chapter four

Emergence of Indian Nationalism

4.1. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Mo t historians of Indian nationalism have argued that the Indian political nation, in a modern sense of the term, did not exist prior to the establishment of British rule. Whether or not such a nation lay unselfconsciously embedded in Indian civilisation and then gradually evolved through history is a point that nationalist leaders and historians have incessantly debated over. Most recently, Prasenjit Duara has crtiqued such formulations as "teleological model of Enlightenment Hi rory" that gives the "contested and contingent nation" a false sense of unity.' There is, however, as of now, little disagreement that the Indian nationalism that confronted British imperialism in the nineteenth century, and celebrated its victory in the formation of the Indian nation-state in 1947, was a product of colonial modernity (see chapter 3.1 for more discussion on this). As the self-professed mission of the colonisers was to elevate the colonised from their present state of decadence to a desired state of progress towards modernity, it became imperative for the latter to contest that stamp of backwardness and assert that they too were capable of uniting and ruling themselves within the structural framework of a modern state. So the challenge of nationalism in colonial India was twofold: to forge a national unity and to claim its right to self-determination. India has been a plural society, everyone agrees, with various forms of diversity, such as region, language, religion, caste, ethnicity and so on. It was from this diversity that "a nation [was] in making" *(sic),* to use the phrase of Surendranath Banerjea, one of the earliest architects of this modern Indian nation. Agreement among historians, however, stops here. How did the Indians actually "imagine" their nation is a matter of intense controversy and ongoing debate.

At one end of the spectrum, Partha Chatterjee would argue that nationalism in India, which was assigned a privileged position by its Western educated political leadership, was a "different", but a

"derivative discourse" from the West.2 Ashis Nandy *also* thinks that Indian nationalism as a response to Western imperialism was "like all such re pon e , haped by what it wa responding to". The alternative version of univer alism rooted in Indian civilisation and propounded by men like Rabindranath Tagore or Mahatma Gandhithe "counter-modernist critic[s] of the imperial West"-was rejected by the Western educated middle-class India. While the alternative vision could unite India at a social rather than political level by accepting and creatively using difference, the Indian nationalists accepted the Western model of nation-stare as the defining principle of their nationalism.' C.A. Bayly (1998), on the other hand, has recently searched for the "pre-history of nationalism". Indian nationalism he thinks, built on pre-existing sense of territoriality, a traditional patriotism rationali ed by indigenous ideas of public morality and ethical government. But how those regional solidarities were consolidated into a broader cultural notion of India through their encounter with colonial rule and with each other is an issue of vigorous contestation. There were various influences and various contradictions in that process, variou levels and forms of consciousness. It is difficult ro construct a onc-dimen ional picture out of this virtual chaos. Yet, since a nation-stare was born, attempts have been made to reconstruct its biography. This does not of cour *e* mean that outside this grand narrative of the evolution of main rream nationalism that asserted its dominance in the formation of the Indian nation state, there were no alternative narratives of envisioning the nation.

The early nationalist school, as well as some of its later follower , while studying this process of nation-building, focused primarily on the supremacy of a nationalist ideology and a national consciousness to which all other forms of consciousness were assumed to have been subordinated. This awareness of nation was based on a commonly shared antipathy towards colonial rule, a feeling of patriotism and an ideology rooted in a sense of pride in India's ancient traditions. This school, in other words, ignored the inner conflicts within Indian society-which among other things, led to its division into two nation states — and assumed the existence of nation as a homogeneous entity with a single set of interests. In opposition to this, a new interpretation emerged in the Anglo-American academia and Rajat Ray has rather loosely labelled it as the "neo traditionalist" school.[4] This new interpretation echoed the old imperialist assertion of authors like Valentine Chirol, that politicisation of Indian society developed along the lines of traditional social formations, such as linguistic regions, castes or religious communities,

rather than the modern categories of class or nation. The most important catalysts of change in this context were the institutional innovations of the colonial state, notably the introduction of Western education and political representation. These new opportunities intersected with the traditional Indian social divisions and created a new status group-the Western-educated elite, which drew its members from the existing privileged indigenous collective , such as the bhadralok in Bengal, the Chitpavan Brahmans in Bombay or the Tamil Brahmans of Madras. The backward regions or the underprivileged groups that remained outside this limited political nation had no access to the modern instirutio.nal life of colonial India, within the confines of which the messages of early Indian nationalism reverberated. This went on until the end of World War One, when for the first time Mahatma Gandhi flung open the gates of constitutional politics to initiate the new era of mass nationalism.

If the 'neo traditionalist' historians studied Indian politics within the framework of the province, a few others have tracked these divisions further down to the level of localities. These latter writings, which have come to be identified as the 'Cambridge School' ,S have questioned the ontology of a unified nationalist movement, and have traced instead only a series of localised movements in colonial India. As imperialism was weak, since it could not function without the help of Indian collaborators, nationalism that grew out of conrestation with it was weak as well; it was nothing more than a battle between the two men of straws. *As* imperial rule depended on Indian collaborators, there was competition among them for favour of the colonial rulers. This led to emergence of various interest groups, which started to expand their constituencies as the British introduced local self-government and electoral system to rope in more collaborators. The national movement was led by these self-seeking leaders entirely to pursue their narrow individual or clannish interests. Leaders at various levels were tied through patron-client relationships and it was through these vertically structured loyalty networks that they bargained with the British for power and patronage. This school, in other words, completely derecognises the role of a nationalist ideology and *seeks* to explain nationalist politics in terms of a competition-collaboration syndrome. India was not a nation, but an aggregate of disparate interest groups and they were united as they had to operate within a centralised national administrative framework created by the British.[6] This cynical view of history, which took the mind and emotion out of its analysis and followed a narrow Narnierite model, reduced nationalist movement

to the state of "Animal Politics", as Tapan Raychaudhuri has de -
cribed it.7 Thi model of interpretation is, however, no longer sub-
scribed to even by its one time enthusiastic champions. C.A. Bayly's
book *Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (1998), referred to earlier,
is a reminder of that significant historiographical shift.

By contrast to this rather constricted political explanation of
nationalism, the orthodox Marxist school sought to analyse the class
character of the nationalist movement and tried to explain it in
terms of the economic developments of the colonial period, primar-
ily the rise of industrial capitalism and the development of a market
society in India. It identified the bourgeois leadership, which
directed this movement to suit their own class interests and neglec-
ted the interests of the masses and even to some extent betrayed
them. This narrow class approach and economic determinism of the
early Marxists like R.P. Dutt and Soviet historian V.I. Pavlov were
qualified in later Marxist writings of S.N. Mukherjee, Surnit Sarkar
and Bipan Chandra. Mukherjee pointed out the complexities of
nationalism, its multiple layers and meanings, the importance of
caste along with class and the simultaneous use of a traditional as
well as a modern language of politics.8 Sarkar showed the non-
bourgeois background of the Indian educated classes and argued
that they acted as "traditional" intellectuals, unconnected with the
processes of production, responding to world ideological currents
like liberalism or nationalism and "substituted" for the as yet inert
masses of India.9 In his later book, *Modern India* (1983), Sarkar has
warned us that "class and class-consciousness are analytical tools
which have to be used more skillfully and flexibly". He recognises
the legitimacy of nationalism, but does not ignore the "internal ten-
sions" within it. There were two levels of anti-imperialist struggles
in India, he contends, the one elite and the other populist. One need
not ignore either of the two, but look at the "complex interaction of
these [nvo] levels" through which was produced' the pattern of con-
tinuity through change" that constituted the dominant theme of the
period."

Bipan Chandra and a few of his colleagues have given Marxist
interpretation a distinctly nationalist orientation in their collective
enterprise, *India's Struggle for Independence* (1989). They argue
that Indian nationalist movement was a popular movement of vari-
ous classes, not exclusively controlled by the bourgeoisie. In colonial
India they demonstrate two types of contradictions. The primary
contradiction was between the interests of the Indian people and
those of British rule; but apart from that, there were also several

secondary contradictions within the Indian society, between classes, castes and religious communities. *As* the anti-colonial struggle made progress, the secondary contradictions were compromised in the interest of the primary contradiction and in this way the hegemony of a nationalist ideology was established. But the nationalist movement was not the movement of a single class or caste or a religious community, and leaders like Gandhi or jawaharlal Nehru recognised that India was not a structured nation but a nation in the making. There were various groups with conflicting interests and hence the need for constant compromises to avoid dass, caste or communal conflicts and to bring all those disparate groups under one umbrella type leadership. As a result, the Indian nationalist movement became a peoples' movement, though all the secondary conflicts were not satisfactorily resolved. [11]

A brave new intervention in this debate came in 1982 when the first volume of the *Subaltern Studies,* edited by Ranajit Guha, was published, with a provocative opening statement: "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism". This "blinkered historiography", he goes on to say, cannot explain Indian nationalism, because it neglects "the contribution made by the people *on their own,* that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism" .[12] This radical Marxist school, which derives its theoretical inputs from the writings of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, thinks that organised national movement which ultimately led to the formation of the Indian nation-state was hollow nationalism of the elites, while real nationalism was that of the masses, whom it calls the 'subaltern'. There was a "structural dichotomy" between the two domains of elite politics and that of the subalterns, as the two segments of Indian society lived in two completely separate and autonomous, although not hermetically sealed, mental worlds defined by two distinct forms of consciousness. Although the subalterns from rime to rime participated in political movements initiated by the bourgeoisie, the latter failed to speak for the nation. The bourgeois leadership, Ranajit Guha argued in a later essay, failed to establish its hegemony through either persuasion or coercion, as it was continually contested by the peasantry and the working class, who had different idioms of mobilisation and action, which the nationalist movement failed to appropriate. The new nation-state established the dominance of this bourgeoisie and its ideology, but it was a "dominance without hegemony".[u]

This particular historiographical strand has, however, undergone considerable shifts in recent years, with the focus moving from class

to community, from material analysis to the privileging of culture, mind and identity. Complaints have been raised by its one time stalwart contributor Sumit Sarkar about *the* "decline of the subaltern in *Subaltern Studies"*.[14] This is because gradually its focus has expanded from an exclusive preoccupation with forms and instances of subaltern protest to an incorporation of the politics of the colonial intelligentsia as well. "Elite and dominant groups can also have a subaltern past", argues Dipesh Chakrabarty as a justification for this shift in focus." It has been argued, following Edward Said (1978), that their subalterniry was constituted through the colonisation of their mind, which constructed their subjectivity. As for an understanding of nationalism of these subordinate colonial elites, the most important contribution has come from Parrha Chatterjee. His earlier assertion was that nationalism in India was essentially a "different" but "derivative discourse" from the West that developed through three distinct stages: the "moment of departure" when the nationalist consciousness was constructed through the hegemonising influence of the "post-Enlightenment rationalist thought", the "moment of manoeuvre" when the masses were mobilised in its support, and the "moment of arrival" when it became "a discourse of order" and "rational organization of power" .[16] This theory has been further developed in his later book *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), where he has argued about two domains of action of this intelligentsia-the material and the spiritual. In the inner spiritual domain they tried "to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western" and here they refused to allow colonial intervention; it was here that nationalism was already sovereign. In the outer material world, defined by the institutions of the colonial state, there was however little scope for them to avoid the influence of Western models. In the outer world the Indian elite contested the colonial rule of difference, while in the inner domain they sought to homogeni e Indian society by producing consent and dominating the space of subaltern dissent. So the two domains of elite and subaltern politics should now be studied in their separateness, Chatterjee persuades us, but in their "mutually conditioned historicities" .[17]

The subaltern view of nationalism-or   what is now being described as a major strand in "postcolonial" theory–has witnessed further development in Gyan Prakash's most recent book *Another Reason* (1999), where he has argued–in partial revision of Chatterjee-that "[t]here *was* no fundamental opposition between the inner-sphere of the nation and its outer life as a nation state; the latter was the farmer's existence at another, abstract level".[18] The fashioning of the

nation-state in India was no mere emulation of the Western model as thought by Chatterjee, but a rethinking and critiquing of the We t-ern modernity from the vantage point of India's spiritual-cultural heritage, combined with a scientific approach. This state, as contemplated by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, would be guided by the Indian principles of ethical conduct that privileged collective good, and in this sense, it would not be a "Western import". However, this very reliance on the state emanated from their failure to achieve national unity, which they had only visualised at a discursive level. Thus, as Praka h argues, "[rjhe nation-state was immanent in the very hegemonic project of imagining and normalizing a national community" and herein lay the contradiction of Indian nationalism.[19]

Outside these particular schools mentioned earlier, which are more or less clearly definable, there are, however, a whole range of other writings that have looked at Indian nationalism from diverse ideological vantage points and historiographical perspectives. Indian nationalism, in other words, is an intensely contested discursive ter-rain from where it is difficult to arrive at a dialectical middle ground or evolve an eclectic view that would be acceptable to all. If British rule sought to colonise Indian minds, the Indians also selectively appropriated, internalised and manipulated that colonial knowledge to mount their own resistance to colonial hegemony. But if main-stream nationalism a sumed the existence of a homogeneous nation that supposedly spoke with one voice, there have been persistent claims about exclusion, silences and suppression of discordant voices, such *as* tho e of women'? or dalits.[21] Jn other words, it is now argued by an ever-increasing group of historians that the forms of anti-colonial resistance and the ideologies that went behind them were visualised or constructed in multiple ways. It is difficult to deny the truth in Ania Loornba's observation that here "the 'nation' itself is a ground of dispute and debate, a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests".[22] India was a plural society and therefore Indian nationalism was bound to have many voices, as different classes, groups, communities and regions inter-preted their 'nation' in various, sometimes even contradictory, ways. Indians had many identities, like class identity, caste identity, reli-gious identity and so on; at different historical conjunctures differ-ent identities were articulated and intersected with each other. As the colonial state sought to reinforce and substantialise these fis-sures, the Indian nationalists tried to publicise an alternative dis-course of integration. Jawaharlal Nehru talked about "the old Indian ideal of a synthesis of differing elements and their fusion into

a common nationality". [23] Such a romantic assumption of fusion was, however, to avoid the hard realities of conflict and contradiction. Such complacency and failure to accommodate difference in the imagining of a national culture excluded some groups from the project of nationalism and the unity that was achieved proved to be fragile and hence so much dependence on a centralising nation-state. However, this critique need not take us to what Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal have warned us against, i.e., "[e]xulting over fragment" and "sliding into mindless anti-starism ". [24]

Instead of denying the existence of the nation at an emotional level, we will consider it as a site of political contestation. The normalising tendency of the mainstream nationalism notwithstanding, this dominant version of the nation was repeatedly contested from inside. But here a question remains: is this contestation incapable of resolution, or as Homi Bhabha has claimed, such "forces of social antagonism or contradiction cannot be transcended or dialectically surmounted'T" Or may be, we should not posit that question at all! For, to expect a final resolution and everyone living happily ever-after, is to think of an end of history. On the contrary, nation building is always a process of continuous adjustment, accommodation- and contestation. It is from this historiographical position of recognising the multiplicity of responses, rather than assuming any unilinearity of progress, that we will look at the emergence of nationalism in post-1857 India. We will focus on the different levels at which this consciousness was developing and try to analyse how such various forms of consciousness intersected and interacted with each other, how they viewed contradictions within Indian society and also defined their variegated contestatory positions vis-a-vis their common oppressive 'Other', the colonial regime.

4.2. AGRARIAN SOCIETY AND PEASANT DISCONTENT

In post-1857 India we witness first of all a continuation of some of the earlier forms of protest against various oppressive aspects of colonial rule, the tribal and peasant movements being the foremost among them. We have already discussed various aspects of peasant ideology and their political consciousness (chapter 3.2), many of these trends being present in the later period as well. But these later movements acquired some new features as well. First, we find in this period a greater awareness of colonial policies, laws and institutions among the peasantry, both tribal and non-tribal. And what is more important, some of them even embraced those institutions, the law courts for example, as an extended and legitimate space for venting

their anger or for seeking redress to existing injustices. The other important feature was the growing involvement of the educated middle-class intelligentsia as spokespersons for the aggrieved peasantry, thus adding new dimensions to their protests and linking their movements to a wider agitation against certain undesirable aspects of colonial rule. The nature of this outside intervention in peasant movements has been a subject of intense debate. Ravindcr Kumar, on the one hand, would think that these middle-class leaders performed an important and effective function as "a channel of communication, between rural society and the administration", at a time when the traditional channels and methods had become ineffective.[26] Ranajit Guha, on the other hand, has described the nineteenth century middle-class attitude to peasants as "a curious concoction of an inherited, Indian style paternalism and an acquired, western-style humanism". Their actions at every stage betrayed their innate collaborative mind and revealed "the futility of liberalism as a deterrent to tyranny".[27] But whatever might have been the nature or impact of this middle-class mediation, this was nonetheless a new feature of nearly all the peasant movements in the second half of the nineteenth century.

One of the major events in which the old and new features of peasant movements were equally visible was the indigo rebellion in Bengal in 1859-60. The oppressive aspects of the indigo plantation system (see chapter 2.5) had been the targets of peasant protest in the central and eastern Bengal for a long time. In 1832 in Barasar, the followers of Titu Mir had given the local indigo planters the fright of their lifetime. Almost around the same time the Faraizi movement under Dudu Mian in eastern Bengal had the indigo planters as one of their selected targets of attack. The oppression of the planters increased in the second half of the nineteenth century as indigo lost its economic importance as an export item and the Union Bank, which was the chief financier for the planters, failed in 1847. The oppressed peasantry continued to bear with the coercive planters for a while, but their attitudes changed when in May 1859 a sympathetic john Peter Grant took up office as the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and with his encouragement some of the district officers-though not all-began to take a pro-peasant position, thinking that the coercive methods of the planters went against the ethos of free enterprise.

The indigo disturbances started in the autumn of 1859 when peasants refused to accept advances from the planters in a wide region in the districts of Nadia, Murshidabad, and Pabna. The jessore peasants

joined hands in the spring sowing season of 1860, by which time the entire delta region of Bengal had become affected. As the planters' men tried to coerce the peasants to sow indigo, they met with stiff resistance and sometimes their Indian agents were subjected to organised social boycott. The substantial peasants and village headmen provided leadership. The local zamindars, who resented the European planters usurping their prime position of power in the country ide, often sympathised with the ryors, sometimes even offering leadership; but soon they lost control of the situation. The panic-stricken pro-planter lobby in Calcutta had a temporary legislation pas ed in March 1860, compelling the peasants to fulfill their contractual obligations to sow indigo. The courts were flooded with such cases and some of the overzealous magistrates forced the peasants to cultivate the hated crop. But Grant refused to extend the legislation beyond its life of six months and forbade the magistrates to compel peasants to accept advances to cultivate indigo. The peasants also took their cases to courts, which were inundated with such law suites. The movement at this stage turned into a no-rent campaign and as the planters sought to evict their defaulting tenants, the latter went to court to establish their right as occupancy ryots under the Rent Act X of 1859.

In this whole episode another important feature was the intervention of the educated middle classes and some of the European missionaries. Dinabandhu Mitra published in September 1860 a play in Bengali called *Neel Darpan* {literally, 'blue mirror'), which depicted the atrocities of the indigo planters in the boldest possible colour. The play was translated into English by the famous Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta and was published by Rev. James Long of the Church Missionary Society to bring it to the notice of the liberal political circles in India and London. For this, Long was tried for libel in the Calcutta Supreme Court and was fined Rs. 1,000 with a jail sentence of one month. His conviction enraged the Calcutta literati, as the Indian press, particularly the *Hindoo Patriot* and *Somprakasb* took up the cause of the indigo peasants, and the British Indian Association came to their side as well.[28] Although their appeal was to the liberal political opinion among the imperial bureaucrats and it betrayed their unflagging faith in British justice system," these middle-class protagonists, however, succeeded in bringing the peasants' issue to the wider arena of institutional politics and this resulted in a growing pressure on the planters to behave. By 1863, the movement was over, as by that time indigo cultivation, which was itself an anachronism before its dissolution began, had almost disappeared from Bengal.

But indigo plantation survived in the backyard of the empire, in the "relatively remote and backward region" of Bihar, where the oppressive system was allowed to continue without much government interference. Indeed, after the disturbances of 1859-60, much of the indigo investment from Bengal shifted to Bihar, where it continued to grow until an artificial dye was invented in 1898. But still the industry continued into the twentieth century, even experiencing a brief revival during World War One. There were instances of resistance in Darbhanga and Champaran in 1874 and then again in 1907–8, by the indigo cultivators under the leadership of rich or substantial peasants. But these movements were suppressed by the planters and their musclemen, with only occasional mild intervention from the government, which could secure for the peasants only some limited concessions." Indigo plantation in Champaran had to wait for Gandhi's intervention in 1917 for its complete demise (see chapter 6.2).

In Bengal–where the spirit of rebellion had been kindled among the peasants of eastern and central districts, particularly where the Faraizi movement had prepared a moral ground for greater righteousness-dissent and resistance persisted through to the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The next most important event was the forming in 1873 of the Agrarian League in the Yusufshahi pargana of Pabna district, where the oppression of a few new landlords pushed the peasants to the threshold of tolerance. In this area, the rate of rent had been continually going up, along with the illegal cesses or abwabs.[31] But the main grievance of the pea antry was against the concerted attempts of the landlords to destroy their occupancy rights by denying them leases in the same plot of land continually for twelve years, which would entitle them to the protection of the law (Rent Act X of 1859). The movement, which was mainly spearheaded by the substantial peasants, but aided by the lower peasantry as well, remained largely non-violent and within the bounds of law, with a profound faith in the British justice system. Indeed, the peasant ambition was to become the true subjects of the Queen; they formed the Agrarian League to raise money to take the landlords to courts, which were inundated with rent suites."

What was more important, the Pabna experiment was repeated soon in other districts of eastern and central Bengal where the zamindars had recently resorted to what Benoy Chaudhuri ha described as "high landlordism", i.e., defying all laws in the management of their estates, enhancing rent at their will, imposing illegal abwabs and persistently trying to destroy the occupancy rights of the

substantial peasants. Agrarian leagues came up in Dacca, Mymensingh, Tripura, Bakarganj, Faridpur, Bogra and Rajshahi districts, where civil courts were choked with rent suites. Although some leaders were Hindus and there was remarkable communal harmony, these were also the regions where Faraizi movement had a large following and Naya Mian, the son of Dudu Mian, was himself active in organising the agrarian combination in Mehendigunge in 1880. As a result of the movement, agrarian relations in Bengal became sharply polarised, and the mounting tension accelerated the passage of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. It provided for relatively greater protection of occupancy rights of the substantial peasants who leased land in the same village (not just the same piece of land) continuously for twelve years. But the rights of the lesser peasantry remained undefined as before. The ocher interesting feature of the Pabna uprising and its aftermath was the ambivalence of the educated middle classes. The Calcutta native press, which had been able to take an unequivocal position against the European planters, now was divided when the oppression of the indigenous landlords was under attack. The same *Hindoo Patriot,* along with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* took an overtly pro-landlord position, while *Bengalee* and the Anglo-Indian press ridiculed them when their grandiose reports on peasant violence turned out to be mere landlord propaganda.'! This was a dilemma which the middle-class Indian nationalists suffered from since the beginning of their career and which they never succeeded in overcoming completely.

Peasant protest against landlord oppression was not confined to Bengal alone. The fight of the Moplah peasants against their jenmis continued in Malabar (see chapter 3.2), while in Sitapur district of Awadh and in Mewar in Rajasthan peasants resisted rent enhancements and imposition of illegal cesses by their landlords in 1860 and 1897 respectively." Religion still played a large role in peasant rebellions as before; in Punjab, for example the attempts to purify Sikhism led to the Kuka revolt in 1872. In all these regions the tradition of peasant militancy continued into the first decade of the twentieth century, ultimately merging into the larger Gandhian tradition of mass movement in 1921. This merger, of course, was not without its own tensions, given the perennial dilemmas of the middle-class leadership (see chapter 6).

In Maharashtra, on the other hand, the peasants had another enemy to fight against; here they clashed head-on with their moneylenders. Although contemporary colonial officials and some recent historians have referred to these events of 1875 as the Deccan Riots,

the peasants looked at it as a revolt or *band,* and thus, as David Hardiman has argued, "incorporated their uprising into a long tradition of *revolt* in Maharashtra"." It took place, as Ravinder Kumar tells us, because of a "redistribution *of* social power in the villages of Maharashtra".36 The roots of discontent lay in the changing relationship between the Maratha Kunbi peasants and the *sabukar* moneylenders. The sahukars used to lend money to the Kunbi peasants in the past, but were never interested to take more intimate control of the village economy. The introduction of the ryotwari system, however, changed the situation, as each peasant individually needed more credit, and the creation of property right in land and the courts protecting such rights created a land market and hence there was now more demand for land. The moneylenders now lent money by mortgaging the peasants' land at a high interest rate and in case of failure to repay, he took possession of the land through a decree of the court. Caste prejudices prevented the moneylenders from touching the plough; so the same land was now leased out to their former owner-cultivators, who thus became tenants in their own land.. The amount of land transfer that took place in Maharashtra during this period and to what extent that caused the riots are of course matters of controversy. Ian Catanach (1993) agrees that there were land transfers, but does not accept Ravinder Kumar's position that it was the main reason behind peasant discontent. Neil Charlesworth, on the other hand, completely dismisses this factor, as he believes that only about 5 per cent of the cultivable land in Deccan had passed on to the hands of the Marwari or Gujarati moneylenders at the time of the riots. [37] But one has to admit that this smaJl proportion of land was the most fertile in the whole region and their loss would therefore be much resented. [38]

A situation for open conflict was soon created when the government increased the revenue rates in 1867 on grounds of extension of cultivation and rise in agricultural prices. In the taluka of Indapur, the increase in revenue demands was on the average of 50 per cent, but in some villages it was as high *as* 200 per cent. Charlesworth thinks that the new taxes were hardly the reasons behind the riots, as villages most affected by the disturbances in the Ahmadnagar district did not face any tax revision at all, while some of the revised talukas remained completely passive during the whole period. But even then, one can hardly ignore the fact that these new rates were announced at a time that could not have been more inappropriate. The cotton boom in Deccan, created by the artificial demand generated by the American Civil War, had just crashed after the end of the

war. The peasants were impoverished and were bound to become hopelessly indebted; the rise in revenue in such a situation would inevitably increase panic.

The Kunbis made appeals for a revision of the new rates; but their traditional leadership had been completely out of touch with the new institutions and their novel demand for a new rational and legal language of communication. *The* Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, the new association of the middle-class intellectuals, now intervened and presented in 1873 a "Report" or a case for a revision of the revenue rates. It also sent volunteers to the villages to arouse the Kunbi pea - ants against the new rates. Pressurised by this, a Ravinder Kumar argues, the Bombay government now granted a major concession, that in case of a failure to pay revenue, first the movable properties of a peasant would be attached; his land would be put up for auction only if his movable properties proved to be insufficient. This conces- sion actually became the source of conflict between the peasants and moneylenders, as the latter in 1874 refused to offer credit to the peasants to pay their land revenue because of what they thought a lack of sufficient security. But the riots of 1875 were not the result of this single factor, a Kumar further argue ; they rernrned from a combination of factors, uch as the dislocation of the economy by the American Civil War, an ill-conceived revi ion of land tax, agitation initiated by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and finally the longstanding hostilities between the Kunbi peasants and the money- lenders.

The riots first broke out on 12 May 1875 at a village called Supe in Bhimthadi taluka and soon it spread to other villages in Poona and Ahmadnagar districts. A wide area, about sixty-five kilometres north to south and a hundred kilometres east to west was affected by the disturbances. Everywhere the Gujarati and Marwari moneylenders were attacked not simply because they were "outsiders", but because they were thought to be more avaricious. They also lived in the villages and therefore were more exposed to such attacks, unlike the Brahman moneylenders who usually resided in better-protected cities. What is more significant, there was very little violence against the person of the sahukars; only their debt bonds were seized and destroyed. Moreover, violence was resorted to only if there was resistance in handing over these legal documents. This very feature distinguishes these riots from the average genre of "grain riots" engi- neered by poverty-stricken peasants. The rioters had clearly identi- fied their target, an instrument of oppression and dominance, and thus seemed to have been quite aware of the new institutional

framework of power relations within which they had of late found themselves locked in. And if the British had not acted promptly in suppressing the revolt, the rioting spirit was highly likely to have spread to the whole of Maharashtra. The Bombay government acted promptly in preventing the recurrence of such rioting; the peasants were protected against such future land grabbing through the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879.

What i important, however, is the fact that in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth, such occurrences of pea ant protests against moneylenders were quite common throughout India, as colonial rule had significantly altered the relationship between the two groups in the political economy of the village. And everywhere we find similar patterns of peasant behaviour, i.e., little violence against persons, but destruction of the legal debt bonds of the moneylenders. This happened in Saharanpur district of western UP in 1857, in Nasik in 1868, in the ghat regions between Bombay and Poona in 1874, in Ajmer district of Rajasthan in 1891, in Punjab in 1914 and in east Bengal in 1930.[39] Very clearly such disturbance were the reactions of Indian rural society against the adverse impact of the British land system, the laws of property right and courts, which appeared as alien impositions from above that tended to turn their world upside down.

However, it was not just the symbols of British rule or changes brought about by it that were being targeted by the peasants; there were also overtly anti-British peasant movements, particularly in the ryorwari areas. Along with the attacks on moneylenders, there were also no-tax campaigns in a wide area of Maharashtra Deccan in 1873-74 in response to the revenue hike by the Bombay government in the 1860s and 1870s. Although the government on this occasion offered some concessions, it refused to tone down the built-in inflexibility of its tax system. So when again in 1896-97 there was a crop failure resulting in a severe famine, there was no remission of revenue, leading to a widespread no-tax campaign, particularly in the coastal districts of Thane and Kolaba. In Khandesh and Dharwar districts, the sahukars refused to pay the land tax as there was a harvest failure, and the peasantry withheld payment of all taxes. One of the major features of the movement, as Hardiman notes, was its strength in relatively more prosperous regions which were least affected by the famine. This was an "agitation of landlords and rich peasants", while the mediation of the urban leadership from Bombay and Poona played a significant role too, inviting strong-arm tactics from the government. By the end of 1897 it was all over. But

peasant unrest erupted again in 1899–1900 in Gujarat, which suffered from a bad harvest and famine. Led once again by the richer peasantry, Kheda, Surat and Broach districts wimessed nearly a universal refusal to pay land taxes; but here the outside urban leadership could not play any important role. Here too, the government broke the movement by coercion and threat of confiscation of the defaulter's property."

A more direct and effective confrontation between the peasants and the colonial state took place in 1907 in Punjab, where in the Chenab Canal Colony the local government proposed to introduce a new law which would control the lives of the settlers more intimately. It proposed to control inheritance of land in the canal settlements, fine all those who would break the canal colony regulations and enhance the water taxes. Peasants were organised by their more educated members to protest against the draconian law; mammoth public meetings were held and petitions were sent. At this stage, the involvement of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, the two leaders of the Lahore Indian Association, and the support of the Singh Sabha and Arya Sarnaj, enlarged the scope of the movement both vertically and horizontally. The peasants held large demonstrations and withheld the payment of all taxes; riots broke out in large cities like Amritsar, Lahore and Rawalpindi. The Punjab government initially misjudged the magnitude of the tension and mistook it to be instigated entirely by outsiders. So it deported Rai and Singh and banned all public meetings; but that did not lead to any abatement of unrest, which now affected the army, as Punjab was the most important catchment area for army recruitment. So ultimately on 26 May, Viceroy Minto vetoed the new act and the measure had a miraculous effect on the peasantry, who hailed it as "a vindication of British justice"." In peasant consciousness, the distant ruler was still the saviour, while the enemy was the corrupt official closer at home. Such ambiguity notwithstanding, they fought against what they thought to be unjust taxes or undesirable interference in their traditional way of life. In this, Punjab was no exception. No tax campaigns were reported in this period from different parts of India—from Awadh in the north in 1879, from Cambay state in Gujarat in the west in 1890, from Tanjore district in the south in 1892-93 and from Assam in the northeast in 1893-94.[42]

Along with the unrest among the settled agriculturists, the earlier tradition of millenarian movements among the tribal peasants also continued well into the post-1857 period, a major example of this tradition being the Munda *u/gu/an* of 1899-1900, under the

guidance of a charismatic religious leader, Birsa Munda. The alien-
ation of Munda land and the advent of dikus had spurred an agita-
tion under their leaders in 1890-95. This movement gradually came
under the leadership of Birsa, who for two years mobilised the
Munda tribal peasants from a wide region in Chota Nagpur in Bihar,
by promising to protect them from an apocalyptic disaster. Rumours
spread about his occult powers, ability to heal diseases and perform
miracles. In tribal imagination, he appeared as a me siah who could
turn British bullets into water. He took them on a pilgrimage to
Munda holy places and the way held large public meetings, talk-
ing about a golden past or *satjug* that was gone and the dark *kaljug*
that had befallen, when the Munda land or *disum* was ruled by
Queen Mandodari, the wife of the demon King Ravana–probably a
metaphor for the Raj under Queen Victoria. [43] What came out in
these meetings was the tribal peasants' antipathy towards the for-
eigners, the dikus=-rhe landlords and the moneylenders and their
patrons, the sahibs (Europeans)—both officials and Christian mis-
sionaries. The grounds were thus prepared for a massive anti-
colonial tribal uprising that started during the Christmas of 1899. It
targeted churches, temples, policemen and other symbols of the new
regime and was finally defeated by the government forces. What was
important, however, about the Munda ulgulan was their greater
awareness of the wider political realities of the colonial state. Tribal
territoriality notwithstanding, Birsa's ambitions were no longer
localised. The aim of his movement was not merely to drive out the
dikus, but "to destroy their enemies and put an end to the British
Raj" and establishing in its place "a Birsa Raj and a Birsaite reli-
gion" .44 It was this political awareness and ability to connect to the
broad picture that was new in the late nineteenth century tribal
movements.

    Another new feature of the tribal peasant life of this period was
the "unquiet woods", as Ramchandra Guha has described it (1991).
The people in the woods became restless as government regulations
threatened to deprive them of their customary user rights on forest
resources. The attention of the British was drawn to the vast forestry
of India in 1806, primarily because of the imperial demand for oak
timber needed for shipbuilding for the Royal Navy. And then the
rapid construction of railways in the mid-nineteenth century and the
huge demand for sleepers that it created, made conservation of for-
ests a major concern for the colonial state. In 1864 a forest depart-
ment was started, followed by a Government Forests Act passed in
1865. It was further tightened by the Indian Forests Act of 1878,

which established complete government monopoly over Indian forestlands. Needless to say, this imperial need to reserve forests for commercial timber production went against the previous unhindered customary user rights of the tribal peasants and impinged on their principal sources of livelihood. The act divided the forestlands in India into three categories: "reserved", protected" and "unclassified". The "reserved" forests were under complete government monopoly where felling of trees was totally prohibited; from the "protected" forests the traditional right holders could collect timber for personal use, but not for sale. Initially they could do it free of cost; but gradually the government imposed and then enhanced user charges."

By 1900, 20 per cent of India's land area had come under government forest administration, which not only redefined properry rights there, but also threatened the customary ecological balance. This change imperilled two groups of tribal peasants, the hunter-gatherers and those who depended on *jhum* (slash and burn) cultivation, and their resi tance to forest laws became endemic in the second half of the nineteenth century in practically all parts of India. To give a few examples, commercial forestry and the game laws that accompanied it, prohibiting subsistence hunting, threatened the Chenchus of Hyderabad with virtual extinction and they took to banditry. On the other hand, the Baigas of central India, the Hill Reddis of Hyderabad and the Bison Marias of Basrar continued with their hunting rituals in defiance of the laws. The government attempted to stop jhum cultivation, because it was considered to be a primitive method of agriculture and against the interests of commercialisation of forests; but these attempts met with various kinds of resistance. The Baigas often migrated to neighbouring areas, thus depriving the government of a useful source of labour. Sometimes, they refused to pay truces or defiantly resorted to shifting cultivation in prohibited zones. The Saora tribal of the Ganjam Agency, on the other hand, often got involved in frontal confrontation with the state by clearing reserved forests for jhum and courting arrests for the violation of laws.[46]

The state monopoly and commercial exploitation of forests also brought outside intruders into the tribal territories, many of whom used a considerable amount of coercive power to exploit the tribal peasants. This situation in turn brought stiffer resistance, as it happened in the Gudem and Rampa hill tracts of Andhra Pradesh, inhabited by the Koya and Konda Dora tribes. The first few rebellions or *[ituris* in this region between 1839 and 1862, were initiated

by the local *muttadars* or estate holders, who found their power curbed and rights denied by the intrusion of the new outside control. However, in the late nineteenth century some other changes took place that brought the masses of tribal peasants into the Rampa rebellion of 1879. *As* the commercial use of forestry began, and the construction of roads opened the hills to commercial penetration, traders and sahukars from the plains came to the mountainous regions and gradually took hold pf tribal lands by confiscating properties of the indebted peasants and muttadars. The prohibition of shifting cultivation *(podu),* restrictions on the use of forest resources and a new tax on toddy tested the tolerance levels of the peasants and they looked to the rnuttadars for leadership.

The fituri broke out first in Rampa in March 1879, and then spread to the neighbouring regions in Gudem. The major targets of attack were the mansabdars, the British and their police stations and the trader-contractors from the plains. The leadership was provided by the muttadars, but in many cases this elite participation was secured by mass pressure and arm-twisting. The villagers supported the rebels in many ways as they were in general opposed to the government; but the fituri of 1879-80, as David Arnold argues, never took "the form of a mass uprising or jacquerie", for mass participation was neither required nor necessary, as the goal of the rebels was only to cleanse the hills of outsiders, and not to take their rebellion beyond their demarcated territory. [47] The British armed intervention restored order in the region by December 1880, but firuri was revived again six years later in 1886 in Gudem, when religion played a significant role, giving it the character of a messianic or millenarian movement. The tradition of firuri survived in the hills of Gudem and Rampa, but by the 1920s it was seeking to extend to the outer world by trying to connect itself to the wider tradition of Gandhian mass movements (see chapter 6.3).

In the princely states too, where the local rulers tried to enforce restrictions on shifting cultivation, the tribal peasants resisted such efforts. The Marias and Murias of Bastar in 1910 openly attacked the police stations and killed foreigners and could be brought under control only when a British army contingent was caJled in. The tribal peasants on the fringes of settled agricultural areas were affected equally by forest laws. This was particularly true in the hill areas where terraced farming predominated, accompanied by animal husbandry as a substitute source of income. Such deprivation obviously brought resistance in various forms. In Madras Presidency, for example, forest crimes increased manifold; in Travancore, the peasants

refused to cooperate with the forest department officials. In the Thane district of coastal Maharashtra the protest took a violent turn," while in the Jungle Mahal in Midnapur district of Bengal, the Santhal peasants looted village markets and fisheries. [49]

In the Himalayan forest tracts of UP, in Tehri Garhwal, which was a princely state and in Kumaun, which was a British administered territory, the local peasants' anger against forest laws was vented in a number of interesting ways. In Tehri Garhwal, the peasants followed the old tradition of *dhandak,* which was protesting against the tyranny of the officials and appealing for justice to the sovereign. When the local raja tried to enforce stricter conservancy laws, the peasants protested in 1886 and then again in 1904. Some concessions from the raja failed to satisfy the peasants and in December 1906 they became violent in their protest against the local conservator and the raja had to appeal to the British for assistance. In Kumaun, the protests were directly against the British, as the peasants resisted the system of *utar* or forced labour and the tyrannous forest management. Mostly this protest was of a non-confrontational nature, Like the defiance of law, theft of timber, incendiarism and finally, purposefully firing the reserved forests." In the forests of central India too, where the consistent colonial policy was to transform the forest tribes like the Bhils either into settled agriculturists or into a servile labour force, the tribaJs resisted such efforts in various ingenuous ways.[51] The Bhils of the Dangs in western India had under the pressure of the British discontinued around 1840s their usual raids on the villages of the plains of Khandesh to claim their customary *giras* (dues), as a mark of asserting their shared sovereignty. Instead, they were now paid directly by the British, but they lost in the process their hold over the forestland. Although there was no sustained overt protest and the Bhils seemed to have accepted the centrality of the Raj in their daily existence, yet they could not completely reconcile themselves to this alienation and subjection, as the memories of a Bhil raj persisted. Such memories from time to rime were manifested in protest movements, such as those in 1860, 1907, 1911 and 1914, when they defied the local representatives of the state, destroyed their documents, ransacked forest department offices or set fire to forests. [52] Similar forms of resistance could also be found in the forest areas of Punjab, where peasants resorted to unauthorised felling, lopping and grazing, deliberate firing and attacking the symbols of new forest management, like the forest guards or the boundary lines."

Even when there was no overt resistance, use of such tools of protest, which James C. Scott (1985) has described as the "weapon of

the weak", ha not been uncommon in peasant history. Absence of direct violent resistance, therefore, did not always mean a general approval of an uncle irable world order. And when protests did occur, the colonial government often showed a patronising attitude towards the 'wild' tribes-stereotyped as the 'noble savage'—who were believed to be honest, sincere, brave, but simple folk, who could be easily manipulated by the deceitful plains people. So when rebellions occurred in the hills, these were often looked at as instigated by outsiders and the rebels were sometimes depicted as "naughty boys making a disturbance in the schoolroom when they believed the school master's attention was momen tarily diverted"." But the rebellions were suppre sed ruthlessly nonetheless, as they posed challenges to colonial mastery and were likely to be taken advantage of by the nationalists. The tradition of tribal resistance, for example, survived in the hills of UP, to be appropriated later in the 1920 by the wider stream of Gandhian mass politics, as it happened also in Midnapur in Bengal or the Gudem-Rampa region of Andhra Pradesh (see chapter 6.3).

In post-1857 India peasant and tribal revolts occurred in all parts of the country; but they remained disjointed or i olated and localised movements. To a large extent, this was due to the complex class structure in Indian agrarian society, which had great regional variarions. As discussed earlier also, economic categories sometimes coincided with and sometimes cut across the cultural categories of religion and caste. Peasants identified themselves more with their cultural groups rather than with the economic category of class. Some historians have argued that it was 'community' and not class, which was the main focus of the peasants' mental world. It was their religious or caste identity, which defined their position in this world, and therefore it was easier to mobilise the peasantry along these lines." Sometimes class and community organisations converged in rural societies, particularly when religious or ethnic boundaries neatly coincided with class cleavages. Peasant mobilisation was easier in such situations; but it would become problematic when class and cultural divisions cut across. Caste or religious affinity between the oppressor and the oppressed sometimes minimised the possibility of conflict; in other cases caste or religious identity of one group of rebels alienated the other possible participants in the rebellion. However, it is also a fact that community organisations often proved to be useful tools for peasant mobilisation; on such occasions it was a source of strength rather than weakness.

The series of peasant uprisings that took place throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries seriously contested the

hegemony of the colonial state. The Indian National Congress after the advent of Gandhi tried to harness this force for its struggle against British rule. But Ranajit Guha has argued that peasant movements of the earlier period should not be looked at as the "prehistory of the 'Freedom Movement'"; they have a history of their *own*.56 As we have mentioned earlier, controversies exist over the question of leadership or about the connections between the two levels of politics, that of the elites and the subalterns. In the late nineteenth century a section of the Western-educated middle class were trying to project themselves as the leaders of the nation, representing the grievances and interests of all sections of the Indian population, the peasants included. Guha and other subaltern historians have argued that peasants were capable of organising themselves and could articulate their own grievances; intervention of the outside elite leaders was only to appropriate these movements for their own political benefits. Only rarely such middle-class leaders exhibited the same radicalism as that of the peasantry. A major exception perhaps was Vasudeo Phadke, who in 1879 gave leadership to an armed peasant revolt in the villages to the southwest of Poona. But everywhere else, as Hardiman has emphasised, their "enterprise was carried on in a spirit of compromise and timidity".57 But despite this alleged frailty, these urban middle-class leaders performed an important role: they tried to connect the localised and isolated peasant and tribal movements to a wider struggle against the undesirable aspects of colonial rule. They acted as crucial channels of communication between the peasants and the colonial state-a role, which the traditional peasant leadership was no longer equipped enough to perform effectively. But they had their dilemmas too, for although they empathised with the suffering peasants, they did not want to see their familiar world disordered. These dilemmas and their ambivalence we will understand better if we look at their social background and ideological inclinations.

4.3. THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS AND THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM

Nationalism at an organised level at the top, as against peasant anti-colonial resistance described above, emerged in India in the late nineteenth century. The rise of nationalism, it is often argued, was favoured by industrialisation, urbanisation and print capitalism. And nationalism in the developing world of Asia and Africa, as Benedict Anderson (1983) tells us, is supposed to have followed one or the other model developed in the West. This theory, which denies

intellectual agency to the people of Asia in shaping their own history, has recently come under criticism from a wide variety of ideological positions. Partha Chatterjee, for example, has argued that if the West defined subjectivity and prescribed our predicament, and also imagined for us the forms of our resistance to colonial regimes, then what was really left for us to imagine? He argues therefore that long before the political struggle for power began, the Indian society was imagining its nation in a private cultural sphere, even though the state was in the hands of the colonisers. It was here that they imagined their own domain of sovereignty and constructed an Indian modernity that was modern but not Western.[51] It was from here, i.e., from this cultural construction of a space for autonomy in the early nineteenth century, that Indian nationalism started its career.

C.A. Bayly, on the other hand, has traced the roots of Indian nationalism to its pre-colonial days; it emanated from what he describes as "traditional patriotism", which was "a socially active sentiment of attachment to land, language and cult" that developed in the subcontinent long before the process of Westernisation (read modernisation) had begun.[59] In India of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such sentiments were emerging on a regional basis as homeland was being defined by various terms like *desh, uatan* or *nadu,* where identities were gradually taking shape with the development of regional languages and religious affiliations. But although regionally centred at Bengal, Maharashtra, Awadh or Mysore, their isolation broke down through various means of communication. The political legitimacy of the Mughal empire was recognised throughout Hindustan, which was thought to be the abode of both Hindus and Muslims; and cultural barriers melted down through commercialisation and regular pilgrimages. As the East India Company established its hegemony, Bayly argues, this traditional patriotism manifested itself through various indigenous critiques of foreign rule deviating from the established ethical traditions of good government and through irate reactions to Christian missionary propaganda. Finally, it burst forth through numerous acts of resistance, participated by both the princes and the commoners, culminating in the revolt of 1857. After the revolt, a modern sector of politics gradually evolved in India, through rapid spread of education, development of communication systems, such as the railways and telegraph, and the emergence of a new public space created by the colonial institutions. Although "old patriotism" did not completely die out during this period, it was significantly reworked

and reshaped—if at this point we may go back to Chatterjee-to cre-
ate a new colonial modernity that was different from that of the
West. We may trace here very briefly the initial phase of that com-
plex and ongoing transformatory process that tried to fuse together,
not always seamlessly though, all theose regional, local and frag-
mentary identities into a modern 'nation'.

The political history of India in the post-1857 period—when the
political contest with the colonial regime began at a more modern
institutionalised public space—is multifaceted. First of all, in colo-
nial policies a conservative reaction set in after the revolt of 1857.
Attempts were made to rehabilitate and strengthen the landed aris-
tocracy, deemed to be the "natural" leaders of the people. They
could "alone command the allegiance of the masses" and could
therefore be the reliable allies of a vulnerable colonial state.[60] The
Imperial Durbar of 1877, where Queen Victoria assumed the title of
the Empress of India, and which Lord Lytton, the then viceroy,
organised in great splendour and pomp, despite famine conditions
occurring in some parts of che country, gave che place of precedence
to the native princes in the new imperial social order.[61] Apart from
them, big zamindars from now on began to play a prominent role
within the colonial administrative set up. The British Indian Associa-
tion was the first major voluntary organisation in India founded in
1851 in Calcutta, representing primarily the local landlord interests.
It began to play a prominent role after the Indian Councils Act of
1861, which provided for limited Indian representation in the legis-
lative councils. Members of this association were usually nominated
to the legislative councils and their dominance continued until the
Act of 1892 introduced limited electoral system. But although "old"
elements continued to dominate this organisation, it was also new in
many respects and performed some very new roles.

For example, unlike its predecessor the Landholders' Society that
had many non-official Anglo-Indians among its members, the British
Indian Association was exclusively Indian in its membership. And it
was created on the eve of the renewal of the Charter of the East
India Company to send petitions to the British parliament to express
the legitimate demands of the Indian subjects. It initially tried to
coordinate the efforts of the three presidencies in this regard by
opening up branches in Bombay and Madras. But regional barriers
ultimately stood in the way, as two other similar associations, the
Madras Native Association and the Bombay Association, came into
existence in 1852 for the same purpose. The three presidency associ-
ations sent three separate petitions to London, but—interestingly-

all of them made almost identical demands. What they wanted was a greater participation in the administration of their own country and what they complained against were the perplexing "dual system" of government, expensive and incompetent administration, legislations unresponsive to the feelings of the people, high taxation, salt and opium monopolies and the neglect of education and public works. They were not against British rule as such, but felt, as the Calcutta petition made it dear, that they had "not profited by their connection with Great Britain, to the extent which they had a right to look for". [62] Thus, the educated members of the landed gentry who headed these associations were contributing to the evolution of a modern sector in Indian politics. But their agitation over charter was treated with "almost contemptuous indifference" by the authorities in London; as Mehrotra tells us, the new Government of India Act of 1853 incorporated none of their demands. For, ironically, it was not the educated Indians, but the uneducated and uninformed that the Raj was expecting its gravest danger from. [63]

This official assumption of an unquestionable loyalty of the landlords and educated Indians was premised on the latter's self-professed faith in the providential nature of British rule and their scornful attitude towards the peasant rebellions of the first half of the nineteenth century and later disapproval of the revolt of 1857. But this was a misconception, to say the least. For behind this loyalism there was also a growing awareness of the ignominy involved in their state of subordination. The unabashed show of loyalty by the Calcutta literati during the revolt of 1857 also came with a sense of dilemma; as the *Hindoo Patriot* wrote in an introspective editorial: "This loyalty ... springs nearer from the head than from the heart"." It was from the early nineteenth century that the Calcutta intellectuals had begun to criticise what they considered to be certain undesirable aspects of colonial rule. Rammohun Roy started a modest constitutional agitation on such demands as the separation of powers, freedom of the press, trial by jury and the Indianisation of the services,[65] many of these issues being later ta.ken over by the members of the Young Bengal. In 1841, at a meeting of the short-lived Deshahitaishini Sabha [Society for the Amelioration of the Country], a young Derozian, Saradaprasad Ghosh noted with angst that "our deprivation of the enjoyment of political liberty is the cause of our misery and degradation'l.f The precocious image of an empire based on interracial partnership nurtured by an earlier generation of Dwarkanath Tagore, was ruthlessly shattered by the controversy over the so-called "Black Acts", which proposed to place

the British born subjects under the criminal jurisdiction of ordinary courts from which they were previously exempt. The act was passed in 1850, but was put on hold for fear of a white rebellion. The controversy around it, however, drove a wedge between the two racial elements in colonial society. The same year, despite united protests from the Hindus of Madras, Nagpur and Calcutta, the government went ahead with the Lex Loci Act, which gave the Christian converts the right to inherit their ancestral properties. The act, the Hindus widely believed, would open floodgates to Christian conversion.

The growing racial tension, threat of conversion and the reforming zeal of the Benthamite administrators made the educated Indians stand back and have a hard look at their own culture. This resulted in a process, which Bernard Cohn (1987) has described as the "objectification" of culture, with the educated Indians defining their culture as a concrete entity that could easily be cited, compared, referred to and used for specific purposes. This new cultural project, which partly manifested itself through the social and religious reforms of the nineteenth century (see chapter 3.1), was encoded in the word "Renaissance". Its purpose was to "purify" and "rediscover" an Indian civilisation that would be conformant with the European ideals of rationalism, empiricism, monotheism and individualism. It was meant to show that Indian civilisation was by no means inferior to that of the West, but in one sense, in its spiritual accomplishments, was even superior to it. Evidence of this search for a superior national culture could be found in the development of a patriotic regional literature in Bangla, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, in the evolution of new art forms, in the search for purer forms of classical music and in the construction of new ideals of womanhood. All of these were projected as modern, but were predicated upon the spiritual superiority of the Indian past. In other words, as already mentioned, this movement was meant "to fashion a 'modern' national culture that *is* nevertheless not Western".[67] This sense of pride in the spiritual essence of Indian civilisation, as opposed to the material culture of the West, not just helped Indians reorganise and sanctify their private spheres of life; its ideological inspiration also motivated them to confront the colonial state in a newly emerging public space. This, in other words, provided the ideological foundation of modern Indian nationalism that developed in the late nineteenth century.

This ideology was, of course, not without contradictions, as the sense of pride in the spiritual heritage was often reduced to an uncritical and obscurantist defence of all customs and practices of

the past. And what was more important, this nineteenth century invention of the Indian tradition, as Vasudha Dalmia argues, conveniently "bypass[ed] the long stretch of Muslim rule" to present an idealised form of Indian/Hindu tradition rooted in classical Sanskrit texts that were now put to modern usage.[61] This created an identity that was inclusive and exclusive at the same time; it united the Hindus in opposition to an alien rule, but alienated the Muslims, non-Brahmans and the untouchables. This problematic of Indian nationalism, which is referred to as Hindu "revivalism"-often thought to be the genesis of "communalism"-will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

The evolution of Indian nationalism might not have been the result of Western modular influences in the same way as Benedict Anderson had thought, but the role of Western education was important nevertheless, as it produced a critical public discourse conducive to its growth. If this education was designed to colonise the mind of the Indian intelligentsia and breed in them a sense of loyalty, the latter also selectively appropriated and manipulated that knowledge of domination to craft their own critique of colonialism. But this critical consciousness was unevenly shared by groups of Indians, as education itself had an extremely uneven growth. Higher education began to grow rapidly in India after universities were established in the three presidencies in 1857 and education became a free enterprise in 1882. The number of students in arts and professional colleges grew fourfold, from 4,499 in 1874 to 18,571 in 1894.[69] The total number of students under instruction was a little over four million in 1896-97; the number more than doubled by 1920.[70] But this growth was highly uneven, and obviously it had a bearing on the uneven development of political consciousness in the various regions of India. The three coastal presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, as the available statistics suggest, witnessed wider expansion of education than the heart of north India then constituted into three provinces, i.e., the North-Western Provinces and Awadh, Punjab and the Central Provinces. Within the presidencies again, certain communities were more advanced than the others were. In Bengal, higher education was monopolised by the bhadralok belonging mainly to the three higher castes of Brahman, Kayastha and Baidya; in Bombay it remained mostly confined to Chitpavan Brahmans and the Parsis; in Madras, among the Tamil Brahmans and the Aiyangars. Again in Bengal, the Bengalees were far ahead of the Oriyas, Biharis and Assamese; in Bombay, the Marathi speaking regions were ahead of the Gujarati speaking areas and in Madras,

the Tamil speaking areas surged ahead of the Telugu and Malayalam speaking regions. And in general, the Hindus were far ahead of the Muslims and among the Hindus, a significant proportion of the lower castes and untouchables remained excluded from education. Those who went for higher education were coming from the middle or declining gentry whose income from land was dwindling, forcing them to look for subsidiary sources of income. For them government employment was the obvious choice; but in this sector, where the domination of the Europeans and Eurasians was quite palpable, Indians were confined only to subordinate positions and were poorly paid. Independent professions, like teaching, engineering, medicine and above all the legal profession became their next desirable option; but here too supply soon outstripped demand.

The situation described above undoubtedly created frustration and as Anil Seal argued, engendered a spirit of "increasing competitiveness" between various groups and regions.[71] But nationalism did not grow out of material frustration alone, and to say that competition forestalled unity is to simplify a much more complex scenario. Obviously, the differential growth of education impacted on the level of political activities in different regions, i.e., the presidencies with higher level of education were politically more articulate than the provinces. But this happened because western education here exposed many more students to a variety of ideological influences that helped create a critical discourse that held the colonial state under stringent scrutiny. If English education was introduced initially to inculcate a spirit of loyalty (see chapter 3.1),[72] it also exposed Indians, to quote A.R. Desai, to the "rationalist and democratic thought(s) of the modern west".[73] These ideas came to constitute an ideological package, which Dipesh Chakrabarty has called "political modernity", consisting of such concepts as "citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on."[7.] Not that the colonial regime offered all these to its subjects; but they were projected as ideal milestones on the road towards progress. The educated Indians now deployed these same ideas to construct their own critique of an autocratic and arrogant colonial state, and mixed with an emotional patriotic belief in the superiority of Indian culture and civilisation, this helped them to formulate conscious theories of nationalism. The *Hindoo Patriot* in June 1857 described the Indian as "strong enough ... in mind and knowledge to assert his right of citizenship."[75] In July 1878 the

Indian Mirror averred more firmly that "We fight for our rights in India". In September that year a public meeting in Calcutta was even more explicit; its resolution put forth in no uncertain words "the claims of the people of this country to the rights of British citizenship". [76] The Indian patriots of the late nineteenth century were not questioning the imperial connection. But Her Majesty's loyal subjects were also gradually turning into conscious citizens, demanding their rights from an authoritarian colonial state. A rapidly growing print culture circulated such ideas across the subcontinent; by 1875 there were about four hundred Indian owned newspapers, published in both English and the regional languages, with an estimated readership of 150,000. These newspapers, as S.R. Mehrotra writes, "broke down internal barriers and encouraged inter-regional solidarity" . [77]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the educated Indians had many reasons to be concerned about their rights being trampled by the colonial state. It started with the continuing threats of Christian conversion, encouraged by the passage of the Lex Loci Act in 1850, protecting the right of a convert to inherit ancestral property. But more importantly, when in the 1860s and 1870s various parts of India were experiencing a series of natural calamities and outbreak of famines, the Government imposed an income tax in 1860, without giving Indians any control over the expenditure of this revenue income. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 had provided for the inclusion of a very limited number of non-official Indian members in the governor general's council; but they could not introduce any bill without the prior sanction of the governor general, who also had, over and above this, the all important power of veto. The income tax under strong nationwide protests was withdrawn in 1865, to be surreptitiously reimposed again in 1867 in the guise of a "certificate tax" of 1 per cent on all trades and professions. The next year, it was converted again into a full-fledged income tax, and the rates went on increasing to reach 3₁/s per cent in 1870. The same year another colonial policy incensed the educated Indians, particularly in Bengal. As the Anglo-Indian press started a propaganda that higher education only bred discontent and disaffection, the government in a resolution on 31March1870 proposed to cut back funding for English education in Bengal, allegedly to rechannel funding to promote mass education through vernaculars. The educated Indians were dismayed to find that increased taxation and fund cuts for higher education came at a time when the government continued to spend excessively on army, the "home charges" and other public works serving the imperial needs.

The municipal reforms of the 1870s introducing limited princi-
ples of election were a concession to the educated Indians. But this
was soon counterbalanced when in 1876 the maximum age for sit-
ting the Indian Civil Service examination was lowered from 21 to 19
to the disadvantage of the Indians; their older demand for a simulta-
neous examination in London and India still remained unfulfilled.
By far the most vicious attack on the educated Indians came from
Lord Lytton who came to India as viceroy in 1876. He passed in
1878, against the advice of his own law member, the Vernacular
Press Act, designed basically to gag the Indian press, which had
become critical of the colonial policies. The act provided for a
deposit from all printers and publishers of regional language news-
papers, which was to be forfeited and their machinery confiscated if
they published anything objectionable. The act at once became the
target of a vehement countrywide agitation of the educated Indians
and their various associations, and they found an unexpected patron
in Gladstone who raised a furore in the British parliament. The same
year, i.e., in 1878, Lytton also passed a new Arms Act, which intro-
duced a licensing system throughout India for possessing firearms,
but exempted the Europeans and Eurasians from its coverage. In an
environment like this, the victory of the Liberal Party in Britain in
1880 brought great joy and expectations among the Indians. Lytton
resigned and a Liberal Lord Ripon came to India as the new viceroy;
but the conservative mindset of the colonial bureaucracy did not
change.

Though Ripon proceeded cautiously, some of his early measures
restored faith among the Indians in the liberal tradition of England.
In 1882 the Vernacular Press Act was repealed and the Arms Act was
modified to eliminate the undesirable racial exemptions. In a Reso-
lution in May 1882, the liberal viceroy proposed to introduce local
self-government in India; by the end of 1884, as S. Gopal has shown,
"the mosaic of local self-government covered almost the whole of
British India".71 This happened despite persistent opposition of the
Indian Civil Service and the India Council in London. But all hell
was let loose when C.P. Ilbert, the law member in his council, intro-
duced on 2 February 1883 what is known as the infamous Ilbert Bill.
It proposed to give Indian district magistrates and session judges the
power to try European offenders in the *mofussil* (small towns), as
they already did in the presidency towns. The ugly face of Anglo-
Indian racism now revealed itself in the "white mutiny" that fol-
lowed, as the British born subjects shuddered at the very thought of
being tried by a native Indian. The bill was bitterly opposed not just

by the non-official Anglo-Indians, but also by a large section of the British officials, including Rivers Thompson, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, who reportedly condemned the bill for "ignoring race distinctions" in order to "establish equality" by "a stroke of pen".[7] The liberal promise of racial equality could not so easily be disavowed, as it was enshrined in Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858. The plea for the preservation of racial privileges was therefore coded in a gendered language. The "effeminate babu", it was argued, was not fit to preside over the trial of a "manly Englishman", nor could he be expected to honour the dignity of white women, as they did not respect women in their own household. [0] The controversy made it crystal clear to educated Indians that racial equality was something, which they could not expect from the present regime. This became more evident when in January 1884 Ripon ultimately succumbed to the pressure and withdrew the bill, substituting it with a milder compromise formula, which somehow sought to preserve the principle by adding a provision of trial by a mixed jury in such cases involving European offenders.

The Ilbert bill controversy was the last straw that politically conscious educated Indians could take, as it made them painfully aware of their subordinate position in the imperial power structure. The counter demonstrations, which they staged, and the press propaganda war that raged on this occasion constitute an important benchmark in the history of the evolution of modern political activities in India. But in the meanwhile, another major change in the organised political life of India had started taking place: the older associations controlled by a landed plutocracy were being gradually replaced by new associations dominated by middle-class professionals. In Calcutta, the British Indian Association controlled by the zamindari elements, came to be looked at as an exclusive body torn by internecine strife. It came increasingly under challenge from the new educated professional classes, which ultimately formed on 26 July 1876 a new organisation, called the Indian Association, under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjea, with the avowed ambition of "representing the people". In Bombay, the Bombay Association had a new lease of life when in 1876 Naoroji Ferdunji and Dadabhai Naoroji returned from London and gave new life to the dying organisation. But it too faced challenge from a younger generation of Western-educated leaders like M.G. Ranade, P.M. Mehta and K.T. Telang and from the establishment of rival associations, such as the short lived Western Indian Association. Its major challenge, however, came from Poona, the traditional capital of Maratha culture

and a centre of old patriotism. It was here that on 2 April 1870 a new organisation, called the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, was established to represent the wishes of the people and within one year its members collected signed *muktiyamamahs* or power of attorneys from seventeen thousand people giving it a true representative character. By contrast, in Madras, political activities remained at a low ebb after the demise of the Madras Native Association in 1862. It was only after 1884, i.e., after an interval of more than two decades, that political life in this presidency again started vibrating with the foundation of the Madras Mahajan Sabha. Outside the presidencies too, organised political life revolved round the new associations, like the Lahore Indian Association in Punjab or the Allahabad Peoples' Association in the United Provinces.81

It should be remembered, however, that the sprouting of new associations did not automatically mean the demise of the older forms of politics; the two idioms of politics, the modern and the traditional, coexisted side by side for a much longer period. The older ways survived in various forms, in Bengal for example, as S.N. Mukherjee (1971) has shown, it did in the form of *dais,* which were dominated by absentee landlords or *dalapatis* (leader of the dais). They presided over informal but effective social networks spanning from Calcutta to the countryside, acting as an apparatus of social control. The dais took position in support of or in opposition to various public issues; any strict line between the conservatives and progressives or between the modern and the traditional became difficult to draw. The same Raja Radhakanta Deb and his Dharma Sabha, who were so vehemently opposed to the abolition of sari, supported with enthusiasm the spread of female education. This dal system continued with varied degrees of effectiveness till about the end of the nineteenth century. Then, as John McGuire has noted, capitalist development gradually weakened its social bonds and its control mechani m. ' Yet this process of disintegration was long and complex".82 And Bengal was no exception in witnessing this dichotomy; in the United Provinces too social impulses were channeled through the older "Caste and communal associations" which became platforms for the ventilation of the grievances of a wide variety of people. The older organisations in a new colonial context acquired new importance, as they had to confront "a more intrusive and supposedly representative government" In the towns, therefore, as C.A. Bayly has found, "the old connections and the new organizations:" came co be "more closely bunched together". 83

The newness of this politics of the second half of the nineteenth century, however, lay in the new demands that were being raised.

These were sometimes of a local or regional character; but most often they were of national significance. The new associations demanded, among other things, Indian representation in the legislative council, separation of the executive and judicial functions of the government, Indianisation of the civil service, and for that purpose simultaneous Indian Civil Service examination in India and England, imposition of import duties on cotton goods, reduction of expenditure on 'home charges' and costly foreign wars, like the Afghan wars of 1878–79, rationalisation of the financial relations between India and England, and the extension of the Permanent Settlement to other pans of British India. They also protested against the imposition of income tax, the draconian Vernacular Press Act and the racist Arms Act. Apart from raising such public issues, which concerned all Indians across the regions, these associations also took interest in the affairs of the peasantry. Their involvement in the indigo riots in Bengal, in the Deccan riots in Poona and in the protests against water tax in the Chenab Canal Colony in Punjab has already been mentioned. Some of these organisations, like the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, were involved in a variety of social work among the peasantry, like mobilising famine relief or organising arbitration courts. Through such mediation, the Indian peasants, so far locked away in their localised existence, were being gradually connected to a wider national contest with colonial rule. These associations were, of course, not overtly anti-British, as many of them sent mes ages of loyalty to Queen Victoria on the occasion of the Delhi Durbar. They were fighting for limited reforms, but nevertheless, they exhibited a new public awareness. They were demanding equality and representative government-above all, a share in the administration of their own country-and this is where the new politics differed from the earlier phase of landlord-dominated politics.

But the educated professional leadership of this new politics also suffered from a few dilemmas, which originated from the social composition of this class. As observed earlier, they came mostly from the priestly and literary castes, who previously held a monopoly control over proprietary right in land. In a way, English education and new professions provided for the extension of the sphere of dominance for essentially the same dominant classes; it was only in Bombay that we witness the emergence of a commercial bourgeoisie. So the professionals in most parts of the country retained a connection with land and therefore also fought for landlord interests. This was revealed in the united Indian opposition to the Bengal

Tenancy Bill in 1885, which proposed to protect the occupancy rights of the peasants and to restrict the right of the landlord to raise rent arbitrarily; the bill was passed by official majority. These hard to conceal dilemmas evoked mixed reactions from the British. The colonial government in the late nineteenth century recognised the political importance of the new educated class. Particularly, liberal viceroys like Lord Ripon realised that it was essential to provide a fair field for their legitimate aspirations and ambitions and convert them into friends of the Raj. But his more conservative successor Lord Dufferin took a different view and contemptuously called them "babu" politicians, representing only a "microscopic minority". After the Indian Councils Act of 1892, which introduced in a limited form the principle of election to constitute the legislative councils, the new professional class in terms of political prominence superseded the landed aristocracy; but they could never completely ignore the landed magnates. The colonial state, therefore, could confidently claim itself to be the real champion of the interests of the masses.

The limitations and contradictions of early nationalism were visible in other areas too, as many of these high-caste Hindu leaders could not totally overcome their social conservatism. Their attempts to construct a nationalist ideology premised on the notion of a golden Hindu past instantly inspired a wide range of people; but this also alienated some others. The social debates brought in a schism in the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha between the two leaders and their followers-the more conservative B.G. Tilak on the one hand and the liberal reformist G.K. Gokhale on the other. The controversy over the Age of Consent Act {1891), which proposed to raise the age for the consummation of marriage for women from ten to twelve, centred around the argument that the British had no right to interfere in Hindu social and religious life (more in chapter 5.2). Indian nationalism thus came to be associated with the defence of Hindu religion against foreign interference and the patriotic literature both in Bengali and Marathi started defining Indian nationalism in terms of Hindu imageries. These developments certainly alienated the Muslims from this stream of nationalism, as a new consciousness was developing among them as well. They too were defining their own self-interests in opposition to those of the Hindus and colonial policies further encouraged such Hindu-Muslim schism. As the Arya Sarnaj started the cow protection movement, this communal conflict began to acquire a mass dimension. Large-scale communal riots

rocked northern India from the 1870s, constituting certainly a new phenomenon in Indian history. The eighteenth century concept of Hindustan being equally shared by the Hindus and Muslims alike, was gradually receding in the face of an emerging communal exclusivism in the nineteenth, paving the way for a violent contest for territory in the twentieth (more details in chapter 5.2).

This communal estrangement in north Indian society had another important dimension. The Brahmans and the other high-caste Hindus, who dominated new education, professions, and new associations, did not do anything to enlist the support of the lower castes and the untouchables. Yet, despite this apathy and indifference, there were unmistakable signs of enlightenment and social awakening among these lower castes, resulting from colonial educational policies, Christian missionary philanthropy as well as their own initiative. This inspired them to construct alternative political ideologies based on anti-Brahman sentiments, around which powerful movements were organised by the untouchables and the non-Brahman castes in Maharashtra and Madras, aiming primarily at their own advancement. They looked at the emerging nationalist movement as a conspiracy to establish Brahmanic hegemony over the new colonial institutions and viewed colonial government as their patron and liberator (more details in chapter 7.2). Thus, the political project of imagining an Indian nation from the top had to confront from the very beginning the difficult issue of diversity and difference. The administration obviously took advantage of such contradictions in colonial society and further encouraged them in order to create more impediments for the budding Indian nationalists who, in spite of all their weaknesses and limitations, were raising some unpleasant questions for the Raj. It was in this context that Indian National Congress was born in 1885 and during the subsequent years it dominated Indian nationalist movement, trying with mixed successes to resolve these contradictions.

4.4. FOUNDATION OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress, which was destined to play a dominant role in India's struggle for independence, was formed at a national convention held in Bombay in December 1885, under the presidency of W.C. Bonnerji. A retired British civil servant A.O. Hume was crucially involved in this process, as it was he who toured across the subcontinent, talked to prominent political leaders in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and persuaded them to meet at a national conference that was initially supposed to meet at Poona.

The outbreak of cholera deprived the Marathi town of this privilege, which was now passed on to the more cosmopolitan colonial city of Bombay. But whatever might have been the historic significance of this first meeting, Hume's involvement in it gave rise to a lot of controversy regarding the origins of Congress. The safety-valve theory or the conspiracy theory, which was deduced from this simple fact, was for a long time subscribed to by all shades of historians, in the right, left and centre. It was even accepted by some of the stalwarts of nationalist movement. In recent researches, however, it has been thoroughly discredited.

The theory originated from William Wedderburn's biography of Hume published in 1913. Wedderburn, another ex-civil servant, wrote that in 1878 Hume had come across seven volumes of secret reports which showed that there had been seething discontent among the lower classes and a conspiracy to overthrow British rule by force. He became disturbed, met Lord Dufferin and together they decided to establish an organisation with educated Indians. This would serve as a safety valve by opening up a line of communication between the rulers and the ruled and would thus prevent a mass revolution. The Congress was in this way the creation of British rule. This safety-valve theory was believed by the earlier nationalist historians; the imperialist historians used it to discredit Congress and the Marxist historians developed a conspiracy theory from this. R.P. Dutt, for example, wrote that Congress was born through a conspiracy to forestall a popular uprising in India and the Indian bourgeois leaders were a party to it. In the 1950s these safety valve or conspiracy theories were proved to be wrong. First of all, those seven volumes of secret reports have not been traced in any of the archives either in India or London. Historians argue that given the structure of British information system in the 1870 , it was highly unlikely that so many volumes of secret reports could have existed. Except in Wedderburn's biography of Hume, nowhere else any reference to the existence of such reports could be found, and he too mentioned that they were supplied to Hume by religious gurus, and were not procured from any official sources. Then the opening up of Lord Dufferin's private papers in the late 1950s cleared up the confusion by exploding the myth of Dufferin's sponsorship of the Congress or Hume. He had indeed met Hume in Simla in May 1885, but did not take him seriou ly and then gave definite orders to the Governor of Bombay to be caucious about the delegates who were going to meet in his city. Both he and Lord Reay, the governor of Bombay were suspicious and disapproved of the proposed meeting, as they

thought that they were going to start in India something like a Irish
Home Rule League movement. Soon after the formation of the Con-
gress, Dufferin was openly castigating Congress for its dubious
motives. In 1888, he criticised it for representing a "microscopic
minority" and this statement, if not anything else, explodes the
afery valve or conspiracy theory. Historians now more or less agree
that the story of seven volumes of secret report was a fiction created
by a friendly biographer Wedderburn to portray Hume as a British
patriot who wanted to save the British empire from an impending
crisis. So, as Bipan Chandra comments, "it is high time that the
safety-valve theory ... was confined to the care of the *mahatmas*
from whom perhaps it originaredl?"

   The fact that Hume played a crucial role in the foundation of the
Congress, however, remains, although this role might have been
grossly exaggerated in the safety valve or conspiracy theories. In
reality, Hume was a political liberal, who certainly had a clear idea
about growing discontent among the Indians. Therefore, he visual-
ised an all India organisation, which would represent Indian inter-
ests and would act as something like Her Majesty's Opposition. He
got in touch with Viceroy Lord Ripon and offered his full support
for his liberal reform programme, particularly his plan of introduc-
ing local self-government, which he knew his conservative colleagues
would try to derail to their own peril. After Ripon's departure, he
embarked upon a project of linking up his wide contacts among the
educated Indians in order to bring them into a national organisation
as a legitimate forum for venting their grievances. But even if Hume
had not taken any initiative, in India of the 1870s and 1880s the for-
mation of a national organisation was clearly in the air.

   As we have seen already, groups of educated Indians were politi-
cally active in the three presidencies and they had established new
associations which had begun to fight for civil liberties and organ-
ised countrywide agitations on various national issues. Protests against
missionary interventions and against the Lex Loci Act of 1850 were
voiced from different parts of India simultaneously. In 1867 there
was a nationwide agitation against the proposed income tax and in
support of a demand for balanced budget. Then in 1877-80 a
massive campaign was organised around the demand for Indianisa-
tion of the civil services and against Lord Lytton's expensive Afghan
adventures, the cost of which had to be met from Indian revenues.
The Indian press and associations also organised an orchestrated cam-
paign against the notorious Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In 1881-82

they organised a protest against Plantation Labour and Inland Emigration Act, which condemned the plantation labourers to serfdom. Finally, a major nation-wide agitation was launched again in 1883 in favour of the Ilbert Bill, which had shaken the educated Indians' faith in the righteousness of British rule. In 1885 there was an all-India effort to raise a National Fund, which would be used to promote political agitation in India and England. The same year, the Indians fought for the right to join the volunteer corps so long restricted to Europeans alone and then organised an appeal to British voters to vote for those candidates who were friendly towards India. The main initiative for organising such agitations came from the presidency associations, the Indian Association being the most articulate of them all. But they were not confined to the presidency towns alone. The other provincial towns, like Lahore, Amritsar, Meerut, Kanpur, Aligarh, Poona, Ahmedabad, Surat, Pama or Curtack, were equally affected by agitations that were launched on what clearly appeared to be some national issues. Western education and English language had formed a bond between these regional elites, while a community of suffering remained conducive to the germination of a new political consciousness across the regional barriers.

All these demands raised by the associations remained unfulfilled and this all the more convinced the regional leaders about the need for an all-India organisation. While informal contacts between leaders from various cities were not lacking in any period, attempts to establish a formal forum were also made a number of times. The earliest of such endeavours to forge all-India links was in 1851 when the British India Association of Calcutta tried to open branches in other two presidencies with a view to send a joint petition to British parliament on the eve of the renewal of the Company's Charter. Again on the occasion of the Delhi Durbar in 1877, the Indian journalists who were invited to this extravaganza took the opportunity to form a Native Press Association. They elected S.N. Banerjea, the leader of the Indian Association and the editor of *Bengalee,* as its first secretary and resolved to meet once or twice every year to discuss issues related to press and the country. The Indian Association organised a national conference in Calcutta in 1883 and another was scheduled in December 1885. Again in Madras in 1884, through the private initiative of a member of the Theosophical Society, delegates from different parts of India met on the sideline of the society's annual convention, to discuss the necessity of a national organisation. So the emergence of a national body was clearly on the

cards, although mutual jealousies that thwarted such attempts in 1851 had not been completely removed either. There was still the need for a mediator who could bring all these regional leaders together under one organisational umbrella. Hume was ideally suited for this role, as his supra-regional identity made him acceptable to all the regional leaders. He was also acceptable for his known liberal political opinions.

The Indian National Congress, which was thus born in December 1885, tried from the very beginning to eliminate such regional differences. The first Congress declared that one of its major objectives would be the "development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity". The decision to hold the Congress session every year in different parts of the country.and to choose the president from a region other than the one where the session was being held, was meant to break the regional barriers and misunderstandings. In 1888 it was decided that no resolution would be passed if it was objected to by an overwhelming majority of Hindu or Muslim delegates; a minority clause figured prominently in a resolution adopted in 1889 demanding reform of the legislative councils. The avowed objective of all these endeavours was to create a forum through which the politically conscious people of different regions of India could unite. It was meant to be organised in the way of a parliament and the sessions were conducted democratically," It represented, in a true sense of the term, the modern politics in India and obviously therefore, it signalled the coming of a new trend in Indian public Life.

At the same rime, the Congress from the very beginning suffered from some important weaknesses, the most significant of them being uneven representation and total exclusion of the non-elite groups of Indian society. The composition of the delegates at the first Congress reflected almost accurately the changing patterns of organised political life in India, the Western educated professional groups gradually taking the lead over the landed aristocrats. Geographically, within the overall ascendancy of the presidencies, Bengal was gradually slipping from its leadership position, which was being taken over by Bombay, surging ahead of all other regions. The first meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was attended by seventy-two non-official Indian representatives and they included people apparently from various walks of life, or belonging to "most classes", as claimed by the official report of the Congress. There were lawyers, merchants and bankers, landowners, medical men, journalists, educationists, religious teachers and reformers. If we look at their regional distribution, thirty-eight came from Bombay

Presidency, twenty-one from Madras, but only four from Bengal, as the Indian Association had convened its own national conference in Calcutta almost at the same rime and the Bengal leaders were told of the Bombay conference only at the very last moment. Apart from the presidencies, seven representatives came from the four principal towns of North-Western Provinces and Awadh and one each from the three towns of Punjab.[86] It was in other words, despite lofty claims, a gathering of professionals, some landlords and businessmen, representing primarily the three presidencies of British India. In their social composition too, the members of the early Congress belonged predominantly to the high caste Hindu communities and this pattern continued unchanged for more than two decades of its existence." This limitation of participation did not fluster the members of the Congress, as they complacently claimed to represent the whole nation; but it obviously put some constraints on their programmes, which we will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

In its political behaviour, quite expectedly, the Indian National Congress in its early career was never a radical organisation, as the culture of open opposition to the government had not yet taken roots. So they were cautious reformers seeking to alleviate certain unpleasant aspects of what Surendranath Banerjea described as the "un-British rule" in India and their method was sending prayers, petitions and memoranda. W.C. Bonnerji, the president of the first Congress, made it clear at the very outset that it was not "a nest of conspirators and disloyalists"; they were "thoroughly loyal and consistent well-wishers of the British Government". [88] This explains why the founders of the Congress had to involve A.O. Hume in their project. His association would assuage official suspicion and this was crucial, as Gokhale, another stalwart of the early Congress, wrote in 1913, any attempt by the Indians to form an all India organisation would immediately attract the unfriendly attention of the authorities. "If the founder of the Congress had not been a great Englishman", he wrote, "the authorities would have at once found some way or the other to suppress the movement". Thus, to use Bipan Chandra's analogy, "if Hume and other English liberals hoped to use Congress as a safety-valve, the Congress leaders hoped to use Hume as a lightning conductor"." In this way the Congress movement started in India as a limited elitist politics for limited reforms. But nevertheless, it represented a new and modern trend in Indian political tradition. Despite its limitations, it sought to forge an overarching national unity and raised a very important political demand: "the basis of the government should be widened and the people

should have their proper and legitimate share in it".[90] It was from here that the mainstream of Indian nationalist politics began to flow. Given its limitations and inherent contradictions, it was bound to face contestation, which we will discuss in due course.

NOTES

1. Duara 1995: 4.
2. Chatterjee 1986: 42.
3. Nandy 1994a: 3-4 and passim; also 1998.
4. Ray 1980: 16-26; as examples of this school of thought, see Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, Broomfield 1968, Low 1968, lrschik 1969, Rothermund 1970, Dobbin 1972, Gordon 1974.
5. See for example, Gallaghar, johnson and Seal 1973, johnson 1973, Bayly 1975, Baker and Washbrook 1975, Washbrook 1976.
6. Seal 1973.
7. Raychaudhuri 1979.
8. Mukherjee 1996: 104-19.
9. Sarkar 1973.
10. Sarkar 1983: 11.
11. Chandra et al. 1989: 22-30.
12. Guha 1982: 1-3, emphasis in original.
13. Guha 1992.
14. Sarkar 1997.
15. Chakrabarty 1998: 475.
16. Chatterjee 1986: 43, *50-51*.
17. Chatterjee 1993: 6-7, 13 and passim.
18. Prakash 1999: 202.
19. Ibid: 202, 212 and passim.
20. See, for example, Visweswaran 1997: 84-85 and passim.
21. See, for example, Aloysius 1997: 2 and passim.
22. Loomba 1998: 207.
23. Quoted in Oommen 2000: 3.
24. Bose and Jalal 1998: 10.
25. Bhabha 1990: 5.
26. Kumar 1968: 175-76.
27. Guha 1993: 64-65, 74-76.
28. Kling 1966.
29. Guha 1993:73-77.
30. Hardiman 1993: 17-18.
31. Chaudhuri 1967.
32. Sengupta 1974.
33. Sengupta 1979.
34. Hardiman 1993: 23- 26.
35. Hardiman 1996: 219, italics in original.
36. Kumar 1968: 151 and passim.

37. Charlesworth 1972: 408.
38. Hardiman 1993: 34.
39. Hardiman 1993: 37-38.
40. Ibid: 40-44.
41. Barrier 1993: 251.
42. Hardiman 1993: 46.
43. Ranajit Guha 1994: 292.
44. Singh 1983: 199, 201.
45. Bhattacharya 1992: 127-28.
46. Gadgil and Guha 1993.
47. Arnold 1986b: 133.
48. Gadgil and Guha 1993.
49. Dasgupta 1994.
50. Guha 1991.
51. Guha 1999.
52. For details, see Skaria 1999.
53. Bhattacharya 1992.
54. Quoted in Skaria 1999: 272.
55. Chatterjee 1984a.
56. Guha 1994: 4.
57. Hardiman 1993: 50, 52.
58. Chatterjee 1993: 5-7.
59. Bayly 1998: 79.
60. Metcalf 1964: 323-24.
61. Cohn 1994: 180,189.
62. Quoted in Mehrotra 1971: 61.
63. Ibid: 76-78.
64. Quoted in Bandyopadhyay 1997b: 23.
65. Sarkar 1981.
66. Quoted in Sarkar 1985: 31.
67. Chatterjee 1993: 6.
68. Dalmia 1997: 15.
69. Misra 1978: 302.
70. Basu 1974: 100.
71. Seal 1968: 25.
72. For this argument, see Viswanathan (1989)
73. Desai 1959: 144.
74. Chakrabarty 2000: 4.
75. Quoted in Bandyopadhyay 1997b: 26.
76. Quoted in Mehrotra 1971: 290-91.
77. Ibid: 110-11, 281.
78. Gopal 1953: 110.
79. Quoted in Ray 1984: 26.
80. For more on this, sec Sinha 1995: 33-63.
81. See Mehrotra 1971 for details.
82. McGuire 1983: 35.

83. Bayly 1975: 14–15, 17.
84. Chandra, et al. 1989: 70 and passim for details on this.
85. Ibid: 74-75.
86. Mehrotra 1971: 412.
87. Gho h 1960: 24-26.
88. Quoted in Mehrotra 1971: 413.
89. Chandra, et al. 1989: 81.
90. Quoted in Mehrotra 1971: 413.