioner. As a result of this, the amount submitted for the year was remitted.

The assumption of the ministry in the province by the Congress added a new dimension to this phenomenon. Now Congress became a mediator between the 'silent' and 'dumb' peasants and the colonial bureaucracy and the immediate oppressors of the peasants. Peasants, therefore, sometimes on their own, sometimes through the Congress and the Kisan Sabha workers, and sometimes even through Congress Socialists and Communists, sent many petitions, deputations, memorials and representations to this new authority.

The peasants of Pravara Left Canal sent a representation to the irrigation minister complaining that water from distribu-

tories No.6-10 was reserved for sugar factory plantations only and requesting that water should be given to the cultivators also. Shivaskarappa Devpura and Gururao Valvekar, on behalf of the Hubli Taluka Congress Committee went to Byahatti Village in June, 1936 to enquire into the cases of coercion and harassment used by Revenue Authorities in the collection of revenue dues. In 1938, a flood of applications to the extent of 6,191, in number were sent for remission of revenue by the cultivators of East Khandesh. The Government gave remission of two annas in a rupee. Even after this, agitation continued. But when Govt. declared in May, 1939, that further remission was not possible, this pacified the agitators. About 2,000 peasants cultivating lands on Girma Canal (Malegaon taluka in Nasik) met in a conference at Dhabadi under Dr. Bhutekar and resolved to send a deputation to the PWD Minister Mr. Nurie. A deputation of 20 kisans met Nurie on July 15, 1939 and asked him to stop coercive measures for recovery of irrigation dues and reduce the irrigation cess. At Bhadgaon, in East Khandesh, a large meeting of 2,500 peasants was held under the Bhadgaon Peta Shetkari Sangh. They marched to the local Mahalkari Kutcheri, on January 10, 1939, under the leadership of the Bombay communist, Lalji Pendse, and submitted a petition. Lalji Pendse advised them not to pay the assessment until their application was decided. Many peasants of Mandavi taluka and adjoining areas led by Yagnik and D.M. Pangarkar marched to Surat on January 17, 1939 and gave a petition to Morarji Desai and B.G. Kher, asking for reduction of rent, enactment of a suitable tenancy Act, release of Kisan prisoners,

126. BC, Oct. 12, 1937.
127. BC, June 16, 1937.
129. BC, July 29, 1939.
and abolition of Taluqdari and Inamdari.\footnote{131} In another case, farmers of 18 villages of North and South Daskroi talukas of Ahmedabad, at a meeting held at Ahmedabad in the beginning of February, 1939, resolved to withhold payment of half the assessed revenue alleging that the crop valuation of annewari made by the government official was excessive. They, however, sent a deputation to the Revenue minister to get a final answer.\footnote{132} Even in the traditional peasant revolts, riots were used only as the ultimate weapon, to be resorted to only when other means of persuasion had been exhausted.\footnote{133} In a situation when other means of persuasion were available to them, the peasants preferred to use them. At a conference of cultivating tenants of Nagasthana Mahal, held in the last week of December, 1938, in Alibag taluka, tenants of 60 villages decided not to pay rents if a remission of five maunds per khandi was not given to them.\footnote{134} Hardiman explains the control of the "elite leadership" by their being "publicists and negotiators to articulate their demands at provincial level", so that without their help the movements of the subaltern "were likely to be crushed by the authorities".\footnote{135} Such an explanation fails to see the role of political leadership of nationalism.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{131}{BC, Jan. 18, 1939.}
\item \footnote{132}{BC, Feb. 13, 1939.}
\item \footnote{133}{David Underdown, \textit{op. cit.}, p.117}
\item \footnote{134}{BC, Dec. 29, 1938.}
\item \footnote{135}{David Hardiman, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.245-46.}
\end{itemize}
as negotiators, mediators, and arbitrators even in the day-to-day struggles of the masses. If the 'subaltern' groups were capable of producing their own leadership at local level, as the 'subaltern' school claims, then why were these 'subaltern' groups willing to accept Congress "elite" leaders as mediator, arbitrator, and settlers of their local grievances? We think that the whole question of control has been raised in a wrong manner. Party, after all, is "the mechanism which carries out in civil society the same functions as the state carries out, more synthetically and over a larger scale, in political society." 136 It is better to ask the relevant question - whether this policing function or control exercised is progressive, i.e., whether it "raises the backward masses to the level of new legality", or whether such a policing function or control is regressive, and merely functions "to conserve an outward, extrinsic order which is fetter, on the vital forces of history." 137 There can be no doubt that the Congress was trying to raise the backward masses to a new conception of legality. For instance, the Congress Ministry removed the uncertainty in the minds of the cultivators of Taluqdari lands regarding the legality of the following feudal dues, and declared them illegal: (1) Punchi-vero (tail-tax), when levied for grazing on land not belonging

137. Ibid., p.155.
to the taluqdar, (2) Ubhad-vero (house tax on sites not belonging to the taluqdar), (3) Bham-vero or tax on hides, (4) Chahtar-vero, (5) Gadh-vero or fort-tax, (6) Window tax when it was not levied for an easement over land belonging to the taluqdar. In the light of the above interpretation, we can easily understand why peasants of 13 villages of Rajapur taluka (around Karak and Sangeri villages) accepted the guidance of Congress MLA, B.R. Rane, and placed their demands before B.G. Kher. These peasants were demanding a fresh survey of their villages, abolition of all inequitable taxes, and that the total revenue of villages should be equal to the amount agreed to be paid by the Khot to the Inamdar at the time of the exchange deed. The manner in which the Kisan Sabha and the Congress approached the problem of class disputes will clarify our standpoint in the next section.

Settlement of Class-Disputes: Congress and Kisan Sabha:

We have already given examples of the widespread discontent of tenants especially in the Khoti, Inamdari and Taluqdari areas, the tribal areas where the outsider Sahukars-cum-landlords had appropriated the lands of tribals people. There were many disputes between Inamdars and their tenants in the villages of Godhra taluka

139. BC, April 28, 1939.
during 1931-32. In many cases, tenants withheld dues to the Inamdars. These villages were Narsana, Dhamai, Mataria Vyas, Sureli, Padrdi, Kasanpur, Aniad, Vinjal, Chanchopa, and Erandi. From nearly 2,000 tenants rents could be collected by the Inamdars only through court decrees. We have already seen how the dispute at a village (Chari tenant strike from 1934-37) in Kolaba district was resolved only after the mediation of Morarji Desai which gave tenants a few concessions. A similar strike of tenants also broke out at Ghansoli village in Thana district and continued from 1934 to 1936. A committee constituting of K.T. Sule, D.M. Damble and P.S. Bhagwat was appointed by the Thana District Congress Committee to bring about a settlement between the tenants and the Sahukars. The settlement was actually made on 21 June, 1936, under which the landlords were to receive 50% of the produce instead of 75%, as was the case earlier. Similarly, the tenant's strike at Adavali village in Sangmeshwar taluka, which continued from December 1937 to April 1938 under the influence of the Independent Labour Party, could be settled only when A.S. Patwardhan, the Congress leader, was accepted by both the parties as the arbitrator with the final say in the settlement.

142. BC, Feb. 22, 1936 and July 14, 1936.
143. BC, Feb. 4, and April 26, 1936.
It would be a gross misunderstanding to pose the question of a "conflict between class-collaborationist line of Congress and the class-struggle line of Kisan Sabha." For instance, in 1935-35, the Dohad CSP took up the cause of Nashipur Inami tenants, who refused to pay rent unless forced labour and illegal exactions were stopped and rents were reduced. After a heroic struggle, the Inamdar agreed to give a 12½% reduction in rents which was accepted by the Dohad Congress Socialists. P.S.Bhagwat, a Congress leader in Thana district, and S.M. Joshi, a Congress Socialist leader, assured the help the Congress to the tenants of Kamatghar and Kariwali in Bhiwandi taluka, who complained to them regarding the use of false measure by the landlord at the time of taking their rent in kind. In case of dispute between 700 peasants and the Khot of Bhynder village over the division of the crop at threshing floor, farmers sent a petition to the local Congress committee. Narayanrao Patil took up the cause of the tenants with the Khot. Dhandhuka Congress Committee took up the cause of tenants who were being threatened by their Taluqdars with evictions, physical assaults and dispossess from property. The Khatedars of Karjat taluka

147. BC, June 16, 1937.
of Kolaba stopped payment of land revenue to the extent of two annas in a rupee, demanding remission. While Congressmen supported their demand, a radical group of Congressmen also demanded that the tenants must be given a proportionate reduction in rents by the Khatedars in case they got relief from the Government. Most important, however, was the case of Mansa State peasants. Mansa can be regarded as a big zamindari of 12 villages covering a population of 16,000. The men and women of this place struggled unitedly and heroically for a long period of 174 days. They combined non-payment of taxes with forest Satyagraha, and resisted crop attachments. Finally, a settlement was reached, through the mediatory offer of Sardar Patel, which secured 35% reduction in rent, abolition of forced labour, and recognition of the Khedut (Kisan) Committee and occupancy rights of the peasants in the lands and trees. Kisan Sabha was also not averse to accept adjustment and mediate in class dispute. At Wachawad, a moneylender of Vejapur was persuaded by the Kisan Sabha to accept land rent at the rate of Rs.3-8-0 per bigha instead of Rs.7-8-0 per bigha. As both the Congress and the Kisan Sabha adopted a similar approach in settling class-disputes by getting

149. BC, April 7, May 4, June 17, 1938.
a few concessions for the tenants, the conflict between the Congress and the Kisan Sabha 1936 onwards, must be seen as a dimension of political rivalry. Congress Working Committee had already at its Wardha meeting (3-8 Feb. 1939), taken a decision to oppose Kisan Sabhas, which were creating an atmosphere of violence. When the Kisan Sabha launched a no-rent movement in villages around Vijaipur and Adavda, local Congressment also toured villages of Ghusar, Chora, and Dungri in Panch Mahals, exhorting peasants not to be misguided by the Kisan Sabha workers. The peasants of Wachawad and Bukhi stopped payment of dues to the money-lenders and landlords because Yagnik had appled to them that under the new agrarian legislation, decrees of rents could not be executed against them till March, 1940. How much faith people had in the mediatory offers of the Congress leaders is evident from the acceptance of mediation by Congressment in arriving at settlements, when the tenants of Nikol and Sahipur Bhoja Inamdari villages withheld payment of rent to their inamdars, they also informed of their action telegraphically to K.M. Munshi, then Home Minister. In many case, therefore, the peasants themselves were ready

152. AICC File No. 42, 1936-38.
154. Ibid.
155. BC, April 18, 1939.
to accept the mediatory offers of Congress leaders. 156

Now we may compare two instances in which Congress and the Communist led Kisan Sabha adopted different approaches to the settlement of class disputes between tenants and their landlords. In Kalyan taluka of Thana, Shetkari Sangh launched a movement in January, 1940 which stipulated payment of only one-third of the produce as rent to the landlords. This movement was strong in 14 villages as Badlapur circle. These villages were Vast, Chikhlolo, Belavli, Katrap, Shergaon, Varande, Jereli, Chamtoli, Kasgaon, Saavare, Sonivli, Eranjad, Dhoke and Dapivli. 157 Moreover the tenants led by Nimkar wanted to pay rent according to old customary measure of 24 Adholis, under which a maund was equal to 55-3/16 seers, and not according to the new standard measure of 32 Adholis under 1932 measures Act, under which a maund was equal to 64 seers. The administrative machinery took a legal standpoint. In a way, therefore, the tenants were demanding less than one-third

156. The movement of plebian elements assumed quite different mode where the feudal ideology, that the spirit of masses must be controlled by force, prevailed. The violent outburst of German peasants in 16th century was, for instance, according to Engels, a product of the ideology that the peasants must have nothing but chaff - an ideology which believed in "food, pack and lash to ass", (F.Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, Moscow, 1974, pp.51-52).

157. Collector, Thana to the Commissioner Northern Division, Ahmedabad dated 16 Jan. 1940; and Landlords Association of Badlapur representation to Prant Office dated 6 Jan., 1940, in Revenue Dept. File No.3308/39-I, 1940
of produce as rent. 158 The local Congress committee through 
Bhagwan Gopal proposed a settlement that Sahukars should 
give reduction to the extent of 4 Maunds per Khandi of 20 
Maunds, (i.e. 20% reduction) and that the maund to be used 
should be the new standard maund of 64 seers. Both the landlord 
and tenant leaders rejected this proposal. 159 The relations 
between tenants and landlords remained strained, scale of 
measurement remaining the major bone of contention. 160 On 
July 3, 1940, the strained relations culminated in an assault, 
when a Talathi had gone to give possession of some lands 
at Shirgaon to two superior holders from the inferior holders, 
under decrees passed in Mamlatdar's court. In the assault 
by some Kunbis of the village, 10 persons from landholder's 
side were injured. 161 The class-relations remained strained 
for a long period but nothing substantial could be achieved 
in this case.

In the other case, Congress workers organised the tenants 
of Karjat taluka (Kolaba) in January 1940. In one case tenants 
of 16 villages around Pashane village instituted a social boycott 
of the landlords. The eventual compromise, agreed to in writing

158. Prant Officer, Kalyan to Collector, Thana, dated 8 Jan. 
1940.
159. Ibid.
160. Collector, Thana to Under Secretary, Govt. of Bombay, 
Revenue Dept., dated 24 Oct. 1940.
161. DM, Thana to Joint Secretary, Home Dept., Govt. of 
Bombay, dated 3 July, 1940; and DSP, S.D., Thana to 
DSP, Thana, dated 4 July, 1940 in Home/Special File 
and attested by the Mamlatdar, was the payment by the tenants of 13½ maunds in the Khandi of 20 maunds (which was slightly less than 70 per cent of Makta or rent). In the second case, in 8 villages around Kondivade, the landlords agreed to accept 14 maunds in the Khandi (i.e. 70% of Makta) in January, 1940. These landlords later complained that the settlement was forced on them by the Mamlatdar and wanted to file assistance suits. The authorities took the view that allegation of undue influence was made by well-to-do Marwaris and was absurd as they themselves had passed receipt for the whole amount. The tenants were prepared to withhold all rents until a fair settlement was made and the revenue authorities had only rescued the landlords at their own request from a difficult situation.  

Compared to Kalyan Shetkari Sangh movement, the Congress move was a clever one which secured the necessary concessions for the tenants, at the same time committing both the administration and the landlords to their own 'legality'. Hardiman assumes that the link between the peasants and the nationalist was only ideological.  

This does not answer the question why the mediation of ideology appealed to the masses, especially when both 'elite' leaders and the masses had separate domains

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of nationalism. In real life, peasants are unlikely to be influenced by abstract ideologies. Ideological mediation worked only because the mediatory offers of Congress, in real life situations, were able to secure some concessions for the masses.

Forms of Mobilization, Primordial ties, Religious Symbols and Peasant Consciousness:

The role played by primordial ties of kinship, caste, community and ethnicity is generally accepted by many. Hamza Alavi argues that primordial loyalties, which precede manifestations of class solidarity, do not rule out the latter; rather they mediate the complex processes through which latter are crystallized. Hira Singh, who studied the Marwar peasant movement in Rajasthan, however, demonstrates that unity of kin and caste groups depends, in final analysis, on an identity of economic and political interests.

Many instances of primordial loyalties playing a role in mobilization in the Bombay countryside can be cited. The Thakrati cultivators were mobilized in a conference in March 1935, under Rasul Khan Pathan demanding relief to the Thakrati

164. Ibid., pp.213-18, emphasises the role of Patidari kinship networks in Kheda district; Guha also stresses the role of ethnicity in tribal movements of early colonial phase, op. cit., pp.173-175.


cultivators and introduction of survey settlement in Thakrati villages.\textsuperscript{167} Organisation of caste sabhas was a major form of caste mobilization. On 13 and 14 October 1934, Prajpati (Potters) from all over Gujarat organised a Provincial Prajapati Sabha at Billimora. Nearly 1,500 potters discussed the measures for the welfare of their caste.\textsuperscript{168} We have already noted the use of caste sanctions by the striking tenants of Chari village in Kolaba district to win the cooperation of their castemen from the surrounding villages.\textsuperscript{169} Dade Saheb Chaudry, a local Congressman, appealed to the 'blood ties' of Lewa Patidars of Faizpur with Patel and Patidars of Ras and Bardoli, in his speech at Bhalod village near Faizpur on July 11, 1936.\textsuperscript{170} Tilori Kunbi Sangh was able to mobilize about 500 Kunbis at Jaitpur in Ratnagiri district in the name of the welfare of the community.\textsuperscript{171} Some of these were cases of simple caste mobilization. There were also instances where caste and communal identities were able to override the wider national identity.

In an earlier section, we cited instances where caste loyalty prevailed over the Congress loyalty. A typical example of this occurred at Nimgaon-Ketki in Poona district where a batch of nationalist students had gone for welfare work during vacations.

\textsuperscript{167} BC, March 29, 1935.
\textsuperscript{168} BC, Oct. 24, 1934.
\textsuperscript{169} Congress Socialist, Vol.I, No.9, Feb.15, 1936.
\textsuperscript{170} BC, July 20, 1936.
\textsuperscript{171} Bombay Secret Abstracts week ending 4 Jan. 1941, in Home/Special File No.800(58)-B-V, 1934-41.
in May-June, 1937. One student, S.P. Limaye, drunk water from the house of an untouchable and persuaded some villagers to follow his example. They were turned out of the house where they were staying. The local Congressmen took down the Congress Board as a sign of displeasure, and villagers decided not to vote for the Congress in future. Local Congress leader, Bhongle, visited the place to pour oil on troubled waters and restore Congress prestige.¹⁷² Even nationalism of voters during the election of 1937 was not based on unmixed loyalty. Often a symbiosis of nationalism occurred with communalism. A Maratha peasant, for instance, preferred to vote for Maratha-Congressmen. But in case of a non-Maratha Congress candidate was in field against a Maratha non-Congress candidate, Maratha peasantry tilted in favour the latter. A Brahmin and a Lingayat Congress candidates were defeated in this manner in East Khandesh and Satara South Constituencies respectively during 1937 elections.¹⁷³ The same process was at work in the case of K.M. Jedhe and N.V. Gadgil - both ex-non-brahmin leaders who had merged their identity with the Congress in 1934. They continued to appeal to the non-brahmin identity

even after joining the Congress. Within the Congress also sometimes caste loyalties did over-ride national identity. For instance, there was a keen rivalry between Lingayats and Brahmins in Belgaum district. There was an open manifestation of this in the 1941 Individual Satyagraha. Lingayats leaders were very active in the villages so that they could claim predominance within the organisation. But the town-based Brahmin leaders were alarmed at the growth of Satyagraha.

In another case of the simultaneous existence of conflicting identities, a member of Nadiad Taluka Committee, Mohanbhai Khodabhai Patel, was found guilty of inciting villagers at Vadtal against Muslims in early 1940 because they did not take part in Congress activity. He even threatened to burn their houses if they did not close down their shops on the Independence Day. When Babubhai Jasbhai Patel, President of taluka Congress Committee, confirmed this, Mohanbhai apologised in front of the villagers.

174. Chitnis, Praaspar Brahman Sahakari Sangh, Narayangaon (Poona district) to Rajendra Prasad, dated Oct. 27, 1937, in Rajendra Prasad Papers. In many cases, the non-brahmin identity was rooted in the socio-economic structure. In 1934, non-brahmin tenants of Parner taluka (Ahmednagar) went on strike against the Brahmin landlords. Nearly 6,000-7,000 acres of lands remained uncultivated in this strike. (Bombay Police Admn. Report, 1934, p.4)


176. Letters from Ibrahimbhai Rahimbhai Vohra to President, Kheda District Congress Committee, 1 April, 1940, and to Kripalani, General Secretary, AICC, 17 Feb. 1940, in AICC File No.P-9, 1940-41.
The problem arises - How to explain this persistence of primordial identities? Can it be regarded as false consciousness, or a detour in the process of the making of a new national identity, a temporary lapse because of backwardness? Or shall we accept these ties as part of the permanent popular psyche reinforced by popular folk culture in opposition to the 'official' or 'elite' culture? What functions did these primary ties play in history? And do they constitute a domain which cannot be replaced by a new set of identities?

In the first place, we cannot assume from these few instances that primordial ties were always effective. In the organization of thousands of Kisan meetings and conferences during the period, the socio-economic interests outweighed primordial linkages. Here we cite two important instances where reactionaries failed to use primary ties because people did not respond to them. A conference of Kunbi peasants in 24 villages was arranged in Bhuj taluka through local Swami Narayan Maharaj by the state. Although Kunbis belonged to the sect of the Swami, only 300 turned up, most of the Kunbis stayed away complaining that the state had not done anything to remove their grievances and hardships. Another important event was formation of All-India Maratha League, with the encouragement of Raja of Kolhapur, by Sardar Patankar to wean away the Marathas from the Congress. Subsequent

177. BC, April 7, 1939.
history proved that the Marathas continued to follow Congress.

Secondly, the role played by these remnants of the past usually exerted a negative influence, hampering the growth and crystallization of a wider class or national identity. The salience of one form of identity often inhibits growth of a new one.

Thirdly, while not denying that poly-morphism is law of nature and human society and that 'polyglot translations' (the different ways in which our psychic apparatus reach to the same kind of stimuli and environment) are possible in life; we cannot preclude the possibility of interchangeability of primordial-national and class loyalties. In other words, mediation of primordial loyalties is not fixed, rigid, and permanent. If through a process of 'psychic displacement', a soldier can find a substitute-object - a scrap of coloured cloth for the honour of his country, the price of which he pays with his life-blood - it quite natural that by the same process of displacement - older forms of ties - the primordial loyalties of family, kinship, clan, sect, etc., are replaced by emergence of a national or class identity. 179

179. For the concept of 'polyglot translations and 'psychic displacement', we are indebted to Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, New York, 1931, pp.80-85 and 158.
to Erikson, a particular group identity emerges, with a maximum of conflict-free energy accrued from the childhood, in a mutually supportive psycho-social equilibrium. But just like historical development, this psycho-social evolution is also not unilinear. This lack of unlinearity explains persistence of earlier identities. But, there can be no doubt that a major component of a mutually supportive psycho-social-equilibrium was provided by the ideology of nationalism. In the hierarchies of identities, national identity assumed a dominant position.

In another way, peasant mobilization was different from early 19th century peasant revolts of India. In 19th century, rumours may have represented undercurrents of popular mentalities because colonial system's intrusion thrust people into ambiguous situations. There was a general unpredictability of taxation and responses of an alien, elite rule. In 20th century India, as colonial administration became more predictable and as the networks of activists (political) spread throughout the countryside providing constant source of information, the role of rumours as a major instrument of mobilization has to be ruled out.


It is an accepted fact that class-struggles of feudal times were invariably "clothed in religious shibboleths". Actually, religious ideologies played a contradictory, double-faced role of both conservation and consolidation of submissiveness, and a convenient mask through which hopes and expectations of the people were expressed. Ladurie also explains how popular revolts of 16th century drew on an ethical and religious value system in which justice and God were on their side against "thieves and robbers" of the people.

Edinger describes religious symbols as expression of "subjective dynamism which exerts a powerful attraction and fascination on the individual", because they are "alive and releaser and transformer of psychic energy". The same function is performed by folk symbols. In some instances, folk symbols and religious fairs were used by the nationalists to propagate anti-colonial ideas. A meeting of the Maharashtra Congress Socialists on 16-17 November, 1935 decided to carry

182. F. Engels, op. cit., p.42.
on propaganda among pilgrims at Alandi Fair with a view to peasant organisation. \textsuperscript{186} Sholapur District Village Improvement Committee utilized Navratri Festival for organizing a cleaning week in the villages. \textsuperscript{187} Sardar Patel in a propaganda speech at Kurai (in Baroda state) on 30 November, 1937, compared the Congress session with Kumbh, Pandharpur Asadi Fair and Brindavan pilgrimage. He also used the symbol of 'mother cow' in his speech. \textsuperscript{188} In November 1936, women volunteers clad in saffron-coloured Saris were used to do propaganda for Faizpur Congress session. Many Kisans, who attended the First Gujarat Provincial Kisan Conference, went to the bank of river Gomati, singing village folk songs, carrying red flags, and playing a national band, to burn the effigy of the 'devil of debt'. \textsuperscript{190} V.V. Kirtane and P.R. Dandekar, leaders of Thana District Congress, addressed a crowded meeting of villagers at Murambe in Palghar taluka on Ganpati festival day in September, 1939. They discussed agrarian legislation of the Congress ministry and the character of the war. \textsuperscript{191} Indulal Yagnik used Vautha fair on 26 November, 1939 to do propaganda among

\textsuperscript{186} Congress Socialist (NS), Vol. I, No.3, Jan. 4, 1936.
\textsuperscript{187} BC, Aug. 2, 1935.
\textsuperscript{188} P.N. Chopra, op. cit., pp.1211-15.
\textsuperscript{189} BC, Nov. 5, 1936.
\textsuperscript{190} BC, April 6, 1939.
\textsuperscript{191} BC, Sept. 13, 1936.
R.L. Rede, Thana Congress leader, taking advantage of the Datta Jayanti Utsav Fair at Sanpada, addressed a large gathering of villagers from Ulva, Juhi, Kukshet, Sarsola, Vasi, Divale, Turumbha, Shiroha, Rabada, Bellapur, Gothivli, and Karawe in the last week of December, 1939. G.B. Bhutekar conducting propaganda against revised land revenue settlement in talukas of Satana, Kalwan and Malegaon from January to May, 1940, used symbolism of Bhakta Prahlad, who was a rebel against his father, to incite anti-colonial feelings. During the meetings, slogans of Shivaji Maharaj Ki Jai, Gandhi Maharaj Ki Jai and Shetkari Majurancha Vijay Aso were frequently used. Yagnik went for a Kisan meeting on 22 April, 1940 to Vanzar in Ahmedabad district. Despite previous announcement, nobody turned up for the meeting. Then he went to Modasar village where an Annual Fair was in progress. Yagnik addressed a meeting in which 400 Kisans participated. Garba dance was used to attract people for the Gujarat Provincial Kisan Conference on 7 June, 1942, at Bulsar in Surat district.

compensate low attendance. The use of Ganpati festivals for political mobilization was more frequent. S.D. Deo appealed to the various Ganpati Mandals in September, 1934, to subscribe to the funds raised for relief of the peasants. Taking advantage of Ganpati festival, Yusuf Meherally, the Congress Socialist leader, and S.K. Patil, the Secretary of BPCC, addressed meetings at Bassein and Palghar on September 4 and 6, 1935 respectively. The Maruti temples were also used for similar purposes in Sholapur and Belgaum districts. Some leading members of the MPCC used the Pandharpur Ekadeshi Fair to do propaganda among the pilgrims in November, 1935. The local Congressmen of Hosritti in Dharwar district used a local annual fair to do Congress propaganda between 2 February and 7 February, 1940. Similarly, many meetings of Congress between 14 and 21 September, 1940 were planned to coincide with the Ganpati festival. Miss Kousalyadevi in her Kirtans on 19 to 21 June, 1938 at Hubli in Dharwar district compared the Congress ministers to King Basava, the founder of Lingayat sect; and to Pandavas who were fighting against the unjust

196. PSI, GID, Ahmedabad to DSP, Surat, 8 June 1942 in Home/Special File No.800(53)-BC-III, 1942.
197. Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, 1934, Para 902.
198. Ibid., 1935, Para 899.
199. Ibid., 1935, Paras 260 and 1291; Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, 1934, Para 124.
200. Ibid., Para 1157.
201. Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, 1940, Para 160.
202. Ibid., 1940, Para 922.
Kourvas, i.e. the British. 203

Subaltern historiography assumes that Gramsci was responsible for giving due importance and recognition to distinct popular culture and folklore in opposition to national or official conception of culture. 204 But in Gramsci, there was no universal application of this concept. He specified that national and popular in Italy did not coincide because of specific historical circumstances in Italy. 205 Gramsci certainly had a better historical sense than Herodotus. The Greek historian Herodotus gave an idealized picture of ants of the size of cats in the Indian desert which, according to him, dug out gold from sand. Gramsci did not idealize folklore, which, according to him, included many "different and juxtaposed elements", and which was "stratified, from more crude to less crude elements". Folklore for him was a "confused agglomerate of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and of life that have succeeded one another in history and it is possible to trace their surviving evidence in adulterated and mutilated form in the folklore". 206 Instead of idealizing folk culture, therefore, he stressed the "need for bridging the gap between the modern and popular culture". 207

203. Secret Abstracts of Intelligence, 1938, Para 542.
206. Ibid., p.189.
207. Ibid., p.191.